



United in adversity How EU concertation could trump transatlantic cooperation in the United Nations Security Council

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Abstract

Almost never in its history has the EU been confronted with such adversities. For over ten years, the Union has faced a multi-faceted domestic crisis to which Donald J. Trump's election as US President on 9 November 2016 added unprecedented pressure. After decades of strategic alignment, the transatlantic relationship is now questioned to its core. Sources of contention have included major international peace and security issues such as the Middle-East Peace Process or Iran's nuclear program.

In such times, adversity becomes an opportunity for unity. Coincidentally to President Trump's election, lines are shifting in a foreign policy forum in which European integration had long seemed impossible: the Security Council. The current strengthening of European concertation in the UNSC would therefore suggest that Trump's election is influencing dynamics in this key UN body.

In this context, the interest for a new research agenda on UNSC dynamics is twofold. First, they constitute an insightful lens on EU-US relations, for they reflect broader geopolitical and transatlantic equilibria. Secondly, they offer promising perspectives on drivers of European foreign policy cooperation, and can highlight alternatives to the controversial issue of a EU seat in the UNSC. To analyze the correlated evolution of transatlantic and European dynamics in the UNSC, this research answers to two inter-related questions: How does the current weakening of the transatlantic relationship reverberate in the UNSC? To what extent does it provide EU members of the Council with an opportunity to strengthen their concertation in this forum?

The concept of Europeanization (Radaelli, 2002), applied to foreign policy (Hill and Wong, 2011), offers an adequate framework to observe the Trump administration's role as an "external federator" and assess "processes of construction diffusion and institutionalization" of cooperation practices in the UNSC. To operationalize this concept, this study builds on 43 interviews with European and American diplomats and a civil society researcher in New York, and other primary and secondary resources.

In response to the first question, research shows that Trump's policies produced ambivalent effects in the UNSC. They induced a weakening of the transatlantic partnership, evidenced by shifting rhetorics, weakening P3 cooperation and disagreements over major peace and security issues (e.g. Middle-East Peace Process and Iran). At the same time, transatlantic cooperation remains at the core of UNSC dynamics on many other files (e.g. Ukraine).



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As for the second question, research demonstrates that Trump's election made the ground fertile for a strengthening of EU concertation practices in the UNSC, such as joint press statements. Some of these were developed as a response to transatlantic divergences, but they were extended to a series of other dossiers, on which the EU and the US tend to agree (e.g. Ukraine).

Nevertheless, this development is constrained by structural limits to European cooperation and the enduring strength of transatlantic cooperation, and remains circumstantial. The Trump administration only opened a limited window of opportunity for stronger EU concertation, which the EU and its member states should actively explore. To this end, this study suggests a set of concrete recommendations.