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Barack Obama in the White House for four more years

The re-election of Barack Obama means that the previous direction in the American foreign policy will be maintained to a significant degree. Will it have any influence on the Transatlantic relations and the role and position of Europe in the American external strategy? The answer to this question seems much easier today than it was four years ago. Then, the first African American to be elected President of the United States, despite the great enthusiasm he was greeted with by many European politicians and the majority of the public opinion, he was a great mystery. Commentators agreed that Obama, with all his charisma, oratorical skills and the influence he had on people, was a dilettante as far as foreign policy was concerned. Still, he faced great challenges and problems. Not only did his administration confront one of the most severe global economic crises in decades and new superpowers ready to compete with America on economic and political grounds, but also two difficult wars fought by American soldiers and, last but not least, a breakdown in the Transatlantic relations. Another important problem was the weakening of the USA's rank and position in the world, especially on the European continent.

Therefore, there is no exaggeration in saying that Europe expected the new resident of the White House not only to rebuild the strained prestige of America, but mainly to restore the rank and importance of the Transatlantic relations or even to give meaning to this historically exceptional arrangement. It was expected that Europe will remain the main partner of the United States, taken into consideration in their political calculations, with whom Washington will consult and establish its strategies.

It is also true that Obama was able to improve the atmosphere in the relations with his main European allies quite quickly and easily. The change of style which took place in the policy of Washington helped a great deal - the importance of diplomacy was restored and the will to cooperate and listen to the partners' opinions was demonstrated. Multilateralism returned to the consciousness of American politicians as the best method of achieving goals and performing tasks in the current situation, which is moving towards multipolarity. As a result, Europe felt - at least at the beginning - more appreciated, important and jointly responsible. On the other hand, the Obama administration could think that their European allies would be ready to serve as a strategic partner of the USA in the international arena, actively engaged in solving global problems. They would no longer be - as it was once said - "stowaways".

However, the reality turned out to be more complex and difficult for both sides. There appeared certain new circumstances and challenges, which not only weakened the Transatlantic cooperation, but also caused the American government to move its attention to a different region of the world. This is how the Obama administration came up with propositions and suggestions which did not meet with a proper reaction on the part of the Europeans, or at least not the reaction that the Americans had expected. For example, Europe was very reluctant to answer to Obama's appeals to send additional troops to Afghanistan. America wanted a Europe which can be counted on when finding solutions to different problems, engaged in different parts of the world according to its - not that small - capabilities.

On the other hand, many countries, especially from East-Central Europe, were disappointed by some gestures and actions of Washington, such as the abandonment of the missile defense system installation, which was considered to be an effect of the "reset" in the relations with Russia. It is also difficult not to notice that for Washington during Obama's time, the European continent ceased to be a region of primary importance. To some degree it was also a result of the weakening of the emotional ties between the African American President of the USA and the European leaders. In some sense it may have also been



related to the simple fact that Europe is no longer an issue for Americans when it comes to its safety and stability.

Therefore, the attempt to strengthen the Transatlantic system by means of a new, expressive stimulus, was not successful. On the one hand, we experienced the feeling of marginalization of Europe in the global policy of Washington, on the other - the lingering assertiveness and passivity of Europe in relation to many challenges and problems. This impression was not changed even by the military intervention of NATO in Libya, initiated by Paris and London - which was undoubtedly unprecedented. Mainly because it was not a unanimous action of all the NATO countries. Secondly, in the end America had to seize the initiative, increase its military participation and once again act as a leader in order for the intervention in Libya to be successful. Europe - in some sense - could not manage on its own.

It is important to consider one more factor, which had a decisive impact on the shape and nature of the foreign policy of the Obama administration. The weakening of the Europe's rank in the American external strategy is also a result of the functioning of the USA in a world of new superpowers competing with America and significantly endangering its interests. While Europe did not meet Obama's expectations at the international arena, other entities became a real competition for the USA. China undoubtedly constitutes such a challenge. Four years ago it was said that the ambitions of Beijing are limited to the economic sphere. Now it seems that the growing economic potential of China resulted in an increase in its political aspirations in Asia. It is not, therefore, surprising that the Obama administration focused its attention on the Far East. There was a "pivot to the Pacific Rim" officially declared by President Obama in November 2011 during his visit to Australia. The American leader declared: "The Asia-Pacific region is now a 'top priority' of US security policy". According to the majority of experts and commentators, a clear change in the orientation of the US policy from the Atlantic to the Pacific is visible. It may also be added that this change took place at the expense of Europe and the European allies - the ties with the Old World were weakened, European interests marginalized.

Coming back to the beginning - it should be assumed that this Asian direction in the American policy will be maintained by the old/new Obama administration. The attention of the American diplomacy will become more and more focused on the Pacific region. It is not only about China being the largest challenge for the policy of Washington. What also needs to be taken into consideration is the general shift of the economic center from the West towards the East and the intensifying process of "political arousal", as Zbigniew Brzezinski put it. All this will have influence on the American policy and needs to be taken into consideration in American calculations. It cannot be excluded that the dynamics of the



modern world will be shaped more by the relations between the USA and China, full of tension and mutual dependency, rather than the relations between America and Europe, even if they are more stable.

Does it mean a real and unavoidable depreciation of the role and importance of the European continent in the American policy? Will this result in the relations between Europe (European Union) and the United States weakening even further? Despite the new factors influencing the vital American interests, Europe still remains an important partner and ally in the consciousness of the American political class and the calculations of the Obama administration, while the Transatlantic system remains relevant for the rank and importance of all its members. In the end, NATO managed to maintain the status of the leading defense alliance in the modern world, the only alliance with such potential and efficiency - even taking into consideration the various accusations and symptoms of the “desolidarization” of this structure. These are the factors that any American administration has to take into consideration, regardless of whether the emotions of its leader towards Europe.

A lot will depend on the degree of readiness to action that Europe will display as an actor on the international scene. This requires the will to take more responsibility for the events taking place in the world, more engagement in solving global problems in various dimensions, including military. Such actions will increase the importance and rank of the European ally in the eyes of the Americans and prevent further marginalization of Europe in the American policy during the second term of President Obama in the White House.

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