



ELIAMEP Outlook – Predictions for 2025

Special Edition

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Special Edition

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A year of transition

Maria Gavouneli

As our world shifts from an architecture of principles and rules to a horizontal distribution of more or less opportunistic partnerships in multiple fields of activity, the lack of a clearly defined direction [...] becomes ever more evident, but also more decisive in its impact on developments.

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In the course of 2024, about half of the world's population voted in elections, from India, the most populous democracy on the planet, to Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population, and from Japan and Britain to the European Union, France and of course the United States. Not one of these elections delivered the expected outcome in full—either because the far-right tsunami anticipated in the European Parliament turned out to be little more than a swell, or because the seemingly certain re-election of Prime Minister Modi ended up strengthening rather than weakening the institutional guarantees of the Indian Republic. The most important thing all these elections have in common, however, is that they have left people feeling insecure round the world, from the Seine to the transatlantic relationship; democracy truly is a difficult tool to manage. As our world shifts from an architecture of principles and rules to a horizontal distribution of more or less opportunistic partnerships in multiple fields of activity, the lack of a clearly defined direction, which finds its ultimate expression in the transactional approach of the newly-elected and re-elected President Trump, becomes ever more evident, but also more decisive in its impact on developments. In the pages that follow, we record our thoughts on the most critical fields of confrontation between our deeply shaken old world and versions of the future in the perpetual quest for security that breeds prosperity.

The French election has put Europe's most significant political force into a prolonged tailspin, revealing its complete inability to reform an obsolete social model that is no longer viable, but also just how hugely difficult it is to manage the pressure exerted by the populism that could win Mme Le Pen and her team the presidency—and all this while Germany, Europe's traditional economic powerhouse, can only stand by as an ineffective coalition government dissolves and watch fearfully as its own populists grow in strength ahead of the early elections called for February. One might consider this the ideal opportunity to strengthen both the EU's internal cohesion and its external presence, given that the groundwork has now been done both at the level of policy: with the reports by Letta on the common market, Draghi on competitiveness, and Niinistö on Europe's political and military preparedness; as well as of politicians, with the new European Commission now in place. In the meantime, the European Union has started talking about attaining energy autonomy, acquiring a Defence Commissioner, and coordinating its response to a possible tariff policy—all in its own 'European' mode of decision-making.

The first indication of whether the European Union is going to succeed will be if it manages (or fails) to maintain economic and military support for Ukraine, in view of the United States' expected withdrawal from the front line. The global South and—now—the United States consider the war an internal European affair, a family quarrel. But the West has experienced Russia's invasion as an attack on the international legal order it built in the wake of World War II, ensuring peace, security and prosperity for three generations. As our world changes, the revisionist powers are forming an alliance of authoritarianism with Russia in the lead and talking openly of a paradigm shift. Of course, it is the Middle East that is spoiling the best laid plans. While, prior to 7 October 2023, Israel was surrounded by the long arm of Iran, the unconscionable humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has been accompanied by a significant weakening of other Iranian non-state actors, one direct

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As the American political scene is set to be plunged into turmoil by another Trumpian presidency, it behoves us to remember that China's leadership has a long-term perspective.

result of which has been the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria. The new architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world, including the neo-Ottoman role Turkey so clearly covets, means we will get to witness the formation of new political and economic reconnections in the region and beyond, as far afield as India and the Far East.

And all this in the light of the United States' declared desire to withdraw from the international stage and of its burgeoning confrontation with China. As the American political scene is set to be plunged into turmoil by another Trumpian presidency, it behoves us to remember that China's leadership has a long-term perspective and will continue to follow the existing rules, with added flexibility and a clear sense of its not inconsiderable economic power. We will not be bored in 2025, either, as our world continues to change—imperceptibly, we hope...

Trump, NATO, Europe and Greece

George N. Tzogopoulos

...the American president will be called upon to decide on the shape of transatlantic relations to come, counting much more on certain European states than on the European Union as a bloc.

The second term of US President Donald Trump is expected to start with different challenges from the first. The world is now in disarray, while the Ukrainian issue remains a major hurdle. After that, the American president will be called upon to decide on the shape of transatlantic relations to come, counting much more on certain European states than on the European Union as a bloc. Naturally, attention is turning to NATO's future role in the international system.

As was the case in 2017-2021, Donald Trump is expected to focus on the obligation of the Alliance's member countries to pay more towards their own defence. His approach is purely economic and, to some extent, reasonable. In other words, Trump considers it unfair that the United States should provide security to Europe while many European countries are happy to take advantage of the situation rather than investing more themselves and taking on additional obligations. In a recent interview given after his victory in the November 5 elections, Trump said he would not withdraw US support for NATO, as long as the European member states pay their fair share. Should they fail to do so, he hinted, the United States could even leave the Alliance.

From a European perspective, the Trump administration should be looked upon as an opportunity.

From a European perspective, the Trump administration should be looked upon as an opportunity. Although his motives were financial, the American president had sought to hold the states of Europe to account long before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. That war was instrumental in changing the European approach, and the next four years could be an opportunity to build on that momentum. The European states will seek to show President Trump that his demanding they contribute more to the Alliance is of geopolitical and not merely economic significance, and aligns with the US foreign policy of the new era.

The US president takes a positive view of Turkey's regional role, which may lead to that role being upgraded. Greece will need to anticipate a possible downgrading of Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus Issue in US strategic calculations.

The countries of Europe are being called upon to prepare to play an active role in Ukraine should the war come to an end. In practice, this means that the military forces of NATO's European member countries will have to send forces to Ukraine to create a security zone and maintain a possible ceasefire. Of course, ending the war while Russia is still winning militarily will be no simple matter. As for Ukraine joining NATO at some point in the future, a possibility that has been publicly discussed in the West in recent weeks, it would be very difficult for Russia to agree to such a development. It is essential that the history of the Ukrainian crisis is taken into account before jumping to convenient assumptions.

From a Greek perspective, the Trump administration and its policy on NATO will pose a challenge. The US president takes a positive view of Turkey's regional role, which may lead to that role being upgraded. In Syria, for instance, the Alliance is largely represented by Turkey, even though Ankara is seeking to serve its own interests rather than expanding and bolstering the Alliance's Mediterranean goals. Given that the Mediterranean has been slowly returning to the fore since the NATO Summit held in Washington DC last summer to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Alliance, Greece will need to anticipate a possible downgrading of Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus Issue in US strategic calculations.

Finally, for obvious reasons, it is unlikely any progress will be made towards deepening the Republic of Cyprus's relations with NATO. It would therefore be useful if Athens and Nicosia were to combine Cyprus' continued pro-Western orientation with the formulation

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of a request for military guarantees from the United States. Obviously, despite NATO's enormous importance, this objective could be achieved via different channels, including the activation of the 3+1 mechanism with the participation of Israel. President Trump will probably look positively upon moves made in that direction.

Trump 2.0 and the world in 2025

Elena Lazarou

With the Republican party having won in both the House and the Senate in the November 5th elections, and with Trump's influence now well-established within the Republican party, but also over the Supreme Court, an important part of the media and much of what is called Big Tech, the new US President will likely face relatively favourable conditions for the implementation of his vision for the U.S.A.

On 20 January 2025, Donald Trump will make his triumphant return to the White House, officially becoming the 47th President of the United States, and only the second president in the entire history of the United States to serve non-consecutive terms after Grover Cleveland, who was elected in 1884 and again in 1892. But Trump is, by all accounts, an outlier in other ways, too. Despite having served as President between 2017-2020, most analysts still consider him as an "outsider" in traditional US bipartisan politics. He and his entourage, including Elon Musk, repeatedly state their aim to shake up the Washington political establishment and inaugurate new ways of governing. With the Republican party having won in both the House and the Senate in the November 5th elections, and with Trump's influence now well-established within the Republican party, but also over the Supreme Court, an important part of the media and much of what is called Big Tech, the new US President will likely face relatively favourable conditions for the implementation of his vision for the U.S.A. a vision which, according to Trump, received support by both the majority of US states (the 'red map') and by the popular vote in the November elections.

Trump's domestic agenda is relatively clear. On the economic front, it emphasises growth through the re-industrialisation of the US, and energy independence through fossil fuel production. It also includes significant tax cuts. In terms of immigration policy, a key part of his pre-election platform, he has promised tighter control over the nation's borders and an increase in deportations. Institutionally, his agenda is focused on unprecedented and radical government reform, possibly under the leadership of a new Department of "Government Effectiveness" (DOGE) led by Elon Musk and by fellow entrepreneur and former candidate for the Republican nomination, Vivek Ramaswamy. Among other things, the new DOGE would be making major cuts to the federal budget.

But while elements of the new President's domestic agenda are becoming discernible, numerous questions remain about his foreign policy. Capitals around the world are keeping a watchful eye on Washington as Trump announces his nominees for key foreign policy and national security posts, his advisors and ambassadorial appointments, and as his administration takes shape, hoping to decipher the policies he intends to implement in the field of global affairs and international relations.

In an era of geopolitical instability which is unprecedented by post-Cold War standards, this raises the question: what do we really know about the priorities and plans of the new leader of what is still the world's greatest economic and military superpower? For now, there seem to be more questions than answers.

Some of the baseline assumptions that will likely underpin the new administration's approach to international relations are beginning to become clear. A bilateral approach to individual states, with an emphasis on trade and on deals linking seemingly unrelated issues (such as trade and defence) is, by most accounts, one of those elements. In trade policy, the assumption is that Trump will use tariffs, which he refers to as the "most beautiful word in the world", as a key tool (and as a weapon). Regarding military conflicts and defence, Trump has stated that he intends to end the "endless wars" in Ukraine and the Middle East, though how exactly he intends to achieve this remains unclear. The doctrine of "peace through strength", first cited by Trump in 2017 as part of an 'America First' foreign policy, seems to be re-emerging, but what this will translate to in practice in

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an environment of substantially deteriorated peace compared to his first presidency, is another unknown. What is (probably) certain is that parts of the strength would be drawn from Trump's own ability to 'cut deals' and from the use of the threat of tariffs and economic sanctions as a geopolitical tool. Moreover, in the Trumpian world-view, strength breeds respect and respect forms part of deterrence. Notably, when asked whether he would use military force against China if Beijing threatened Taiwan, Trump said he wouldn't have to, because Chinese President Xi Jinping "respects me".

At the same time, numerous question marks remain regarding the policy content and practices the new administration will adopt. Will Trump end economic and military support for Ukraine? Will he really impose 60% tariffs on China, escalating the trade and technology war with Beijing—with collateral consequences for Europe and others? What will be his approach to multilateral organisations (such as the UN and NATO) and to international treaties—especially in the sphere of climate change, given that he withdrew the US from the Paris climate agreement in his first term? Finally, how much influence will his cabinet and advisors wield? Will Trump 2.0 be a one man show with rotating guest appearances, or can third countries assume that the initial makeup of his team will endure this time around? Interestingly, the team 'in the making' is increasingly resembling a motley crew made up of Silicon Valley giants (e.g. Elon Musk), advocates of the "end of endless wars" (e.g. Keith Kellogg, Steve Witkoff), "China hawks" and tariff enthusiasts (e.g. Marco Rubio, Mike Waltz, Peter Navarro), and Trump's own loyalists (e.g. Pete Hegseth, Tulsi Gabbard).

December is always a month of predictions. But in the case of Donald Trump, the most predictably unpredictable President of the United States, nothing can be taken for granted. In today's increasingly unstable and challenging international environment, this raises the urgency for capitals—in Europe and across the world—to adopt clear strategic priorities, to raise preparedness and to enhance diplomatic engagement in order to ensure enduring and mutually beneficial relations with the world's superpower.

China-US Trade War and the Opium Crisis

Stefanos Gandolfo

For President-elect Donald Trump, the word "tariff" is the "most beautiful word in the dictionary".

It is hardly surprising then that he intends to impose 25% tariff on imports from Canada, Mexico and China—three of the US's largest trading partners.

More striking is the link between the tariffs and Trump's accusations that these three countries [Canada, Mexico and China] are responsible for the unprecedented opioid crisis that has been wreaking havoc in America for at least the last decade.

More striking is the link between the tariffs and Trump's accusations that these three countries are responsible for the unprecedented opioid crisis that has been wreaking havoc in America for at least the last decade. Last year alone, [more than](#) 100,000 Americans died primarily as a result of their use of the extremely dangerous synthetic opiate fentanyl. Although experts have described this epidemic as the most damaging in US [history](#) in terms of loss of human life, it has not been adequately covered by either the US or international media. Similarly, Trump's multiple posts on his own social network [Truth Social](#) towards the end of November, in which he linked the increase in tariffs to drug trafficking, attracted limited attention.

In his posts, Trump accused China of failing to take the necessary measures to combat the trafficking of the substances in question, and of not implementing the death penalty as required by Chinese law. In light of this, he is threatening to add an additional 10% tariff to all Chinese exports. For several years now, the US authorities have been accusing China of being responsible for producing the bulk of fentanyl's key ingredients, but Trump is the first to link the drug crisis so explicitly to the US trade balance. It is worth noting that most of the trafficking is done through the Mexican cartels, and that China, in response to a request from the US, classified all fentanyl-type substances as narcotics in 2019. This makes China the [only](#) major nation in the world to have done this—the US itself has yet to do so.

With inflation a major thorn in the side of the US economy, the key problem the new administration will have to solve is how to reduce dependence on China without raising prices for consumers.

This role assigned to opiates in the US-China trade dispute is extremely interesting from a historical perspective. In the first half of the 19th century, China experienced its own profound drug crisis, with a third of the male population becoming addicted to opium. The opium crisis then, as now, was due to a number of discrete factors. It is surprising, however, that the issue of international trade should have been so closely intertwined back then, too—two centuries ago—with a health crisis featuring opiates at its core. In the late 18th century, the British Empire, then the world's dominant power, began trading with China. As it proceeded to import huge quantities of tea, porcelain, silk and other valuable goods, its trade balance was quickly deep in deficit. To balance the flow, rather than imposing tariffs, the East India Company decided to increase its exports (having first increased production in North India) of opium, the one product China seemingly couldn't get enough of. And the policy would prove highly effective, reversing the trade balance on the one hand and creating millions of addicts on the other. The Chinese political class began to take increasingly strict measures against traffickers, seizing and destroying huge quantities of opium. When British commercial interests in China began to be threatened in a substantial way, they intervened by despatching military forces. The clashes between Chinese and British forces have gone down in history as "The [Opium Wars](#)" (1840-1860) and mark the start of a period of "unequal treaties" and "national humiliation" for China which form the basis on which President Xi Jinping's narrative of "national rejuvenation" is built. This is the historical background to the [statement](#) made by the Chinese Embassy

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in the US in 2023 to the effect that drugs are a scourge and a "burning pain" for China, and that unprecedented measures are being taken to combat fentanyl.

Returning to the present, the reality is that the new Trump administration will face numerous difficulties when it comes to implementing its announced course of action. The tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration—and maintained by President Biden—brought about a temporary reduction in bilateral trade, with China's exports and the trade deficit hitting all-time highs in 2022 (although both have fallen significantly over the last two years due to the policy of "decoupling"). With inflation a major thorn in the side of the US economy, the key problem the new administration will have to solve is how to reduce dependence on China without raising prices for consumers. Typically, the bulk of Chinese exports to the US are [electronic goods](#), on which no tariffs were imposed during Trump's first term.

How China chooses to respond will complicate Washington's decision-making. It is considered almost certain that Beijing will retaliate with a new round of tariffs of its own. Of greater interest, however, is the intention of Chinese companies to [expand](#) their production in South-East Asian countries, which have [benefited](#) significantly from the trade war since 2018, strengthening China's presence in the region. Finally, it is expected that China will continue to present itself as a guarantor of global trade and related institutions such as the World Trade Organization, which the US [has been obstructing](#) systematically since 2019. How China will manage to convince President Trump that it is doing everything it can to fight fentanyl—if that is possible—remains to be seen.

Viewed in this historical context, the current US-China trade war takes on a different hue. On the one hand, it underlines the failure of the American political establishment to solve one of the biggest social and health problems the US has ever faced which may partly explain Trump's appeal to portions of the American population who feel invisible to the eyes of the "elite." On the other, it creates a more complex context for China, as Trump's evolving rhetoric connects separate and complex issues that penetrate to the core of China's contemporary political identity.

Middle East: Walking the tightrope over the turmoil

Triandafyllos Karatrantos

The Middle East was the catalyst for geopolitical developments in 2024, with the situation in Syria following the toppling of the Assad regime representing the final (?) act in a chain of changes that have caused upheavals and instability.

The new President's approach could be summed up as increasing support for Israel and increasing pressure on Iran, which will obviously have a knock-on effect on US policy with regard to the entire regional subsystem.

The terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 and the military confrontations that came about as a direct consequence of it showed that the Middle East remains the epicentre of strategic developments and continues to have a catalytic effect on both the balance of power and international (in)security. It is no coincidence that the turmoil in the Middle East defined the policy debate in the field of international relations in the run-up to the US elections.

The combination of instability and turmoil in the Middle East with a new Trump administration in the US make it extremely hard to predict what may happen in 2025.

What is certain is that developments in the region, as well as US policy, will centre on an Iran-Israel axis. The new President's approach could be summed up as increasing support for Israel and increasing pressure on Iran, which will obviously have a knock-on effect on US policy with regard to the entire regional subsystem.

The collapse of the Assad regime radically changes the framework of the Iran-Israel confrontation, as one of the key elements in the so-called Axis of Resistance no longer exists. But the argument that Israel has gained from this development is based on a fragmentary reading of the situation. Because, while the removal of the Assad regime may have a positive impact in the short term, how things work out in the long term will depend on where Syria goes from here—which, in turn, is a factor that will significantly impact the overall direction the Middle East takes in 2025.

There are three negative scenarios for the future of Syria: The first is a process reminiscent of the events that followed the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and the extensive de-Baathification that served to further strengthen the divisions in an already deeply-divided country, causing massive population movements while also strengthening terrorism, with many of the Baath regime's battle-hardened former military and police officers joining ISIS.

The second is that of a Middle Eastern Afghanistan. In this scenario, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham could evolve into a variation on the Taliban, a jihadist organisation that wants to present itself as a route to normalization in order to form a government and control Syria without provoking reactions from the international community.

The third possibility is that Syria mirrors Libya, meaning further fragmentation and instability that could lead to multiple centres of power and a new conflict. In this case, Syria could become a new black hole spewing insecurity throughout the whole regional subsystem.

There is one crucial parameter in each of these scenarios, and in discussions on the future of Syria in general: the Kurds, particularly in relation to Turkey's priorities and actions.

So, the future of Syria will clearly have a catalytic effect on developments in the Middle East.

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However, there are other crucial issues and open fronts, first and foremost being Gaza and, more generally, the war between Israel and Hamas. Apart from the ceasefire that has yet to be achieved, there is the big question of what the future will hold for the enclave, including its critical rebuilding. But it isn't only Gaza: there is also Israel's broader confrontation with the Axis of Resistance, and particularly with the Houthis, who are currently the strongest member of Iran's alliance militarily.

Iran itself will not remain unaffected. Israel's defeat of Hezbollah and the collapse of the Assad regime have detracted significantly from its ability to intervene in regional developments. The new pressure expected from the US will only make the situation more difficult for the Iranian regime, which, despite its brutal repression of any signs of discontent, has on several occasions faced mobilisations by citizens with accumulated grievances.

In 2025, the Middle East will remain a living laboratory for instability and insecurity.

The last parameter for the region is the role of external actors: the US and the EU, and especially France, Great Britain, Russia and Turkey. Competition between international and regional powers and interests creates a geopolitical spiral that is not generally conducive to stabilisation, and this has been the case in Syria. In addition, it is obvious that developments in the Middle East are directly linked to and influenced by the situation in Ukraine and the war being fought there.

In 2025, the Middle East will remain a living laboratory for instability and insecurity. Over and above states, both regional and international actors, the main catalysts for developments will be the various non-state actors, and in particular the extremist and terrorist organisations. There is, in any case, a continuous feedback loop between state and non-state actors in various spheres, which impacts on European and international security while also hampering stabilisation initiatives.

Geopolitical Maneuvering and EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans: Challenges and Prospects for 2025

Bledar Feta

In 2024, the Western Balkans became a focal point for geopolitical maneuvering, with Brussels prioritizing regional stability and emphasizing EU integration. Significant progress was achieved in Albania and Montenegro's EU accession processes, while Serbia's accession remains stalled due to its pro-Russian stance, and North Macedonia's progress is impeded by issues with Bulgaria.

Diplomatic tensions with Greece are also likely in 2025, depending on Skopje's adherence to the Prespa Agreement.

In 2025, North Macedonia's journey towards EU membership will be decisive. The government, led by Hristijan Mickoski, must break the deadlock by initiating constitutional reform to recognize a Bulgarian community, as requested by Sofia. Brussels has emphasized this step is essential for Skopje to progress towards the second intergovernmental conference (IGC) and open its first negotiating cluster. However, the government has hesitated to implement further EU-requested reforms without substantial incentives from Brussels. Mickoski may seek strategic partnerships with leaders like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to leverage support from Brussels. Diplomatic tensions with Greece are also likely in 2025, depending on Skopje's adherence to the Prespa Agreement. Additionally, the disputed constitutionality of a controversial minority languages law will challenge the government and could trigger political instability and social unrest.

Rama's goal to open all accession chapters by the end of 2025 and conclude negotiations by 2027 seems unrealistic

Albania is gearing up for an electoral year likely to keep the Socialist Party of Edi Rama in power. In October 2024, Albania marked a significant milestone by opening the first "cluster" of negotiation topics. The year ended on a high note with the opening of two EU accession chapters related to foreign policy. However, Rama's goal to open all chapters by the end of 2025 and conclude negotiations by 2027 seems unrealistic, considering the experiences of other Balkan countries like Croatia and Montenegro. The Albanian government must provide tangible evidence of judicial reform implementation to convince others of its independence, a crucial precondition for progress in chapters 23 and 24, which have proven to be the most challenging.

The stance of the new American government towards Sali Berisha will be a catalyst for Albania's internal political situation.

As Albania approaches the May 2025 parliamentary elections, restoring political dialogue with opposition is crucial for its EU membership aspirations. Without it, necessary reforms, particularly in the judiciary, will be hindered, delaying the opening of additional negotiation chapters. Opposition leader Sali Berisha has been a vocal critic of the government, and his continued street protests are likely to intensify as the elections approach. The stance of the new American government towards Sali Berisha will be a catalyst for Albania's internal political situation. Any decision to lift Berisha's non-grata status could dramatically change the political landscape, potentially affecting the electoral results, as Berisha's supporters may feel emboldened, leading to increased political activity and possibly altering voter sentiment. This development could either stabilize or further polarize the political environment, depending on how it is managed by both the government and the opposition.

In 2024, the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue faced significant challenges, with numerous incidents, including violent clashes and political standoffs, impeding progress. The dialogue is currently at a standstill with both parties entrenched in their positions. In the first months of 2025, no significant changes are expected. Kosovo's leadership will focus on the

The return of President Trump could notably impact the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

February 9, 2025, parliamentary elections, diverting attention from the dialogue with Serbia. Meanwhile, Serbian President Vučić will prioritize managing protests against his administration, further hindering progress in the dialogue.

The return of President Trump could notably impact the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. During Trump's first term, his Balkan envoy Richard Grenell championed the controversial idea of territorial partition as a solution to the Kosovo issue, which met significant resistance from the EU and other Western allies. The possibility of revisiting such contentious proposals under the new Trump administration remains a worrying prospect.

It would not be a surprise if Brussels, despite reservations, gives the green light to Serbia as a counterbalance to the increased influence of Russia and China in the country.

Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina faced significant political and security challenges in 2024, primarily driven by the actions of Milorad Dodik, the leader of Bosnian Serbs. Dodik's threats to undermine the state and his close ties with Russia have exacerbated tensions within the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina is expected to continue grappling with internal divisions and external influences. The EU's role in mediating and supporting reforms will be crucial, but the risk of political instability and security threats persists. The country's path towards EU integration will depend on its ability to navigate these challenges and maintain a stable political environment.

In 2025, Serbia's political landscape is expected to be shaped by several key developments. President Aleksandar Vučić faces significant political challenges, including protests against his administration. Vučić's handling of the situation will be crucial in determining his political future and maintaining stability in the country.

Recently, there was a significant push, led by Hungary, major EU member states like France and Italy, and the European Commission, to hold a third intergovernmental conference and open several negotiation chapters with Serbia. Despite this, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania blocked the process due to Serbia's nonalignment with the EU's sanctions policy on Russia. The issue of Serbia's EU progress is expected to resurface in early 2025. It would not be a surprise if Brussels, despite reservations, gives the green light to Serbia as a counterbalance to the increased influence of Russia and China in the country.

The EU faces criticism for prioritizing stability in its enlargement process, often overlooking the autocratic tendencies of several regional leaders.

The EU faces criticism for prioritizing stability in its enlargement process, often overlooking the autocratic tendencies of several regional leaders, which undermines the region's democratic consolidation. Critics argue that the EU's geopolitical push for enlargement has shifted the process away from a strictly merit-based approach, favoring political considerations instead. If this approach has diminished the EU's transformative power, the return of Trump, who focuses on a business-oriented approach in the Balkans rather than the consolidation of democracy, could further complicate matters in 2025, leaving the region's structural issues, such as state capture, unaddressed.

Ukraine-Russia and uncertainty over the end of the war

Panagiota Manoli

An end to the war in Ukraine in 2025 seems anything but certain. It seems even less certain that a final settlement to the conflict will be reached and peace achieved.

2025 will bring about a renewed focus on diplomatic initiatives aimed at achieving an agreement or establishing a ceasefire.

Kyiv now seems to acknowledge that it will not be able to recover (all) the territories Russia has occupied.

(How) Will the war in Ukraine end? This question is gaining in pertinence as it becomes increasingly likely that a ceasefire at least, if not a comprehensive solution, is being sought as we head towards the end of the third year of the conflict. US President-elect Donald Trump declared during his election campaign that he would end the war in "24 hours" (a statement he has avoided repeating since his election), while more recently, on 24 November 2024, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the Russian incursion could end in the year ahead—though he clarified that this could only happen if "Russia wants the war to end".

An end to the war in Ukraine in 2025 seems anything but certain. It seems even less certain that a final settlement to the conflict will be reached and peace achieved. What are the factors feeding into this uncertainty? First, there is the lack of a clear picture of the new US administration's plans vis-a-vis Ukraine and the policy it will pursue towards Russia. What is, however, considered a near certainty is that US military aid to Kyiv in its current form will be reduced (or even stopped) and that extreme pressure will be put on Kyiv to reach a ceasefire agreement. Of course, neither of the above implies Kyiv's immediate "surrender", particularly if the existential threat Russia poses to the country is not satisfactorily addressed via the provision of reliable security guarantees. Second, there is no indication that Moscow would be willing to withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory if it has not achieved all of its objectives, which include not only recognition for the territories it has illegally occupied and annexed since 2014, but also regime change in Kyiv and full control over a demilitarised, neutral Ukraine. A third important parameter is Ukraine's ability to access necessary resources, mobilise additional forces, and maintain popular support for the ongoing war. A fourth uncertainty relates to how resilient the Russian economy will prove in the face of the sanctions which have now been in force for over three years. Economists believe the Russian economy faces the spectre of stagnation and will have to cut social benefits (which would impact on the domestic economy) amidst falling revenues—due mainly to the reduction of its energy exports. However, despite these estimates, Russia's 2025 budget includes a 25% year-on-year increase in military spending.

What can we expect?

Initially, 2025 will bring about a renewed focus on diplomatic initiatives aimed at achieving an agreement or establishing a ceasefire. These efforts will be initiated by the new administration in the US and, hopefully, coordinated with the European capitals to define the negotiating strategy and the goals of actions taken. However, political uncertainty in key European states (elections in Germany and political problems facing the French presidency) will restrict Europe's active involvement in the negotiations. It should be noted here that the EU leadership have recently reiterated their determination to continue to support Kyiv by any means and have not ruled out an increase in military support. However, Europe's ability—unaided—to provide Kyiv with the military support required to tip the balance on the ground in Kyiv's favour and not just to keep it in the war, is questionable, especially given the "Ukraine fatigue" noted among the peoples of Europe.

The EU-Russian agenda is becoming increasingly burdened with problems that extend beyond the war in Ukraine.

Second, on the military front, only limited developments are expected, with Ukrainian forces maintaining a strategic defence, given that military aid to Ukraine will not increase, and Russian forces possibly making minor gains in some eastern regions. Kyiv now seems to acknowledge that it will not be able to recover (all) the territories Russia has occupied.

Thirdly, even if there is a cessation of hostilities, it will be in the form of a truce. The two sides will present the truce as a temporary victory at home, winning themselves time to regroup their forces and strengthen their military capabilities. No certain, absolute "victory" for either party is expected in the coming months. In one possible scenario, a truce could lead to a "protracted conflict" and a stabilization along the front line. In another scenario, both parties would regroup their forces, ultimately leading to a "long war" of attrition with the aim of exhausting the economic, military and human resources of the other. Such a situation would put Ukraine at a disadvantage, as it would have to tackle the extra challenge of reconstructing the nation while continuing to engage in combat. Under these circumstances, Ukraine's negotiations with the European Union on its future accession will continue, gaining increased political weight, especially in the absence of any prospect of NATO membership for Kyiv.

The war in Ukraine reflects, of course, on Russia's relations with the West. The indications in recent months are that the EU is hardening rather than softening its stance towards Russia, as demonstrated by the renewal and expansion of sanctions until early 2025, and by the rhetoric of the new EU leadership. The EU-Russian agenda is becoming increasingly burdened with problems that extend beyond the war in Ukraine to include hybrid threats including disinformation and cyber-attacks aimed at destabilizing the EU, as well as Russian aggression along the bloc's eastern border, and in the Baltic in particular.

Whatever Trump may intend, it is the Kremlin that holds the key to resetting relations with the West. And at the time of writing, far from sending signs of some sort of collaboration.

But will Trump's return to the White House introduce a new dynamic into relations with Moscow? Will the President-elect's transactional approach and expressed intention of normalizing US-Russian relations serve as an opportunity for Moscow? Whatever Trump may intend, it is the Kremlin that holds the key to resetting relations with the West. And at the time of writing, far from sending signs of some sort of collaboration, the Kremlin seems to be signalling a head-on confrontation with the West on every front aimed at wresting control of Ukraine, redrawing the European security map, and weakening the Western world.

Critical issues for Turkey in 2025

Ioannis N. Grigoriadis

2024: an assessment

The move taken to resolve the Kurdish question came as a surprise, not only due to the circumstances but also in the light of whose initiative it was.

The opposition's wide-ranging victory in the municipal elections of 31 March 2024 was the most important political event in Turkey in 2024. It wasn't just the comfortable or overwhelming re-election of the mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş, that made an impression. There was also the unexpected victory of the Republican People's Party (CHP), which finished in first place for the first time since 1977. This success proved that the party's new president, Özgür Özel, had opted for the right policy, as well as confirming the leading role played by the two mayors as pillars of the opposition front. It also partially restored morale among the ranks of the opposition, which had been dealt a severe blow by its painful dual defeat in the presidential and parliamentary elections of May 2023. However, there was still a good chance the government would use the judiciary to block the candidacy of İmamoğlu and Yavaş, and a serious political crisis remained a distinct possibility.

The fall of the Assad regime in Syria [...] marks the start of a new era in the Middle East in which Israel imposes its hegemony in collaboration with the Gulf States, with the other Arab states left on the sidelines.

The move taken to resolve the Kurdish question came as a surprise, not only due to the circumstances but also in the light of whose initiative it was. For it was the president of the Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, a politician not known for his sensitivity with regard to minority rights, who led the public debate on the issue. Indeed, in his speech on the matter in the Turkish Parliament, he went so far as to suggest that the convict and historic leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan should be invited to address the body. However, the ongoing suspensions and arrests of mayors of Kurdish origin elected with the pro-Kurdish DEM party, and one mayor of Kurdish origin elected with CHP support in a suburb of Istanbul, have to call into question the sincerity of the government officials' intentions and/or indicate that the 'deep state' intends to undermine the new initiative.

The Hamas terrorist attack of 7 October 2023, and Israel's retaliation to it, have had a profound impact on Turkey's foreign policy. The weakening of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran have ushered in a new era for the strategic balance of power in the Middle East. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria surprised everyone, especially given how it came about, and marks the start of a new era in the Middle East in which Israel imposes its hegemony in collaboration with the Gulf States, with the other Arab states left on the sidelines.

The release of Abdullah Öcalan

Although he has been imprisoned on the island of İmralı in the Sea of Marmara for a quarter of a century, Öcalan remains a symbol for a large part of Turkey's Kurdish minority.

The release of Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned since February 1999, could form part of a new government initiative to resolve the Kurdish issue. He could either be pardoned or released on parole, since he has served a full 25 years in prison. There are also European Court of Human Rights judgements that could be instrumentalized with this goal in mind. Although he has been imprisoned on the island of İmralı in the Sea of Marmara for a quarter of a century, Öcalan remains a symbol for a large part of Turkey's Kurdish minority. The goal would be for Öcalan's release to split the opposition by stopping Turkey's Kurdish minority voting as a bloc for its candidate (especially if it is Ekrem İmamoğlu) in the next presidential elections. The omission of the other big name in the Kurdish political movement who remains in prison, Selahattin Demirtaş, is indicative of these aims: since it is not thought Mr Demirtaş will be agreeing to play any role in the political plans of the ruling coalition, he has been left out of the negotiations and his release is not under discussion.

Crisis in Turkey's Relations with Russia

Turkey's relations with Russia have gone through multiple phases in recent years, as the interests of the two states have sometimes coincided and sometimes clashed. The two states have often preferred to side-step international crises in which both their interests were at stake in order to seek convergence. The apparent weakening of Russia as a result of its involvement in military operations its state infrastructure and resources cannot support has become clear in both Ukraine and Syria. In Ukraine, Russia was forced to request the assistance of North Korean troops. In Syria, the collapse of the Assad regime was made possible by Russia's failure to provide the support that had propped the regime up in the past. It is highly likely that any readjustments made to Russian-Turkish relations in view of the new conditions will lead to a crisis. Possible Trump administration support for a ceasefire plan in Ukraine that serves Russian interests would shift the regional balance of power away from Turkey. Moreover, the future of Russia's military presence in post-Assad Syria will be a crucial point of reference. Both the Tartus naval base and the Khmeimim air base are crucial to Russia's strategic security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean and to its relations with Turkey, and Russia's presence a few hundred kilometres to the north-west, at the nuclear power plant it is building in Akkuyu, Turkey, south of Mersin on the Mediterranean coast, can also be understood in this context. Any attempt to remove these Russian bases from Syria could lead to a crisis in Russian-Turkish relations.

...any readjustments made to Russian-Turkish relations in view of the new conditions will lead to a crisis.

Holding on to what has been achieved with no solution in sight

Panagiotis Tsakonas

... far from abandoning these grandiose ambitions, Turkey seems to be pursuing them with ever greater confidence.

Turkey's influential role in the fall of the Assad regime has been recognised both by President Trump and by a weak EU which is reluctant to intervene in the developments currently underway in the Middle East.

...the conditions that would force Greece and Turkey to engage in meaningful negotiations with a view to resolving their problems will once again be absent in the year ahead.

In last year's special feature on Greek-Turkish relations, we successfully predicted both that the waters would remain calm for most of 2024 and that the Turkish President would limit his focus, for a range of reasons, to keeping relations with Greece in a state of relative normality and stability, without seeking to resolve the differences between the two countries. Moreover, given Turkey's stance on the ongoing war in Ukraine and on the Gaza front, we correctly predicted that Turkey would continue to be a useful, albeit "problematic" partner for the West, with its active support for Hamas having certain legitimacy cost for Ankara. Nonetheless, we overestimated the determination of the Biden administration and the EU to set the terms of, and preconditions for, the West's current and future relationship with Turkey in order to increase the pressure on the Turkish President and limit his options, especially with regard to the pursuit of ambitious goals that would clash with those of the US and/or the EU.

As the New Year begins, far from abandoning these grandiose ambitions, Turkey seems to be pursuing them with ever greater confidence. Indeed, regardless of how the war in Ukraine is finally settled, it seems that Turkey will be coming out ahead—albeit less so than it would like, especially in terms of its high level of dependence on Russia. Still, there can be no doubt that Turkey has emerged as the biggest winner on the Syria front where, following the collapse of the Assad regime, it expects not only have a seat at the table around which the final settlement will be reached, but also to play a leading role in the proceedings of the negotiations. It should be noted that Turkey's influential role in the fall of the Assad regime has been recognised both by President Trump and by a weak EU which is reluctant to intervene in the developments currently underway in the Middle East.

Apparently, President Erdoğan will cash in on Turkey's enhanced usefulness for the West (chiefly the US and NATO) by seeking a trade-off in terms of the "existential threat" the continuation of US support for both Kurdish fighters in Syria (the Kurdish YPG-PYD) and for Israel poses for Turkey. Fortunately, the "linking" of Israel with the Syrian Kurds, which President Trump seems intent on pursuing after his installation in the White House, is expected to offer the new US administration serious leverage with which to counter both Turkey's aspirations in the Middle East and its attempt to decouple its foreign policy from that of the US. Indeed, given both its upgraded say and role in events in the Middle East and its stated goal of achieving "strategic autonomy", Turkey may also seek to expand its role further by claiming a leading place among the world's "emerging powers".

What could the above imply for the future of Greek-Turkish relations in 2025? Unsurprisingly, both countries are interested in keeping the rapprochement process ongoing, albeit for different reasons. For an upgraded Turkey with grand ambitions, maintaining an—at least relatively—stable front in its relationship with Greece will allow it to pursue a broader range of goals. For Greece, a continuation of its current, relatively smooth relations with Turkey is the best-case scenario, especially if the achievements the rapprochement process has delivered in terms of the bilateral "positive agenda", confidence-building measures and cooperation between the two neighbours on migration can be retained.

ELIAMEP Outlook – Predictions for 2025

President Trump's picks to date for US ambassadors to Athens and Ankara reveal a limited appreciation of Greece's importance as a pillar of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, the conditions that would force the two countries (Turkey in particular) to engage in meaningful negotiations with a view to resolving their problems will once again be absent in the year ahead. Indeed, the "Political Dialogue" which both countries have gone out of their way to downplay ensures that any "exploratory discussions" will not address the two neighbours' differences on 'high politics' issues, but aim instead at achieving some kind of "lasting peace". For the above reasons, 2025 is highly unlikely to bring with it developments that are either extremely positive—the resolution of the Greek-Turkish conflict—or extremely negative—the discontinuation of the rapprochement process and a return to the perilous and unpredictable relations of the past.

Of course, these predictions about the future of Greek-Turkish relations assume that the Greek-Turkish rapprochement remains independent of the planning and priorities of specific third parties. As regards the US in particular, which remains the dark horse, President Trump's picks to date for US ambassadors to Athens and Ankara reveal a limited appreciation of Greece's importance as a pillar of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean (although the choice of a young female ambassador is anything but hackneyed) and a greater interest in Turkey's potential role as a facilitator of the US strategic goals in various Turkish 'zones of control'. The same applies should Turkey succeed in reaching an agreement with the new Syrian government on the delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)—which, though unlikely, is not out of the question. The most likely consequence in that case would be an abrupt end to the Greek-Turkish rapprochement and the subsequent negation of any progress made thus far.

In 2025 migration will continue but with constraints

Angeliki Dimitriadi

In 2024, the UN Refugee Agency reported that at least 117,3 million people remained forcibly displaced due to conflicts, violence, persecution, and human rights violations, with the number rising to 120 million by mid-2024. Seventy percent of these displaced individuals are in countries of the "Global South," yet most restrictive measures are taken in the "Global North," including the United States and the EU.

Migration was a central issue in various national elections in 2024 and is expected to play a significant role in the upcoming German elections.

While migration has increased, returning to pre-pandemic levels, so too have reactions within EU member states. Migration was a central issue in various national elections in 2024 and is expected to play a significant role in the upcoming German elections. Electoral gains by far-right parties have pushed centrist and right-wing parties to adopt restrictive measures and even xenophobic rhetoric in an effort to appease growing voter discontent. This trend is set to continue into 2025, already influencing policies such as the Migration and Asylum Pact, which reflects a highly conservative approach.

After years of negotiations and failed attempts, Europeans reached an agreement in May 2024 on the Migration and Asylum Pact. The Pact includes 10 major reforms aimed at strengthening border controls, enhancing the processing of asylum claims, increasing deportations, and cooperating with non-EU countries of origin and transit to curb irregular migration.

A key milestone was the introduction of a new solidarity system, requiring member states to take responsibility either through relocation or other forms of assistance (financial, technical, etc.). Nevertheless, the Pact retains the logic of the Dublin Regulation.

The new reforms incorporate practices tried since 2016 at Greece's external borders, which have proven problematic, especially during periods of large influxes. A key milestone was the introduction of a new solidarity system, requiring member states to take responsibility either through relocation or other forms of assistance (financial, technical, etc.). Nevertheless, the Pact retains the logic of the Dublin Regulation—the first country of arrival remains responsible for processing and hosting asylum seekers.

As a political compromise, the legislation is already considered insufficient for reducing arrivals and asylum requests. Although set to come into effect in mid-2026, full implementation is unlikely, with member states already seeking new ways to fortify their borders and shift responsibilities to frontline states for migration management.

In this context, deportations will become a priority in 2025. Within the EU, most of the 100,000 return orders issued quarterly do not result in deportations. As a result, more radical ideas than those of 2024—such as return hubs in third countries—are expected to be discussed to achieve higher deportation rates.

Following the end of Assad's rule in Syria in December 2024, attention in many member states, including Germany, has turned to how quickly Syrians can be repatriated. Several countries have suspended the processing of Syrian asylum claims, awaiting developments. However, large-scale returns to Syria in 2025 are unlikely unless conditions stabilize and meet the legal framework criteria for enabling voluntary return.

In the coming year, the Schengen area will continue to face challenges, along with the capacity of member states to demonstrate solidarity and responsibility. Several states will maintain or expand internal border controls within Schengen while seeking ways of reducing secondary movement from frontline states. This will disproportionately affect countries like Greece, which is expected to face additional challenges in 2025.

Several states will maintain or expand internal border controls within Schengen while seeking ways of reducing secondary movement from frontline states.

Greece will continue to act as the “gatekeeper,” with the new Pact explicitly linking a country’s adherence to its asylum and migration obligations with its ability to receive solidarity support. At the same time, Greece must develop robust migration diplomacy, not only to secure returns beyond Turkey but, more importantly, to establish successful legal migration pathways. These pathways are critical for meeting labor market demands and should remain a national priority.

Legal migration, in all its forms, will be the EU’s primary challenge in the coming year. The absence of regularization programs, restrictive entry and employment policies, and the inability to align labour markets with individuals eligible for refugee status (who often possess valuable skills) are issues that have already emerged in several countries and are set to intensify. Meanwhile, the return of Trump to the U.S. presidency will mark a shift back toward isolationism and a significant reduction in resettlement programs and legal migration pathways, undoing progress made under the Biden administration. This development will heighten the EU’s responsibility to find a delicate balance between maintaining secure borders and providing legal pathways for refugees and migrants, all with the ultimate goal of integrating them into European societies.

Europe's Uneasy Stasis

Alekos Kritikos

A mass of storm clouds are gathered, dark and threatening, in the international sky. But they didn't appear suddenly out of nowhere, and as Europe we should really have noticed them and started worrying long before Trump's re-election. We should have heard the bells tolling long ago for the major geopolitical changes that are taking place, for the emergence of new powers demanding their place on the international scene, for the ongoing decline of Europe's international competitiveness, the crisis of democracy in the West, climate change, immigration, the war in Ukraine, and the crisis that was simmering for years in the Middle East whose current size and volatility shouldn't have taken us by surprise.

Trump re-election was just the icing on the cake of these dangerous developments. That this latter development has served as a wake-up call for us as Europeans—it remains to be seen whether it will actually wake us up—is due to the US being the world's most powerful nation both economically and in terms of defence, and hence the main factor in the global balance that is currently being upset, but also to the US being both a competitor and a partner of Europe, with everything that contradiction entails.

Recent developments also include the discussion of the proposal that certain member states fund the joint defence policy through a hybrid type of borrowing, in the light of the refusal of Germany and other "frugal" Member States to accept new joint EU borrowing.

The Letta and Draghi reports, two crucial texts, emerged not as an initiative conceived of by certain inspired circles or individuals, but as a logical consequence of rapid geopolitical developments. They both begin with the same realisation, though they formulate it differently: that the international geopolitical environment has changed dramatically and that the EU must therefore take immediate action to address its investment deficit, estimated at €800 billion per year, along with what Draghi calls the "existential challenge" it is facing. Both reports make concrete and detailed proposals for the comprehensive and multi-faceted actions the EU needs to take, the most important of which is to unify its member states' fragmented national efforts so as to close the EU's competitiveness and innovation gaps.

That the European Council accepting the bulk of these proposals in Budapest, and did so in short order (by EU standards), indicates how important they are for the future of Europe.

But Budapest also made it clear how unwilling Europe's leaders were to even broach the hot potato of EU competition policy (distortions caused by the state aid the larger EU member states give to their companies, the discouraging of mergers and thus of the creation of European international business "champions") and the even hotter issue of generating significant additional resources through new joint borrowing, which led some to argue that November's European Council did little more than draw up a somewhat painless wish-list.

Recent developments also include the discussion—brought to light by the *Financial Times*—of the proposal that certain member states fund the joint defence policy through a hybrid type of borrowing, in the light of the refusal of Germany and other "frugal" Member States to accept new joint EU borrowing. Specifically, the borrowing in question would not be undertaken by the EU itself, as was the case with the Recovery Fund, but by a kind of SPV in which as many member states as want to can participate, along with some non-EU countries (such as Great Britain and Norway), with the loan then guaranteed by all these countries.

It is possible that the gathering storm clouds of burgeoning threats will bolster and accelerate the EU's 'awakening' but there is always a risk that losses suffered in the interim could pre-empt the wake-up call, stalling recovery efforts and pushing Europe into a regression that could prove irreversible.

However, it should be noted that this debate, though it undoubtedly has positive aspects, serves to reduce, if not actually eliminate, the pressure to implement the proposals both Letta and Draghi make for the repeated issuance of bonds by the EU itself, which would contribute substantially to the promotion of European integration.

It is possible that the gathering storm clouds of burgeoning threats will bolster and accelerate the EU's 'awakening'—confirming Jean Monet's prophetic comments yet again on the contribution crises have made to European integration—but there is always a risk that losses suffered in the interim (from the imposition of punishing tariffs on European products, other protectionist measures, the withdrawal of the US defence umbrella, etc.) could pre-empt the wake-up call, stalling recovery efforts and pushing Europe into a regression that could prove irreversible. Which is why how Europe reacts is important, but also when it reacts.

And while the Budapest declaration may not have gone as far as the situation demands, it still makes it clear that the European Union has taken the need to regain the initiative fully on board. Given certain preconditions, the discussion about a policy on joint defence funding, even outside the EU framework, also points in the same direction. On the other hand, the political uncertainty in Germany, together with the signs of Berlin distancing itself from European options, plus—and above all—the political deadlock in France and the prospect of worse to come, make the possibility of the active awakening of a united Europe at best remote. Does realism require the scenario of EU regression to be tabled, albeit in the context of attempts to prevent it? Whatever the case, Europe must leave its uneasy stasis behind as soon as possible.

National Defence in 2025

Antonis Kamaras

In previous years, the US and France were the two countries most crucial for Greek national defence in terms of a combination of geopolitical alliances and weapon systems procurement. In 2025, Germany will emerge as the country with the greatest impact in this policy area, in view of its European dimension.

The government that will emerge from the snap German elections of 23 February 2025 will remove the debt brake and thus lift fiscal limits on spending. The need for greater investment in defence in the wake of the return of 'Big War' to Europe will make this development politically feasible.

The government that will emerge from the snap German elections of 23 February 2025 will remove the debt brake and thus lift fiscal limits on spending. The need for greater investment in defence in the wake of the return of 'Big War' to Europe will make this development politically feasible. The new Trump Administration will, in any case, be applying pressure in the same direction. In turn, the lifting of the German debt brake will facilitate the exclusion of national defence spending from EU fiscal rules and/or an increase in the resources set aside by the European Commission for collective defence. After all, bolstering German military power with no commensurate investment in the Armed Forces of the other EU member states lacks operational logic and would also be politically problematic.

Consequently, Greece will be able to increase its defence spending and close with greater rapidity the 20-billion-euro investment gap in Greek national defence which opened up during the fiscal crisis, according to Nikos Dendias. At the same time, the EU will further step up its role as a collective security provider for Greece. The start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022 has led *de facto* to Greece—for decades, the only NATO member country that has not enjoyed Article 5 protection, due to Turkey also being a member of the Atlantic Alliance—joining an increasingly powerful, and this time purely European, collective security mechanism. We can expect to see Greece's membership to this new collective security mechanism being further crystallised in 2025 both institutionally, with the new EU Commissioner for Defence taking office, and financially.

Greece will be able to increase its defence spending and close with greater rapidity the 20-billion-euro investment gap in Greek national defence which opened up during the fiscal crisis.

At the level of the Greek Armed Forces, the relatively neglected Land Army will be the beneficiary of this development. Therein, the armour, mechanised infantry and artillery in particular will seek to exploit the increased funding made possible for national defence to upgrade their existing systems and/or acquire new ones. One of the key lessons learned from the war in Ukraine is that all main elements of a Land Army need to modernise if they are to prevail on the modern battlefield, and if the personnel manning them can enhance their survivability. This reinforcement of the Greek Land Army will also restore Germany's status as one of the three or four main suppliers of weapon systems to Greece, both because the Greek Army's armour is German-manufactured and in light of the aforementioned influence Germany can be expected to exert over collective European defence.

The Hellenic Centre for Defence Innovation (HCDI) will prove its worth in 2025. In addition to the highly technocratic leadership of both the Greek Armed Forces and the HCDI, the Greek start-up ecosystem has now matured to the point at which it can meet the challenge, and pursue the opportunities, presented to it by HCDI. The accelerated lifting of restrictions on European Investment Bank (EIB) financing to European defence companies will allow domestic venture capital funds, almost all of which manage EIB funds, to invest in Greek defence companies. As well as generating financial returns, the intangible incentive for our most innovative entrepreneurs and researchers, including those of the Greek diaspora, to help the Greek Armed Forces gain a qualitative advantage

2025 will see the Greek Armed Forces employing their deterrent power once again in grey-zone operations at sea and/or in the air.

over Turkey's armed forces will also prove to be a powerful driver of innovation in the defence sector.

Syria is clearly going to be of particular concern to the Turkish military establishment in 2025. However, the at least transient perception developments in Syria will instil in Turkey's political and military leadership that the regional environment can be shaped through the use of military force will reinforce a sense of Turkish superiority over Greece. Consequently, 2025 will see the Greek Armed Forces employing their deterrent power once again in grey-zone operations at sea and/or in the air.

Given its focus on Syria, the possibility of Turkey springing a strategic surprise at Greece's expense is rather remote. But certainly not out of the question. President Erdoğan's efforts to perpetuate his rule either directly, or indirectly through his successors, against a backdrop of declining economic expectations and a resurgent opposition mean his regime must regain the political initiative at all cost. And this can be achieved through the domestic prestige which Turkey imposing itself militarily abroad confers on the Erdogan regime. The successive military victories won by Turkey's proxies with direct or indirect assistance from the Turkish Armed Forces has reinforced Ankara's 'war optimism', even in view of a possible military conflict with Greece, despite Greece's deterrent power being incomparably stronger than any of Turkey's military opponents to date. If Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Hamas' attack on kibbutzim in Israel have taught us anything, it is to avoid 'mirror imaging'. In our case, this means that we must not project our own circumspection and prudence, as a mature democracy and EU member state, onto an undemocratic regime which Erdoğan has rendered profoundly personalistic; a regime that is powerful but simultaneously weak and which has become path-dependent by the very arbitrary use of power that it has exercised in order to perpetuate its rule.

Developments in European Defence

Spyros Blavoukos

...while several NATO member countries are still struggling to meet the long agreed 2% GDP threshold for defence spending, discussions have already started on raising the threshold to 3%.

Europe is under pressure twice over: from the US to increase its defence spending in a period of 'lean cows', which will exacerbate the political and socio-economic strains within EU member states, but also from the geopolitical reality that is challenging the EU to rise to the occasion and increase its military strength.

The (West's) Problem: the global geopolitical system has been subject to repeated and intense shocks since February 2022. The invasion of Ukraine crowned Russia's attempts to re-establish its sphere of influence around its perimeters and beyond, while putting the West's will to support the Ukrainian struggle to the test, as a result of the growing 'war fatigue' in European societies. Ukraine is reaching its limits, but every appeal to the need for pragmatism comes accompanied by the realisation that any solution that fails to provide Ukraine with sufficient security guarantees will inevitably lead in time to a new round of clashes and destabilisation.

The (American) Elephant in the Room: Trump announcing during his campaign that he would resolve the conflict immediately on being elected raises concerns for Ukraine's territorial integrity and how its borders could end up being redrawn. This puts pressure on Kiev, but also fuels a perilous escalation in military operations aimed at securing territorial gains in view of an expected border "freeze". At the same time, Trump's repeated references to the need for the West's security burden to be shared more equitably portend serious tensions in transatlantic relations. Threats of the US withdrawing from NATO, should this fail to come about, seem—for the time being, at least—to be more a means of exerting negotiating pressure than a realistic possibility, judging from President Trump's transactional modus operandi and world view. The new element in the equation is that, while several NATO member countries are still struggling to meet the long agreed 2% GDP threshold for defence spending, discussions have already started on raising the threshold to 3%.

The (European) Solution: the 'Ukrainian problem' has been a 'European problem' from the start, due to its geographical proximity but also—and mainly—because it calls into question the fundamental givens of the global geopolitical system as Europe perceives it, including respect for international law and the inviolability of borders. So, it is imperative Europe contributes to its resolution. Now, it is clear this cannot be achieved through financial support alone, however generous it may be. Setting aside the provision of European combat units to directly support the Ukrainian struggle, which would signal an unthinkable escalation of the conflict, a Western security umbrella for Ukraine remains a key component of any viable settlement of the war. Europe has an essential role to play in this umbrella, though—realistically speaking—it can only provide it with US support. Moreover, in the event of peace or a ceasefire, a European military presence on the ground will be needed in any buffer zone that is created.

This means Europe is under pressure twice over: from the US to increase its defence spending in a period of 'lean cows', which will exacerbate the political and socio-economic strains within EU member states, but also from the geopolitical reality that is challenging the EU to rise to the occasion and increase its military strength.

The Two Basic Conundrums (for the European Union): 2025 will be a pivotal year for EU defence, on two levels: firstly, on the financial side, the bloc will need to find resources to finance the process of strengthening defence cooperation between Member States. In the period now ended, discussions centred on exploiting existing untapped resources—from the Cohesion Fund or the European Stability Mechanism, for instance, to European Investment Bank funding, all of which have a very different *raison d'être* but remain largely underutilized. Alongside these existing resources, the debate on new financial

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mechanisms in which only a 'coalition of the willing' will participate has now gained considerable momentum; at this stage in the discussions, it appears to be the most realistic prospect. This new intergovernmental scheme would involve the setting up of a special Fund which would finance investments in the European defence industry by borrowing on the international financial markets with the expert guidance of the European Investment Bank. This scheme differs from the 'defence Eurobonds' that have been tabled but met with opposition from several EU member states opposed to joint borrowing; it will permit flexibility and sidestep obstacles and delays caused by Member States that are not interested in the EU's defence prospect and certainly do not want to be saddled with new financial burdens stemming from it.

Second, closer defence cooperation transcends the purely technocratic to touch directly on the political deepening of the EU. Apart from military operational organisation and the handling of interoperability issues, both of which are major factors in any discussions centred on a credible European deterrent, the processes required for defence cooperation to come about cannot take place in a political vacuum. However, with France and Germany both racked by internal political strife, it would be unrealistic to hope for meaningful policy initiatives in 2025—unless Commission President Ursula von der Leyen surprises us and demonstrates exceptional leadership skills in her second term.

So, what can we expect from the year ahead? Certainly, important developments in the field of European defence financing, where a medium- and long-term dynamic could come into being on the basis of the neo-functionalist approach to European integration. With no meaningful political progress on the horizon, however, these schemes cannot help the EU cross the Rubicon of political integration—at least not in the near future. So, once again, as Europe, we will be called upon to pay for the tardiness of our response to major crises and challenges, and risk being overtaken by historical and geopolitical developments. Unless, that is, catalysts from outside the bloc—the Trump 2.0 administration, for instance, developments in Ukraine, or some new crisis—provide us with the impetus to overcome our inherent weaknesses.

Climate change or climate crisis?

Emmanuella Doussis

...global climate cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations, while important for maintaining a channel of communication, is neither a panacea nor a provider of substantial solutions for managing climate change.

Over the last year, the term “climate crisis” has been increasingly used to emphatically describe the severe deterioration of certain phenomena affecting the climate, and to awaken society. Sudden and extreme weather events, which are now occurring more frequently and with greater intensity and duration, alongside with droughts, heat waves, floods, and wildfires, cause massive destruction and impact water resources, agriculture, infrastructure, health, and security, accelerating population displacement and testing the resilience of governments and national economies.

However, a crisis is typically a temporary phenomenon that peaks and then subsides or transitions into something else. Thus, the term “climate crisis” is misleading because it does not include the parameter of duration. Moreover, it gives the impression that a return to normality is possible. But this is now unattainable. The Earth’s average temperature has already risen significantly, and harmful greenhouse gas emissions are still increasing rapidly. We are therefore facing a phenomenon that is causing an emergency, a situation that requires urgent action in two directions: to drastically reduce the causes and to manage the consequences. This is a phenomenon that we will be constantly confronted with and which we must learn how to manage. There are practices that can help in this direction, but the pace of our mobilization is exceedingly slow.

The annual global climate conference (COP 29), which concluded its work a few weeks ago in Baku, Azerbaijan (a country that produces and exports fossil fuels, as well as being the host country of the 2023 conference), had the main objective of reaching an economic agreement on the transition to clean energy and addressing the climate-related disasters in poorer countries that are most affected and least equipped to respond. An agreement was reached, but it falls short of expectations. Annual funding of \$300 billion a year will be provided until 2035, but trillions are needed. This outcome confirms the observation we made last year that global climate cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations, while important for maintaining a channel of communication, is neither a panacea nor a provider of substantial solutions for managing climate change. The persistent search for global consensus serves only to lower the bar to the lowest common denominator.

Having adopted most of the necessary legislation, attention now turns to implementation, which requires Member States’ cooperation to achieve the collective European goal.

Meanwhile, the upcoming assumption of the U.S. presidency by the most well-known climate change denier is not good news. Certainly, the circumstances are not the same as in 2016, when the same president withdrew U.S.A, the world’s second-largest emitter, from the Paris Agreement. At that time, the biggest challenge was to convince the largest polluter, China, to make commitments to reduce harmful emissions. Today, while China still relies on coal as its primary energy source, it has invested heavily in expanding renewable energy, aspiring to become climate neutral by 2060 while maintaining high exports of materials essential for clean energy. Therefore, it also has an economic reason to support the green transition. India, which has risen to third place on the list of global polluters, is also heavily investing in renewables, has set ambitious targets for 2030 and leads global initiatives, such as the International Solar Alliance, to accelerate the deployment of solar energy technologies that will improve energy access and ensure energy security in participating countries.

Despite the heightened politicization of the green transition ahead of the European elections, the European Union, which ranks fourth on the list of global polluters, remained

Greece is slowly but progressively moving towards a green transition.

committed to achieving the European Green Deal goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Having adopted most of the necessary legislation, attention now turns to implementation, which requires Member States' cooperation to achieve the collective European goal. Implementation is far from easy given the great turmoil affecting Europe. It will only succeed if the net-zero carbon emissions target is combined with Europe's economic transformation.

It is obvious that another way for central government to engage with local authorities is needed, rather than simply shifting responsibility to municipalities.

Greece is slowly but progressively moving towards a green transition. The revision of the National Energy and Climate Plan gives great priority to the use of domestic energy sources, such as solar and wind power, i.e. abundant, proven and not speculative resources, establishing a system that better leverages the natural assets available. However, it is not yet clear how the ongoing hydrocarbon (i.e. fossil fuel) extraction programme is consistent with European climate change objectives. In addition, the implementation of important provisions of the National Climate Law is delayed, such as the obligation for municipal authorities to draw up five-year emission reduction plans. It is obvious that another way for central government to engage with local authorities is needed, rather than simply shifting responsibility to municipalities.

But beyond addressing the causes, which is one aspect of climate action, particular attention must also be given to adaptation to climate change and preparing to manage the inevitable. This involves more than flood prevention projects or purchasing more firefighting vehicles and coordinating emergency services. Emphasis on prevention—such as monitoring vulnerable areas, planting trees to cover open spaces, better water management, etc.—along with citizen education, are also critical factors.

Identifying and understanding the challenges is a priority, and this requires a common language of communication between science, policymakers, and society. In a region warming faster than others on the planet, communicating both risks and best practices is becoming a major issue. Today many communication efforts try to convince the sceptics that climate change is happening and is an undeniable fact. Yet most citizens already know this. What they do not know is how it specifically impacts the area they live in and what they can do to protect their homes, land, businesses, and infrastructure to make them more resilient to climate change. Time is already running out.

How much of a problem is hereditary democracy?

Asteris Huliaras

..."hereditary democracy" is a feature of a good many countries both developed.

22 years ago, in October 2002, *The Economist* published an article entitled "Enduring virtues: Greece's political dynasties go on and on", which noted that "there is one aspect of Greek politics that is remarkably enduring: the loyalty that voters feel for familiar old surnames—even if the policies, and political styles, are entirely new". The article was accompanied by six photos with the subtitle: "One Karamanlis, Mitsotakis and Papandreu after another". Kyriakos Mitsotakis wasn't included among the photos (Dora Bakoyannis was there to represent the Mitsotakis clan), but the author of the article would surely feel vindicated two decades on.

...excluding monarchs, there are now more democratically elected heads of government whose fathers were heads of government before them than there are autocratic heads of government for whom the same is true!

But *The Economist* article was misleading in one important respect: it seemed to imply that political dynasties are an exclusively Greek phenomenon. In fact, as Professor James Loxton noted in a recent article in *The Journal of Democracy*, what he calls "hereditary democracy" is a feature of a good many countries both developed (the Kennedy, Clinton and Bush families in the US, for instance, or the Trudeau family in Canada) and less developed (e.g. the Gandhis in India and Marcos *père* and *fils* in the Philippines). And not only in the past. In fact, excluding monarchs, there are now more democratically elected heads of government whose fathers were heads of government before them than there are autocratic heads of government for whom the same is true! And on every continent: from Mexico to Estonia and from Guatemala to Pakistan. Loxton is highly critical of the phenomenon. He argues that hereditary democracy shrinks the pool of political talent and can frustrate the expectations of voters who mistakenly believe that the son, daughter, widow or relative of an important statesman will share their abilities. However, the professor does note that these negatives are partly offset by one noteworthy plus: that more women reach high office in countries where this would be unlikely under other circumstances (the first woman ever elected prime minister in the world was Sirimavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka—still Ceylon at the time, in 1960—six decades before Sweden elected its first female head of government). But the paper ends on a bitter note, concluding that this isn't how democracy is supposed to work.

However, there is a counter argument. In his provocative 2003 book *In Praise of Nepotism*, Adam Bellow—son of the Nobel Prize-winning author Saul Bellow—argues that nepotism has always been and will always be part of life, and that it is practised in a far less damaging way today than it was in the past.

He calls the modern version 'meritocratic nepotism', in so far as family connections help a person to come to the fore and knock on the door of advancement, but no further: after that, they have to prove their worth. Bellow concludes his argument by saying they are likely to do so, given that they will have been apprenticed to the role since childhood. This obviously applies to politicians, but also to actors, academics, trade unionists and others. In the final chapter of the book, he argues that nepotism is a natural development, since it stems from the ties that bind children and parents, the transmission of family heritage, and the cycle of generosity and gratitude that binds society as a whole. And because nepotism is not going away any time soon, Bellow argues we should take an "open-minded" approach to the phenomenon.

Nepotism offends our sense of meritocracy and fair play, which tell us that what we receive in life should be the result of our efforts and not of inherited advantage. For centuries, people have been fighting nepotism in court, in parliament and the workplace

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...perhaps it is time we looked on nepotism with a slightly more open mind—especially in relation to our leaders.

in the name of justice and equality. In part, it is an ongoing battle whose outcome remains undecided. In politics, though, the practice has made such a comeback in recent years, we can legitimately speak of a "new nepotism". But perhaps it is time we looked on nepotism with a slightly more open mind—especially in relation to our leaders.

From a different perspective, the debate on nepotism obscures more wide-ranging problems. The fundamental problem in countries like Greece is favouritism, meaning the favouring of one person over another, whether they are relatives or not. In many ways, the debate on nepotism helps to conceal the high levels of cronyism and party-political selection criteria in Greece, both of which are more germane and critical to the functioning of democracy than political dynasties. Focus on those instead, and nepotism might also become less prevalent.

Europe in difficult times

Loukas Tsoukalis

I wrote this time last year that Europe was not at its best and that 2024 looked set to be a difficult year. And so it has proved. But it's looking like next year is going to be even harder. And it is certainly far from a foregone conclusion that Europe can summon a response that even begins to measure up to the immense challenges confronting it.

...the question is how long the Europeans can withstand US pressure before they split and retreat? And at what cost to the European economy?

Trump's re-election in the United States will have a direct impact on transatlantic relations and Europe's relations with the rest of the world, also on how its own member states interact. We know that the once and future President of the US does not believe in international institutions and rules, or much in alliances. Like a true businessman, he takes a transactional approach to international relations and also believes in the law of the strongest.

He views the European Union as something strange and perhaps rather decadent: such terms as consensus and shared sovereignty are alien to him. The US trade deficit with Europe annoys him, and his threat of tariffs has the German automobile manufacturers and others shaking in their boots. He sees China as the biggest threat to American hegemony and we can expect the trade war between the US and China to heat up. The pressure on Europe to toe Washington's line will also increase. But European and American interests don't necessarily coincide. So, the question is how long the Europeans can withstand US pressure before they split and retreat? And at what cost to the European economy?

The EU is entering the new year with a clear leadership deficit.

The newly elected US president wants the war in Ukraine to end sooner rather than later. But the responsibility for maintaining a precarious peace and the expense of rebuilding a badly savaged Ukraine will fall mainly on the Europeans, who will also have to take more responsibility of their own external security. On this last point at least, Donald Trump is certainly not wrong. Can the Europeans take all that on? And what place do they envisage for Russia in Europe's security architecture in the future? For the leaders of Poland, the Baltic countries and a few others, the answer is clear: prepare for war. Can there be a unified and autonomous European response to these key questions? If not, Europe will continue to be dragged behind decisions taken by others on its behalf.

The EU is entering the new year with a clear leadership deficit. Germany will be heading to the polls and the Christian Democrats are readying themselves for a return to power leading a new coalition government that will probably take a few months to smooth over its differences between the constituent parties. As for France, a stable government that excludes the extremes is going to be very hard to achieve and extremely precarious if and when in place. The President of the French Republic, for years the only leader who thought and acted European, is now paying the price for political mistakes at home and, dare we say it, of arrogance.

There are no other strong candidates to fill the gap at the European level, although some have begun to look to Meloni who, like Orban, may enjoy privileged access to President Trump. God help us! As far as the European Commission is concerned, power will be even more concentrated in Ursula von der Leyen's hands in her second presidency, while the responsibilities of rather weak politically Commissioners will overlap. I doubt the Commission has the political weight to fill the leadership vacuum left by others.

The Draghi report highlighted Europe's economic woos. It proposed bold and concrete solutions. But will it be possible to translate the positive reception by the leaders of member states into action? [...] In Europe, we still do too much talk.

A crisis of governance and a crisis of democracy across Europe. The disappointment the political system engenders in large sections of European societies (and an even bigger one in the United States of America) continues to lead voters to cast their votes increasingly for anti-systemic parties, most of them populist and in the far right. The old mainstream parties are still trying to work out why, as is European social democracy that most of the poorer strata abandoned years ago, thus leaving a vacuum that the far right has filled with appeals to patriotism and social welfare. We had seen an earlier version of this same scenario play out in the interwar period, and let's not forget how badly that had turned out.

How can the problem be addressed? Certainly not by labelling as populism every radical proposal that departs from traditional norms. And certainly not by cancelling elections when we don't like the verdict they deliver, as happened very recently in the Romanian presidential election. If elections had to be cancelled every time someone attempts to manipulate the popular vote via social media, how should the US have dealt with Elon Musk and other plutocrats for their interventions in the US elections? They surely spent much more money than the Russians may have done in Romania. While maintaining an embarrassed silence on such major issues, European institutions will lose in credibility.

The Draghi report highlighted Europe's economic woos. It proposed bold and concrete solutions. But will it be possible to translate the positive reception by the leaders of member states into action? Because with words we can't build an army or run an industrial or a social policy, let alone pull off the green transition. In Europe, we still do too much talk.

This year, I have not followed the advice proffered by Savvopoulos one of his well-known songs: "Since he had no good news to share, he'd best have said nothing at all". Because I believe complacency is dangerous in the difficult times we are going through.