

# European governments debate relations with Trump at Budapest summits

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On Thursday, the heads of state of the European Political Community (EPC) met in Budapest for the first time after Donald Trump's re-election as US president. It was followed by an informal European Union (EU) summit Friday. They marked a first response of the European ruling class to the political earthquake caused by the election of Trump, who on January 6, 2021 launched a far-right coup aiming to overturn the 2020 election result and has discussed ending elections in America.

The summits must be taken as a warning also of the fascistic course of the European bourgeoisies. The Budapest summits signaled that they hope to work with the billionaire fascist Trump, as long as he keeps waging their war with Russia in Ukraine. They aim to resolve mounting inter-imperialist tensions with the United States, notably over Trump's threats to impose crippling tariffs on EU exports, at the expense of the working class via deep attacks on jobs and social programs.

What is being set into motion is an explosive escalation of the class struggle, as workers collide with far-right regimes pursuing flagrantly unpopular policies. While deep-rooted and ultimately insoluble tensions exist between US and European imperialism, the European bourgeoisie hopes to address them by waging jointly with Trump imperialist war abroad and class war at home.

A recent *Politico* article noted, "Trump is deeply unpopular in most of Europe, and there are few political points to score from embracing him." One poll found that only 13 percent of French people supported Trump in the US elections. However, *Politico* cited anonymous top EU officials who argued that a fascist US president would be, for one, "a beneficial shock... like the pandemic or the energy crisis following the war in Ukraine." Another said Trump would administer "bitter medicine" and help the EU justify increasing military spending.

Nonetheless, even the format of the summits pointed to the explosive geopolitical tensions between the NATO imperialist powers. The EPC was first proposed by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2022, after the Ukraine war

began, as a forum for European Union (EU) countries, Britain, Turkey, and selected ex-Soviet republics to discuss plans to encircle, wage war on and ultimately dismember Russia.

Trump's election has pulled the ground out from under the EPC. As the Ukrainian army retreats all along the front and faces mounting opposition inside Ukraine, Trump has called the war a "loser," denounced current US President Joe Biden for having "instigated" it and criticized the hundreds of billions of dollars Washington and the EU powers spent on the war. He has also threatened to let Russia "do whatever the hell they want" to European NATO countries who do not "pay" America.

The German government collapsed the day after Trump's election, and Chancellor Olaf Scholz only arrived for dinner on Thursday after the EPC summit had formally ended. Berlin said government talks in Berlin prevented Scholz from attending the full EPC meeting.

At the EPC summit, Macron embraced Trump, calling his regime "legitimate" and his policies a "good thing." Macron said, "I think our role here in the European Union is not to comment Donald Trump's election, whether it is good or not. He was elected by the American people, he will defend the interests of the American people, and that is legitimate and a good thing."

Europe's key interest, Macron claimed, is to ensure that even under Trump the war with Russia in Ukraine goes on: "Our interest is that Russia not win this war... because if Russia wins, this means that there is on our borders an imperial power to whom we are saying, 'You can be expansionist.'"

At the same time, Macron pointed to divisions inside NATO, calling for a separate EU military establishment and defense industry from the United States. He said, "We Europeans need not delegate our security for all time to the Americans. I believe that it is important, also, to send a message that we are now providers of security solutions and... to openly state a policy of European preference in this type of industrial production."

Macron asked: “Do we want to read history written by others, wars launched by Vladimir Putin, the American elections, choices made by the Chinese... or do we want to write history?” The EPC, Macron asserted, could constitute a viable, independent military power: “There is no market of 700 million inhabitants so united by history, interests and values than ourselves around this table.”

Though Scholz did not speak at the EPC summit, powerful factions of the German bourgeoisie are laying out a similar policy of allying with Trump against Russia and the workers. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* called to calm Trump’s anger by cutting the US trade deficit with Europe—by buying overpriced US liquefied natural gas instead of cheaper Russian gas, and large quantities of US weapons for war with Russia.

While acknowledging Europe’s vulnerability to US trade sanctions, the FAZ said: “Yet the EU is not defenseless. It could try to reduce the trade surplus by purchasing [US] liquefied natural gas, farm products or arms. For Trump, the US trade deficit with the EU and especially Germany is an obsession. But his most important economic advisers are also pushing for more balanced trade. The EU could also reduce tariffs itself, which are slightly higher than US import tariffs.”

Even if Trump decides to satisfy himself with such offers, two evident obstacles face this policy of European imperialism.

Firstly, the pursuit of an alliance with Trump by making workers shoulder the burden of Trump’s economic demands on Europe will deepen Europe’s involvement in wars with major, nuclear-armed military powers. Trump has clearly signaled plans to escalate war in the Middle East, including by “wiping” Iran off the world map.

While Trump has claimed his “Art of the Deal” will allow him to rapidly negotiate an end to the Ukraine war his claim has no credibility. Trump is threatening massive tariffs on Chinese imports that will devastate Chinese industry and US workers’ living standards. Moscow would have no reason to believe in Trump’s peace offers, were he to make them, under conditions where Trump is also pledging to crush key Russian allies strategically located on Russia’s borders.

Neither Moscow nor Beijing called Trump the night of his election victory to congratulate him. That day, former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said Trump could not end the war, that he would be assassinated like US President John F. Kennedy if he tried: “A tired Trump, issuing platitudes like ‘I’ll offer a deal’ and ‘I have a great relationship with’ will also be forced to follow all the system’s rules. He won’t be able to stop the war. Not in a day, not in three days, not in three months. And if he really tries, he could become the new JFK.”

Secondly, military escalation faces growing working class opposition at home, as it is to be financed at workers’ expense. Trump plans to name the world’s richest man, Elon Musk, to head a cost-cutting commission preparing to slash pensions and health care. As national governments stagger under the cumulative financial impact of decades of wars and bank bailouts—with France’s debt at 112 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the US debt at 122 percent, and Italy’s at 140 percent—European war plans also require savage social attacks.

Mass layoffs are underway throughout European industry, after the announcement of plans for a staggering 30,000 job cuts at Volkswagen and to shut down Audi production in Belgium. This week, thousands more job cuts were announced in France, with 3,700 job cuts at Michelin including the closures of plants in Cholet and Vannes, and 2,400 cuts at the Auchan supermarket chain.

Governments in Britain, France, Spain and beyond are preparing austerity budgets cutting tens of billions of euros from social programs.

The EU is intensively discussing these plans behind closed doors. The agenda for its Friday summit in Budapest blandly said that amid “a new geopolitical reality,” it would hold a “strategic debate on EU-US relations” and EU “competitiveness.” It adopted a brief documented, “Budapest Declaration on the New European Competitiveness Deal,” calling for further free-market reforms, strengthening the EU defense industry, and reducing regulations that impact business operations.

This will face deep opposition in the American and European working class, like last year’s strikes in France against pension cuts designed to fund a €100 billion increase in defense spending. The key question is unifying the struggles of the working class in an international movement against imperialist war, austerity, and far right rule. The defense of fundamental social and democratic rights requires a political struggle by the working class against capitalist governments on both sides of the Atlantic, waged on a perspective of international socialist revolution.



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