After the Republican defeat in the US, Berlin insists: Rearmament continues

Peter Schwarz
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The official German reaction to the outcome of the US midterm elections is characterised by a striking contradiction.

On the one hand, the Republicans' defeat is presented as proof of the vitality of American democracy. The rise of a vulgar gangster to the helm of the American state is thus not seen as an expression of the historical crisis of American capitalism, but merely as a temporary hiccup. In this view, Trump does not embody a ruling class whose power and wealth are based on extreme exploitation, financial speculation and military force—and are therefore incompatible with democracy—but is merely a regrettable misunderstanding that is now being overcome by democracy's self-healing powers.

On the other hand, all commentaries insist that Germany and Europe must stick to their course of rearmament and military autonomy even after the Republicans' electoral defeat—a course they had justified not least by citing the growing conflicts with the Trump administration. They argue that Trump will remain president of the US for another two years, and that even a Democratic administration would pursue goals similar to Trump's.

When it comes to its own economic and geostrategic interests, official Berlin thus acknowledges that Trump is merely the symptom, and not the cause, of the political shift to the right with which the US and all other imperialist powers are responding to the deep crisis of global capitalism. The German ruling class is sticking to the policies of militarism, social cuts and oppression against which voters in the US have rebelled and against which millions of young people and workers are taking to the streets in Germany and Europe.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democrats, CDU) stated in an initial reaction to the election result that he was not "all that excited" about the Democrats' victory. He did not expect the US president to be significantly weakened, as he had already "largely governed bypassing Congress over the last two years." He asked, "Why should that change now?" The German government nevertheless intends to continue its cooperation with the US, he added.

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius (Social Democrats, SPD) said: "NATO must become more European in order to remain transatlantic." Germany would fulfil its responsibilities regardless of the election result and would not be deterred. The German government's Transatlantic Coordinator, Metin Hakverdi (SPD), emphasised that Germany must not make its security and economic strength dependent on US election results and must work on its own defence capabilities and resilience "regardless of what happens in the White House."

The Greens were even more forthright. Co-chair Franziska Brantner described the Democrats' victory as "a stop sign for Trump and his billionaires." However, she warned that the European Union must not breathe a sigh of relief. "On the contrary, we really must rely on Europe and our own strength." The deputy parliamentary group leader in the Bundestag, Agnieszka Brugger, warned: "It would be dangerous if Europe were to let its guard down again following a Democratic election victory." Germany, she said, must not sit back in the hope "that transatlantic relations will soon return to the way they used to be."

Armin Laschet (CDU), chair of the Bundestag Foreign Affairs Committee, also said that transatlantic relations would "never be the same again." For this reason, he argued, the EU must become sovereign and be able to act on the global stage.

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The daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) warned that people in Berlin or Brussels should not "dream that there are now only two years left to get through. The old transatlantic partnership will not return, certainly not in a form where America bears the brunt of the cost of Europe's security." The world has changed fundamentally. Trump's posturing has laid bare America's weaknesses. "Europe must stand up for itself (much more), under this president as well as under his successor."

Several commentaries assume that Trump, having nothing left to lose, will act even more ruthlessly than before.

"Amid all the relief at the victory of the Democrats (and of democracy) in the US, it is easy to overlook the fact that Donald Trump will remain in office until 20 January 2029. That is a good 800 days. In the current global political climate, which is more dangerous than at any time since the end of the Second World War, that is an eternity," wrote *Der Spiegel*. "The 80-year-old president still has every opportunity to drag the world down with him into the abyss."

As far as economic relations are concerned, *Die Zeit*, under the headline "The Democrats are not Europe's friends when it comes to tariff policy," warned against a further escalation of punitive tariffs, which have hit the German export sector hard. "In fact, the idea that the Democrats are champions of free trade is wrong," the newspaper wrote. "In fact, it was the Republicans—until Donald Trump took over the party."

Rainer Dulger, president of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, expressed a similar view, warning against too much euphoria over the election result. "The Americans have voted, but Europe's problems will not be solved in Washington. We must take our competitiveness into our own hands." A partnership with the US on an equal footing requires "both sides being economically strong. Whoever loses economic clout also loses political influence." That is why, he said, Germany and Europe must "finally get on with the tasks at hand."

What Dulger means by the "tasks at hand" is most clearly evident in the metal industry, where employers are insisting on real wage cuts and mass job losses. Some 350,000 jobs have been destroyed since 2019, and a further 300,000 are now under acute threat.

The landslide in the US midterm elections was the result of massive opposition to the rising cost of living, anti-migrant rhetoric, war and self-enrichment—the hallmarks of Trump's policies. But the election has not solved a single problem. No sooner had the victory celebrations died down than the Democrats offered to cooperate with the Republicans. They represent the same capitalist interests as Trump's party, even if they have tactical differences on some issues.

The German and European governments are responding to the shift to the left in the US elections and to the youth protests and wave of strikes in Europe by intensifying their war course, violently suppressing protests and strengthening far-right parties—such as the French Rassemblement National, the Spanish Vox or Alternative for Germany (AfD). They fear a mass movement and are moving towards a right-wing dictatorship.

This development can only be stopped by an international movement of the working class that is independent of all bourgeois parties and the trade unions and fights for a socialist programme.



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