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## *What 'America made great again' might mean for European security: foreign policy views and priorities among a divided American electorate*

### **About Security Radar 2025**

For Security Radar 2025, the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace polled 14 countries in September 2024 on public attitudes towards foreign policy and security questions. FES polls countries under the aegis of Security Radar at regular intervals. More information can be found on our website.

### **Introduction**

The United States has voted. In January 2025, Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 47th president. This event is hotly anticipated by a global audience, as the repercussions of US elections are felt nearly everywhere in the world. This is especially true of Europe.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the United States has taken on an even more central role in European security. Washington has been coordinating support for Kyiv and strengthening NATO deterrence of Russia. What US engagement on the European continent might look like after this election was one of the most worrisome issues in Europe in the run-up to 5 November 2024. While it remains to be seen how key positions in the

new government will be filled, a look at the foreign policy views of American voters might help us define the cornerstones of the direction to be chosen by the coming administration. For Security Radar 2025, we polled 14 countries, including Russia, in September 2024 on a number of issues surrounding European security. The same poll was previously conducted in 2022 and 2021. A look at the results in the United States, sometimes in comparison with European data, may help us understand the general mood and the background against which President Trump will pursue his foreign policy over the next four years. It also sheds light on a polarised society and the deep divides between US voters, which the new administration will have to contend with.



Three observations stand out in the data:

**The American-European bond remains strong, but not unconditional**

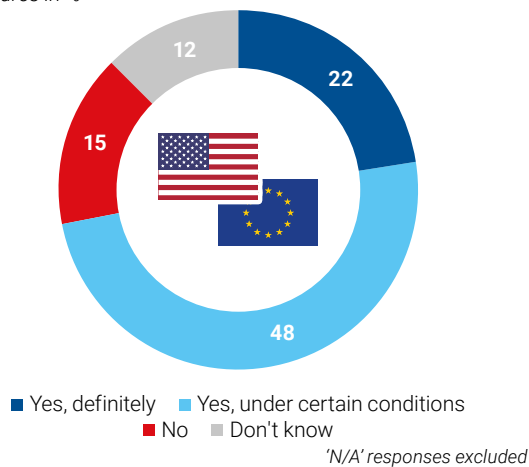
**Americans are behind their country's support for security in Europe**

First, Americans perceive the United States as being an integral part of European security. Some 71% support the continuing US provision of security for Europe, although 48% would attach conditions to that support.

**Figure 1: US support for the provision of European security**

Should the US continue to provide security for Europe?

All figures in %



**US-EU cooperation is viewed positively and EU-US interests align, in principle**

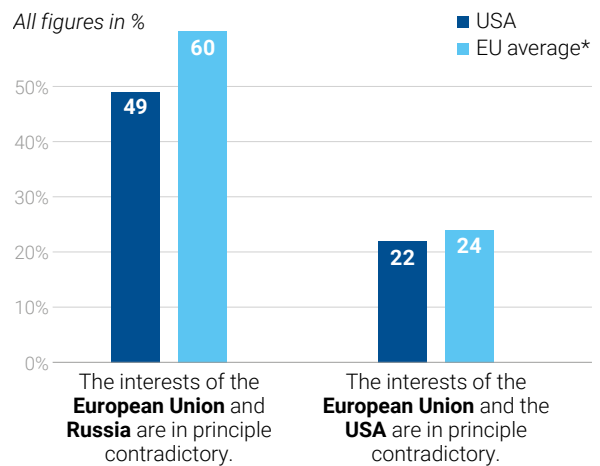
A closeness between the United States and Europe is also expressed in questions focussing on direct cooperation or common interests. Some 61% of American respondents support stronger cooperation between the US and the European Union, while only 22% believe that the EU and the US have contradictory interests.

<sup>1</sup> Security Radar 2022, excl. Sweden.

Interestingly, Americans are more positive about EU-US cooperation and the complementarity of interests than European respondents in Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Poland and Latvia, where 52% support stronger cooperation with the US. Some 24% of respondents in these countries believe in contradictory interests between the EU and the US, a slight decrease since 2022 (27%).<sup>1</sup> France (29%) and Germany (28%) have the largest shares of respondents who expressed this opinion, Poland (22%) and Sweden the smallest (20%).

**Figure 2: Contradictory interests between the US, the EU and Russia**

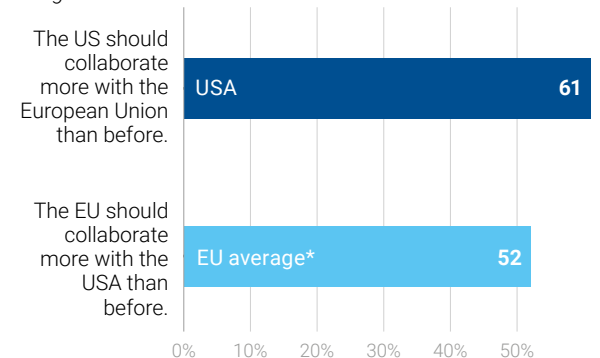
All figures in %



\* The EU average is based on poll data from Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and Poland.

**Figure 3: US-EU cooperation**

All figures in %



\* The EU average is based on poll data from Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and Poland.

Shares of 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined.

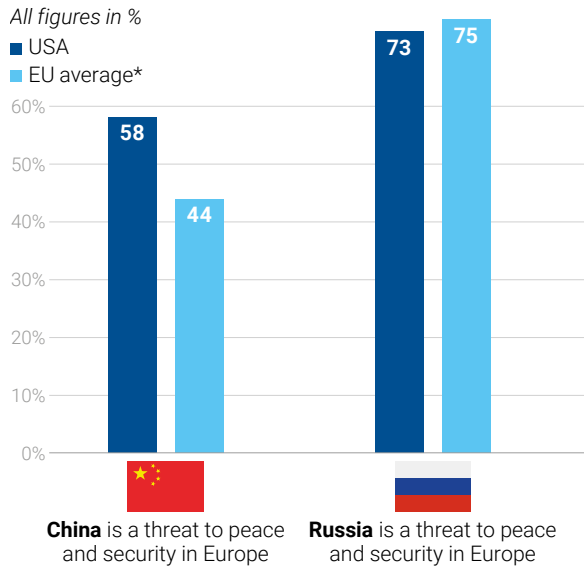


## No common enemy: Americans fear China, Europeans fear Russia

### Perception of countries that constitute a threat to European security

While Americans' and Europeans' assessments of whether Russia constitutes a threat to European security are very similar (73% and 75%), their views diverge on China: 58% of Americans express the view that China is a threat to peace and security in Europe, while only 44% of citizens of the European Union agree.

**Figure 4: China and Russia as threats to peace and security in Europe**



Shares of 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined.

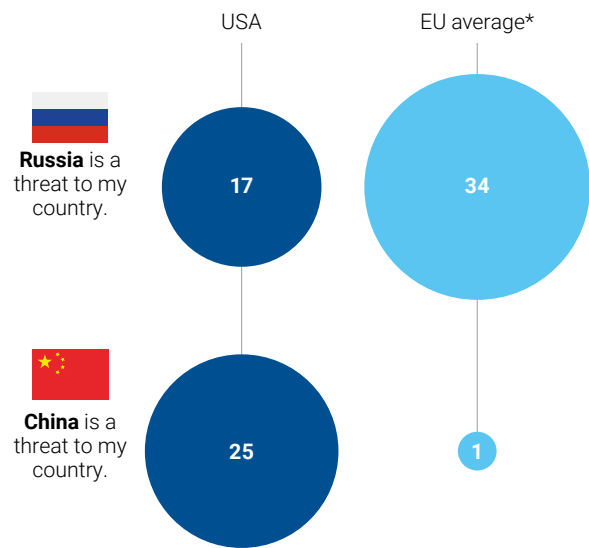
### Perception of countries that constitute a threat to their country

A quarter of Americans believe that China constitutes the biggest threat to their country, followed by Russia, which 17% of respondents view as the biggest threat. Among citizens of the European Union, one-third view Russia as their country's biggest threat, with miniscule segments of the population expressing the view that China constitutes their countries biggest threat, ranging from 0.2% in Latvia to 2.2% in Germany. Among European NATO allies, this picture remains stable, with the exception of Türkiye, where 22% of respondents express the view that the United States constitutes the biggest threat to their country. This view is shared by 6.9% of respondents in the United Kingdom.

**Figure 5**

**In your opinion, is there a country that constitutes a threat to your country? If you think that more than one country constitutes a threat, please name the country that you think is the biggest threat.**

All figures in %



\* The EU average is based on poll data from Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and Poland.

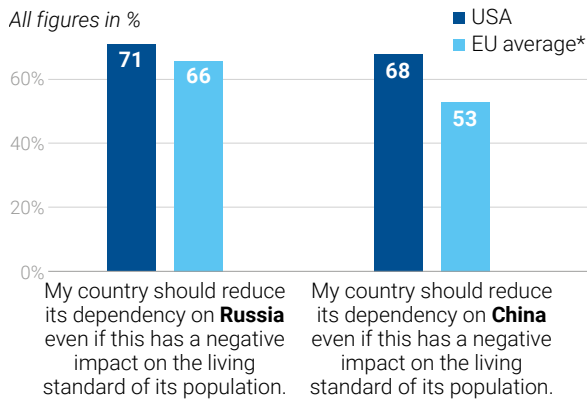
### Decoupling from countries that are perceived as threats

Nonetheless, Americans and Europeans converge on the issue of how to manage economic relations with China. Decoupling from China is supported by 53% of Europeans and 68% of Americans. However, while in the US the driving force behind these beliefs seems to be a sense of competition and threat, in Europe it is rather a perception of diverging interests and China's closeness to Russia.

Decoupling from Russia is strongly supported among Europeans and Americans, with roughly two-thirds of respondents expressing that they strongly or somewhat agree that their countries should reduce their dependency on Russia, even if this has a negative impact on living standards. At 71%, support among Americans even exceeds that among EU citizens, at 66%, but the US dependence on Russia is obviously significantly weaker overall than that of Europe, meaning that such a choice would have fewer detrimental consequences for Americans.



**Figure 6: Support for decoupling from Russia and China**



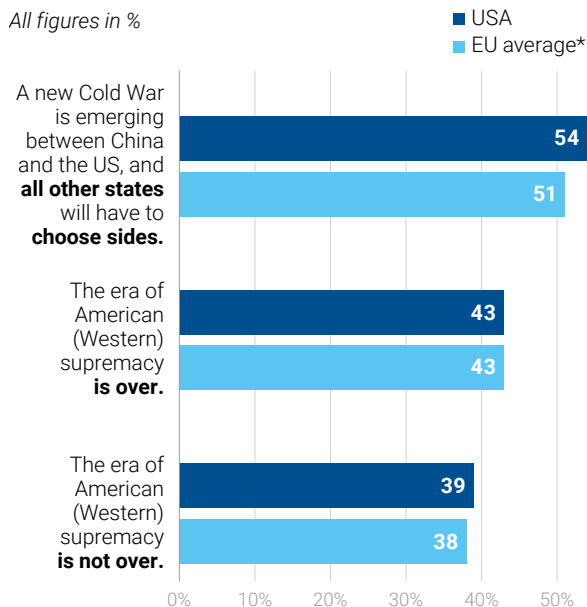
\* The EU average is based on poll data from Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and Poland.

Shares of 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined.

**Americans and Europeans converge in their views of the most likely future developments**

Lastly, Americans and EU citizens share very similar assessments of future developments. When asked how US-China relations will develop and what effect this will have on the rest of the world, a solid half of respondents in both countries strongly or somewhat agree with the statement that a new Cold War is emerging between China and the US, which will re-

**Figure 7: New 'Cold War' scenario between China and the US and Western supremacy**



\* The EU average is based on poll data from Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Sweden and Poland.

Shares of 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' responses combined.

quire all other states to choose sides. Equally, Americans and EU citizens converge in their assessment of the longevity of the era of American (Western) supremacy: 43% of Americans and Europeans believe it is over, and 39% of Americans and 38% of Europeans disagree with that statement.

**Americans live in two worlds**

Third, and most important, the division of the American electorate into Republicans and Democrats is mirrored in their views on foreign policy and matters of peace and security. There are two different foreign policy worlds across the Atlantic, and depending on their worldview, Democrat and Republican voters support different courses on Europe. Party affiliation is a significant factor determining how respondents perceive America's standing in the world, its role in Europe and, accordingly, its policy on Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

**What America's two worlds mean for views on Russia and China**

The differing worldviews of Democrats and Republicans as expressed in the poll can be highlighted in general terms by their views on the international engagement of the US, their perception of China in relation to the US, as well as their views on Russia.

Democrat voters generally lean more strongly towards an engaged international role for their country. They support the US taking on international responsibilities, an active foreign policy and cooperation with non-likeminded states, if those states promote peace. Democrats are not as averse to US-Chinese cooperation as Republicans, but rather opposed to Russia, as they also perceive it as a threat to European security in larger numbers than their Republican counterparts.

Republican voters prefer a rather isolationist policy for the US, focussing more on domestic issues and reducing their country's international engagement. Their focus is very clearly on the rivalry with China; the perception, that a new Cold War is emerging between China and the US is broadly shared among Republican voters. Compared with Democrats, Republicans do not perceive US and Russian interests as totally conflicting and thus are more open to US-Russian coopera-



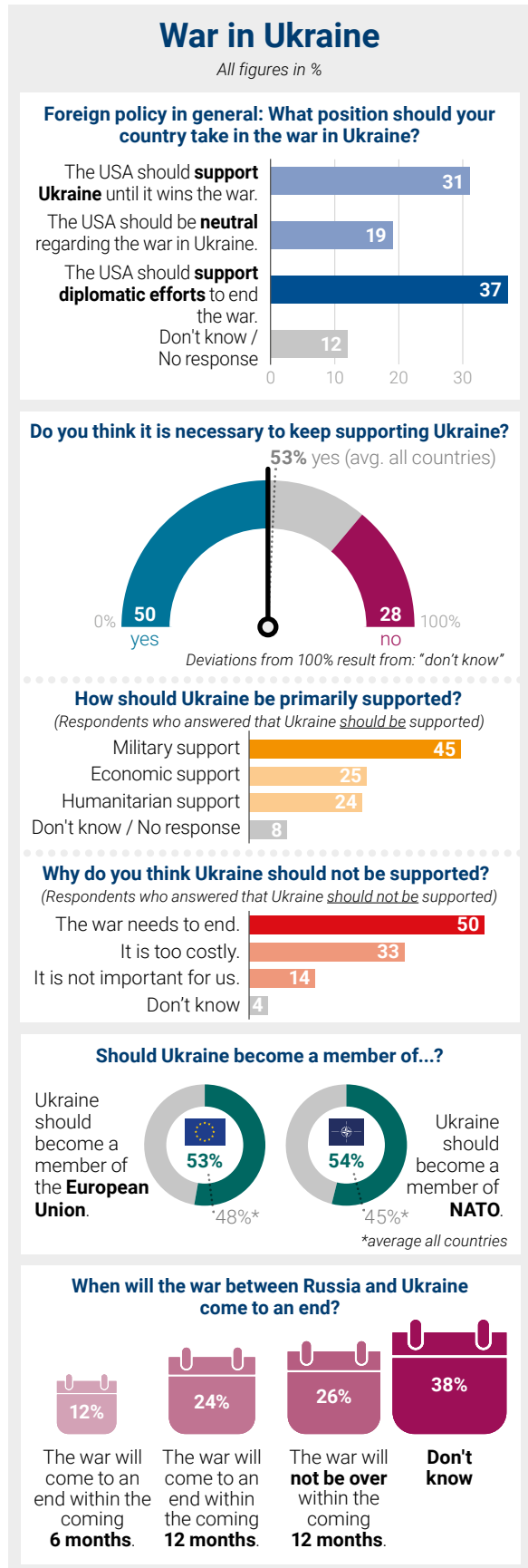
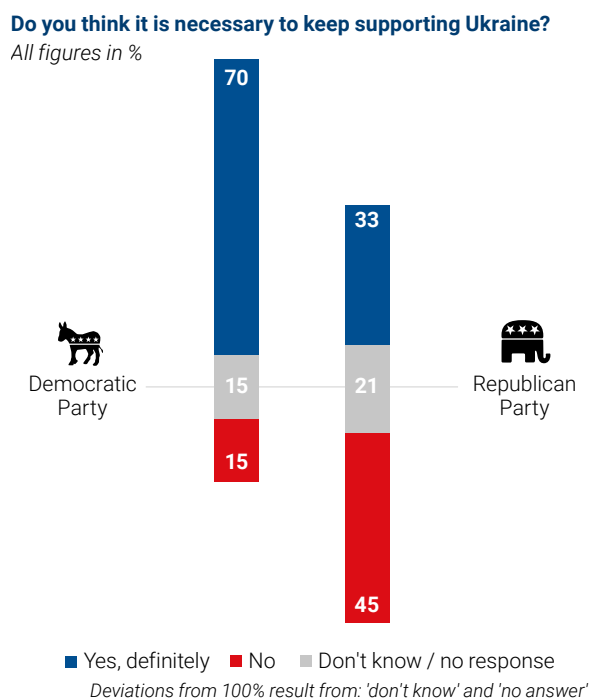
tion. However, the Republican Party currently encompasses a broad span of foreign policy views between the more traditional perspective of the late Senator John McCain and the much more radical MAGA wing. It may reasonably be assumed that the latter tends to a more isolationist approach, as well as being more hawkish on China and more dovish on Russia.

### Cooperation between the US and the EU, and US support for European security

These two worldviews are mirrored when it comes to the US role in Europe and more specifically America's policies towards Ukraine.

On the more general level of cooperation between the US and the EU, Democrats support closer cooperation with an overwhelming 73%, while Republicans are slightly more reluctant, but still in favour of stronger EU-US cooperation, with a majority of 53%. There is more good news for Europe with regard to the more specific issue of the US role in European security. Democrats are quite satisfied with a continued US role in providing security for Europe. Ne-

Figure 8: Bipartisan support for Ukraine





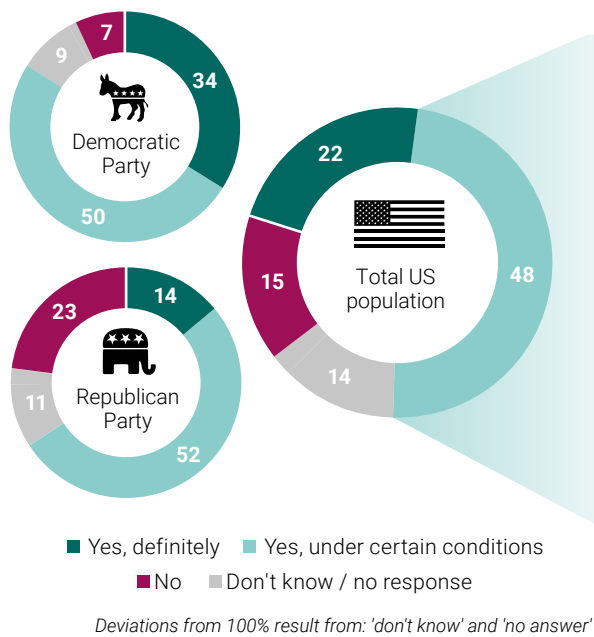
arly 35% would support it unconditionally and another 50% or so would continue this role with certain conditions. On the Republican side, a clear majority agrees that the US should continue to provide security for Europe, with 14% expressing agreement with unconditional support and 52% support under

certain conditions. A closer look at the conditions attached to US support reveals a strong consensus between both parties: Europe needs to shoulder a bigger financial burden for defence, be it by 'paying its fair share' (33%) or 'contributing to our defence expenditure' (30%).

**Figure 9: Support for Europe**

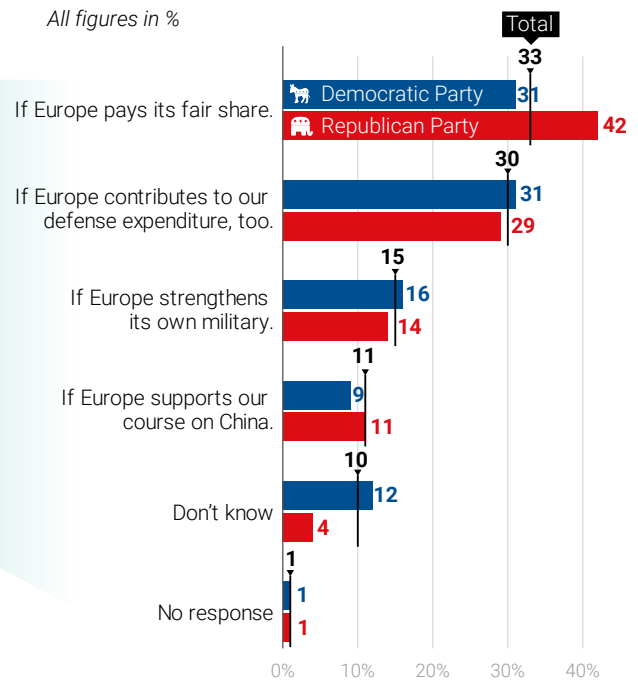
**Should the US continue providing security for Europe?**

All figures in %



**Under which conditions?**

All figures in %



**Support for Ukraine**

However, when focusing on the more urgent and specific question of how to deal with Ukraine, the differences between the two parties become apparent. When asked 'Do you think it is necessary to keep supporting Ukraine?', 70% of Democrats answer 'Yes', while only 33% of Republicans agree. Instead,

45% of Republicans reply 'No' to this question, citing 'the war needs to end' (48%) and 'it is too costly' (37%) as reasons. A similar picture emerges on the issue of providing more weapons to Ukraine (60% of Democrats in favour vs 35% of Republicans).



## Conclusion and outlook

Close cooperation between the US and Europe is still supported on both sides of the aisle. Voters of both parties perceive Europe as closely allied to the US, and thus form a strong societal basis for continuing trans-Atlantic cooperation. Nonetheless, the truism of pre-election analyses in Europe still holds: the way to American alliance solidarity is through the strengthening of European defence capabilities.

### Europe needs to invest in its own defence capabilities

Enhancing its own defence capabilities should be the first priority for European decision-makers, not merely in order to achieve greater security and independence, but in order to solidify the still strong support for a continued US role in Europe among American voters, who expect Europe to do more. The second priority, closely linked to the first, will be a European strategy to support Ukrainian defence against Russia's full-scale war. Here, garnering the necessary majorities in the US has already proven difficult, even prior to the elections. The third priority for European decision-makers should be to rally around a shared position on China. The expected alignment with US strategies towards China is an issue that will face Europeans more or less squarely in the coming years. This comes on top of existing fissures inside Europe on the question of how to de-risk or decouple from Beijing, as well as on the Taiwan-China conflict in the event of a potential escalation.

### A unified European strategy on Ukraine is urgently required

After the elections, the Republicans will hold a majority in the Senate as well as in the House of Representatives. They will thus be able to implement their priorities without being checked by Democratic influence. In recent months, President Trump and his running mate have expressed various views on Europe and Ukraine, ranging from the unrealistic claim of ending the war in a day to the more troubling proclamation of allowing Russia to do whatever it pleases with NATO allies.

However, completely abandoning the advantages the alliance with Europe represents for the US remains inconceivable, even for this administration. The economic weight of the Transatlantic allies, as well as the added value of international legitimacy are important assets for Washington, assets that President Trump will likely seek to leverage in his interest. Nonetheless, a unified European strategy for Ukraine will be necessary to balance short-term attempts in Washington to end the war at whatever cost. In the longer term, a stronger European role in this matter could enable even a Trump administration to continue supplying some of the necessary support for Ukraine to achieve a better negotiation outcome.

### Europe will come under US pressure on China policy alignment

Apart from that, it is expected that European policies towards China will come under huge pressure and the coming Trump administration might try to apply a transactional approach towards the EU. The pressure will be on Europeans to align themselves with a more confrontational US policy towards China, if they don't want to see the US role in Europe reduced. Stronger European capabilities to deter potential adversaries conventionally will be the key to alleviating this pressure and making more self-determined decisions in alignment with European interests, rather than those prescribed in Washington.

## ***FES ROCPE in Vienna***

Established in 2016, the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) addresses today's profound challenges to European security. It also works closely with the OSCE on integrating young voices in European security debates and the interface between security and environment.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was a watershed moment for security in Europe and has rendered obsolete previous visions of European order. A new Cold War or even more unstable relations between Russia and the West are the probable outcome of this war, creating an environment of confrontation and containment in Europe. At the same time, planetary challenges such as climate change or pandemics continue to threaten peace and security and require cooperative approaches.

In these uncertain times, FES ROCPE continues to develop new ideas under the aegis of solution-oriented policymaking, together with experts, politicians and policy planners from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US. The aim is to tackle interconnected security challenges, contribute to conflict resolution and strengthen the idea of common and indivisible security in Europe in the spirit of the Paris Charter (1990) and the Istanbul Charter (1999). It is our belief that organisations such as the FES have a responsibility to come up with new ideas and to introduce them into the political process in Europe.

### ***Our activities include:***

- regional and international workshops aimed at developing new concepts on stabilising the security situation in Europe, dealing with conflicts and achieving lasting peace in Europe;
- a regional network of young professionals working on de-escalation, cooperation and peace in Europe;
- regular public opinion polling on security matters;
- cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions of security: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

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