



Counterpoint

## **Europe – the USA after the election: the old trail or a new beginning?**

- Will the disappointment with globalisation and the fashionable anti-systemic sentiments bring Donald Trump to power?
- What decisions can we expect from Barack Obama's successor?
- Should Europe prepare itself for a possible change of the American policy with regard to security, emigration and economic relations with the EU?

Each American president in their second term of office endeavours to leave behind a legacy. They dream of going down in history as great statesmen, remarkable politicians and eminent players on the global political arena. Yet the history of the previous two decades indicates that the last president who still enjoyed popularity when stepping down was Ronald Reagan. His successors usually followed a similar path: after extremely successful first four years they ruined their entire legacy in the second term of office. During Bill Clinton's times America enjoyed one of the greatest economic booms. It was, however, completely overshadowed by the subsequent scandals, whose investigation by the Congress and the Department of Justice wore on throughout the entire term. George W. Bush inaugurated his presidency with the courageous decisions to attack Iraq and fight Al-Qaeda in retaliation for the attacks on WTC and the Pentagon. He stepped down under the cloud of the collapse of Lehman Brothers, a market meltdown and the worldwide economic crisis. This was the point when Barack Obama appeared – an idealist president, a community organizer, and soon a Nobel Peace Prize laureate 'for his efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and his promotion of global peace.' Is that how he is going to be remembered? Obama as a politician feels much more comfortable dealing with internal American matters than appearing on the international arena. He will undoubtedly go down in American history as the first African American president, but also as the one who had millions of Americans covered by public health insurance and who succeeded in taking up diplomatic relations with Cuba and in gradually closing the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

According to some commentators, the Nobel Prize set its stamp on Obama's second term, since it unambiguously determined the course of American foreign policy, rendering it conservative, passive, indeed indolent. What may be perceived as consolidation of global peace by Obama's backers is interpreted as a sign of weakness and irresolution by his opponents. The best example is the lack of reaction to the use of chemical weapon in Syria or to the establishment of a self-proclaimed caliphate by the jihadists from the terrorist organisation Islamic State. The goal of the group, which was founded in the aftermath of the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, was to found a hierarchy based on the principles of sharia and the destruction of the Western civilisation.



From the point of view of the United States, more essential than to intervene in Syria was to protect Israel, to reach an agreement with Iran and to prevent the latter from gaining nuclear weapon. That is why it was Vladimir Putin who took over the initiative not only in the Middle East, but also in Eastern Europe. Russia knew (perhaps thanks to Edward Snowden, perhaps due to Hillary Clinton email controversy) that the US would not hinder its regaining influence in Ukraine, as we could witness during the annexation of the Crimea or the establishment of separatist, pro-Russian republics in Ukraine's eastern territories. Even if, in response to the annexation of the Crimea, America introduced sanctions against Russia, this step did not convince Cremlin in any way to return the peninsula to Ukraine. From that moment on, for the first time after the end of the cold war, the Russian fleet based in Sevastopol controlled the Mediterranean Basin and the Russian air force put its neighbours' patience to the test with numerous violations of their airspace.

We may not forget about China and its aggressive policy in the South China Sea, which the American president preferred to ignore, focusing instead on maintaining good economic relations with the Middle Kingdom. And even though the head of the Pentagon, Ash Carter, and the Secretary of State, John Kerry, repeatedly expressed their concern with the tense political situation worldwide, President Barack Obama tended to leave strategic decisions to his successor, as they might have had an adverse effect on his image and his political legacy in his citizens' eyes.

What decisions can we expect from his successor, then? Both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton stir major emotions in Europe. The candidate of the Democratic Party is a symbol of the current establishment. Since her husband became the Arkansas attorney general almost 40 years ago, then governor and finally president, Hillary has been continually present at the very peak of American politics. If the elections had been held three years ago, she would have won them big. When she stepped down from the position of the Secretary of State in 2013, 69% Americans assessed her work as positive and only 25% as negative, according to a Wall Street Journal poll. Yet today voters are particularly mistrustful towards the establishment – politicians who have held power in the US and have led – in their view – to the country's collapse and loss of power on the international arena. That is why the appeals to return America to its former grandeur and to make it a superpower, like in the period of prosperity in the fifties, especially when expressed by billionaire Donald Trump, are well received and bring him growing popularity. Trump fits perfectly in the trend of disillusionment with globalisation and, more centrally, is an outsider, not compromised by politics. In the context of the current vogue to be anti-systemic, this is a vital advantage in the public opinion.

Three issues will be crucial from Europe's point of view: security, emigration and economic relations. In his interview for the *New York Times*, Trump gave the public to understand that the United States would come to aid only to those members of NATO who fulfilled their obligations towards the Pact and contributed a relevant portion of their budgets to security. He questioned the presence of American military bases in Europe, but spoke in



favour of cooperation with Russia in terms of fighting terrorism and joint military operations to destroy the Islamic State.

Hillary Clinton demonstrated more moderate views: the presence of American troops and common military exercises in Europe are important, but no soldiers will be sent to the Middle East again. She was probably aware that NATO's intervention in Libya, in which the US participated and which resulted in the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, led to the outbreak of a civil war, making Libya a hinterland of the Islamic State. Both agreed on the role of the United States – the country's power entails the obligation to lead. The world needs the leadership of America as the global peacekeeper. Both candidates expressed similarly consenting opinions on the withdrawal from negotiations concerning the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the postponement of the implementation of a similar pact with Canada (CETA). According to Danuta Hübner, member of the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament, a move away from free trade would be particularly dangerous to Poland, as we have only begun our trade expansion and must oppose protectionist trends.

The final meaningful element of the presidential campaign is the controversial new immigration policy. Making security his top priority, Donald Trump is in favour of "extreme vetting" of new immigrants. In this context Poles will need to wait some more for the promised visa waiver. The policy of fencing oneself in meets the criticism of i.a. Michio Kaku, famous scientist and dean at the City University of New York. Professor Kaku emphasises that approximately 50% PhD candidates in the US are foreigners (predominantly from Europe and Asia), while 100% of the students at his faculty come from abroad. But for special visa programmes (including H-1B visa), the American research would simply collapse, since there are no home candidates for the positions taken now by foreigners. *Chicago Tribune* sums up the notion of America's isolationism in the following way: 'These people do not take Americans' jobs away. They create entire sectors of the American economy.' The American candidates for the presidency ought to take that into account in their election programmes and to remember that not all immigrants bring along 'crimes, drugs and violence.'