

Università degli Studi di Torino

Euro-American Relations in the Age of Globalization: Risks and Opportunities

Guest Editors

Massimiliano Demata, University of Turin

Marco Mariano, University of Turin



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INTRODUCTION

Euro-American Relations in the Age of Globalization: Risks and Opportunities <i>Massimiliano Demata, Marco Mariano</i>	5
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ESSAYS

La Turchia nella NATO, un ruolo in evoluzione per un antico alleato <i>Alessia Chiriatti, Davide Borsani</i>	11
George H.W. Bush's "Pause" and Mikhail Gorbachev's "Common European Home" <i>Stefano Luconi</i>	29
Fears of oneself: perceptions of the role of the American élites in the political literature during the 1989 crisis <i>Patricia Chiantera</i>	49
Trump vs. the EU: framing the enemy <i>Paolo Donadio</i>	63
The polarity of collective identity in diplomatic discourse: legitimacy by metaphor <i>Liudmila Arcimavičienė</i>	73
Anti-Immigration Rhetoric in Italy and in the USA: A Comparative Perspective <i>Maria Ivana Lorenzetti</i>	97

Introduction

Trump vs. the EU: framing the enemy

Paolo Donadio

Introduction

In the history of transatlantic relations, a broadening European Union and its strengthening political and economic cohesion have triggered several and sometimes different approaches in the US (Lundestad 1998). After Bill Clinton's open support of monetary union in the EU, the progress towards a tighter political union among European states was seen as a geopolitical threat at the time of the G. W. Bush administration (2000-2008), potentially jeopardising American global interests (see Kopstein and Steinmo 2008). Obama's era, in the long term, resulted as quite disappointing (Cowles and Egan 2012). However, the new course of the Conservative administration led by Donald Trump, the most divisive supporter of US national isolationism and protectionism, has upgraded US – EU relations to a new political rivalry.

This rivalry was symbolic, on the one hand, when President Trump supported the political forces that challenged Brussels' rule and shrank EU borders. Nigel Farage, former leader of UKIP, was the only European political leader to take part in Trump's electoral campaign. Introduced as the "Brexit winner" at a rally in Jackson, Mississippi (August 2016), his backing was consistent with Trump's message addressed to the people dissatisfied with mainstream parties. (Webb 2013; Donadio 2017)

On the other hand, the downgrading of EU diplomatic status in the US seems to be a more aggressive act than just a campaign strategy¹. Trump's decision to transform the EU diplomatic status of nation state into that of an international organization reversed a decision taken by Obama in 2016. This means that Washington will not deal with the European Union anymore as a single national entity, but with the single European countries.

This paper aims to investigate, by combining the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis and cognitive linguistics (Czarniawska 2004; Lakoff 1987, 1995, 1997, 2002, 2016; Wodak 2006), the way in which Trump constructs foreign politics by following a narrative frame that undermines the EU as an institutional global actor and its political integration. The study starts from Donald Trump's approach to the electoral process in 2016. Campaign speeches, along with interviews and statements by Trump, will be the main objects of a qualitative investigation, since the main terms of his attitude to Europe are already outlined therein.

1. The electoral competition and Trump's approach

The electoral process can be regarded as a macro-cultural political model embedded in any democratic system and fundamental to any definition of democracy (Sartori 1987). It includes a competitive interaction between several and different parties, and thus features:

- a) several categories of interacting participants, among which we have some competing candidates;
- b) the accomplishment of different types of actions: call to general elections, candidates' acceptance, public debates, polling, voting and vote counting, acceptance speeches;
- c) a sequence of some steps that mark the beginning of the whole process (primary elections), its development (the electoral campaign), and its conclusion (the election day).

The competition, taking place over time, can last a few months, one year or more in the cases of the so-called "long campaigns" (Norris 2000). The effect of the choice between candidates is to give power to one of them and transform him/her into a "ruler", just as it reduces voters' power and transforms them into "ruled". In order to accomplish a democratic process, the attribution of power and its actual exercise do not remain in the same hands before and after the election day (Sartori 1987: 30).

General elections in modern democratic states can, therefore, be considered as a consolidated democratic practice (Bobbio 2004), framed as a macro-cultural model with prototypical variations (Lakoff 1987) between different countries and depending on different political and institutional structures and electoral systems.

It is, in a nutshell, a competition between opposite actors for the governing of the country, carried out through a public and mediated debate. Being mainly a discursive practice, the electoral process is often considered a metaphorical form of "battle" – an "ARGUMENT IS WAR" conceptual metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson's terms (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), in which we have a "battlefield", "winners", "losers", "camps", "attacks", "defense", and "strategies"².

In 2016, Trump's rhetoric altered the basic elements of political confrontation by simplifying the standardized cultural frame of electoral competition. His rhetoric was based on a weak, but coherent and constant narrative structure (Polletta- Callahan 2017), which inspired much of his political communication.

To start with, even Trump's slogan (coined and already recorded in 2014) "Make America Great Again" was structured around a temporal conflict between the nation's glorious past and a present situation to blame. Its simple narrative structure is founded on the basic elements of any narrative: a) an initial state b) the action of a character and c) a final transformation (Frye 1969).

² Bobbio (2004: 241-242) describes a formal democracy as a game ("un gioco") having its specific rules ("le regole del gioco") and defining the ways in which citizens are allowed to select their representatives.

In “Make America Great Again”, the narrative is embedded in the sentence: the addressee is identified by the imperative form, targeted to a potential YOU/elector. He/she is the main character in Trump’s narrative. The American elector is directly invited to take action (MAKE) upon an object and change its state, that is to say, America. The invitation to action leads to a positive result (GREAT), which is implicitly in contrast with a bleak present, but at the same time idealizes a glorious past (AGAIN)³.

The slogan, therefore, does not ask American citizens to vote for Trump, but mobilises everybody to act in first person and be an agent of change.

2. Framing elections through narrative

In 2016, Trump campaigned in a way that actually introduced a “simplification of the political space” (Laclau 2005: 18), as it happens with populist movements.

According to Olson⁴, Trump built his success thanks to the narrative intuition of an expert salesman, quite used to dealing with and solving problems. Conceived in terms of roles or Greimas’s actants (1963), Hillary Clinton’s campaign constructed a “standard” network that can be outlined as follows: if the “addressor” is to be found in American democracy, Hillary Clinton is the “political-hero” candidate to the Presidency who fights against an “opponent” (Trump) for the electoral victory, whose ultimate “beneficiary” is the American people.

Trump, instead, modified this taken-for-granted model:

- a) he did not introduce himself as a “hero” external to the American electorate, but “internal” to it;
- b) he constructed and delegitimized his opponent’s role as a rival of the final beneficiary of the electoral “battle”, *i.e.* the American people - as if he had said “Hillary Clinton fights for the Presidency against the American people, not Trump”.
- c) in 2015, when he announced his candidacy, he introduced himself as an entrepreneur, not a politician:

[...] politicians are all talk, no action. Nothing’s gonna get done. They will not bring us — believe me — to the promised land⁵.

Moreover, Trump did not appear to fight for a personal electoral victory, but for a radical transformation in which he marketed himself as “representing” the American people. Populism simplifies and radicalizes political antagonism and creates a direct link between the people and one of the candidates: Trump’s rhetoric was effective because it was structured around a narrative, and this narrative had a unifying function.

³ That glorious past dates back to the years after the WWII, from Truman to Eisenhower, as Trump exposed in two telephone interviews to Maggie Haberman and David Sangers of New York Times. Transcript: “Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views”. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html>

⁴ <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/podcasts/episodes/how-trump-won-the-election-by-using-core-narrative-techniques>

⁵ Donald J. Trump, Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310310>.

During an interview to CBS in 2012, Obama admitted that one of his biggest mistakes, during the first two years of his office, had been his inability “to tell American people a story”, and give “a sense of unity”:

the mistake of my first term - couple of years - was thinking that this job was just about getting the policy right. And that’s important. But the nature of this office is also *to tell a story to the American people* that gives them a sense of unity and purpose and optimism, especially during tough times⁶.

In 2016, people elected themselves in the person of Trump, whose aspiration to the presidency was shaped in function of the advantages for the American people. Trump the businessman, unlike Hillary Clinton, politician and former member of the government as Secretary of State (2009-2013), was able to give American people a “sense of unity” and played a downsizing of the ego in favour of a collective and inclusive stance engaged in a fight against “the establishment”.

I believe true reform can only come from outside the system. I really mean that. Being a businessman is much different than being a politician because I understand what is happening. “And we are going outside the establishment”⁷.

The political rival – “crooked Hillary” – was not framed as Trump’s rival, but the American people’s, embodied in the person of Hillary Clinton and, from time to time, in the power groups that were said to support her candidacy - the “media-donor-political complex”, “out of touch media élites”, “big business”, a “failed élite in Washington”, and the “establishment”.

3. America’s enemies

Along with the socio-political analyses of populist movements (see for example Mudde 2004; Pasquino 2005), populism can be defined as a simplification of the political debate taking place through a narrative restructuring of a macro-ICM (Lakoff’s Idealized Cognitive Model, 1987) rooted in contemporary democratic societies. This cultural model is challenged and delegitimized through a restructuring of the orders of discourse (Foucault 1971). The populist leader literally gives people access to discourse and allows people to spread a kind of knowledge that is *silenced* in public communication. Giving voice back to the people means giving back power in the form of rights, security, protection:

I have visited the laid-off factory workers, and the communities crushed by our horrible and unfair trade deals. These are the forgotten men and women of our country. And they are forgotten, but they’ re not going to be forgotten long. “People who work hard but no longer have a voice. I am your voice!”⁸

⁶<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-reflects-on-his-biggest-mistake-as-president/> (my emphasis).

⁷ Donald J. Trump, Remarks at Great Faith International Ministries in Detroit, Michigan Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/319646>.

⁸ Donald J. Trump, Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/318521>.

However, Trump's people are identified by their geographical residence, not by their beliefs or social class. Therefore, in Trump's vision of foreign policy, at least during his 2016 campaign statements and speeches, every country/body/organization "outside" the US borders can become a potential enemy. His populist impetus puts forth a radicalisation of America's enemies, which are no longer defined in ideological terms, but according to the physical space they occupy. The national border defines who's who and its relationship to the USA.

Within US borders, the enemy is basically the power held by groups or organizations in opposition to Trump's worldview: Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party, the media spreading fake news, the political establishment and its corrupted élite, even including some Republicans:

I mean, you looked at Bush, it took him five days to answer the question on Iraq. He couldn't answer the question. He didn't know. I said, "Is he intelligent?"

Then I looked at Rubio. He was unable to answer the question, is Iraq a good thing or bad thing? He didn't know. He couldn't answer the question⁹.

Outside the US borders, the label of "enemy" is a shortcut to identify a long list of threats, such as some rogue states – e.g. Iran and North Korea, which represent a clear military threat, but also ISIS, Al Qaeda and radical Islam and the threat of global terrorism; immigrants (especially from Mexico), who can endanger American people's safety; the European Union, considered as threat to US commercial interests along with China; not to forget the failing social policies in Germany and France (on immigration) and the antidemocratic nature of United Nations.

Which brings me to my next point, the utter weakness and incompetence of the United Nations. The United Nations is not a friend of democracy, it's not a friend to freedom, it's not a friend even to the United States of America, where, as you know, it has its home¹⁰.

In this long list, the European Union has its own place of honour. At the beginning of 2016, after criticizing some European capitals (London and Paris) for their poor control of immigration from Muslim countries, Trump started by defining Brussels a "hellhole", being home to "radical Islamic terrorists"¹¹.

However, Trump's aversion to European Union (indeed, his scepticism was and is against all forms of "international unions"¹²) became manifest before and, above all, after the Brexit referendum. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of Brexit (23 June 2016), Nigel Farage was the only European political leader to endorse Donald Trump and

⁹ Donald J. Trump, Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City, June 16, 2015. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/310310>.

¹⁰ Donald J. Trump, Remarks at the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, DC, 21 March 2016. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/317133>.

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/world/europe/trump-finds-new-city-to-insult-brussels.html>

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/04/28/donald-trumps-real-foreign-policy-a-clash-of-civilizations>

take part in his electoral campaign. He was introduced as the “Brexit winner” at a rally in Jackson, Mississippi (August 24, 2016), before 15,000 Republican supporters.

Trump did not involve a member of the British Conservative Party supporting the *leave* campaign, but opted for the symbol of the new anti-establishment politics, in line with Trump’s message addressed to people dissatisfied with mainstream parties and asking for greater political participation or desiring a more direct democracy (Webb 2013).

In his short introduction to Trump’s speech, the UKIP leader shared the same anti-international and anti-globalist approach as Trump, and made a list of the enemies that had conspired against the British people and had been eventually defeated:¹³

[...] if the little people, if the real people, if the ordinary decent people are prepared to stand up and fight for what they believe in we can overcome “the big banks”, we can overcome “the multinationals”. [applause] And we did it. We made June the 23rd our independence day. [applause]

When we smashed “the establishment”. And we did it. Everybody said we would lose but what did we see? We saw “experts” from all over the world. We saw the “international monetary fund”. We saw “Moody’s”. We saw “Standard and Poor’s”. We saw “global leaders” project fear.

Telling us that if we voted not to be run by “a bunch of unelected old men” in Brussels. [applause] [...] our economy would fall off of a cliff. They told us there’d be mass unemployment. They told us that investment would leave our country. And David Cameron, then our Prime Minister, but no longer, told us that we might even get World War III¹⁴.

And Farage’s “black list” goes on, in a mix between UK and US enemies that was meant to create a parallel between Brexit and Trump’s election: “Barack Obama”, the “polling industry”, “global corporatism”, “Hillary Clinton”, the “political class in Washington”, and the usual “liberal media élite”.

The long list of enemies of the British people is not dissimilar to the enemies that Trump mentions in reference to the American people (in the name of his anti-internationalism, Trump even discredited NATO as an “obsolete” institution during his electoral campaign)¹⁵. Farage’s short speech reinforced the narrative structure of Trump’s rhetoric, since it outlined a list of opponents who were not dubbed as political competitors, but simply hostile to the American nation and its people.

4. European Union and the “logic of confrontation”

The so-called “logic of confrontation”, which was so pervasive until the end of the cold war (Ivie 1997: 72), even prompted Trump to declare in 2016 that the European

¹³ According to Incisa di Camerana (2004), the idea that strong lobbying groups conspire against *the people* is quite frequent in populist movements.

¹⁴ Donald J. Trump: “Remarks at the Mississippi Coliseum in Jackson, Mississippi”, August 24, 2016. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=123198> (emphasis added).

¹⁵ See the transcript of his interview to NYT on foreign policy (March 2016), “Trump Expounds his foreign policy views”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html>

Union had been created to beat the United States in trade:

Don't forget, Europe got together, why, primarily did they get together? So that they could beat the United States when it comes to making money, in other words, foreign trade¹⁶.

This opinion was held even after being elected. In 2018, as President, Trump labelled the European Union a "foe" of the United States, in a list that included Russia and China:

"Well, I think we have a lot of foes," Trump told CBS News at his Turnberry golf resort in Scotland. "I think the European Union is a foe, what they do to us in trade. Now you wouldn't think of the European Union but they're a foe." [...] EU is very difficult. I respect the leaders of those countries. But – in a trade sense, they've really taken advantage of us."¹⁷

This was not the first time that European Union had been deemed an enemy of the United States. During G. W. Bush's second term, the debate within The Heritage Foundation (a leading think tank of US neo-conservative thought, closely connected to the Republican Party) was focused on EU's political role in the transatlantic relationship and its status of "friend or foe"¹⁸. At that time, the concerns were similar to Trump's worries: the European Union was forging its economic and political ties and, despite the referendum defeats in France and Holland in 2005, the European constitution conferred a continental superpower status comparable to that of the United States and Russia.

The element in common between Trump's worldview and past US administrations seems to be the "logic of confrontation", which once opposed the USA to the Communist threat. This moral vision of international relations (Hassner and Vaïsse 2003; Lakoff 1995) was based on the *need* to find an external antagonist that represented a challenge to the principles and values of American people.

Indeed, the idea of threat was a leitmotif of Cold War rhetoric (Donadio and Napolitano 2011). The Reagan administration drew upon quite a wide range of terms that identified the USSR as a destroying force of savage nature. They talked about Soviets as if they were "snakes, wolves and other kinds of dangerous predators [...] primitives, brutes, barbarians, mindless machines, criminals, lunatics, fanatics and enemies of God" (Ivie 1997: 74).

After 9/11, the conservative political strategy and its discourse framing rethoric changed dramatically to meet the needs of the post-Cold War. Philippe Golub, during the years of Bush's first term, described the new conservative approach to foreign policy as a form of legitimisation of the American *régime* after the end of the Cold War:

¹⁶ Meet the Press, July 24, 2016: <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-july-24-2016-n615706>

¹⁷ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-interview-cbs-news-european-union-is-a-foe-ahead-of-putin-meeting-in-helsinki-jeff-glor>

¹⁸ <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/the-eu-americas-friend-or-foe>

During most of the Cold War, the existence of an existential enemy gave meaning to American power. It grounded the country's collective identity by generating cohesion behind unifying national objectives. For the most part, Vietnam being the major exception, cohesion and acceptance of the "permanent war economy" (Melman, 1974) was obtained relatively effortlessly thanks to the guns and butter offered by the Keynesian warfare-welfare state. However, as Peter Katzenstein suggested in 1996, in the post cold war "America's collective identity can no longer be reinforced by the invocation of an overpowering foreign enemy - unless, of course, one was to reinvent that enemy for political reasons in a new cultural gestalt" (Katzenstein, 1996: 536). That is what the Bush coalition has been attempting to accomplish. Post September 11 state-led mobilization against a newly defined global enemy aimed to unify the country behind a power political group that had repeatedly failed, as Wallerstein rightly notes, in its efforts to consolidate domestic hegemony (Golub 2004).

Trump pushes this logic to a further extreme, since his concerns are not about the changes of the geopolitical balance, but, at least, gaining and maintaining an internal political consensus.

The difference between the concerns of the Bush administration and Trump's aggressiveness towards the European Union lies in the US willingness to impose a world geopolitical order, as in the case of Bush, or reduce American commitment at a global level, as in the case of Trump's isolationism. The logic of confrontation and that of "find-an-enemy" strategy seem the same, but the main assumptions are different.

On the one hand, as demonstrated by political analysts (Burgoon et al. 2017; Payne 2017), the Republican and then Bush government's positions in the first half of the 2000s derived from contingent concerns: Europe and its own constitution, its own single currency and the project of a European military force threatened the world hegemony of the American giant and could weaken the North Atlantic alliance and US commitment against global terrorism. The initiatives aimed at delegitimising the European Union and the desire to build relations with single European states responded to the desire to undermine the unity of the Union (Donadio and Napolitano 2011).

In the case of Trump, on the other hand, the European Union, along with other supranational players, seems to be part of an archetypal vision of the enemy. The EU is a foe *a priori* of Trump's America First, because of his "transactional view of foreign affairs" (Payne 2017). The narrative structure of Trump's rhetoric, made explicit in his electoral campaign and then reiterated in his public addresses, includes an apparently random list of enemies who are such by definition: not because they are hostile to American interests, but because they are "non" American.

In this sense, Trump's concept of the enemy seems to draw on a notion of enemy as a cultural archetype, rather than individually defined enemies, and exploits the sense of fear that seems to haunt American society after 11 September 2001 (Sheets and Johnstone 2010).

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Euro-American Relations in the Age of Globalization: Risks and Opportunities

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The special issue of *De Europa* on “Euro-American Relations in the Age of Globalization: Risks and Opportunities” includes multi-disciplinary approaches to the current Euro-American relations, with a focus on the new scenarios created by the Trump administration as well as at the crises and transformations in transatlantic relations during the three decades between 1989 and 2019



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