

Commentary, May 25, 2017

THE G7 ENTERS THE TRUMP ERA

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Global summits have rarely played such an important role as in 2017. In times of political volatility and economic uncertainty summits provide a forum for heads of state to exchange views on eye level contributing to a stabilization of expectations and potentially restoration of international consent. The US under President Trump questions a number of previously defined international commitments, in particular the stance on anti-protectionism and on the mitigation of dangerous climate change. These two commitments featured prominently in previous G7 and G20 communiqués.

Italy and Germany, as the hosts of the upcoming G7 and G20 meetings, are faced with a serious and extraordinary situation. Since the summits fall into a period of heightened international turbulences, the outcome and ambition of the G7 and G20 processes under Italy's and Germany's leadership are highly uncertain. With growing anti-globalist and populist sentiments in key member countries, both face a double fragmentation that becomes visible both within the negotiation room, as the interests of the countries seem to increasingly diverge, and outside, as civil society activists are questioning

whether the G7 and G20 are at all capable of addressing the problems people are facing around the globe.

In their preparatory meetings, G7 and G20 officials have not been able to reach consensus on issues such as trade and climate. This was particularly clear at the meetings of G7 and G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Baden-Baden, in March, and in Bari, in May, where they [were not able to confirm their clear stance on anti-protectionism](#). Instead, they stated: "we are working on strengthening the contribution of trade to our economies". This sentence is not only vague and virtually meaningless, it actually expresses how far apart the current positions are in the G7 and G20 countries on trade.

On climate, too, meetings of G7 and G20 officials have [not resulted in a confirmation of past commitments](#), let alone an agreement on increased efforts against global warming. For example, it is still unclear whether the US will stay within the Paris climate agreement or pull out of this landmark accord. [President Trump announced that he would not make a final decision on this crucial question until his return from the G7 Summit in Taormina on 26 and 27 May](#).

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As summits play such a crucial role this year, in hindsight, it is a fortunate coincidence that the G20 Summit on 7-8 July in Hamburg takes place only six weeks after the G7 Summit in Taormina. It is now up to the heads of state to engage in an unusual open discussion about these topics – typically the final communiqué is sorted out by their Sherpas several days in advance of the actual summit.

The succession of summits gives long-established and newly elected heads of state a chance to get to know each other in the first place and seek compromise on a number of issues of global importance. At the G20 Summit in Hamburg the German chair should not only

focus on reaching an agreement with the US on the importance of an open trading system or effective climate change mitigation. The key question will be whether the other 18 countries (plus the European Union) will manage to hold the same line. The risk of deviation, inspired by an unwilling US, is certainly more acute in the G20 given its more diverse membership. While the G7 slipped into a sort of an identity crisis after the establishment of the G20 on leader's level after the 2008 financial crisis, it turns out that this forum is more needed than ever. The Taormina G7 Summit is therefore more than a nice photo opportunity: it is a crucial milestone on the way to a successful Hamburg G20 Summit.