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## **CONCERN OVER FUTURE OF NATO AS RUSSIA ADMITS TO 'CONTACTS' WITH DONALD TRUMP'S TEAM**

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European leaders and senior former military officers have called on Donald Trump to clarify his position on Nato amid fears that the US president-Elects rhetoric on Russia could undermine trans-Atlantic security.

The warnings came as the Russian government confirmed that it had been in touch with Mr Trumps team during the election campaign, despite repeated denials of interference in the election.

"I don't say that all of them, but a whole array of them, supported contacts with Russian representatives," he said, adding that Hillary Clintons team had refused to similar invitations to meet.

Mr Ryabkov added that there was no euphoria over Mr Trumps election and that so far Russia does not expect anything special from the new US administration.

"We have not seen any reason to depart from our assessment of the campaign that there was a bipartisan consensus in the United States that has an anti-Russian basis, he said.

Mr Trump has been praised in the Russian press as a political realist who may end what many see as American aggression against Russia. There was applause in the Russian parliament when his victory was announced.

Russian politicians and pundits have openly speculated about Mr Trump dropping sanctions or even formally recognizing the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

But top military and diplomatic figures in Europe fear Mr Trump's rhetoric could spell the end of

basic elements of trans-Atlantic security doctrine and encourage Russia to repeat Ukraine-style interventions against Eastern European Nato members.

Mr Trump is on record describing Nato as obsolete and extremely expensive, and has suggested he would not honour article five commitments to defend other alliance members unless he was satisfied they had paid their fair share for defence.

Donald Trump's election as US president dominated the Russian front pages on Thursday

The danger is that if there is any question mark over the implementation of article five, that effectively neutralizes the Nato doctrine of collective defense. It casts doubt on its credibility. So the deterrent effect is neutralized, said General Sir Richard Shirreff, a former Nato deputy supreme commander Europe.

Gen Shirreff said he was sympathetic to the view that European allies needed to spend more on defence, and warned that by failing to step up to the mark, Europe is reinforcing this isolationist tendency in the United States.

Last week the Telegraph revealed UK military intelligence has raised concerns that Western armies may soon be outgunned by new Russian tanks.

European policy makers called for Mr Trump to clarify his position on Nato on Thursday.

I really hope that the rhetoric on defence and Russia was mostly a part of the election campaign," said Saulius Skvernelis, Lithuania's incoming prime minister.

"We would like to know what intentions he has regarding the alliance. Jean-Claude Juncker, the head of the European Commission, said on Thursday.

The prospect of a rapprochement between Mr Trump and Vladimir Putin also set alarm bells ringing in Ukraine, for which the US has been a key ally since a Viktor Yanukovich, a Russia-leaning president, was overthrown in a revolution in 2014.

Nadia Savchenko, the former army helicopter pilot who spent two years in Russian custody after being captured fighting in east Ukraine, appealed to Mr Trump not to leave Ukraine one-on-one with the aggressor.

I appeal to you with the kind request to maintain and even to strengthen sanctions against the Russian Federation, because this country understands only force, Ms Savchenko, who is now an MP, wrote in a letter to Mr Trump published on Thursday.

Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian president, offered his sincere congratulations to Mr Trump on Wednesday, and pointedly reiterated his faith that the new president would continue to support Ukraine in our fight against Russian aggression.

I very much appreciate your comment this morning that the sanctions will be rolling over in December and the new president will remain a reliable partner in our cooperation for fighting for freedom and democracy, he said in a televised meeting with Marie Yovanovitch, the US ambassador to Ukraine, on Wednesday.

President Obama imposed sanctions on a number of Russian individuals and businesses following Russia's annexation of Crimea and military involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine.

Because the sanctions were imposed by executive order, Mr Trump could theoretically reverse them without consulting Congress.

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