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The European Union in a Changing Global Landscape

The European Strategy

The European Union's (EU) global actions are driven by its core values and principles. As the Treaty of Lisbon define (European Union 2007, 306/23),

> *"The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law."*.

In order to endorse these principles on the global agenda, the EU seeks to maintain the multipolar world order, based on international law. Therefore, it promotes the political and economic relations guaranteed by international organizations and treaties. Yet, recent developments of both European and international relations have been challenged this rule-based, multilateral system. As Dworkin and Leonard (2018) summarize, great-power competition is returning in forms of trade wars and proxy conflicts; rules and alliances that used to advocate for cooperation and stability on the international agenda are losing significance; the role of international organizations defining the liberal international order developed after World War II, such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) seem to be losing their hold. While rule of law, democracy and human rights are declining, nationalism and populism, authoritarianism and illiberalism are on the rise both within and outside of the European borders. Adequate international regimes and new responses are needed to face migration, terrorism, cyberattacks, climate change and other non-state threats to avoid the collapse of the liberal international order developed after World War II.

The international system is an ever changing, evolving entity with diverse norms, institutions and practices. The actors defining the rules and the dominating values of the system gain an enormous advantage by their influential potential. Therefore, the EU's vital interest is to promote liberal internationalism and maintain the rule-based international system (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). To do so, it needs to reform its agenda and develop an effective adaptation strategy to the new global challenges (Dworkin and Leonard 2018).

By introducing 'resilience' as the new overall approach to foreign and security policy, the 2016 EU Global Strategy makes one of the first main steps on the way of this reform process. The

essence of the resilience concept is the ability to reform, resist to and restore from both internal and external crises (Wagner and Anholt 2016). Accordingly, one of the main objectives of the Strategy is to foster innovation in international organizations on both the strategic and the implementation level in order to provide a common foundation for cooperation (Wagner and Anholt 2016). The overall aim is to

> *"stay the course and continue to be a reliable global power and strong security provider (...)* [and to] *make Europe stronger: an even more united and influential actor on the world stage that keeps citizens safe, preserves our interests, and upholds our values"* (EEAS 2016, 1)

However, internal crises, the lack of inner cohesion and the resistance of several member states to delegate sovereignty to the European level hinder the effective implementation of the Strategy and so the ability of the EU to deal with external crises.

A changing global landscape

As Dworkin and Leonard (2018) enhance, the rule-based international order was a joint project of Europe and the US since 1945. Now, the – briefly described – ignorant, confrontational, protectionist, isolationist and nationalist politics of Donald Trump became a significant threat to the status quo. The global geopolitical landscape is shifting, inducing a deficit in global diplomacy (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). The US's withdrawal from international treaties determining the global order, such as the Iran nuclear deal or the Paris Agreement on climate change, are clear signs of this altering landscape. Europe has to face the question, whether it will be able to sustain the international order before it irreversibly changes, and if so, how.

Trade wars, shifting preferences and weakening cooperation characterize even the EU-US economic relations. Visiting Europe last summer Donald Trump referred to the Union as the *"enemy"* of the US in trade relations (Euronews 2018) and later on last year he repeatedly welcomed Brexit (Frum 2018). His recent statements and his unpredictable, hectic way of decision-making, usually announced on Twitter, do not foster the long-term stability of the international relations. Since the end of World War II, the WTO promoted economic growth guaranteed by multilateral, rule-based international trade. Yet, this stability of the global trade order has been challenged by shaping geopolitical relations. Last summer, Donald Trump called the WTO as a *"disaster"* for his country (Hesse 2018) and threatened by pulling it out of the organization (Micklethwait *et al.* 2018). Moreover, as a reaction to the debate about steel and aluminum tariffs between the US and the EU, the US has opposed the appointment of new

members of the WTO's appellate body, threatening the organization's ability to dispute-settlement (Miles 2018). Since the EU's economy depends on a predictable, rule-based international trade, the crisis of the multilateral trading system constitutes a substantial risk for the Union, challenging the stability and the sustainability of economic growth (European Commission 2018a). Therefore, the European Commission proposed a comprehensive approach for the modernization of the WTO with the main goal to make international trade rules competent for today's global economy (European Commission 2018b). In order to maintain the rule-based international order, the EU supports not only the WTO-reform, but also the renewal of the UN, initiated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres with the overall goal to create a *"21st century UN"* (Universal Rights Group 2017). The main areas for the UN reform comprehend the management, development and the peace and security architecture of the organization (Universal Rights Group 2017). However, recognizing the need for new measures is only the first step. The most vital question is, whether the EU will have, besides its intention, also the capacity to address these challenges. Can the EU push these reforms through, before it is too late to save the rule-based, multilateral global order? The answer sorely depends on the EU's ability to act as an integrated, united actor in international relations. Thus, it has to address its own issues concerning the lack of inner cohesion first.

Similarly, the renewal of the European security and defense architecture is also on the EU's agenda. Since Donald Trump does not believe, that the US should invest as much in the defense of Europe and the stability of its neighboring regions as it used to (Dworkin and Leonard 2018), the EU may need to take its own lead. The reduction of the NATO's expenses for the defense of Europe would significantly bolster the argument for a European defense autonomy initiated by French President Emmanuel Macron and supported by Germany (Valášek 2018). As German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, a European army would not be an army against NATO, but one complementing it (de la Baume and Herszenhorn 2018). Earlier this year, Emmanuel Macron (2019) turned to the European people in a letter promoting the Union's renewal, and argued as followed:

> *"A treaty on defense and security should define our fundamental obligations in association with NATO and our European allies: increased defense spending, a truly operational mutual defense clause, and a European security council, with the UK on board, to prepare our collective decisions."*

Yet, there are several obstacles hindering a greater European military and defense integration. Even if the discourse on Europe's defense and military autonomy has been already established, the real materialization of a European army is a question of the long-term future.

More than that, many of the 21st century's security threats, such as terrorism or organized crime, cannot be defeated by traditional military means. One significant approach to fight against these phenomena is to provide support for unstable regions in order to foster their development. On this matter, the Sahel region has a key role for the future integrity of the EU. Accordingly, the EU has already made the region as a top priority in 2011, defined in its first Sahel Strategy (Lebovich 2018). As part of the current 2015 Sahel Regional Action Plan, the EU provides inter alia emergency aid for food security, capacity building to security forces, direct budgetary support and other security and development assistance to control migration (Lebovich 2018). The EU's actions in the region are based on four main pillars: preventing and countering radicalization; improving economic and social conditions for young people; managing migration, mobility, and border issues; and fighting illicit trafficking and organized crime (Lebovich 2018). Even so, it needs to further improve its measures and develop long-term strategies for the region, with explicit focus on the endorsement of good governance and access to justice (Lebovich 2018). If not, its current support will not have any significant impact on the ground, explains Lebovich (2018). He also points out, that the EU programs in the Sahel region might be the pre-stages of a future integrated security and development approach. Above all, effective actions against terrorism and illegal migration on the ground might provide the keys to address populism and nationalism within the EU (Lebovich 2018).

Concerning the war in Syria – which is crucial for the future formations of international affairs – the EU supports the UN and the Geneva peace process to promote consolidation in the region. Nonetheless, it has not taken an active role in the crisis intervention yet. Even if there is an ongoing debate about the necessity of a new EU strategy to fulfill humanitarian obligations and avoid further mass migration to the continent, the EU's actions in the region will probably remain modest and indirect (Youngs 2018). High Representative Federica Mogherini said after a meeting with the EU Ministers of Defense and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the summer of 2018 (EEAS 2018), that

> *"We discussed ways in which we can increase even more our humanitarian assistance for Syrians, including inside Syria, while still keeping a very clear position on the fact that European Union money for reconstruction in Syria will only come once the political process will be firmly underway under UN auspices".*

The "Third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", which took place in March 2019, led to the same conclusion: the EU's influence on Syria will remain minimal.

On one hand, migration is often referred as a new security threat. On the other hand, the consequences of migration are enormously complex, including not only security aspects, but also beneficial effects. By way of example, Europe has an increasingly aging population and many member states need qualified labor to maintain their prosperity in the long term. In order to keep the cure of migration secure, for both refugees and destination countries, the majority of member states ratified the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration prepared under the auspices of the UN. However, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia did not sign the agreement. The EU needs to find a common denomination to deal with these discrepancies among member states, and to respond the challenges of migration. Presumably, a controlled migration might be essential for the long-term prosperity of Europe. In addition, to withhold the arrival of refugees by building walls and making the external borders of the EU completely tight does not seem accomplishable. Therefore, the earlier the EU finds consensus and feasible solutions, the better it will manage both the challenges and the potential advantages of migration.

European scenery

The greatest obstacle hindering Europe to shape the global order with more influence is its lack of integrity and cohesion. Brexit, the rise of populism, nationalism and illiberalism are weakening the EU's position and enforcement capacity on the international agenda. According to predictions, populist and anti-European parties might win a high number of seats in the coming elections to the European Parliament, causing severe consequences for the EU's ability to act as an integrated global actor (Dennison and Zerka 2019). As Cadier (2019) notes, one of the most inherent characteristics of populists is to be engaged in conspiracy theories and to claim to fight against enemies, mostly imaginary ones. Since foreign policy approaches comply with domestic policies, there is a potential threat that by gaining a significant number of the seats in the European Parliament, populist could set the coordinates of the EU's foreign and security policy accordingly. Furthermore, as the EU's global actions are driven by its own core values and principles based on democracy and rule-of law, putting these norms and standards into question by member states such as Hungary or Poland, substantially weakens the EU's potential and legitimacy to export them (Cadier 2019). Even though there has not yet been a proper solution to deal with such resistant member states efficiently, the discourse on potential measures against their ability to block the EU's security and foreign policy actions is already shifting. Accordingly, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission proposed

the extension of the Qualified Majority Voting in the Council about decisions related to the EU's external actions (Tempel 2018). Supporting the extension, German Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated the formation of a European security council (de la Baume and Herszenhorn 2018). The implementation of these proposals might be the beginning of a new era with a more united EU. Integrated and united, Europe could have the capacity to take an even more influential role in shaping the international order.

Maintaining the rule-based international system

The global landscape is shifting inevitably and permanently and it might become not as regulated as it used to be. The main question for the EU is, whether it will be able to influence the way of transformation substantially and be among those, who determine the characteristics of the new global order. Thus, simply backing attacks on the current rule-based system and trying to sustain it the way it used to be will not be enough (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). As Dworkin and Leonard (2018) argue, the EU needs to develop a renewed vision and its own strategy on the international system, taking an autonomous and independent role. It has to find alternative principles and prioritize them by putting the rule-based order as top priority, perhaps over other liberal goals (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). The EU's economic power bolstered with alliances with like-minded international actors is one of the most important tools to pursue its strategic goals (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). Considering the size of the European market, many exporters around the world voluntarily implement the European standards to be able to sustain their trade relations with the Old Continent (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). Furthermore, promoting the euro as a global currency and thus challenging the US dollar is another crucial instrument to become a stronger, more united and sovereign global actor, as Jean-Claude Juncker pointed out (Macdonald 2018).

In order to address the challenges of the shifting global landscape, the EU needs, on one hand, extend its existing capacities. On the other hand, especially as regards to the non-state security threats, the existing global order is underdeveloped and Europe needs to strengthen its alliances to build new adequate regimes (Dworkin and Leonard 2018). Additionally, integrating the multi-level governance approach in the EU's strategy may be another vital measure. The enhancement of the role of non-state actors, such as businesses and NGOs, and the support of more informal governance mechanisms based on pragmatism and the diversity of actors, might open new perspectives to address contemporary global challenges.

Primarily, the EU should however, deal with its inner cohesion issues and implement efficient arrangements against resistant and anti-European member states weakening the EU's legitimacy and hindering its capacities as a coherent global actor. Without that, the EU will not be able to take a significant role in the formation of the new global order and thus, will not have the power to influence the international agenda substantially.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this paper was to give an overview about the shifting global order causing inner and external challenges for the EU. As discussed, the rule-based, multipolar international system is losing its hold and the EU needs to find alternative principles and approaches to maintain it. It needs to reform its agenda to comply with the contemporary global and European challenges. Moreover, it has to strengthen its financial independence and security capacity to be able to address the external and internal crises it is facing. Its economic power and its alliances with like-minded international actors are among the most important tools to pursue its strategic goals on the global agenda. However, first, the EU needs to sustain its inner economic, social and political cohesion in order to act as a relevant global actor and be among the ones, who take a leading role in shaping the new global order and defining its main characteristics. The EU can best support a multipolar, rule-based international order by ensuring its continuity within the European borders.

In spite of the both inner and external challenges, there is an ongoing reform and adaptation process in the EU, backed up with the powerful European economy. Europe has begun its way on renewal and many member states, such as Germany and France, are promoting a stronger and more sovereign Union in order to sustain the EU's magnitude on the international agenda. The ones fostering dissension instead of cooperation, and hindering the continent to act as an integrated and influential global actor, might fall behind in the long run. However, the outcomes of the next elections to the European Parliament might significantly influence the future course of the EU's foreign and security policy.

The discourse on a renewed Union has already started, even if the implementation seems to remain a long-term process. There is an ongoing casting to play the most influential roles in the altering international system, and the EU better takes its lead as an integrated actor, before it is too late to do so.

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