The EU and the Crisis of Liberal Order: At Home and Abroad

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Abstract

Europe, and particularly the European Union (EU), have for a long time represented a pillar and a laboratory of the liberal order. The EU’s role in the world was very much shaped around a self-understanding as a liberal democratic area which applies to its foreign policy the same liberal values that shaped its internal development. Now liberalism is in trouble and Europe seems to be afflicted with a ‘fascination with the illiberal’ which puts the unique model of European integration at risk. This seems to be largely the result of a failure of liberalism to deliver on at least three fundamental fronts (which are also three aspects of the crisis of liberalism): economic equality and solidarity, liberal democracy and pluralism. Europe and the EU are today less egalitarian, less democratic and less open to cultural diversity. The EU, under the pressure of populist and new nationalist forces, is also more concerned for its own survival as one polity. Attempts to respond to ontological insecurities both at the EU and member state levels are leading to policies that compromise human rights and make our societies more closed and ascriptive. The result is an EU less and less capable of acting as a pillar of the liberal world order.

Keywords

European Union, liberalism, ontological security, populism

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**Introduction**

In recent years there has been a flourishing debate on the crisis of the liberal world order. Most of the attention has been devoted to the rise of non-liberal actors who could challenge the foundations of the liberal world order, be they states (Russia and China in the first place) or non-state actors (Daesh/ISIS). Since the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, however, also the US has gradually become a challenger to the world order it has contributed to shape since World War II. At the moment, if to some observers the liberal order continues to look rather resilient (Ikenberry 2014; 2015), to the eyes of many it is in serious trouble and there is a widely shared expectation that the future world will be ‘less liberal, and [...] less American’ (Alcaro 2018: 1). To be true, the world is already—and will be even more—less Western, and in being so, it will also be less European.

Europe’s role in shaping the core norms of world order has been frequently overshadowed by the predominant (US dominated) IR reading of the liberal order as mainly a result of American—more or less benevolent—leadership. Europe has, however, played a fundamental role in the expansion of the basic norms of the liberal international society. Not only did the expansion of international society with its core norms start in Europe—for better (Bull and Watson 1984), or for worse (Suzuki 2009)—but during the Cold War, Europe developed a system of regional integration in which all core principles of the liberal order were developed like nowhere else: continuity between domestic and foreign policy, liberal democracy, a *constitutionalisation* of international politics, based on the assumption of the existence of a core set of universal norms (human rights *in primis*), multilateralism, and embedded liberalism (welfare systems and free trade combined). Such a system, institutionalised in a dense set of institutions, transformed Western Europe into a laboratory of an enhanced liberal order. It was this Europe which, although institutionally still too immature to face the challenges ahead, took the burden to stabilise Central and Eastern Europe through the expansion of liberal norms (Schimmelfennig et al 2006; Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig 2005). The expansion of institutions was the carrot used to achieve the transition of Central and Eastern states into liberal democracy and free markets, as well as their adherence to international law. Moreover, the so-called ‘structural foreign policy’ of the EU (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, 2017).
2014) has always embedded a liberal Kantian recipe for the construction of long-term peace: spread of democracy, development of (regional) forms of *foedus pacificum*, and support/development of international law and human rights. The distinctiveness of such a foreign policy led scholars to talk of the EU as an ‘adjectivised power’ (normative, civilian, soft) whose *sui generis* international role was to be found in the EU's socially and historically constructed political identity (Elgström and Smith 2006; Lucarelli and Manners 2006; Sjursen 2006; 2012). The EU has been able to diffuse liberal democratic norms both for what it was (a successful model of regional integration) and for what it purposely did. The extent and the mechanisms of this diffusion have been objects of debate, but there seem to be little doubt on the EU’s liberal credentials.

And today? Is the EU still a pillar of the liberal world order based on liberal democracy, free trade, embedded liberalism, universalism of norms and multilateralism? And can it work to save what is left of the liberal order globally? The answer is ‘hardly so’ and the rest of this paper will explain why.

**EU’s weakened liberalism at home**

The European integration process, despite its accelerations and periods of stagnation, has always represented the incarnation of the liberal faith in progress, the trust in the possibility that modern, rational human beings could shape and transform the socio-political and material environment to create a better world for themselves and their offspring. One of the most successful political versions of this liberal worldview has been the institutionalised cooperation among former enemies in Europe and the gradual, incremental, creation of common institutions following the logic and the practice of the spillover effect among areas of cooperation. Particularly since the EU acquired a more visible international position in the 1990s, its self-representation as an international actor was inspired by the same worldview. The texts of the Laeken declaration (2001) affirmed that ‘Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation [...to] battle against all violence, all terror and all fanaticism, [... and against] the world’s heartrending injustices’ (European Council 2001). The guiding principles, proclaimed the Lisbon Treaty, should be those ‘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’ (Article III-292 of the European Constitution; Art 23 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; emphasis added).

In essence, the idea was that the EU’s guiding principles, which formed the basis for the political, social and economic development of Europe, should also guide the EU’s global action. Now the pact, internally and globally, was that liberalism would bring more diffused wellbeing (social, political and economic) to more people. The EU, and the liberal order in general, received more support the more advantages it brought. The
promises of liberalism on one side, and of European integration on the other, were high. This is why the EU’s failure to deliver severely damaged both the EU and the liberal order at large. The failure to deliver by liberal Europe has manifested itself in three especially relevant areas in recent years: economic equality and solidarity, liberal democracy and pluralism.

**Equality and solidarity**

It was clear to those who drafted the Laeken declaration that the responsibility to shoulder the burden of globalisation was necessary, also in order to respond to the concerns of EU citizens. On the contrary, liberal Europe’s promise of wellbeing and diffused growth crashed not so much with Europe’s relative economic decline, but with rising inequalities and social polarisation in Europe, both in objective and subjective/cognitive terms.

In the 1980s, in Europe, the average income of the richest 10 per cent was seven times higher than that of the poorest 10 per cent; in 2017, it was around 9 1/2 times higher (OECD 2017: 7). Income inequalities are however unevenly distributed in Europe, with the UK, Eastern and Southern European countries being much more unequal than Northern European countries—although it has increased also in traditionally egalitarian North European countries such as Finland and Sweden (OECD, n.d.). An even more dramatic picture of absolute inequality emerges if one compares the average per capita income of the richest and poorest national quintiles in Europe. The richest national quintile in Europe is that of Luxembourg with an annual income of 73,832 euros (at exchange rates) and 61,304 euros at purchasing power parity (PPP). The poorest quintile is that of Romania with an annual income of only 685 euros or 1,289 euros in PPP. The ratio is more than 1:100 at exchange rates and 1:47 in PPP. Furthermore, these indicators of extreme inequality show a further deterioration since 2009. This implies that a person’s living standards in the EU depend more on the country s/he is born and grows up in than on whether s/he belongs to the relevant upper or lower stratum of their national society. It also depends on age, as the worst off are the young generations, who have replaced the old in terms of risk of poverty. As for wealth, currently 10 per cent of the wealthiest households hold 50 per cent of total wealth, while the 40 per cent least wealthy owns little over 3 per cent (OECD 2017), again with national differences. In addition to such wealth inequality, there are associated inequalities in terms of education and life expectancy. Given the fact that the young of worst-off families (and even more of non-native-born) are the most affected, it is expected that inequality trends are replicated with the next generation (OECD 2017).

The net effect is polarisation, both geographic (within countries and among countries) and social: industrialised areas vs. deindustrialised peripheries, South-Eastern vs.

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3 The US and Europe are losing relative economic power, but to a much lesser degree than seemed likely a few years ago and maintain a lead position: US GDP share 24 per cent; EU 21 per cent; China 14 per cent; India about 3 per cent (World Bank data, February 2017).
Northern countries etc. A geography which coincides with the geography of dissatisfaction reproduced in recent elections. The geography of voting in the 2016 British referendum, the 2017 French Presidential elections, and the 2018 Italian parliamentary elections all tell the same story: one of domestically divided countries. This is not at all a solely European phenomenon (as the US’s Presidential elections of 2016 demonstrate), but in Europe, it delegitimises not only so-called neoliberal policies, but the EU’s liberal ontology and the EU’s historical experiment as such. An unwelcome output of the failed Europe’s promise of combining welfare with free trade in order to diffuse wealth, enact solidarity and guarantee a progressive future.

**Liberal democracy**

The EU’s failure to ‘shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation’ so to avoid the negative economic effects of a globalisation which led to rising inequalities and relative impoverishment, had important repercussions in Europeans’ attitudes towards Europe and the established elites (Kuhn et al., 2016). The geographic map of Euroscepticism, populism and support for illiberal tendencies largely overlapped with that of economic inequalities and relative impoverishment, with a sharp societal distinction between highly educated young employees in big cities (much more likely to share a cosmopolitan/European identity, supportive of the integration process and of an EU leading role in the liberal world order) and middle-aged workers in depressed areas. The latter group being particularly sensitive to feel ontologically insecure and call for ‘protection’ for their own interests and identity—as Emmanuel Macron has clearly understood, proposing ‘une Europe qui protège’ (A Europe that protects, see Macron, 2017). It is a group that is largely averse to the core elements of the European liberal integration project: free movement, free trade, enlargement, and common currency. It is the group that feels most threatened by immigration and adopts nativist perspectives on national identity, a group which calls for a new Westphalianism, and which is not reluctant to support illiberal tendencies.

The rise of terrorist attacks in Europe since 2004 and the fragmentation and complexification of security threats has further challenged liberal democracy from within. Global terrorism has shown the vulnerability of liberal societies and triggered an ontological anxiety which has allowed reductions of individual liberties in the name of enhanced security. Citizens are ready to give up part of their liberty in exchange for more (perceived) security, gradually allowing for (even demanding) the transformation of their liberal democracies into simplified electoral systems.

The most clear political embodiment of such attitudes at the moment of writing (2018) is the Hungarian leader Viktor Orban, who for several years has legitimised illiberal attitudes and regimes in his public speeches and political practices (Freedom House, 2017). Tellingly, in a 2014 speech delivered before an audience of ethnic Hungarians in Romania, he accused liberal values of ‘embody[ing] corruption, sex and violence’. For this reason, he argued, ‘the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-
liberal state’, a non-liberal democracy. Internationally, declared Orban, ‘the stars of the international analysts today are Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey’ (Orban 2014).

Orban, however, is no longer an isolated case. The political results have been particularly visible in the 2017-18 rounds of elections and referenda. In October 2017, the elections in Austria led to the formation of a government coalition which includes the Freedom Party (FPÖ), the reactionary and anti-European party that European governments had managed to contain in 1999. In Italy, the populist and sovereignist Lega of Matteo Salvini took 17.4 per cent (from 4 per cent in the 2013 elections). The anti-establishment Five Stars Movement got the striking majority of 32.7 per cent, becoming Italy’s first party. In Hungary, the Eurosceptic, nativist and sovereignist Viktor Orbán has been reconfirmed as Prime Minister in the 2018 elections with 50.0 per cent of votes, followed by the even more right-wing Jobbik Party (18.9 per cent). In Poland, the anti-democratic drift of the ultra-nationalist and anti-European government of Mateusz Morawiecki continues (Wojcie and Strzelecki 2017). The countries of the Visegrad group (i.e. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) are now united against Brussels on migrants, media freedom, and human rights (Freedom House 2017). Even where the populist forces did not win the elections, they got important results. In Germany, the conservative and populist force of Alternativ für Deutschland (AfD) obtained more than two million votes. In the Netherlands, the xenophobic party of Geert Wilders (PVV) gained five seats and shortened the distance from the first party, the conservative Freedom and Democracy Party. Even in France, if the victory of the young pro-European Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French Presidential election gave progressive forces a sigh of relief, it cannot overshadow the striking fact that Marine Le Pen, of the Front National, passed the first round and challenged Macron to the Presidency.

The wave of populist nationalism that overwhelmed Europe has also conditioned the tones and decisions of other political forces and made the foreign policy (European and international) of member states less predictable and bipartisan than in the past. However, while in the past authoritarian drifts in some member states (such as Haider’s Austria) were punished in a timely manner (and not only in the figurative sense) by the other member states, today the blatant democratic setbacks in Hungary and Poland, the xenophobic positions of political movements everywhere in Europe, and the open violation of common standards by the Visegrad countries (especially with regard to immigration and asylum rules) have not been quickly and strongly sanctioned. It seems that Europe is becoming accustomed to a new normality that denies Europe itself and the values on which it is based.

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4 Although the deterioration of the rule of law in Poland has been evident since 2016, it was only at the end of 2017, after years of ascertained violations, that the Commission invoked Article 7 of the TEU for ‘a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law’. At the moment of writing it is still to be seen whether the Council, with a four-fifths majority, will decide to suspend some of Poland’s rights (including the right to vote in the Council).
The split between national-populist, Eurosceptic and other forces (including euro-critical ones) does not only affect countries, but also domestic societies, as shown by the results of the polarised vote in the Brexit referendum, the vote for the French Presidential election, and the Polish and Dutch elections. If liberal democracy is a pillar of the liberal international order, in the West, and more precisely in Europe, the threat comes from within. Moreover, if Europe is ever more illiberal, how can it support the liberal order internationally?

**Pluralism**

The third element, connected to the previous one, in the crisis of the liberal order in Europe is what can be labelled the ‘ontological challenge’. Liberalism was based on a cosmopolitan worldview, on the idea of man as primarily a ‘citizen’, with a non-ascriptive (based on achievement) socio-political identity. In multicultural societies like the US this led to a steady affirmation of a double track policy: adopt measures to protect members of groups that are known to have previously suffered from discrimination (affirmative action), and at the same time nullify the political relevance of ascriptive identities (based on predetermined factors such as sex and race) portraying them as irrelevant for citizenship rights and national identity (the hyphenated identity—Afro-American, Asian-American etc.).

In Europe, different countries experimented with different roots to national identity and citizenship in growingly multicultural societies. Since the 1950s, Western liberal democracies have struggled to develop strategies to deal with diversity in societies that until that moment were considered homogeneous (secular, white, and Christian). Racism and discrimination characterised the European societies’ responses to the arrival of people from the former colonies in the 1950s and 1960s. This time the ‘Other’ was not the assimilated other European of the past, but a physically different other, considered different and—frequently—inferior. Their difference was perceived as a threat to European national identity, and the history of Europe is also the history of the responses that different societies have provided to the challenges of national identity in an increasingly multicultural society (Chin 2017; Taras 2012). However, European societies developed ways to cope with cultural and ethnic pluralism according to the basic principle of equal treatment of citizens in a liberal society. Gradually European societies found ways to accommodate elements of group rights without abandoning liberalism’s individualist perspective.

The European integration started from the beginning as a liberal project and since the late 1960s human rights steadily gained importance in European Community (EC) legislation. Eventually, human rights norms have been ‘mainstreamed’, becoming integrated in all aspects of policy-making and implementation. At the same time, since its creation, having to pull together countries with different cultures, the EC recognised that national cultural differences should be respected and protected (Article 151 EC).

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5 The debate on the possibility to combine liberalism and multiculturalism is rich and articulated. One of the most known authors claiming the compatibility of the two is Will Kymlicka (1989, 1995, 2007).
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Treaty). The Charter of Fundamental Rights—legally binding since the Lisbon Treaty—affirms that ‘[t]he Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity’ (art 22) and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin and religion or belief. The member states are bound to combat public incitement to violence and hatred against people of different race, colour, religion, or national or ethnic descent by means of criminal law. Yet, even when there is not proper discrimination, evidence of an ethno-cultural tension within European liberal societies is still clear. The religious discrimination embedded in the request of Poland and Slovakia\(^6\) to accept only Christian asylum seekers in order to not put the national culture ‘at risk’ is but one of the most visible manifestations of this general malaise.

For a long time liberal democracies under-evaluated the role of cultural identities and their link with political identities in the construction of legitimate institutions. No liberal democracy has ever been able to transform its people into mere ‘citizens’, but they have made attempts. In the past few decades, particularly since the end of the Cold War and, even more so, since 9/11, ascriptive identities have started to call out for recognition. Liberal democracies had to fight against the obstacle of multicultural societies where ethno-national groups called for a political recognition, not only in Iraq or Afghanistan (to which they tried to export the liberal model) but also inside the West. The European construction embedded the idea that an overall European citizenship could coexist with national and (enriching) cultural diversities. However, particularly since the early 2000s, multicultural coexistence showed its limits in several European societies and the surge of Islamic terrorism significantly worsened the situation (Chin 2017). Between 2010 and 2011, the leaders of France, Britain and Germany publicly proclaimed that multiculturalism had failed in their countries.\(^7\) No European nation had found a successful road to multiculturalism, and no all-European formula had been discovered. When the European ‘migration crisis’ arose in 2015, the arguments were politically used to depict migrants as a threat to European Communities’ ontological security. Migration and the cultural diversity issue were eventually crucial arguments in the debates leading to the success of the nationalist, Eurosceptic, largely illiberal forces that won the elections (or referenda) in Hungary, Poland, Austria, and the UK and which had unprecedented electoral successes in Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands.

To summarise, three important promises of liberal Europe were missed: wealth and enhanced socio-economic equality, liberal democracy, and pluralism. The three elements are interlinked and a part of global trends in the crisis of liberalism. However, their impact on Europe (and the EU in particular) as a pillar of the liberal world order is particularly troublesome: they threaten the EU’s core identity, the legitimacy of European institutions as bearers of collectively shared values, the EU’s ability to undertake collective policies in support of the liberal order, as well as the EU’s credibility in the eyes of others.

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\(^7\) BBC News 17.10.2010; France24 2.11.2011; BBC News 5.2.2011.
... and abroad

In the EU’s external relations, the first signals of transformed ‘role conceptualisation’ and ‘role performance’ are rather clear and they point to a compromise with (if not a metamorphosis of) the ‘adjectivised power’ Europe. Following the new momentum, the EU documents have abandoned the emphatic self-representation as a force for good, with only values and no interests. However, this ‘normalisation’ has also been characterised by a reduced faith in the possibilities to shape the world according to its principles. The EU’s 2016 Global Strategy called for ‘principled pragmatism’, a catchy oxymoron to describe a more pragmatic and—hence—efficient foreign policy which still has to be grounded on some fundamental principles. Even the objectives of EU’s foreign policy are described in a transformed continuity with the past (to keep with the register).

The keyword in this respect is ‘resilience’, which in psychology implies the ability to stand still before difficulties in life, and that applied to states and societies conveys the idea of an ability to ‘resist’ more than an ability to transform in a progressive way. It is a word for moments of crisis, introduced in political debate by the US President Obama (Selchow 2016), and then used in the EU documents in a rather polysemic way, from the ability of European societies to resist and keep their living standards, to the ability of third countries to develop enough to prevent civil conflicts but also to prevent emigration towards Europe. In recent documents (European Commission 2017), it is a word for a joined-up and comprehensive approach to challenges.

However, the real transformation in the EU’s contribution to the liberal order is visible when looking at actual policies. Michael Smith and Richard Youngs (2018) convincingly argue that the EU is gradually adopting a ‘contingent’ form of liberalism, mixing liberal and realpolitik strategic principles in a number of areas, from international trade, its relation with Donald Trump’s USA, and its approach towards different countries in the Eastern neighbourhood.

In international trade, despite continuing to adhere to a liberal economic order, the EU has begun to exhibit a degree of ‘soft mercantilism’ (Smith and Youngs 2018: 47). In several trade negotiations, the EU insisted on multiple safeguards and limits to trade liberalisation. This is not that surprising since the EU has never been a supporter of liberalisation at all costs, rather it has always combined liberalisation with domestic protection. However, the protectionist mood is stronger now than in the past. Some new trade agreements, like the EU-Canada Free Trade Agreement (CETA), were held hostage by the worries of local European producers backed by populist forces for months. Moreover, new mechanisms screening inward foreign direct investment are being studied by the Commission (Smith and Youngs 2018: 47). In its relations with Donald Trump’s gradual dismantlement of multilateral agreements (from climate change to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP) and threat to collectively achieved agreements (as in the case of that with Iran) the EU has balanced blame with compromise. In the Eastern neighbourhood, the EU adapted its effort to uphold and promote democratic norms to what could be feasible given each country’s role in the Russian sphere of influence.
other words, argue Smith and Youngs (2018: 52), the EU ‘shifted towards a more consequentialist-utilitarian foreign policy, more concerned with immediate outcomes and less uniquely driven by the Union’s institutionally embedded liberal norms and identity’. This can easily be regarded as the ‘normalisation’ of the EU’s actorness, responding to the need to compromise principles and pragmatism.

However, the area where EU policy has been most affected by the internal illiberal trends described above, and the area in which the liberal credentials of the EU are put under the most strain, is that of migration. This issue is particularly significant as it stands at the crossroads of the three challenges to the European liberal order that we described above: economic, political and cultural.

For the EU, coping with the challenge of migration has a triple strategic meaning: first, it implies envisaging solutions to a long-term phenomenon that is here to stay; second, it means identifying ways to cope with Europe’s demographic decline and its economic shortcomings (cf. Ceccorulli, Fassi, Lucarelli 2015); third, it entails figuring out what kind of actor the EU is and will be: an inward-looking one, committed to ‘securing’ its homeland and borders at the cost of compromising the migrants’ rights as human beings, or one upholding its liberal values and fundamental rights (which would imply upholding human rights and non-discrimination). The challenge is not an easy one, and different concerns and justice claims are at play (Ceccorulli 2018a; 2018b; Fassi and Lucarelli 2017); however, it is indisputable that the European reaction to the migrant and refugee crisis in 2015-2016 was largely a response to the pressures of ever more frightened societies and to the EU’s ontological insecurity that the response by the member states generated.

Facing the sudden rise in numbers of sea and land arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers in 2015\(^8\), the EU responded with implementation packages of its Agenda for migration (2015), which gradually shifted the balance from a double aim of saving migrants’ lives and protecting its borders, to a stronger focus on the latter. What triggered this shift was the concern that the migration crisis was putting one of the most important achievements of European integration—the Schengen agreement—at risk (Ceccorulli 2018b). Faced with the temporary uncoordinated suspension of Schengen in several countries, the construction of physical fences to stop migration flows in Hungary and the refusal by several states (particularly the Visegrad countries) to implement the relocation scheme envisaged by the EU, the Commission adopted a second implementation package which increased the focus on border protection (by creating the European Border and Coast Guard and strengthening operation Triton). Since then the EU and its member states have adopted measures to enhance border protection and patrolling of the Mediterranean sea to fight smuggling (through the operations Triton and EUNAVFOR MED Sophia); collect/detain migrants at the points of arrival (the hotspot

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\(^8\) Arrivals from the Mediterranean Sea were 216,054 in 2014 and reached its peak with 1,015,078 in 2015 (UNHCR, n.d.). The number of asylum applicants passed from 627 thousand in 2014 to around 1.3 million in both 2015 and 2016 (Eurostat, n.d.).
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system implemented in Greece and Italy) to avoid secondary movements of asylum seekers (through improved fingerprinting); improve return effectiveness through strengthened relations with third states; externalise the control of migration to third countries (as in the case of the EU-Turkey Statement and the Italy-Libya agreement supported by the EU); and propose a Regulation on a common list of safe countries of origin which de facto would render some asylum requests automatically unfounded on the basis of the nationality of the asylum seeker. What is at risk the most in this scenario, are the human rights of migrants, which according to several attentive observers and NGOs are being systematically violated, not only in the Libyan camps (Amnesty International 2017) or in Turkey (Human Rights Watch 2018), but also within Europe (Human Rights Watch 2018), where the hotspot system has de facto created different categories of asylum seekers depending on their nationality, hence allowing different rights and priorities and not guaranteeing adequate living conditions. In other words, the net effects of the ‘securitisation’ of Schengen (Ceccorulli 2018b) has been a policy of migration and asylum which has led to a significant reduction of human rights standards in Europe and which has brought a dangerous (for the migrants) externalisation of policies.

The launch of a Trust Fund for Africa looks like a promising return to an holistic, long-term and joint-up approach to cope with the root causes of migration, and a step in the direction of a concrete implementation of the EU Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) launched in 2011. However, the way in which the Trust Fund has been shaped so far is not particularly promising. With its limited budget of 2.5 billion euros for Africa and the Middle East (23 eligible recipients), it is not likely that the Fund can have a significant impact on the receiving societies, particularly since most of it is directed to enhance border control and migration management rather than development (Castillejo 2014). In general, the link made in the GAMM between development and migration raises the concern, also within the European Parliament, that there could be an “instrumentalisation” of development aid for migration management purposes’ (European Parliament 2016). Smith and Youngs (2018, 53-54) report that “[i]n early 2016, a group of EU donors pushed the OECD to change its definition of “aid” to include some military spending and funds for refugee camps’. It also seems that some member states have exercised pressure on the Commission to allow the ‘development funds to be used for border controls and other measures to restrict migrant flows’. Even the fund to train and equip the Libyan coast guard to intercept and return back migrants (200 millions euro) points to a particular liberal actorness on the side of the EU. Here again, pragmatism seems to prevail over principles.

**In lieu of a conclusion**

Europe, and particularly the EU, have for a long time represented a pillar and a laboratory of the liberal order. The EU’s role in the world was very much shaped around a self-understanding as a liberal democratic area which applies to its foreign policy the same liberal values that shaped its internal development. Now liberalism is in trouble within Europe: to use Emmanuel Macron’s (2018) words before the European
Parliament, Europe is in a state of ‘civil war’ and is afflicted with a ‘fascination with the illiberal’, putting its ‘unique model’ at risk. Liberalism does not seem to have delivered on at least three fundamental fronts (which are also three aspects of the crisis of liberalism): economic equality and solidarity, liberal democracy and pluralism. Europe is today less egalitarian, less democratic and less open to cultural diversity. Such a Europe, under the pressure of populist and new nationalist forces is also more concerned for its own survival as a union. Its foreign policy can only be affected by these internal developments: First, populist parties provide less guarantees for the maintenance of the traditional bipartisan pillars of foreign policy (national and European) than traditional parties did. Second, they are frequently Eurosceptic and less eager to give competence to the EU in relevant external matters. Third, the EU tends to be dominated by its internal struggle and is ready to compromise its liberal values if this appears to be necessary to save achievements of the integration process (as evident in the case of migration and the challenges to the Schengen agreement).

The root causes of illiberal tendencies in Europe (as in the world in general) are too structural to think that they will easily disappear, too grounded in the deep dissatisfaction of those who suffered the negative effects of globalisation the most and felt abandoned by the distant ‘Berlaymont man’. Only by addressing those deep causes, keeping faith to its founding values and-upholding its liberal order, can the EU hope to save itself and again start to play the role of a liberal power in a not-so-liberal-anymore world. But how can the domestically troubled and divided Europe described above find the energy to address such causes and keep faith with its original values?
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