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THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE CHESSBOARD OF GREAT POWER POLITICS

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Abstract: *The European Union can be considered as the triumph of liberal institutionalism. However, the international community only seems to understand a realist rhetoric. It is therefore questionable to what extent the EU needs to move towards a more realistic outward perspective rather than its current liberal institutionalist. To understand the extent of this necessity three cases studies have been conducted to identify windows of opportunity in policy areas where the Union is currently fragmented. At the same time these situations expose the necessity for the EU to take on a stance which is more pragmatic and oriented on the protecting and promotion of its interests. The dependency of the Union's members on Russian energy offers an opportunity to further integrate the single market and build a more stable relationship. The issues surrounding NATO membership and the current U.S. approach are discussed to further explore possibilities for a more autonomous EU military and further harmonisation and integration of the Unions Defence and Security policies. By exploring these subjects, a conclusion is drawn that the EU is in a position where it can harmonise its internal liberal institutionalist perspective with an outward realist position to withstand the international power struggle.*

Keywords: Defence, Integration, Europe-Russia-U.S., Energy.

Introduction

Currently, the European Union is being challenged from many different directions, both internally (Brexit, populism, a two speed Europe) and externally (migration, trade wars, conflict, new (re)emerging powers). While the Union tries to cope with these challenges and seems to turn more inwardly the world outside its borders moves on quickly. These developments could leave the Union paralysed and perhaps hamper its future development and position on the world stage.

The other actors seem to have a more realist orientation in their pursuit of interests, which leaves to question if there is still room for a liberal institutionalist oriented project. This has raised the question: *To what extent do the opportunities for the European Union within the international community move the European project from a liberal institutionalist to a realist perspective?* This article is too short to answer this question in its totality, therefore three windows of opportunities of the EU will be analysed. First the energy relationship between the EU and Russia is reviewed to see if there is an opportunity for further EU integration and a rapprochement between the Union and Russia. Secondly the integration of European Defence policy and the relation with NATO will be analysed. This will also put the EU - U.S. relations in perspective and will look at the internal perspectives on the issue. It will then move on to discuss the EU dependency on the U.S. and the impact it has had on its own development. Finally, the article will be concluded by answering the before raised question and by discussing the relevance, importance and potential of the European project. But first a more in-depth understanding of the two different schools, realism and liberal institutionalism, of international relations.

Realist Versus Liberalist Institutional Union

The European Union is possibly the greatest triumph of liberal institutionalism. States have sacrificed their sovereignty on subjects such as climate, agriculture and trade for the greater good and the benefit of all. The individual members of the European Union understand, like no other, working together is a necessity to ensure a brighter future. It took the founding European states two world wars to discover that pursuit of individualistic competition results in more sub-optimal outcomes for all. After the Second World War it was the shadow of the future and a push from the Americans that allowed the foundations of the Union. Ever since, it has gone through remarkable changes and membership to the project has become a goal towards many European states have and still are working. The EU has become a shining example of how supra-national institutions can succeed and that realists are not always right.

Classical liberals assume that the individual is driven by self-interest and is therefore most capable to decide what is needed. To achieve these interests are exchanged on a market (Dryzek, Honig and Phillips, 2009). On an international scale trade and finance forge relationships between states that were unimaginable before. These ties are then used to spread democratic norms (Snyder, 2004). But unconstrained competition frustrates this freedom and will eventually lead to sub-

optimal outcomes. Therefore, the emergence of international institutions is logical as this will provide the competing states with a “leader” which enforces rules, regulations and policies to which all parties have agreed. Which, in turn, will eventually provide a more optimal outcome for all. Within such collaboration states are willing to sacrifice sovereignty and national interests (Little, 2014). These institutions are also the main tools used for international relations and are even considered an actor alongside the sovereign state (Snyder, 2004). ‘Many liberals also believe that the rule of law and transparency of democratic processes make it easier to sustain international cooperation, especially when these practices are enshrined in multilateral institutions’ (Snyder, 2004, p.56). This unshakeable faith in international institutions is supported by plenty of hard data. Democratic institutions and values have proven to help states to cooperate (Snyder, 2004).

On the other hand, Krasner argues realists only accept sovereign states as actors in the international sphere (1993). These sovereign states will only sacrifice certain interests to serve greater and more important interests (Little, 2014). They view the world as anarchic where there is no higher power than the sovereign state which can enforce rules and regulations, therefore they are forced towards self-help (Krasner, 1993; Little 2014). States are focused on their own security so to protect their territory and political integrity, as rational actors ‘domestic politics, individual rationality, or organisation failures have only a marginal impact on policies’ (Krasner, 1993, p. 453). International institutions are therefore only used to coordinate strategies to prevent sub-optimal outcomes. Actors within the international community pursue their own interest and strive to maintain the balance of power in their favour. A shift in this balance will trigger reactions by other actors to ensure their own security both physically and economically (Little, 2014). Hall (2006) argues that the threat of another nation becoming more powerful and infringement on sovereignty are the personification of evil, this gives realists incentive for control and alliances without considering identity or religion, “(y)our enemy's enemy is your friend” (Hall, 2006, p. 189).

The U.S. has withdrawn from many international institutions and others refute their influence, authority and even usefulness. There are also those who have come to use these institutions to their own benefit. Within this turbulent era the European Union is often challenged. Internally the members understand cooperation is more important than competition, however, if the Union wants to survive and protect the securities, freedoms and interests of its citizens it may need a more realist

outward orientation as its fellow players seem to lose interest in liberal institutions. The following windows of opportunities will show how this identity crisis has taken shape.

The Russian Question

The pen is mightier than the sword and the current tumult surrounding media shows words can be interpreted differently depending on who reads them and in what context. Therefore, it is important to clearly define certain words which will be often used in this, and also other, sections of the article. When Russia is mentioned this refers to the state and their general population, though as a writer I do not claim to know what their preferences or interests are. The Kremlin and Moscow refer to the (ruling) political elite of the state of Russia and the policies that come forth from it. NATO and the European Union refer to the institutions and its interests and not to its individual members. When members of NATO or the EU or other states and their capitols are mentioned this refers to the general interests expressed by the (elected) representatives of these states.

Russia is part of the European peninsula and therefore of importance to the survival of a peaceful Europe. The current relationship between Russia and the West, mainly existing of the EU and the U.S., is in precarious waters. The EU, its members and Russia have a difficult relationship when it comes to energy resources. As prices soared and resources seemed to become depleted, policies concerning the constraint on existing, and finding new sources became political charged. In such a case who controls resources can influence national politics. Most of Europe's natural energy sources are situated within the territories of Russia. Rises in oil prices and its gas resources led Russians, and the Kremlin, to believe these exports could be used as a foreign policy tool to regain ground as a global influential power (Harsem and Claes, 2013; Trenin, 2016).

It is every state's desire to become independent of its reliance on resources. Any shortcomings are often balanced by the development of human capital or technology. Dependency relies on how important supply is to the receiver, how easily it can change suppliers, find other ways to suffice its needs and how important the compensation is to the exporter. Within the energy department, gas is special in some respect, namely by its infrastructure. Both importer and exporter are dependent on the pipelines transporting the gas, making diversification of supplier and importer difficult. In the case of energy trade between Russia and European member states, we can also speak of an asymmetrical interdependence. Both are dependent on the other, however, the inability of Europe to diversify in supplier or find another source gives considerable power to the supplier,

in this case Russia, more specifically the Kremlin. Several members within the EU are quite able to resist the Kremlin's influence, although this becomes more difficult as Moscow controls ever more energy companies within the Union. However, the more Eastern member states are very dependent on Russia's supply, which buys the Kremlin coercive power to create silence or moderate resistance in internal EU issues. The current bilateral agreements have created different stances among European members towards Russia and internal EU issues. For instance, Cyprus and Greece look favorable on Russia, while France, Germany, Italy and Spain enjoy a special relationship with both Russia and the Kremlin which sometimes undermines common EU policies. Then there is a large group which clearly separates politics from business and is willing to speak out against Moscow. Finally, Lithuania and Poland will block any negotiations by the EU with Russia or the Kremlin (Harsem and Claes, 2013; Dos Santos, 2010). The latter's stances can be well understood as the Kremlin was willing to put its threats of cutting supplies into action when trying to coerce these states (Trenin, 2016).

It is important to put the relationship in a wider perspective. 50% of Russia's gas exports go to Europe, and 50% of the gas used by the EU comes from Russia. Some members are more dependent, like those in the east, than others. This makes the EU more dependent on Russia when it comes to energy supply. On the other hand, Russia, and thus Moscow, is dependent on the EU for other trade. With gas demand expecting to rise national governments develop different policies. Such policies hamper a possible common strategy making members more vulnerable to pressure from Moscow. Direct pipelines from Russia to certain member states, like Germany, also undermine the bargaining position of their Eastern counterparts, as they are currently transit countries. While the EU is looking for diversification in its energy sources Russia is also trying to diversify its clientele and is looking towards Asia (Harsem and Claes, 2013; Dos Santos, 2010). Kratochvíl and Tichy (2013) looked deeper into the Russian discourse on diversification and found that Moscow has interests in, and dialogues with Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary concerning its energy exports. On the other hand, they found that most of the Kremlin's efforts are focused on constructing more supply lines of oil and gas towards Europe and strengthening the position of Russian companies in that market. Moscow believes diversification of such supply lines are necessary as certain transition countries can be unreliable. It also stresses that rhetoric about the importance for the EU to diversify as it is too dependent on the Russian market and should limit the latter's access to the EU market, is exaggerated. Thus, the EU should not be

surprised when Russia starts looking at other markets because of such statements and policy developments (Kratochvíl and Tichy, 2013). It also needs to be considered that Russia may not be able to cope with demands and will need the EU's technological advances to drill into new resources. This may paint a more balanced picture of interdependency, but Moscow will be able to find other suppliers for its current trade with the EU, while the EU will not easily find another supplier of gas. And even if it could, putting down the infrastructure will take tremendous time (Harsem and Claes, 2013; Dos Santos, 2010).

Fortunately, the EU has made considerable progress on the issue. The energy market has been liberalized with the Third Energy Package, preventing Russia from both controlling and owning the pipelines. Member states have started to increase their diversification by importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) and by looking for other suppliers willing to invest in infrastructure. Soft winters have also lowered demand and left considerable reserves. On the other hand, the Kremlin's biggest worries are concerned with its state coffers as energy prices keep lowering (The Economist, 2015; Harsem and Claes, 2013). As these prices keep dropping this energy tool is becoming impractical and seems to be turning on Moscow. The low prices might leave the Kremlin with more debts than surpluses giving the West a tool for discipline and limiting Moscow's freedom to manoeuvre (Trenin, 2016).

To understand the Russian perspective Kratochvíl and Tichy put the Russian discourse in perspective in their article from 2013. According to them integration is an important subject within Russian energy discourse. As the EU gradually tries to have Russia integrate its energy policies, Moscow on the other hand stresses the importance of an equal relationship in which both parties' benefit. Sergei Shmatko (2009) as cited by Kratochvíl & Tichy (2013, p.400), made a clear statement about this 'what is important for us is dialogue, not a diktat'. Lavrov and Medvedev go on to state that energy is an important aspect in the Russian - European relation. According to them energy is a product from which many Europeans benefit and which enables them to live comfortably. Chizhov (2008) as cited by Kratochvíl & Tichy (2013, p.400), puts it even more plainly 'you need gas, and we need the money'. The interdependency by both parties is seen as something positive by both Putin and Lavrov. But Putin also sees the relationship as asymmetrical, with the EU importing 44% of its gas from Russia, while at the same time Russia exports 67% of its gas to the EU (Kratochvíl & Tichy, 2013). In an official document published by the Russian Government transcribing a meeting between members of the Russian Government and the

European Commission in 2013 Medvedev is quoted to say ‘(o)f course, we discussed energy. We have huge potential here... this cooperation should be implemented on a mutually advantageous basis... (w)e believe that our colleagues in the European Commission must hear Russia’s arguments... In this case we will be able to build stable and mutually advantages cooperation for decades to come’. He then goes on to stress the intensity of the relationship by stating that the EU receives 80% of Russia’s oil and 70% of its gas exports. Barroso on behalf of the European Commons underlined that the EU is not afraid of Russia and considers it be ‘an important part of European civilisation, and we are proud of that’. In a report on the Russia-EU energy relations Likhachev (2017, p.6) states that ‘Russian-EU relations in the gas sector have now shifted from a strategic partnership to ordinary commercial cooperation that is further aggravated by serious political disagreements. He goes on to argue that the Russian side of the relationship is not always market-based in nature.

‘Russia is often accused of implementing divide-and-rule policies towards the European Union. It is indeed difficult not to engage in this practice, given the absence of a common foreign policy in the EU’ (Trenin, 2016, p.41-42). This is a natural tactic for states, whether it is Russia, the U.S., China or any other, as it will, first and foremost, promote and further their own interests. The asymmetric interdependency surrounding the energy trade shows the importance for the EU to move towards a common policy on the issue. Likhachev (2017) argues that one of the fundamental reasons for the EU’s existence is to have a unified voice in third party negotiations. However, national interests still triumph. To move forward the European Union will have to make a better effort to understand and acknowledge both the fears of its Eastern members as those of Russia and the Kremlin. While there may never have been a relation of trust between the West and Russia, it is now also dominated by a lack of respect. European history shows us that such a lack and inability to integrate a former adversary will result in a new conflict (Trenin, 2016). It is important to note that a rapprochement towards Russia does not mean a pro-Putin stance or favouring the current Moscow political elite. A harmonised foreign policy will, eventually, be inevitable as it becomes a functional spillover from other policy areas. As the EU harmonises and integrates other policy areas, such as climate change, sourcing defence production, the single market, immigration, a common foreign and security policy will be inevitable. The democratic deficit also shows that the European citizen is tired of the European project and unable to keep up with the great leaps being made. It is therefore important to move forward with small steps. A

common policy towards Russia and the Kremlin concerning the energy trade is a window of opportunity the EU should seize.

European Defence Integration and NATO's relevance

In one of his energetic speeches, Guy Verhofstad mentions '(t)here is no longer a question of more or less Europe, there is a question of another Europe. The world order has changed and Europe can bring an added value on a number of issues that are clear. Defence for example.' The development of a common European defence policy has become intertwined with NATO. While the latter's uncrowned leader, the U.S., urges European states to become more independent in their defence department it openly opposes the idea of a common defence policy. Europeans historically preferred to buy their equipment from the U.S. as it created a special relationship besides NATO, which might get severed when the EU pushes forward with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and PESCO. Currently, most of the equipment produced by EU companies is done so locally and against high prices, the main reason for doing so is to protect jobs and ensuring a supply chain in times of crisis. When the EU would harmonise its standards and source together production and research, prices will drop and military staff from different states will be able to train with the same equipment, simplifying potential cooperation (Valášek, 2018). Certain NATO members and large defence companies do not like such developments. As stated before one of the points in the agreement aims to source together production, at the same time this will make things more difficult for external suppliers. The priority of the EU's defence production is mainly to serve its missions and not NATO, which is understandable as the Union itself is not a member of NATO. Some argue that the European companies benefit from unfair rules, however the U.S., for instance, does the same for its national defence companies. Some question that these policies might even make the EU and NATO competitors (Valášek, 2018). This is, however, not a question but already a reality.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, NATO found itself in an identity crisis. From the beginning its core purpose, as stated by its first secretary general Lord Ismay, was 'to keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down'. In the early 90's some hoped to see NATO go, but former Soviet states, fearing renewed Russian expansionism in the mid-90's, offered the alliance a lifeline. We now know that such fears were misplaced as Russia neither had the will nor the power to regain influence in its near abroad. At

some point it even applied for NATO membership itself, would it have been accepted it would probably have only caused more problems than solved. The Kremlin would have undermined the structure with its demands and challenged U.S. leadership by building coalitions against it. Furthermore, NATO's enlargement served political rather than security interests, in which Russia's were bluntly ignored (Trenin, 2016). These, and to some extent also the EU's, enlargements remain a thorn in Russia's eye, which needs treatment rather than being ignored or worse, being pushed further in. In the mid-90's NATO found itself with a new purpose defending and advancing democracy. It even exerts certain military and political stability before membership would be considered (Hirschman, c.2017; Wallander, 2018). NATO portrayed itself and still does, as the defender of liberal institutions such as democracy and the rule of law. However, its history paints a different picture, as it once included dictatorships like Salazar's Portugal, facilitated military coups in Greece and Turkey and cooperated with Franco's fascist Spain (Heartfield, 2016). Since the Cold War NATO has pushed for military and political reforms amongst its (potential) members (Hirschman, c.2017). The alliance might not function as it used to do during the Cold War but has become a powerful tool for the U.S. to exert pressure (Steele, 2004). Some even argue it has become an international intervention force at the disposal of the U.S. to secure the West's energy supply. Congressman Ken Paul went as far as to say that NATO's expansion only serves the American defence industry, selling equipment to new members (Hirschman, c.2017). So, the EU and NATO cannot become competitors as they are already in each other's business, even more so NATO has become a drag on the EU's leg towards its own security institutions (Steele, 2004). What is even more worrying is the ability of certain EU and NATO members to use its good stance in either one of the organisations to justify its deteriorating commitment in the other (Wallander, 2018; Kolyakova and Haddad 2018). 'For example, Poland often cites its good standing in NATO, where it is a strong military ally that assumes a tough stance on Russia, to excuse its growing illiberalism' (Wallander, 2018, p.80).

In its origin, NATO is but an alliance which was aimed to secure Americas Marshal Plan and form the first line of defence against the Soviet threat. With the threat gone it has started to develop towards a tool for political interests and has become a somewhat politicised organisation. None of its current members seem to oppose this, while on the other hand, some do oppose the EU's development towards independent and strong security institutions. It is thus only fair that scholars and politicians question if NATO is still relevant, or if it is a leftover from the cold war with no

place in modern times (Simons, 2015). During his campaign, Trump stated that NATO was obsolete, after taking office his stance slightly changed. Currently, both Trump and his administration are emphasising the fact that other members are not living up to the 2% norm. During the Brussels summit, he even went as far to accuse the European members of not pulling their weight. The differences surrounding the Iranian nuclear deal are not helping either (Anonymous, 2018). The European members, on the other hand, argue that the money which is not spend on defence is used to strengthen other tools of security, like trade and investments in international relations.

The often-used term “West” encompasses mainly the members of NATO and might give the idea its members are similar, but they only share institutions rather than norms and values (Steele, 2004). Isn't it therefore somewhat odd that NATO promotes and enforces certain interests upon potential members on the European continent. As discussed before the membership of both NATO and the EU allows certain states to play one organisation against the other, while the third benefits. The alliance also gives the U.S. an unfair finger in the European pie of foreign affairs. Over time NATO members felt obliged to fall in line with U.S. foreign policies, even if they were against their own interests. Some EU countries have not joined NATO as they do not feel there is an added value besides their existing relationship with the U.S. However, dissolving NATO does not mean there shouldn't be relations or an alliance between EU members or the EU and the U.S., it should just be on different terms and with reciprocal influence (Steele, 2004).

Further integration of the CSDP and PESCO is but a logical step as this becomes another case of functional spillover. As members of the EU opened their borders and reduced constraints on the movement of goods and, to some extent, human capital military equipment and personal were exempted. But as the armies of European states, like the Dutch and German and the French and Belgiums, start to cooperate more with one another the free movement of military goods and staff become more important. While the EU's economic strength often bolsters its foreign policy both the crisis in the Middle East and Ukraine have shown that it falls short of credible military hard power. A clearer and more robust foreign policy strengthened by the two classic hard powers, economic and military, on which the U.S. had a monopoly for a long time, will enable the EU to push back on U.S. policies going against the Unions interests (Biscop, 2018). If it does so it could even aim to fill the vacuum left by the U.S. in many areas or even deter its policies that might risk conflict, harm the global economy, or be overall dangerous to the international peace and defence

of human rights. However, internally some of the leading members are divided. While the financial crisis propelled Germany to an unofficial leaderships role it is reluctant towards conflict intervention, but it does prefer to develop and invest in EU defence rather than in national defence. France, on the other hand, seems to be taking a lead in developing a European army and pushing for further integration on defence and security. It is important to remember that these two states have been able to cooperate not because they agree, but because they disagree (Simón, 2018; Walshe 2018). In this particular case, such a cooperation can be fruitful. Germany's adversary can serve as a basis on which checks and balances both for the CSDP, PESCO and a future European army can be created.

It is also important to acknowledge the positive influence NATO has had on its members. During its life, NATO has provided its members with security but also prosperity in one way or another. However, as tensions rise, interests diverge and the global order changes, it is important that the EU seizes yet another window of opportunity for further integration and a stronger position on the world stage.

U.S. Dependency

For decades the U.S. has been a haven for those aspiring the American Dream, a term associated with free markets, endless possibilities and freedom of oppression. After the Second World War, it emerged as the hegemon in a new world order divided by communist and capitalist powers. As the Cold War dragged on the U.S. became the leader of the free world, rushing to the aid of those seeking independence from oppressive regimes. It founded the League of Nations which became the United Nations and stood at the cradle of many institutions working towards a safer and more stable world. It has defended many liberal freedoms which are, far too often, take for granted. But in the past years, this crusader has started to withdraw from the fight as political and economic turmoil at home demanded more and more attention. Trump's words "America First" aren't new, as they were uttered by U.S. congress in the early 1940's preventing president Franklin D. Roosevelt from getting involved with the conflict on the European continent (Walshe, 2018). The result of this policy is well known today. After assuming office, the Trump administration has pulled the U.S. out of 70 years of commitment to the European project, which has also brought more security and prosperity to the U.S. (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018). It has also backed down from important international commitments such as the Paris Agreement, the

Iran nuclear deal, the UN Human Rights Council and started numerous trade wars. The EU is wrong in thinking it can wait out the Trump administration, previous, and also coming, presidents have been well aware of the Unions dependency on the U.S. defence apparatus. In recent interviews, Trump bluntly said that the EU, from its outset, aimed to exploit the U.S. and by failing to fall in line with its recent foreign policy changes has become a “foe” (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018).

Trump’s position on NATO, the EU, its rapprochement with autocratic governments and nationalistic orientation has caused major concerns around the world. While a direct relation with the increase in demagogues, populism, undemocratic and illiberal regimes with the decline of U.S. leadership, which would make for an interesting research, cannot be established, there is a desperate need for a new crusader. There are those who look towards the European Union to fill this vacuum, an idea that might not be as crazy as it seems. For over 60 years the EU has been a successful experiment, putting trade and the value of a human life on equal footing and, if necessary, even put the humane interest first. But the Union is internally divided, coping with economic problems, populism and challenges to the liberal values of its members. Trump’s U.S. has become a predator rather than a partner to this weakened EU. Offering members different and bilateral trade agreements, for instance in the case of France on the condition it would leave the Union. The EU’s once biggest ally is now copying Russia’s approach. ‘As great powers compete for influence across the globe Europe, like the Middle East or Latin America, will become another battleground’ (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018). If the EU wants to play a role, instead of being played, on the global stage its members need to unite and use their advantages. Current efforts for military autonomy and independent security and defence policy are admirable but not enough. While the EU is economically strong, it does not flex this muscle sufficiently and has been unable to combine it with military power (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018). Europeans these days still rely on the U.S. for security and leadership, but ‘(w)ith the latter gone and the former at risk, Europe will need to unify at home and undertake some savvy diplomatic manoeuvring abroad if it is to continue to pursue its interests on a global stage’ (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018). The current U.S. strategy may be short sighted but that doesn’t mean the EU should sit by, watch and take the damage. It would do wise to look for new friends like Russia and China (Polyakova and Haddad, 2018). If the EU would be able to overcome these hurdles it can defend liberal values and human

rights, come to the aid of those seeking relief from oppressive regimes and rebalance the worrying shifts in power. Instead of being the minor partner to the great powers it could become equal.

Conclusion

So, to what extent do the opportunities for the European Union within the international community move the European project from a liberal institutionalist to a realist perspective? The answer to this question is twofold. As discussed before, the European project is a triumph of liberal institutionalism and should, above all, remain so. If the past decades have shown the world anything it is the success of the Union, and as people vote with their feet, more seem to find a way towards it. A common energy, defence, security and foreign policy are a logical next step within this project. As the analysis of the Russian question has shown it is within the own interests of the members, and of the EU as an institution, to form a common strategy concerning energy. These unified policies will provide the Union with a stronger negotiation position towards its partners and will benefit every member, ensuring profitable deals and a lower risk of being cut off. The shared outcome for the Union and its member states will be higher than the sum of their individual endeavours. The analysis of European Defence Integration and NATO's relevance has shown that a common security and defence policy will provide the EU with financial benefits, independence from other security providers and a second hard power tool. The relationship with NATO is another reason for a more independent position of the Union, as membership to the alliance is often used as an excuse for not keeping to internal EU rules, regulations and agreements. With NATO's transformation during the 90's, the alliance and the EU have become competitors rather than a cooperation providing optimal outcomes for its members. Further integration, either on energy, defence, security or foreign policy, is therefore not a threat, and should neither be dreaded, but an opportunity. The current turbulent arena in which the great powers play their chess game should motivate, not paralyse, the EU members to do what they know is in their best interest. As the economic and monetary union, integration of policy areas such as agricultural, climate control, free movement of goods and persons has brought prosperity to each member state, so will further integration of other policy areas. Above all the European members should not feel threatened by external powers, trying to fragment them, but believe in the power, strength and success of their liberal institutionalist project.

The other side of the argument, however, is in order for the EU to ensure respect of its interests and the security, wellbeing and prosperity of its citizens it will have to take on a realist position within the international community. Other actors have shown to only understand a pragmatic, secure oriented position while pursuing their own interest. Even the once proud defender of liberal democracy, who stood at the cradle of many international institutions, including the EU, has shown preferring to put self-interest above the common good. The analysis of the U.S.-EU relationship and the relevance of NATO have shown that, although the U.S. wants the members of NATO, and especially the EU, to become more independent, it does not want the EU to develop a common defence and security policy. Let alone source its production together and cooperate more on the military level. The Russian question underlines the need for self-interest of the Union. Moscow uses the absence of a common security, foreign and energy policy to divide the members, and even influence the internal politics, of the EU. It does so for its own security interests, as it feels threatened by both NATO and the European Union. Within this ideology it does not want to understand the benefits of such a liberal institutional project, but it does reap the benefits of its vulnerabilities. Therefore, in order for the Union to handle such a partner it should deal with equal coin and adapt a more realist stance for its outward perspective. As Polyakova and Haddad wrote; '(a)s great powers compete for influence across the globe Europe, like the Middle East or Latin America, will become another battleground' (2018), therefore the Union should do anything in its power to prevent Europe from becoming such a battleground.

This position provides the European Union and its members with an opportunity. As it has done many times before it will have to rise to the challenge of harmonising two rivals, realism and liberal institutionalism, to further its internal integration and prosperity while withstanding the international power struggle. While the international community only seems to understand a division between these two schools the Union will be able to wield a unique position. And if its members dare to move forward to further integrate on some crucial policy areas the Union will find its toolbox dramatically expanding, able to take on any international superpower. In such a situation rapprochement with Russia and new international alliances with other states than the U.S. will not be a strange phenomena. And when it has established itself as an international player, rather than a playground for other powers, it will be able to use sticks and carrots to move these actors towards partnerships where the common good trumps the national interest.

On a Final Note

‘Human progress isn’t measured by industry. It’s measured by the value you place on a life. An unimportant life. A life without privilege’ (Doctor Who, 2017). History is scattered with examples of both industrial and humanitarian progress, but they never occurred simultaneously. Whenever there were industrial progress large groups suffered. The Golden Age of Europe went hand in hand with slavery, oppression and exploitation of overseas colonies. Enlightenment in the 18th century saw bloody revolutions bringing down, literally, heads of state and those benefitting from industrial progress. The industrial revolution in the 19th century left the larger part of the European population impoverished and working in atrocious conditions. What followed was the formation of unions, the establishment of the universal vote, and in some cases again bloody revolutions. The following world wars showed the willingness to let others suffer to benefit from industrial advantages and raw resources. From this short history lesson, we might deduct that progress with only industrial benefits in mind leave large groups suffering and are followed by major, and maybe even bloody, change.

After the Second World War, a group of men with differing interests sought a way to prevent future wars on the European peninsula. Robert Schuman can be considered as one of the key founders of the European Union. In his reasoning we can clearly hear the importance of a human life vis-a-vis industrial progress ‘(T)he economic capitalism lent itself too easily to methods of egoistic exploitation and neglected the meaning of human responsibility’ (Schuman: 57). The basis of the European project was cooperation to prevent another war over the resources on the French and German soil. At the core, a healthy combination of humanitarian and industrial interests can be discovered. Neither party on the European peninsula wanted new human suffering at the cost of industrial benefit, thus beneficial trade was a logical solution. The Americans did not want to be drawn into another war to prevent strain on both its population and its industry. The project flourished and has become what it is today with a mindset of maximising human benefit combined with industrial progress, instead of one at the cost of the other.

This reasoning leaves to question how things are today. Human life within the Union is of a high standard and well protected by both national government and the European Union. Both works to protect its citizens from exploitation, discrimination, climate change, bad trade, pollution, bad products, and so on. Here, however, also lies an uncomfortable realisation that the value we place on a human life, in general, is very different from the value on the life of a European citizen.

Economical, climate and conflict refugees seek their way to a better life, for whom our Union is like a lightbulb to all creatures fleeing from darker places. Irresistible and hopeful. But as the European citizen puts more value on his or her iPad where does that leave the “unimportant, unprivileged life”?

Industry and trade have fueled human progress for centuries, but, as stated before, putting a human life second to industry is destructive to general progress. Industrial progress and trade are directly related to living standards. But in the past decades the European project has proven that both can go hand in hand, it is thus important to show the world and ourselves time and again the successes while working hard to solve internal and external problems. Although some may consider the Union ill or even say its time to disband it, there are hopeful movements too, new political parties, young people willing to fight for the European project and their ideals, think tanks looking beyond the problem towards constructive solutions. As the U.S. moves further away from its role as promotor and defender of liberal democracy and human rights, hopeful eyes turn to Europe. But are the members willing and is the European Union ready?

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