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Avoiding "Mixed Messages" (in times of COVID-19):
Towards a Consistent EU Position on World Order

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Note from the authors:

This paper was drafted in early January 2020. We thought closely about the utility and the continuing relevance of the paper in the context of the dramatic implications and changes emanating from the still unfolding pandemic COVID-19. The judgment we arrived at was that the message of the paper not only remained relevant but was all the more enhanced by the implications of COVID-19. Rather than re-write the paper we have a ninth proposition to the initial eight that puts it into the contemporary context.

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Abstract

This paper makes the case that the EU must not send out mixed messages. It cannot go down the road of adopting a forward leaning geopolitical strategy, while at the same time wishing to maintain its wider commitment to collective action problem-solving. In today's unravelling of the post-World War Two world order, the EU's longstanding instinct to resist geopolitical imperatives in favour of a commitment to collective action in multilateral institutional contexts should remain. Therefore, the priority for the EU is to remove ambiguity from its external policy by focusing specifically and precisely on topics and regions that matter to citizens directly: security, migration, climate, but also on other things that might seem one step removed from everyday life yet actually have a considerable impact on citizens, such as the defence of multilateralism and the situation in the near neighbourhood. This paper sets out nine key points of substance for consideration. They are presented as a series of propositions in need of recognition by those driving EU international relations in the life of the next Commission. If the EU really believes in its internationalist values, it should stick to them and make it clear that it is driven by the pursuit of geo-sustainability through multilateral cooperation, not by geopolitics and its related nationalist assumptions of closure to the wider world. This, the paper argues, becomes even more important in a time of global pandemic.

Keywords:

Table of Contents

Introduction: Where Are We With the World Order

Henry Kissinger defined a world order as the concept held by a region or civilisation about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world (Kissinger, 2014, p.3). One way to look at it is by using the metaphor of a game: one can picture a world order as a set of playing rules, a playing field, players and star players. In this way, one could say that in the aftermath of World War Two, a world order crystallised with the multilateral organisational structure as the playing field and states as the main players. The US and the USSR were the star players and Cold War the dominant game. As that world order was mainly designed by the US, one can label it the American Liberal Led partial order (Acharya, 2017). The USSR was not following the liberal rules and was excluded from the playing field of the Bretton Woods institutions. For more than half a century that world order remained intact. With the collapse of communism, the only star player left seemed to be the US, but the end of the Cold War unleashed several new dynamics. Today, that historical world order is unravelling rapidly in front of our eyes. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to push the world further in a period of dramatic political and societal change. However, the current world order was already at a crossroads prior, before the arrival of the pandemic. Several explanations of this unravelling exist. They are multifaceted and often inter-connected. They include *inter alia*:

(i)   The rising challenges from China;
(ii)   An era of post-Soviet collapse and Russian re-assertiveness following a radical shift in trust between Moscow and Brussels in the wake of the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine in 2014;
(iii)   The impact of digital information, communication technologies and social media on politics; especially as a facilitator of the growth of nationalism, populism and fundamentalism in Europe and elsewhere (especially since 2008);
(iv)   The destabilising political impact of Middle East regional conflicts on migration flows to Europe as part of a wider global refugee problem of unprecedented and growing proportions (in excess of 70 million displaced persons worldwide);
(v)   The impact of uneven distributional consequences of globalisation on rising inequality within developed countries to a level that undermines economic solidarity and the "social bond" (see Devetak and Higgott, 1999) in the relationship between citizens and the state;
(vi)   The growing awareness of the structurally disruptive impact of climate change;
(vii)   The progressive withdrawal of the United States from international citizenship, both reflected in and exacerbated by the growing socio-political divisions in the USA and the destabilizing populist, nationalist and transactionalist behaviour of its current president effectively placing the international institutional architecture in suspended animation.

All of the above explanations for the unravelling of the current world order refer to trends that seem to be aggravated by the impact of COVID-19. It is too early to tell, but this pandemic might well be the tipping point that ends the current world order and paves the way for a new order. Europe must be better prepared for this as the unravelling of the current world order is not, and will not be, Europe's friend; especially if its effects on European policy remain unaddressed. EU policy during the lifetime of the next Commission must be alive to this situation and develop policy accordingly noting that the US remains the dominant global actor. But for too long the USA, as the dominant financial power, has taken advantage of the oft cited "exorbitant privilege" given to it by dollar hegemony to

support its public deficit and debt. It did, nevertheless, provide a mostly assured geopolitical context in which Western and much of Central Europe progressed over sixty plus years to become the European Union.

In this context, one can point to several contingent key issues that are directly impacting the EU. Firstly, all the current global tensions, especially the stand-off in the US-China relationship, are consolidating the relationship between Russia and China. But the EU should also recognise that President Putin's rogue behaviour might stem as much from an understandable sense of insecurity engendered by the aggressive western posture that followed the immediate end of the Cold War as it does from a perception of Russian strength.

Secondly, a culture of narcissism afflicts the international politics of the world's major states and we must recognise that we are caught in a "narcissistic turn" in international political discourse. While not new in international relations, this discourse is back with a vengeance and increasingly influential. We live in an era of narcissistic authoritarian "strongman leadership", such as Putin, Xi Jinping, Modi, Bolsonaro, Duterte, Orban, Mohammed bin Salman and "wanna-be" strong leaders such as Trump and Johnson. Identified by Christopher Lasch (1979), narcissism is a personality trait determined, ironically for the prevailing strongman hypothesis, by weakness, rather than strength. Importantly, we need to recognise that such personal narcissism affects the manner in which states practice international relations and conduct diplomacy (see Burkle, 2017). For the narcissist, international leadership has to be both *public* and *personal* (think Trump and Kim Jong Un) - not the best way to conduct international relations and diplomacy. Fortunately, the collective leadership of the EU does not exhibit such tendencies. The structure of the EU, the dual roles of the President and the HR, the importance that the new President wants to place on College decision-making supported by others, increasingly gender diverse, commissioners with international dimensions to their portfolios, all mitigate against this kind of behaviour – the illiberal behaviour displayed by some leaders in the EU, notwithstanding. Any desire to establish unique personal roles is contained by this collective structure of leadership in the EU. Europe does not need to exhibit the leadership style of Donald Trump and his role model, Vladimir Putin. As we will suggest, the EU needs simply to show consistency and resolve - a quiet but persuasive strength if you like - in its external relations.

Thirdly, the EU remains one of the few serious international actors that believes in, and still mostly practices, a liberal view of world order as articulated in its *Grand Strategic Vision Statement* (EU, 2016) and echoed in its *New 2019-2024 Strategy* (European Council, 2019). The challenges facing the EU is what it might usefully do to secure positive reform to that order.

Fourthly, the incoming Commission has indicated that it needs to toughen up for a more brutal age in which geopolitics and realist power politics is back in fashion after the 20 years of growing soft power ascendancy between the collapse of the Wall and the Global Financial crisis and built on assumptions of EU normative power (see Manners 2004). Indeed, as indicated in her *Mission Letter* (September 2019) the incoming President identified her Commission as a "geopolitical commission". On one level, this makes sense. Given both the nationalist rhetoric and practice of international relations of the 21st century, especially by the Great Powers, the EU must be attuned to this trend and its attendant implications. But a knee jerk U-turn from its traditional positions is not without dangers for the EU. None of the challenges identified by the Commission can be successfully

confronted by hard power and *realpolitik*, nor indeed by traditional diplomacy, alone. "Toughening up" is one thing, jettisoning the EU's traditional collective institutional strengths and ethics is another. The EU's external relations cannot be just about geopolitics because, taken literally, the notion of geopolitics is guided by *geographical factors* in the determination of external political, security and economic relations. But more often than not, geopolitics is accompanied by the baggage of geostrategic thinking that reflects an understanding of foreign policy for most states driven implicitly, or in most cases explicitly, by aggressive nationalist sentiment. Now this is not, in our judgment, what is or should be driving EU policy. Rather, the assumption underpinning evolving EU strategy is that it needs to be more like the world's three major players, the US China and Russia - basically practicing *geostrategic realpolitik*. Yet at the same time, the EU wishes to preserve its long-held commitments to a liberal, cooperative institutional collective action approach to international problem solving. In so doing, the EU wants to have its cake and eat it too, and by trying to do so, it is sending out mixed message to the wider international relations and foreign policymaking community.

The EU cannot have it both ways and should be cautioned against a full-bore commitment to *geopolitical* strategic thinking. In terms of both intellectual tradition and practice, the geopolitical disposition is at odds with the path the EU has taken over the last several decades, especially in its commitment to collective problem solving in multilateral institutional settings. For all the challenges, limitations and weaknesses, multilateral collaboration has exhibited of late it is still the best approach for the EU to articulate and propagate in pursuit if *its* international politico-strategic and economic well-being. For all its good intentions, the EU should be careful what it wishes for if it intends to pursue a more aggressive forward leaning role beyond its borders.

While not only does it have its own internal divisions, the EU is also increasingly sandwiched in the pursuit of its international relations between the US, China and Russia. Being like them will not necessarily enhance its international role and standing. In an era when populist leaders try to normalise nationalist postures, it falls to the EU to provide the intellectual and practical leadership necessary to halt this trend. It will best do so by reasserting the core values that underpin the European project. In the remains of this paper, we offer nine propositions as to how this might be done in a way that resists both the populist-nationalist discourse and the geopolitical discourse with which the Commission appears to be dabbling.

The EU's international strengths are economic (especially as the world's third large trading community) and cultural (as the home of the Enlightenment tradition), but neither economics nor culture are easily applied to modern day geopolitical strategy. If there is any doubt about this, the recent ineffectiveness of a Trumpian recourse to economic warfare (as opposed to economic statecraft) has not served the US well in either geopolitical or geoeconomic terms (see Higgott, 2019 for a discussion). There is no reason it will serve the EU any better.

Conversely, cultural/soft power diplomacy while yet to punch its weight does, if implemented strategically, exhibit at least the potential to enhance EU international standing in both the near neighbourhood and far abroad (see Carta and Higgott, 2019). Soft power (Nye 2004), notwithstanding the ubiquity of the concept, is thought by many to be in retreat as international relations becomes more bilateral, transactionally focussed with geoeconomics and geopolitics in the ascendency. But geopolitics and geoeconomics ignore the dramatic rise of *geo-civilisational* politics and culture wars at the international

level and the need to mitigate their worst excesses. States are appropriating the concept of "civilizational status" to resist the ubiquity of universal liberal values in the discussion of the structure of global order. This is not just the trend in China, India, Russia, Turkey and other (semi) authoritarian states. Western articulations of civilisational identity are also built on what O'Hagen (2018) calls "narratives of irreconcilability". Without further elaboration here, this is a battle of ideas and culture (see DOC, 2019) that needs to be addressed with soft power in the domain of international cultural relations.

So, Let's Do International Relations the European Way!

That the EU is a global actor is, for many, a taken for granted assumption (Söderbaum and Van Langenhove, 2006). But rather than an assertion it needs to be put as a question: to what degree is Europe a global actor? In a world order where states are the key players, it is not clear what kind of actor it is and how it should it practice international relations. Should it have global economic and political strategies comparable to the United States in the 20th century and now also China in the 21st century? The EU is not the US nor China, but it has to be a player in a multi-polar world if it is to share in the economic and technological developments that are changing the nature of world order (especially online digital platforms, AI, data monopolies etc.) and that are reshaping the power structures of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. But Europe is not a major player here and it is vulnerable to the technological and political trends of the modern age, especially the bifurcation of the global superstructure between the US and China.

As Gabriel and Bornschein (2019) note, Europe is a "user" not a producer in the domains of modern technology - whether it is GAFA propriety products such as Amazon's industrial cloud or Chinese digital business solutions such as Huawei operating systems. It could argue that the Europeans have done well to embrace US technologies and apply them for the European economy. Otherwise, Europe might now have its own European iPhone and search engines but perhaps comparable to an East German Trabant, with related consequences for the European economy overall. Similarly, the EU is largely an observer, not a participant in the contemporary debate over future of the global trade system. In the 21st century, we increasingly live in the digital economy where cross border data flows are a much better determinant of globalisation and they have grown dramatically - from 200 terabits a second in 2010 to 1400 terabits a second in 2017 (https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-globalization/). The near inverse relationship between the declining nature of trade traditionally understood, and the globalisation of the digital economy, is telling.

If, on the back of the changing nature of great power economic competition identified above, a *decoupling* of the US-China relationship, to use a mot du jour (Rachman, 2019), were to take root in the international order, then the longer-term effects on the EU will be profound. Occupying a secondary role will be an inevitable loss of influence and, more importantly, diminished economic autonomy. The resolution of this conundrum for Europe is not easy. To flourish, while the EU needs to become more assertive while at the same time maintaining its wider commitment to collective action problem solving.

This strategy, rather than a geopolitical strategy, is indeed the road to which the EU should adhere over the next five years. To do so the EU must get over its self-identified "existential crisis" (EU, 2016:9) and develop its currently underdeveloped *global* voice if it is not to

become an international "pawn" in the new great game (Mark Leonard, ECFR, 2019). Establishing a global voice is a task not only for the High Representative but the Commission as a whole, operating as far as possible in a "joined-up" fashion recognising that the boundaries between internal affairs and foreign affairs are always blurred, and operating through the collective decision making structures of the College of Commissioners in a manner identified in her *Mission Letter* (2019) by the then President elect.

Put bluntly, the Commission's role should be to avoid getting tied up in the game of geopolitics and its contemporary imperatives wherever possible. The EU's longstanding instinct to resist geopolitical imperatives in favour of a commitment to global, collective action problem solving in multilateral institutional contexts is not wrong. Taken at her word, the new EU President understands this. As she says: "We want multilateralism, we want fair trade, we defend the rules-based order because we know it is better for all of us. We have to do it the European way. This European way isn't marked on black and white geopolitical maps". (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_19_4230 (For further illustration see similar sentiments in her *Mission Letter* to the incoming Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-13/trade-war-latest-trump-brussels-europe-cars-tariffs-economy-k0i0fv86).

Used deftly, the principles that underpinned European normative power in the closing decades of the 20th century can remain relevant as a guide to action. Europe needs to stand by these oft-derided ideas. The EU is the only unambiguous supporter of liberal values and multilateral, institutional collective action problem solving among the major players; especially on key issues such as climate. Moreover, the EU cannot match, and nor does it have the intellectual will or stomach for, the crass transactionalism of the other major states. It needs to lead by example and carve out a wider collective position with other "like-minded" democratic nations (of which there are more still more than we often imagine) resistant to simply being squeezed between the two major bullying global powers of the 21st century; such as Japan, Canada, South Korea, Australia)

The EU has, or should have, the ability to lead hybrid "coalitions of the willing" or "like-minded" actors that can constitute a critical mass and act as "force multipliers" in specific policy areas, adopting strategies re-designed around the new communicative technologies. The EU should develop its "soft power with a hard edge" (Sitter and Goldthau, 2015). It is, after all, still the world's largest single market and the Commission could and should have substantial ideational regulatory power and capability if properly applied. For example, its competition policy - working in the grey area between hard economic power on the one hand and soft power on the other has the ability to target actors (state and non-state alike) - is a potentially forceful international policy instrument.

Of course, this is no easy task. But if "finding voice" is to be successful, it is crucial to demonstrate the added value of an EU foreign policy, both to citizens of member states and international partners. Mitigating the challenges emanating from the unravelling of the world order is both an internal and an external task. To the extent that there is a social contract between the EU and its citizens, citizens expect security, friendly neighbours and stability. Therefore, the EU's external policy goals and priorities need to be constantly flagged in order to construct, to the extent possible, a European wide consensual foreign policy discourse. The EU should thus engage in dialogue both within the EU's border and beyond with its external partners. In so doing, it needs to focus on soft and smart power as

important instruments and practices of diplomacy, together with traditional security driven diplomacy.

EU policy approaches over the next five years needs to incorporate and enhance the instruments and practices of soft power and cultural diplomacy, scientific and academic diplomacy begun under HR Mogherini, as well as the instruments of traditional security and economic diplomacy. To punch its weight, Europe needs to be a proactive, rather than reactive, innovative multilateral actor. It must also believe in itself at a time when major allies, notably, but not only, the US president, see European values as increasingly alien. It is no longer sufficient for the EU to consider itself as the US's junior partner waiting to take its lead from the major ally. Waiting for this leadership, on all current evidence, would be like "waiting for Godot".

Moving beyond the tetchy Trump-Macron exchanges at the London NATO meeting, the relationship between Europe and the US is changing. Notwithstanding the size and depth of the economic and politico-security partnership (Hamilton and Quinlan, 2019) and people-to-people links between the US and Europe, the negative impact of Trump's rhetoric and practice on US-EU relations, on both sides of the Atlantic, is unlikely to abate while he remains in office. While the transatlantic relationship remains rhetorically strong, it is weakening on both sides of the ocean; especially as the US, with increasing frequency, threatens judicial responses to EU policies it deems unfavourable to US interests in areas such as the EU's preference for the Russian Northstream2 gas project rather than US gas.

But for Europe's potential as an international innovator for other international actors, it must be presented in a sensitive and practical manner. It should avoid references, as per HR Federica Mogherini, to Europe as a "cultural superpower" with superior universal values. This approach will no longer wash with partners in an era when international cultural relations are becoming increasingly salient. Rather, the approach must be to stress the *practical utility, not cultural superiority* of European norms values; especially the rule of law, a commitment to an open liberal, anti-protectionist international trade regime, the need for the continuing enhancement of equality (both economic and gendered), the importance of multilateralism and collective action problem solving via the international institutions, yet recognising the need to bring the international institutions into alignment with the modern era.

Europe and the Reform of the World Order: The Challenges.

Challenges to the EU, as listed in the introduction above, are both endogenous and exogenous. Internally, they have ensured that the politics of the EU have become increasingly polarised and given rise to a growing number of elected populist-nationalist politicians more interested in weakening the EU than supporting it. Externally, they have brought the EU to a tipping point in world affairs in which geopolitics has become the principle driver of global economic uncertainty. The geoeconomic and geostrategic consequence of the US-China trade war are reflected in China's decision to go its own way on technology development. It is showing signs of wishing to de-couple every bit as strongly as those of the USA.

We are in what Ian Bremmer (2019) calls a "geopolitical recession" which, unlike economic recessions, are not short lived. Global re-ordering will not work its way out over a few short years but rather decades. To the extent that the geopolitical nature, and the accompanying

dynamics of that order can be mitigated, the better things will be. A mitigation strategy, while it seems out of step with the hard realist nature of geopolitics, must remain at the core of EU strategy. It has to be a goal of the EU to strive to develop a hybrid, post-institutional international order in which the existing institutions are both buttressed and reformed in a manner that opens the way for less institutionalised players to take on a greater role in what we identify as an "open, networked world".

Europe is something of an outlier in the current debate over world order when contrasted with the centrality of the USA, China and, to a lesser extent, Russia. There is a sharp divergence of EU thinking with that of the US on issues of global order and especially relationships with China and Russia. The EU, while cognisant of the downsides of Chinese international policy - especially its penchant for intellectual property theft (European Commission, 2018) - is more pragmatic than the US and strives hard for a strong relationship with East Asia and a realistic accommodation with China; especially if the transatlantic relationship continues to deteriorate. The more Donald Trump saves some of his choicest critiques of trade policy for European allies - even to the extent of describing Europe as "… almost as bad as China" (Politi, 2018) - the more nervous the EU becomes. Classic here has been the Trumpian absurdity that European (read German) auto imports represent a threat to American national security, thus offering the opportunity for the US to respond with tariffs on the EU. Increased tariffs in the wake of the adverse October 2019 WTO finding on excessive EU Airbus subsidies can be expected to further exacerbate tensions in the relationship.

What Role Might the EU Play in Helping Reform the International Institutional Order?

The EU knows what it does not like about the current international order: it explicitly rejects a Trumpian view of world order, especially his bilateral-cum-transactional hostility to multilateralism, yet it currently lacks a coherent strategy to secure what it does like. The EU does not think like the other geopolitical powers and currently has an underdeveloped voice in the debate over world order. It has been argued by some analysts that the EU should strive for "geopolitical equidistance" between the USA and China; a situation in which it develops a strategic autonomy and attempts to reform and secure an international order absent the participation of the two major protagonists (see Biscop, 2019) as per example France and Germany's recently launched *The Alliance to Support Multilateralism* (Democracy Without Borders, 2019).

Others argue that equidistance is not an option. Notwithstanding its economic strength, the EU lacks the joined-up clout to contest US, Chinese and even Russian political strategic power or pursue a *via media* strategy. In this view, the paucity of the current transatlantic relationship notwithstanding, the ties across that ocean, both political and economic, are still determinant factors in European political security thinking and practice (Simon, 2019). Absent a European deterrent force and its own champions in the domains of technology and AI, Europe is not in position comparable to the USA and China. It is not just on trade, Iran and gas purchasing that the US has warned the EU to bring its policies into line with those of the US - Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has warned the EU that failure to freeze out Huawei from next stage (5G) telecommunications in Europe will have a negative effect on the transatlantic relationship.

The EU, along with the other major actor in the US-China relationship, Japan, have effectively been given a series of "take it or leave it" propositions by the US vis-a-vis China, rather than the opportunity to develop a collective strategy. For example, the putative EU-Japan-US initiative developed by Japan in 2017 to coordinate legal action against China at the WTO on technology transfer was dismissively relegated to second place behind US direct unilateral action against China. While Europe and Japan had worked hard to coordinate their trade strategy, both remain concerned not to get caught in the crossfire of an exacerbating, long, wide, and deep US-China conflict which has now become about more than just trade imbalances. But in what amounts to a sign of the times, both appear equally as concerned not to alienate China, as the US has pushed for. If the EU follows the logic of geopolitics, the luxury of avoiding choosing sides in the US-China will not easily present itself. The pressures to align with the US may prove immense, indeed overwhelming, unless Europe can engage the wider international community in the conversation on this issue. Other states will be watching Europe and looking for a lead from it.

Perhaps the final factor in an understanding of EU policy towards a wider global cooperative endeavour is its relationship with Russia and the degree to which the development of a Eurasian geopolitical sphere will affect the relationship with Eurasia and East Asia in the future. The key issue is whether Russia will act as a barrier or a conduit between Europe and Asia. While it is easy to suggest that the infrastructural development of the BRI across central Asia is clearly facilitative, the politics of the process may be less so. Russia is not an easy issue for Europe. Russia has been less of a beneficiary of economic globalisation and, as a consequence, appears less economically and politically invested in international economic and political reform in the way that the EU is.

While clearly a *revisionist* power in its attitude to the current world order, Russia, understandably perhaps, wants a restoration of prestige lost in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intrusion of NATO into what it considered its legitimate orbit after the end of the Cold War. It wants to reassert its own sphere of influence. But its internal economic problems are as great, if not greater, than those of Europe. Can, in this context, Russia make a more positive contribution to world order reform? Does it (read President Putin) have the ability and strategic vision to contribute to world order reform? Its recent international track record is problematic so the answer will turn on (i) how its rapprochement with China proceeds in the geoeconomic and geopolitical space that we now think of as Eurasia and (ii) how the relationship with the US continues as both states exhibit "spoiler characteristics" in the international domain (see Palacio, 2019).

Clearly Russia is becoming more strategic in the international space. And the US by default (or Trumpian design) is making it easier for Russia to play a greater international role and greater China-Russia closeness is clearly developing. Indeed, the integration of Eurasian and European economies more generally seems inevitable. With the rapid economic expansion of China and India, but also some Eurasian nations, there is a growing demand to improve connections between Europe and Asia. The current *status quo* of the rising world in the East provides an opportunity for Eurasian countries to emerge as a hub for finance, goods, and services, which makes them valuable trading partners for Europe.

Nine Propositions in Need of Attention

The unravelling of the liberal order and the as yet scratchy geopolitical contours of any future world order pose a range of generic policy questions in need of answer by those who would guide the EU's external relations over the next five years. In this context the EU, for its part, needs to offer a common-sense bout of reformism. This is something the High Representative alone cannot guarantee or lead. What must be done, however, is to remove ambiguity from the EU's external policy by focusing specifically and precisely on topics and regions that matter to citizens directly: security, migration, climate, but also other things that might seem one step removed from everyday life but actually have considerable impact on citizens, such as the defence of multilateralism and the near neighbourhood. Set out below are nine key points of substance for consideration. We are neither so bold nor pretentious as to offer formal recommendations. Rather, what is offered is a series of propositions in need of recognition by those driving EU international relations in the life of the next Commission.

1. *Recognise* that the USA is looking less reliable than ever as a benign actor in international relations. Waiting for Donald Trump to go is not the solution because Trump is not a cause but a symptom of what is going on. Even post-Trump, key elements of this new reality will need to be lived with. What we do not know is the degree to which his successor may move to restore America's reputation and role as a global leader and whether they will try to do this unilaterally and transactionally or - in a manner more suited to the EU's preferences for collective action problem solving - multilaterally. There are damaging long term splits in the EU relationship with the US that need to be repaired post-Trump; especially over the future of NATO, strategy towards Iran, trade and protectionism (including health and food standards), the importance of international institutions such as the United Nations and the WTO and global environmental policy given the US absence from the Paris agreements.

   But, in the current context, it is not rocket science to suggest that the EU - without turning its back on the US security relationship - should do more to defend itself. This has to be the EU's longer-term strategic focus, even without the at times paranoid musings about the demise of NATO, and especially if the EU is to be considered a serious player in the wider global game of reforming world order.

   For sure, there is a hiatus in NATO; but this is not really a question about organisational survival. The 70th anniversary meeting was more about damage limitation than developing a strategy for the future. The US is unlikely to turn its back on NATO and Europe. To do so would be offering game, set and match to the Chinese. US-China competition is not restricted to the Pacific and, although the EU wants Chinese investment and to keep China, as well as the US, happy, Donald Trump appears to have been persuasive over 5G technology and the curbing the penetrative power of Huawei. The 2019 NATO communiqué noted that the US and Europe needed to respond to China "together as an alliance". While the jury is still out on the EU response to the US on Huawei and gas supplies, the time has not yet come when Europe will choose China over the US in the wider security domain (see Rachman, 2019).

   This is not to be complacent about NATO. A strategy of European Defence will obviously pose questions about the future of NATO. But they can co-exist; especially as long as the EU continues to buy 80+% of its military hardware from the US. Nor is it to suggest that Europe is without security threats on its Eastern and Southern borders, as was brought so sharply into relief with the migration crisis of 2015. Something must be done to break the

logjam of Macron's "frozen conflicts" but avoid a Trumpian style reset that sees Europe give way to it on core issues. Specifically, Russia should be engaged. It was engaged during the Cold War, so why not now? But Russian engagement needs to be in a European, not a Trumpian manner.

On an issue such as Russian readmittance to the G7, we need to distinguish President Macron's views of re-engagement subject to what he calls "necessary prerequisites" rather than Donald Trump's supine "condition free" approach. Deadlock and stalemate on issues such as Ukraine can only undermine both Ukraine's and Europe's position - which must see the EU as one the principal interlocutors if we are to avoid throwing Eastern Europe into chaos. The relations between major powers such as Russia and the EU in shared neighbourhoods need to be addressed systematically, yet urgently (see Schunz, Gstöhl and Van Langenhove, 2018).

2. **Recognise** that for many people in Europe, migration is the key concern and a major policy challenge**.** Therefore, a coherent, humane and fair migration policy is needed in order to help refugees and control economic migration. Specifically, the dangers of a further refugee crisis in the wake of recent events in Syria must be foreshadowed. Brussels needs to develop a sensible asylum policy that thinks longer-term about the issue of migrants and refugees. As the leadership of the Commission will be acutely aware, doing this is more complicated than simply stating it. One major complication is that Brussels must now deal with fact that the principal opponents to a sensible migration policy - populists and nationalists - not only have they grown more politically powerful, they *are becoming internationalist in outlook.*

While still strongly Eurosceptic, the new populist-nationalists are, as the journal *Foreign Policy* notes, learning to harness "a pan-European identity to further their goal of a racially pure, white Christian continent". (https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/30/how-europes-nationalists-became-internationalists/; see also Higgott and Proud, 2017). Nationalists have done this by adopting a broader "civilizational" outlook on international relations (see DOC, 2019) which, ironically and not a little contradictorily, focuses on European, not nationalist, culture. Conflict still falls along national lines but is moving increasingly in the direction of a cross-cultural civilizational one. Nationalist views of European values focus less on issues of freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, but rather the accentuation of racial and ethnic identity, identarian politics, and a privileged status for the Judeo-Christian religion. This is now an issue that needs to be factored into Brussels thinking on the EU's external relations.

The Europeanisation of anti-immigrant positions by nationalists has evolved into a deliberate strategy to make their radical demands appear more moderate and palatable. In this context, Brussels will need to have a strategy to minimise a pan-European, anti-Muslim "occidentalisation" of migration policy that nationalists, if successful, would mobilise in the pursuit of its particular view of the EU and its external relations. To counter this, the EU should enhance its strategic approach to international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy as a vehicle to help combat this growing occidentalisation of European populism and nationalism (see Carta and Higgott, 2019).

This is not to say that efforts to shape a European identity *within* the EU does not also remain important. To give but one example, the success of the Erasmus exchanges inside show that the EU can and should be active in fostering an open dialogue within its boundaries to combat nationalist thinking. The recent call to set up pan European university consortia (the

Macron initiative, https://thepienews.com/analysis/views-from-the-frontline-of-the-european-university-project/) is, in this respect, a strong signal that backs European external policy by internal policy action to create not only a single market, but also a sense of collective European identity that nevertheless embraces diversity.

3. *Recognise* that climate change is not only a major community concern but also a major international policy challenge. The EU cannot solve this challenge on its own. It becomes central to its external relations and is linked, to give but one example, to policy towards the Middle East where the consequences of the climate change will be felt first. Recognising the relationship between development and environmental health as per the UN SDGs is also important. Until now, the European project has been narrowly focused upon growth. The new Commission has the formidable ambition to change that and combine growth with sustainable development. The European Green Deal, announced by the incoming President, is premised on the assumption identified in the 2019-24 *New Strategic Agenda for the EU* that climate change is "an existential threat" (European Council, 2019).

   In theory, President Von der Leyen's proposed €100 billion European Green Deal will cut emissions while also creating jobs and improving the quality of life. The new strategy also suggests that it is possible to "embrace technological evolution *and* globalisation". Perhaps it is, but it will require massive investment in infrastructure (electricity grids, pipelines for hydrogen transport, public transport, etc.) research, innovation and green technologies if it is to do so. Moreover, it will also need policies to decouple economic growth from resource depletion and environmental degradation. This implies levying carbon taxes on imports, becoming carbon neutral by 2050 and developing the various technologies needed to get there as it becomes the global partner of countries also wishing to address the climate change challenge. This task is not simply an internal affair, but also one that will change the EU's external policy as the ambition affects its trade policy and its policy of scientific and technological cooperation. As the failure of the Madrid COP 25 meeting attests, climate agreement will be one of the most intractable and vexatious international problems the Commission must face in the coming years.

4. *Recognise* that the EU is surrounded by a ring of either weak states, zones of conflict, and states that are sandwiched between the EU and other major international actors of influence and activity; notably Russia, Turkey. Thus, all instruments for development and reconstruction need to be mobilized in order to provide a coherent way for peacekeeping and peace-building activities, and for reconstructing or developing public institutions, in a manner that brings other international actors along. This too draws upon, and casts policy shadows over, the nature of EU support for the SDGs.

5. *Recognise* that in a world drifting away from multilateralism, inter-regional relations, especially with Eurasia and East Asia, will become increasingly important. But for the EU, its relations with East Asia cannot be separated from transatlantic relations. EU-Asia relations will grow as transatlantic relations become more strained by the vagaries of Trumpian logic. Of course, the EU understands the global "China problem" but, in contrast to US policy towards China, the EU should work towards accommodation, not confrontation. Nurturing the relationship is not the same as passive acceptance of all things Chinese. China does cheat and the EU must resist this cheating when and where this happens. While trade with China, currently at $400 billion a year, is strengthening, favourable European opinion of China is (according the *South China Morning Post*) declining.

For the time being, the EU should treat the growth of the concept and practice of *Eurasia* seriously. It is gaining momentum as both an economic and a geopolitical fact of life. The developing relationship between Russia and China might be fitful, but it would be imprudent to assume that it is not destined to consolidate in either the security or the economic domain over the near term; especially since the relationship is developing more on the basis of strategic pragmatism and not, as in the past, on ideology. And while the level of economic integration is not great, US antagonism towards both is proving an important external catalyst for closer economic cooperation between them.

Both the concept and practice of Eurasia will have a role in the international relations of the middle and later 21st century in a way not imagined in the early decades of the century when European visions were still directed westwards across the Atlantic, rather than eastwards across what Halford Mackinder recognised as early as 1904 as the economic and strategic significance of the Eurasian landmass. If China's forward leaning diplomacy in the economic and political domains - with its BRI, accompanied by the continued theft of intellectual property and forward leaning military posture in the South China Sea - is to be successfully countered by the EU, then it first needs to come to a political solution to the current hostility between it and Russia. Only mitigation of the major tensions with Russia is likely to allow the EU to play a stronger role in the relationship between these two Great Powers.

6. *Recognise* that dealing with digitalisation and the dramatic effects of digital disruption must be a priority. Particularly note that these factors are rapidly becoming a foreign policy and international relations question as much as a question for internal EU resolution. The need and desire of states to preserve their "information sovereignty" is now a major policy issue as tensions over sovereignty and jurisdiction compete with contestation over freedom and openness. We need to recognise both the *hierarchical* behaviour of the digital "superpowers" (the USA and China) and the aspiring great powers (notably Russia, India, and Brazil), *and hybridity* of the near dominant role of the principal non-state digital players that have driven digitalisation in the 21st century: notably Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft in the USA and Tencent, Huawei, Baidu, Alibaba and Weibo in China.

The battle to secure ascendancy is no longer simply sovereign states butting heads with each other across a spectrum from diplomacy to war - the traditional stuff of international relations. Rather, the major states are now harnessing privately developed technological platforms of power to enhance the rhetoric and practice of nationalism in the battle to safeguard their national digital economies. While the internet may have been designed, or simply emerged, as a decentralized platform, there have nevertheless always been competing models of what the digital terrain should look like. Current tensions over design, governance, and jurisdiction reflect, and are reflective of, broader global fissures. In the contemporary era, the USA and China are creating two sharply defined technological and online systems - what we might call separate *digital ecologies*. The American system is still primarily private sector driven while China's is state driven. But both systems envelope the development of AI, big data, 5G and instruments of cyber warfare.

The European President appears to understand the implications of this for the EU. By way of example she sees the significance of digitalization of the financial domain where she argues that the role of the Euro should also become a greater instrument of international policy. Indeed, it is time for the EU to get over its monetary inferiority complex vis-à-vis the hegemony of the US dollar. Just as China and Russia are looking to trade in renminbi and roubles, the EU should be promoting the role of the Euro as a way of enhancing European

sovereignty and power in the next five years. As the High Representative recently said: "We should reinforce the euro's international role, and …. learn to use the language of power". The President too has encouraged all relevant Commissioners to ensure that international financial instruments "… are used strategically, [to] contribute to our wider political aims and enhance Europe's leadership and influence in the world" (https://www.ft.com/content/3165c19c-0ba0-11ea-bb52-34c8d9dc6d84?segmentId=a7371401-027d-d8bf-8a7f-2a746e767d56).

This is not to understate the challenge to a greater role for the Euro which has its own limitations, notably the absence of large reserves of Euro denominated assets. Rather, it is to assert that it be used more as an economic foreign policy instrument than it has in the past. At the very least, its role as a currency for trade invoicing should be grown, especially in the energy sector. President Trump's behaviour is giving sustenance to this strategy. But the rapid evolution of digital payments technology can assist the EU to whittle away at the hegemony of the US dollar. Beijing is close to launching an official digital currency, with the direct involvement of China's central bank. There is clearly a message here for the EU, urged on by the European private commercial sector: to increase euro use by creating a European alternative to these initiatives. The association of private commercial banks in Germany has called for the creation of a digital euro to minimise excessive future European reliance on China or US-based services (https://www.ft.com/content/3165c19c-0ba0-11ea-bb52-34c8d9dc6d84?segmentId=a7371401-027d-d8bf-8a7f-2a746e767d56).

7. *Recognise* that major decoupling in the manufacturing and industrial sectors will not take place to the extent that the US would like. While the promotion of decoupling in the name of national security is a US response to China as a strategic competitor, the state of supply chain integration is much greater than those vocal "de-couplers" in the Trump administration appreciate. Nonetheless, this trend is alarming. Supply chains are at core of the modern global manufacturing and industrial economy and China too has now joined the US in this strategy (see Yang and Mathurin, 2019). But integrated supply chains are one of our best hopes for avoiding a new cold war. Global supply chains leverage international comparative advantage in costs and skills to produce better and cheaper products for the benefit of all. Moreover, there is a co-dependence between the major players such as the US and China, the rupturing of which can only be bad for everyone.

As Kant said, "the spirit of commerce …. is incompatible with war." Notwithstanding that, Europe lacks clout to contest US, Chinese or Russian politico-strategic power. It must make the best of the economic and trade assets that it has to remain global commerce's champion. The EU should be a major player *but* has essentially to-date "muddled through" in face of its own internal crises and external pressures. This needs to stop. The EU is a top three global trader. It is time to put its money where its mouth is. It needs to do three things:

   (i) Whatever the pain, it must face down US protectionist recklessness if an open liberal trading regime is to survive. It will not be alone. Others will support the EU position, especially along the East Asian seaboard from China down through Japan, South Korea and into the major Southeast Asia trading states of Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. Support will also be found in a progressively outward facing Africa, Latin America and especially Oceania.

   (ii) The EU should resist US calls for a "reset" on international trade that reflects the US preference for bilateral and transactionalist approaches to negotiation. In this context, the electoral success of Boris Johnson means that the major bilateral transactional trade activity of the next few years will almost certainly be between the

US and the UK. In theory, the UK should prioritise Europe given the size of the trade relationship. In practice, it will be surprising if they do. Moreover, their ability to conduct two major trade deals at the same time (let alone all the smaller renegotiations that will need to be conducted) is limited. This will complicate the post Brexit UK-EU trade negotiations, especially if deals are cut with the US that run counter to positions acceptable to the EU. But, at the very least, it will strengthen Europe's understanding of what needs to be done to mitigate the opportunity the US will almost certainly try to take to drive a wedge between the EU and the UK. The EU needs to plan accordingly if it is to maintain hard won trade standards.

(iii) The EU should engage with China but show resolve to resist excessive Chinese intrusion, especially into the digital industries. It is proper that "technological sovereignty" should be a contemporary EU slogan. Both Macron and Angela Merkel have recognised the need to secure artificial intelligence and computing programs and the new Commission has etched the concept of digital sovereignty into its political guidelines. But excessive decoupling from China in the AI and digital information domain to conform to American wishes should be resisted.

8. **Recognise**, perhaps most importantly, that in the absence of either US or Chinese leadership, Europe must lead on the reform and (re) strengthening of multilateralism. The importance of multilateralism for the Europe Union is obvious. Indeed, as the new President notes: "Cooperating and working with others is what our Union is all about. This is why Europe will always lead the way when it comes to upholding and, where necessary, updating the rules-based global order" (*Mission Letter*, 2019).

But multilateralism needs to change dramatically. It needs to recognise the growing hybridity in international relations and become less bureaucratic and more open to non-state actors and to a networked approach. Multilateralism 2.0 is urgently needed (Van Langenhove, 2010). The EU should therefore aspire to be a change-agent in the UN and the Bretton Woods systems. A new multipolar system will require new rules, or at least reform of the old rules. Sensitively espoused and properly contextualised, the "rules-based order" preferences emanating from long standing liberal democratic norms still have considerable purchase. They are worth defending.

Europe has been and remains, in and of itself, a laboratory of multilateralism and multi-level governance. Europe has always been a pillar of the international institutional architecture. Therefore, it is necessary for it to act as a defender of these principles and support the reform of institutional practice where necessary. The institutional venues of diplomacy and dialogue need to be re-invigorated or they will continue to atrophy, and nowhere is this clearer than with the WTO. The challenge is to get the balance right between a tired looking international technocracy in the contemporary institutions on the one hand, and the need for a multilateral diplomacy charged with the task of providing global public goods, but doing so in a nuanced and moderated fashion exhibiting appropriate compromise reflective of the demands of *all* major players in the modern order.

The US prerogative of being the only one to shape the global agenda is no longer tenable or present. The EU must support multilateralism with all the vim and vigour it can muster. It must, for example, put real financial support, not just rhetoric, behinds the new Franco-German led *Alliance for Multilateralism* (https://www.dw.com/en/germany-launches-alliance-for-multilateralism/a-50600084). While the EU must tread firmly in the pursuit of modern-day multilateralism, it must also tread softly and deftly. The art of modern soft

power diplomacy by the EU requires that its commitment to Cartesian legal formalism is not labelled as such!

9. **Recognise** that COVID-19, notwithstanding that its full implications have yet to be understood, reinforce the arguments advanced in this paper.

It is already clear that the pandemic outbreak illustrates that only a truly global approach can result in containing the virus. States might be the only powers to take the necessary measures such as forcing their citizens to stay at home, close down large sectors of the economy or restrict international level movement, but in order to ensure the effectiveness of such measures, there is need for global cooperation.

Beyond its epidemiological implications, COVID-19 will usher in a new period of wider dramatic political and societal change. For some, the state-led attempts to combat COVID-19 will result in a permanent tighter grip on citizens, and the need to collect data at a large scale is by others seen as a step towards an Orwellian society where privacy is at risk. And then there are some states where the political rulers are misusing the COVID-19 crises as justification for their anti-migration policies or for destabilizing other states. For the EU, the most important side-effect of the crises is the lack of internal solidarity between the Member States.

At the very least, the above adds an unanticipated dimension to the environment in which the new EU Commission was proposing to position itself as an equal geopolitical player to the US, China and Russia for the next five years. It is too early to tell in what ways global interaction will be changed by it. Will it exacerbate trends towards de-coupling and nationalist closure, or will it force a recognition of the global nature of pandemics and that they require globally cooperative, multilateral decision-making to adequately address them?

On current observation, it would be fair to suggest that the nationalist response is in the ascendency. COVID-19 is exacerbating, rather than mitigating, the prospects of a new bipolar order built around the influence of a declining USA and a rising China. This is not the place to debate it, but it seems clear that China, notwithstanding its initial lack of transparency and candour as the source of COVID-19, is winning the international propaganda soft power battle the pandemic has generated with the USA, as the respective asymmetries in their international standing diminish. This situation, we would argue, makes it all the more important that the EU adheres to and enhances its traditional commitment to a multilateral collective action approach to international relations.

Conclusion: Some Thoughts on an "Open World Order" for EU Policy Makers to Consider

As it fully understands, the EU, and thus the new Commission as well as the Member States, must come to terms with a changing world order that seems to be drifting away from its liberal underpinnings. The emerging world order seems to be a more realist, power politics driven order underwritten by the new geopolitics and complicated by both geoeconomic and geo-cultural/civilizational dynamics. We are heading somewhere new altogether and Europe is not bound to succeed in its aspirations to be one of the three or four major actors determining the fate of that order, either on its own or in partnership with the US - a proposition that appears increasingly unlikely. In any case, the liberal order is unlikely to be

restored. As Pascal Lamy (2018) notes: "Adjusting old narratives to new environments will not be enough". Outdated mindsets will need to be superseded in order to take account of the impact of modern communicative technologies on international relations as we strive to maintain an open (and increasingly networked) new order.

Specifically, we need to recognise the degree to which networks reflect the nature of global policy issues and problems as much as, if not more than, states do. Digital, networked communication changes the nature of state bargaining and cooperative strategies from the pre-digital age. Thus we need more precise and tightly defined **minimal conditions** for multilateral cooperation that recognise: (i) that networks and digitalisation change the nature of connections in global governance, (ii) that networks do not require government sanction, indeed networks - unlike institutional hierarchies - encourage self-organisation; (iii) that the governance dilemma is no longer simply democracy *versus* autocracy; in addition it is also **open** governance versus **closed** governance. Of course, many governments try to have it both ways; to be both open and closed at the same time with open economies and closed societies (e.g China, Saudi Arabia) (for a discussion of these themes see Slaughter, 2017).

What would the principles of an open world order look like? Some traditional liberal values will remain salient. There will still be a place, or there should be, for democracy (of many variants), freedom of thought, rule of law and human rights. Europe must be their advocate. But these values will have to learn to exist within the context of greater respect for national values; especially respect for sovereignty and less compliance with those, supposedly Western, international norms of the second half of the 20th century. In an open order, we should expect power to be distributed more horizontally - both publicly and privately with flatter, reciprocal structures - than in the past. And an open order will stress more nebulous terms such as community and civilization in which we will inevitably, and sadly, see digital spheres of influence consolidate - they are already developing. The EU should resist this trend in digitalization. But while resisting it, the EU should recognise that soft power and cultural diplomacy will become increasingly important and increasingly digital.

We are moving into a new era and the EU should be a voice in the discussion over what this newness shall look like. To make its contribution, the EU must decide what is going to be the prominent message it wishes to put forward. Two competing views are presently to be found emanating from the Commission's senior leadership: (i) the idea that this Commission will be a "geopolitical commission" for an increasingly geopolitical world and (ii) a continuing commitment on the part of the EU, if the rhetoric is to be taken seriously, to the values of multilateralism and cooperative, collective action problem solving.

These competing views are leading to contradictory messages as they have never sat, and do not now sit, easily together. The EU needs to resolve what is looking increasingly like a "Mixed - contradictory even - Message Strategy." Sometime soon choices will need to be made. The EU should not make the mistake of thinking that the only way it can be a "player" in the contemporary order is by mimicking the behaviour of the other major players; that is by becoming a "realpolitik" driven geopolitical player itself. Rather, it should stick to the approach recently identified in its *New Strategic Agenda: 2019-24* (European Council, 2019) of supporting multilateral organisations, implementing the 2030 sustainable development agenda and preserving an open global economy. If the EU really believes in its internationalist values, it should stick to them and make it clear that the EU is driven by the pursuit of geosustainability through multilateral cooperation, not by geopolitics and its related nationalist assumptions of closure to the wider world.

Besides, the current pandemic is not the time to weaken collective action at the global level. The pandemic is proof positive of global interdependence and a global pandemic demands a coordinated global response even though, as yet, nations continue to pursue solo efforts. Even within Europe, there is a lack of solidarity. For sure de-coupling is fashionable, and with the aid of AI, robotics, 3D printing and automation increasingly possible, but in a world of digital communication, there is a limit to the degree of de-coupling that can actually occur. Let us not forget that technology is now global, not only in its distributive effects, but also in its consequences. Viruses, both in humans and computers, acid rain, radiation and the like do not need passports and become trans-sovereign in their impact.

Sooner or later, the world's leaders must return to needed collective action through multilateral cooperation to address these shared global problems. As noted by Thakur and Van Langenhove (2006: 233), the paradox of governance is that "the policy authority for tackling global problems still belongs to the states, while the sources of the problems and potential solutions are situated at transnational, regional or global levels". If the pandemic can shock global leaders into recognising what is lost by the pursuit of great power competition and the failure to cooperate in multilateral decision making on global policy issues, then COVID-19 would have served at least one useful purpose. If it is not to lead to a progressive decoupled, closed international order, we need a new, reaffirmed, hard headed internationalism of the kind that characterised the post- World War Two era and that blossomed again briefly after the end of the Cold War, and an EU contribution to global leadership in this process remains pivotal.

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