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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Simul stabunt, simul cadent: The US, the EU and the liberal international order in the Trump era

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ABSTRACT (max 150 words)

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States was perceived by many observers as a threat to the international liberal order. This paper sets out to contribute to the debate by focusing on the role of a specific component of this order: the relationship between the United States and the European Union. The question addressed is whether the potential transformations experienced by the element of the transatlantic relationship due to the 'Trump effect' are liable to have a substantial and distinctive impact on the wider order. Using the lenses of the security community approach, we point out variance and convergences in interests, interaction, institution and identities of the two partners, and to what extent the advent of Trump has actually – or is likely to – impinge on each of these categories, and how this affects the foundations of the international liberal order.

KEYWORDS: Liberal Order; Donald Trump; Transatlantic relations; Security Communities; European Union.

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Introduction

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States was presented by a number of American and foreign observers as a watershed in the international role of the country, and a potentially fatal incident for the political arrangement that had underpinned world politics since the end of World War II (Adelman 2016; Rachman 2016). More than one year into the Presidency, a number of disrupting promises and projects have in fact been scaled back, put on hold or just forgotten. Yet, the current administration's volatile platform, inconsistent foreign policy agenda and off-centre approach to decision-making continue to be cause for concern and scholarly interest. Several rules, institutions and practices apparently undisputable have been impacted by Trump's extemporary revisionism, so that not even one of the most cherished outcomes of the foreign policy commitment of the United States (US) and its allies – the liberal international order (LIO) – seems immune to what may be called the 'Trump effect' (Speck 2016; Niblett 2017; Nye 2017).

The prospect of a substantial transformation, if not the collapse, of the fundamental arrangement of contemporary international society has been mainly looked at either from a broad perspective (i.e. Colgan & Keohane 2017; Ikenberry 2018) or focusing on US foreign policy and its role as the leader of the LIO (i.e. Stokes 2018; Brattberg & Kimmage 2018). This paper seeks to contribute to the debate by identifying and elaborating on the role of a significant component of the liberal order: the relationship between the US and the European Union (EU). The question addressed in this work is whether the transformations experienced by this very special relationship as an effect of the advent of Donald Trump are liable to have a substantial and distinctive impact on the LIO.

The US-EU relationship is assumed here to be one of the main routes of the transatlantic interaction, not least as a result of the former's role as an external regulator of post-war European integration and an enduring model/counterpart of the process in the subsequent decades (Peterson 2016). The choice to focus on the institutional embodiment provided by the European Union does not negate that re-

lations with single European states and the thick network of international organisations other than the EU remain vital channels of transatlantic engagement in a number of crucial areas. For example, there is little doubt that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), even with its significant shortcomings, remains the main forum for consultation on Euro-Atlantic security and strategic issues – also (but not only) as a result of EU member states giving precedence to their bilateral relations with the US over EU-US co-operation (Keohane 2018). Nor does the assumption blank out the lack of interest, if not the plain disdain, that US policymakers have periodically shown towards the Union and the integration process (Cowles & Egan 2016). Still, no matter how obscure or contested, the EU and the integration process have retained a central role within the wider transatlantic relationship insofar as America and Europe have mutually behaved not only as a highly-institutionalised subset of the international system, but (also) as a something resembling a political community, implying a comparatively high relevance of ideational as well as material aspects and the pursuit of some form of integration. This is also the result of the major post-World War II foreign policy initiative of the US, designed not only to induce or prevent specific behaviour or orientations in particular actors (mainly governments), but also to influence or even shape Europe's political, legal, economic, social, security and other underlying *structures*, in order to alter the very foundations of the Old World's social and political processes – instead of just influencing *behaviour*. In a sense, the EU can be conceived as the upshot of the structural component of the US transatlantic foreign policy, which manifested most conspicuously in the Marshall Plan (Keukeleire & Delreux 2014). In fact, the European Community/Union is far from being just the brainchild of post-war America, designed to serve without fault its interests – already the Kennedy administration took steps to counter undesirable effects like the European Community (EC) common tariff on US export, not to mention the Nixon administration ill disposition towards the EC's increasing coordination capabilities. Already in the Seventies, the relationship started to partly develop into a partnership, at first with mainly rhetorical, and somewhat inconsistent commitments, and then in progressively more substantial

ways. Also in response to the progressive emergence of the Union's international agency, the US have been constantly adjusting the structural/relational rationale underlying their engagement with the EU, which has come to be (perceived as) a pivotal component in terms of scope and polity format within the wider European integration process, even in light of the pre-eminent NATO framework (Fichera & Hänninen 2014).

In particular, the Union appears to have been a major reference point, either as a conduit or an active partner in the exercise of American leadership in the creation and operation of the transatlantic community, at least to the extent that the US has aimed – and sometime managed – to fashion relationships with and between European countries so that interactions become more substantive beyond mutual interest-based cooperation. Hence, the relationship between the EU and the US is examined as a distinctive element of the transatlantic 'pluralistic security community' – that is, a configuration of interests, identities, interdependence and institutions that interact with each other in ways that solve the security dilemma between its members, creating dependable expectations of peaceful change (Deutsch et al. 1957; Adler & Barnett 1998; Peterson 2016).

The other assumption of the paper is that the transatlantic relationship – with the EU-US nexus at its core – is the pivot of the multiple liberal order established after the Second World War, and the stepping stone to the global order emerged after the end of the Cold War (Ikenberry 2012). The idea is that, through the encompassing framework provided by the transatlantic security community and the constitutive connection with the US, the EU has become a local advanced realisation – and, to some extent, an agent – of the transatlantic effort to uphold and advance liberal principles, such as multilateralism, rule-based action, economic and social openness, in the international sphere.

Based on these premises, the paper sets out to investigate whether and how the revisionist orientations of the current US foreign policy – and in particular Trump's unabashed, if inconsistent, antagonism to principles and policies informing the relationship with the EU and the transatlantic security community – poses a

specific threat to the LIO. Following this introduction, the paper is composed of three sections. Section one looks into the conceptual premises of the allegedly revolutionary repercussions of the ‘Trump effect’ by outlining a criterion according to which the effect of the Trump presidency on the US-EU relationship can consistently be seen as a crisis – as opposed to ‘ordinary’ transformation. Section two sets out to assess magnitude and modes of the Trump effect – i.e. the actual risks it generates to the transatlantic relation, especially in light of the traditional role of leader played by the USA within the transatlantic community. More specifically, this section investigates the relationship between the Union and the United States through the lenses of the security community approach, in order to point out variance and convergences in interests, interaction, institution and identities of the two parts; in particular, the paper assesses whether and to what extent the advent of Trump has actually – or is likely to – impinge on each of these categories. Finally, section three focuses on how the impact of Trump on the relationship between the United States and the European Union affects in turn the foundations of the LIO.

1. Trump and the ubiquity of crisis

The presidency of Donald Trump has recurrently been associated with the notion of ‘crisis’. Even before his election, Trump had been indicated as a symptom of a ‘deeper systemic crisis’ affecting large sectors of the American society (Ahmed 2017). Today, the President’s intolerance for rules has been increasingly recognised by scholars and the public to be on the verge of a constitutional crisis (Jurecic & Wittes 2018). Trump’s foreign policy has also been thought of in these terms, despite the relative ‘good luck’ that has characterised his first year in office (Cohen 2018). Even without any of the tense situations brewing across the globe having reached a major meltdown (yet), the mix of belligerent rhetoric, erratic and revisionist views and chaotic decision-making have been regarded as enough evidence of the critical conditions – generated or aggravated by the current administration – in which current US foreign policy develops (Price 2017; Smith & Yalowitz 2017).

Today's turmoil in traditional US alliances is frequently indicated as evidence of the alleged climacteric generated by the Trump administration. In January 2018, the New York Times published an article by its regular opinion writer on Germany titled *Is the Trans-Atlantic Relationship Dead?* (Sauerbrey 2018). According to the article, the doomsday prospect has several adherents in Germany's political elites; even Chancellor Merkel is reported to have had contingency plans devised to face the possible breakdown the American leadership and reliability. On the other hand, a number of German experts and policymakers – e.g. the authors of the 'Trans-Atlantic Manifesto' (Berger et al. 2017) – have deemed the crises serious but not fatal, and urged to hold fast to a relationship that is to remain crucial to the LIO in the foreseeable future, as well as the legitimacy of the Germany's role as a leader in Europe. An analogous debate about whether the presidency of Trump marked or not a turning point in transatlantic relations has flourished on the other side of the Atlantic as well (Pifer 2017; Schulster & Karnitschnig 2017). Admittedly, even before the advent of Trump, there has been no shortage of analyses and commentaries concerned with the crisis affecting the relationship between Europe and America, as well as the tenability of the liberal order that hinges to a still significant extent on it. In fact, the term crisis has been so pervasive that it may even be regarded as an expression of the 'spirit of the time'. Nonetheless, ubiquity comes with a high degree of vagueness – and the risk of becoming just a trope. A few preliminary clarifications are therefore needed in order to establish whether the notion is in fact adequate and of any analytical use in identifying the conditions of the US-EU relationship.

Without going into the manifold conceptual subtleties of the notion, a crisis can be defined as a transitional phase during which the *modus operandi* of a political system or community differs markedly from the functioning in normal times. This definition posits a subjective point of view in determining the presence of a crisis, which depends on policy makers experiencing 'a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions'

(Boin et al. 2005, p. 2). Whereas the failure of the social and political orders experiencing a crisis is not inherent to this definition, ‘threat’, ‘uncertainty’ and ‘urgency’ are key components of it. Thus, in addition to an idea of abrupt transformation, a crisis also implies an element of risk for established institutions – formal and informal – whose control capacities are under stress (Guiraudon et al. 2015).

Based on this conception, the Trump effect meets the criteria for being consistently considered a critical factor to the US-EU relationship, but only with a number of qualifications. The US and the EU have virtually no life-sustaining system in common (e.g. infrastructures that, if compromised, may induce a sense of existential precariousness among the population) and at least some of their respective core values are not only exclusive to each of them, but even incompatible with one another – e.g. the role of government in the national economy and its responsibility to its citizens, as evidenced by the ongoing debate on Obamacare. This reduces the internal cohesion of the US-EU relationship as a proper community, making it comparatively more prone to collapse compared to a closer-knit community, but less exposed to a proper existential crisis. Still, conceptions, practices and values relative to safety and security, (partial) economic and social openness and prosperity, the common international status and integrity as ‘the West’ have been construed, protected and advanced to a great degree through mutual exchange. Making disparaging remarks about the European Union, derailing the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership talks, embracing authoritarian figures like Putin, withdrawing from the Iran Nuclear agreement, levying tariffs in steel and aluminium, but also calling NATO obsolete and hesitating before reaffirming the Article 5 commitment: these all are policy directions which violate the values embedded in the institutions and practices constituting the US-EU relationship (Binnendijk 2018). Moreover, they break the tacit ‘rules of the game’ that so far have mediated between, on the one hand, explicit formal structures and prescriptions regulating relations among the US, the EU and its member states, and on the other the uniqueness of the integration processes underway and the asymmetries in terms of power as well as polity and policy solutions between the transatlantic partners. It was this

set of rules that allowed for the viable coexistence of formal rules of sovereignty equality (between Western countries and with the rest of the world), the establishment of functional regimes, special relationship, structural interventions to coexist as well as the exercise of American leadership in the European and transatlantic space. The clear disregard of the current administration for these rules of the game is what makes today's tension look like a crisis. In seemingly denying the experience of the EU – and the expectations that have emerged from an established pattern of behaviour – the US administration 'gaslights' the relation: it not only challenges the 'obligations' that have arisen for the EU out of the US's reliance on those patterns, but also calls into question the 'normality' of the Union for harbouring such expectations (Kratochwil 1989). If, according to the abovementioned definition, the seriousness of a crisis is proportional to the system's stability, Trump's attack to the 'rules of the game' of transatlantic interaction lends weight to the thesis that the President is a critical factor for the transatlantic and the global order, rather than just a turbulent epiphenomenon contingent on structural changes determining the actual state of affairs.

As displayed by a recent Pew Research Centre poll conducted among a sample of 387 thought leaders, Trump and his administration rank very high among the biggest challenges for the Transatlantic Relationship across the American/European divide according to roughly a quarter of the surveyed (basically a tie with economic and trade issues) (Stokes 2018). The functional and symbolic value of the transatlantic relation has been beset by any number of setbacks and inconsistencies throughout the decades, the most recent instances being the severe break in the US-EU relationship over the 2003 Iraq war – with the US's upheaval of the 'alliance determines the mission' principle and the EU member states painfully taking sides with (and being called names by) the US – and President Obama's political and diplomatic retrenchment. Again, the discontinuity of the Trump presidency lays is the determination (and lack of care) with which nearly every basic assumption – even the basic American support of the European project and the legitimacy of the US relationship with it – can be the object of occasional contestations, if not a radi-

cal revision (Szabo 2017; Golino 2018). The current transatlantic tensions do threaten the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of the US-EU relationship, in spite of the resilience of the NATO architecture. The current administration's actions are causing uncertainty 'the likes of which the world has never be seen before' in Trumpian terms. The President communication excesses (e.g. bashing of Germany) and disdain for diplomacy, his radical and at the same time changeable policy agenda (for instance on trade tariffs), the promotion of foreign-policy personnel sharing his hawkish views and lack of experience (as is the case with the appointment of Mike Pompeo as new Secretary of State), as well as the quite open support to illiberal movements and governments across Europe (Sloan 2018) are all elements that escalate unpredictability – which is the antithesis of the 'constitutional aim' of the EU as well as, to a lesser degree, the transatlantic community at regularise relations within its borders and with third states. In this sense, even 'good news' – such as the US increasing funding for the European Deterrence Initiative, the redeployment of US troops to Eastern Europe and NATO Battle Groups in the Baltic States and Poland – while in compliance with the shared value of (common) security, add to the perception that, even when not directly threatened with hostile remarks or measures, the relationship is exposed to the risk generated by intemperance and lack of predictability.

2. The EU-US relationship and the transatlantic security community

Having established that there are grounds to discuss a crisis, and that it pertains to the risk fuelled by high uncertainty rather than the threat of unilateral withdrawal and immediate collapse, we may delve into the scope of the crisis, that is, the impact of the Trump effect on specific areas whose interplay can direct the intrinsically hazardous transformation of the US-EU relationship towards a range of possible outcomes. In analysing all the critical junctures that have punctuated the relationship between America and Europe since the end of the Second World War, Jones (2004) also observes the components of the relationship and come to the conclusion that until the crisis over the intervention in Iraq, all crises are 'crises of will',

that is, times of intense distress on account of divergences among actors in capabilities, values and expectations. Since the death knell has tolled so frequently for the transatlantic relationship without ever bringing it to an end, one might wonder if the latter had better be regarded as being not so much affected, but rather 'constituted' by a continual series of crises, each leading to a more or less conspicuous rearrangement of its components (e.g. balance of power, strategic rationale, identities and values). The security community theoretical angle is adopted in order to ascertain in what sense the current crisis, unlike past instances, may also be traced back to a cyclical phase, or if there is any sign of something resembling a 'quantum shift' in the complex US-EU relationship.

Even taking as read that the transatlantic order is in critical conditions due to the Trump effect, one may still wonder whether the toilsome reappraisal of the partners' mutual engagement also impinges on their ability and willingness to pursue their common purposes. A realist take would make short work of the problem, arguing that changes are only critical as long as they generate serious repercussions for the actors' interests.

Without ruling out the importance of material power and the maximisation of groups' and/or governments' utilities, the analytical approach first designed by Deutsch (1957) and then further developed by Adler and Barnett (1998) has emphasised that the transatlantic relationship should be conceived as more than a traditional alliance or the outcome of (economic) interdependence as, despite its pluralistic nature, the transatlantic relationship has attained the characters of a community (Adler & Barnett 1998). The conceptualisation as a (security) community alters what counts as a fundamental aspect or a principle that, if altered, may trigger a genuine crisis, as opposed to contingent features, no matter how consequential. Closer to the postulates of social constructivism, the security community approach assumes that shifts in the material power balance are mitigated, or magnified, by institutional and ideational factors. Elements like security-based interests and rational calculation of collaboration's costs and gains are important, but their meaning depends on discursive construction. This is relevant in assessing the *momentum* of the

‘Trump effect’, for it alters the otherwise clear hierarchy between, on the one hand, long-term structural factors that might permanently damage the basic conditions of systemic – as opposed to social – Europe-America interaction, and on the other hand, cyclical factors expected to generate meaningful but transient disruptions of US and European/EU policymaking and reciprocal influence. Clearly, divergences in capabilities, political polarization, economics and leadership are transient compared to imbalances triggered by geography, demographics or the availability of resources (Wickett 2018). Still, although they operate on a much more limited temporal dimension, the former factors can hardly be underestimated as their impact reverberates on the communal setting within which US-EU relationship has developed over the decades, that is, the specific social setting within which meanings have been associated to both structural and cyclical factors.

In the next sub-sections, the impact of orientations and actions of the Trump administration is measured based on the four categories singled out by Risse in his more comprehensive assessment of the state of the European-American relationship in the 2010s prior to the US presidential election: interests, interdependency, institutions, identity (Risse 2016).

2.1. Interests

Even in a sophisticated relationship **such as** security community, conflicts of interest are accepted as long as they are liable to be solved peacefully. For this to happen, said interests – ‘expressions of preferences held by political actors over states of the world (preference over outcome) or the means to achieve goals (preferences over strategies)’ (Risse 2016, p. 23) – must remain, if not common at least mutually compatible, no matter how stark their divergence. Hence, in order to establish whether expected conflicts of interest have been escalating into a full-blown crisis due to the advent of the Trump administration, the breadth of the range of contentious issues and their closeness to what either side considers to be core business has to be investigated (Risse 2016).

Trade policy is an area where mechanisms to manage US-EU conflicts of interest have been exposed to the highest pressure. Already during the Obama administration, a string of gridlocks had effectively led the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) come to a standstill (Eriksson 2016). It is with the come into office of the Trump administration, though, that the discussion of the comprehensive bilateral deal has been suspended *sine die* and amid unpleasant accusations of the EU (Germany) trying to rip-off all-too-tolerant America. Admittedly, the tariffs imposed thus far by the US are still far from a full-blown trade war, leaving some latitude for normal reconciliation processes to catch up. On the other hand, Trump's general anti-globalisation stance has been affecting not only prospective exchange volumes, but the core interests of US-EU trade relations. The promise to defend American jobs and production from the harmful effects of globalisation at all costs amounts to a challenge against the principles of trade openness and fair competition upon which the international liberal (economic) order has rested since it was created – and largely based on the transatlantic pivot. US-EU relations have long been ridden with controversies and mutual accusations of protectionism, but these had never been informed before by an explicit – if simplistic – vision of the international trade system as a zero-sum game, where relative gains outclass absolute ones.

Despite the European Commission's exclusive competence in this area, divergences internal to the EU also complicate resolution processes, for not only differentials in trade power translate into the EU interests to overlap unevenly with those of each member states, which can influence outcomes (and/or undermine the Commission's effectiveness) relative to those commercial sectors where the decision-making process involves the national level of government. The Trump effect's here manifests in Trump presenting and dealing with the Union as though it was a mere 'vehicle' of Germany's interests, also trying intermittently to play post-Brexit UK against the bloc – only to making sudden U-turns on both positions.

As for the potential clash of interests in the security area, the Trump administration has turned policy issues until then routinely managed (often at the ex-

pense of an effective coordinated action) to become a source of unsettling uncertainty if not open contention. In this regard, Russia's case is emblematic as the country's ties with the US – though much more complicated than Trump's pro-Russian stance alone may suggest – have become a source of discord with and within the EU. The US's unpredictable framing of strategic relations with Russia, combined with divergences in other areas, appears to create a context unfavourable enough to offset persistence of common strategic interests among the transatlantic partners. The tendency to subordinate even structural foreign policy issues to domestic party politics considerations, and the more or less explicit support to Euro-sceptic positions within the EU (counter to US diplomatic tradition) make the identification of (each partner, and common) interests even more complicated.

A conceptual overhaul by the Trump administration of core interests in terms of outcomes and strategies has also played a role in driving a wedge between the traditional partners. The withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal has been premised on a notion of national interest defined in terms of mutual exclusion *vis-à-vis* the other countries' and the international community. Indeed, that notion of national interest seems to be incompatible to any trade-off between the US leadership within the transatlantic alliance on the one hand, and the anchorage provided by the 'international presence' of the Union, and its member states, on the other (Bretherton & Vogler 2006). This makes the asymmetry that has always been ingrained in the Atlantic alliance a critical factor, which spread throughout the European security system binding together NATO and the EU by means of institutions, norms and cooperative/competitive communitarian relationships (Cornish & Edwards 2001; Simòn 2013).

2.2. *Interdependency*

Even in front of significant shifts in the interest structure, it is reasonable to expect interdependency to keep up the *momentum* of cooperation and integration within the US-EU relationship, at least on a merely functional level. Given their deep interconnectedness and the costs associated with potential incongruities, the

integrated complex of the European single market and the US may appear relatively isolated from the effects of ‘extrinsic’ changes. Indeed, the current US administration seems able to produce a significant impact on structural factors too, especially the balances underlying the distinct ‘competitive interdependency’ at play between the US and the EU (Damro 2016). The complex integration between the American and the European economies and their combined global influence have been coupled by an underlying competition between the two parties, each endeavouring to project their respective trade policies and regulatory systems (especially since bilateral preferential trade agreement became the new standard after the failure of the WTO’s Doha Round). Today this balance is put at risk by the neo-mercantilist approaches embraced by the US administration and some European government. According to these conceptual and policymaking trends, regulated competition, apart from some short-term benefits, no longer compensates for the costs of interdependence, and economic competition, in order to be authentically ‘fair’, has to be conditional on the pursuit of national interests (Wright 2016; Ahmed & Bick 2017). Whatever its specific content, national interests are assumed to be better advanced through bilateral relationships, as these do not imply the establishment of institutions and inter- or supra-national bureaucracies that end up pushing ‘globalism-inspired’ normative agendas, which are inevitably at variance with the primacy of the people’s will. This shift in the fundamental understandings of international economic relations indicates that the material and substantial aspects of the transatlantic relationships are in fact tightly intertwined with the domain of ideology and identity, although they mostly ‘emerge’ irrespective of whether and to what extent they are formulated in theoretical forms. Arguably, what under many aspects is merely a rhetorical means aimed at achieving immediate political goals and economic gains can also be regarded as a simplistic expression of a new set of values and conceptions about the national and international politics.

2.3. Institutions

Institutions can be conceived as a set of permanent but flexible structures of rules that prescribe, enable and constrain the actors' conduct based on criteria of appropriateness (Keohane 1989; March & Olsen 1989). US-EU institutions have not taken over the wider transatlantic setting; in fact, their mutual behaviour is intertwined with a sophisticated and diverse institutional framework, including formal organisations equipped with their own bureaucratic structure, like NATO, whose inter-organisational relationship with the EU is regulated by a well-structured, if strategically ineffective, regime (Græger 2016). Other formal institutional venues are periodic high level meetings like the yearly US-EU summit, as well as a high number of ministerial level meetings between the US Department representatives and their EU counterparts, complemented by reciprocal liaison relationships in areas spanning from intelligence and counterterrorism to trade. The operations of these formalised structures are fleshed out through the day-to-day activity of a host of groups of officials, from ministerial to work level, who, in doing so, play a big role in constantly re-shaping interactions according to the transatlantic community's underlying rules. One step further towards the informal end of the transatlantic institutional framework is an array of policy networks of experts, academic, civil servants, international organisations officials and state and non-state actors. These networks served as a necessary complement to formal intergovernmental cooperation and made inroads even into sensitive policy areas like regulation and intelligence (Pawlak 2010). Astride the formal-informal divide lays also the host of bilateral relationships that the US prefers to entertain with individual (groupings of) member States rather than the EU as such in specific policy area – especially those where the EU has relatively little competence. Clearly this is a delicate aspect, as the option of privileged access to the US has frequently been the consequence not only of diverging goals and capabilities among EU governments, but also an instrument used in a 'divide-and-rule' game played by America.

At least to some extent, this partially multilateral, partially bilateral institutional set-up is the result of a pragmatic 'division of labour' among partners with partly diverging strategies and capabilities, one that has resulted conducive, in its

own way, to normative expectations and patterned behaviour (the ‘rules of the game’ underlying US-EU interaction). On the other hand, the tension between the bilateral dimension and the commitment to multilateral structures also reflects the enduring dilemma between ‘Atlanticism’ and ‘Europeanism’, which, while being typical of the integration process since its outset, has undergone a distinctive development since the advent of Trump.

The picture is actually more nuanced than one would infer from the President’s boastful rhetoric. For instance, despite the new administration’s apparent non-adversarial attitude towards Russia, the US does not seem to have lost its allure in the eyes of Central Europe EU members, other staples of the Atlanticist party (Tamkin 2017). These countries’ enduring trust in the US may be due to the fact that, despite Trump’s apparent warmth towards Putin, the US military and political deputies have taken decisive steps against Russia, in accord with their European counterparts as well as the traditional principles of deterrence (De Luce et al. 2018). Yet, an unbroken military engagement through NATO structures does not necessarily imply the good health of the corresponding security community. NATO may well be phasing from a community into a military alliance, which would still provide protection against external threats –especially traditional understanding of threats, as it is the case with the Russia – while leaving countries free from burdensome institutional limitation to their newly cherished sovereignty.

In fact, aside from traditional favour for America and NATO, support for Trump in Central Europe member states may also be credited to a widespread sympathy for the nationalistic and populist views informing the American President’s agenda, despite the latter being at odds with the values of multilateralism underlying the transatlantic relationship (Sjursen 2004). Trump’s political platform is highly relatable for voters and political entrepreneurs responsible for the powerful Euro-sceptic turn in the young Central European democracies, still unsettled by the sudden transition from communist regimes and comparatively less prosperous than longer-standing member states. The question is not about the transatlantic community becoming more pluralistic, but rather the extent to which the Trump effect is

impinging on the behaviour patterns and the ensuing recognition of mutual expectations underlying any institutional setting, pluralistic or amalgamated that it might be. However, one can already pinpoint some evidences of this shift by focusing on the institutional aspect. The controversy stirred by Trump about the NATO members being 'in debt' lays bare his transactional understanding of the transatlantic institutions (and foreign policy in general) and seems to have spurred ramifications in the institutional remit of the EU. The President of the European Commission's call for a European army or the European Defence Union in the 2017 State of the Union address, or the President of the French Republic's proposals for a new intervention force, a EU defence budget and the freedom to serve in any member state's army were presented with a discernible timing, and that at least indicates that the troubles in the relationship between NATO and the EU, though not new, are today increasingly pressing concern among policymakers and publics (Valasek 2017).

2.4. Identities and values

Ideational and normative aspects have been frequently called into question in the effort to comprehend the Trump presidency. A largely irrational aversion to (central) government, a deep resentment against liberal elites, upwardly mobile minorities and immigrants, and a heightened perception of white, small town and rural America as being left behind by the powers that be: these are some of the identity politics factors that, combined with economic and material aspects like new trade balances, technological development and de-industrialization, have been frequently pointed out to account for the unexpected ascent to power of Donald Trump as the champion of the so-called 'cultural backlash' (Sawhill 2016). On the other hand, the unpredictable behaviour of its members, a constantly unstable make-up and the lack of a clear ideological foundation make it hard to single out a set of ethical and identity markers informing the action of this administration, or the extent to which this conduct represents genuine ethical orientations and self-images of American society – as opposed to being nothing more than the resultant of forces pulling in different directions, all in response to a conveniently vague political platform.

Against this uncertain backdrop, what needs to be assessed here is whether the Trump effect can be classified as a very intense manifestation of a deep(ening) but thus far manageable divide between the identities of the US and the EU, or if instead the present administration is stretching the chasm to the point of provoking permanent consequences.

Until the dawn of the Trump era, the US and the EU had generally acted ‘as if’ their mutual relationship were, for better or worse, different from any other association. This is in line with the notion of identities according to the security community approach: collective expressions of what is special about a particular group, its core values, social habits and codes of behaviour, and, more broadly, anything that contributes to identifying the group as distinct from ‘out-groups’ (Abdelal et al. 2009). Being (perceived as) special has never really implied for the transatlantic security community to be undisputable. Admittedly, hypocritical support, open criticism or even deliberate neglect have hardly come so far as to dismiss this ‘togetherness’ as inconsequential (Jones 2004). On the other hand, there is also evidence that ‘a sense of mutual indifference (if not resentment) has been gathering steam’ among members for years (Risse 2016, p. 34).

In determining whether Trump effect may drive mutual alienation trends towards their breaking point, or alternatively trigger – if only by reaction – a new awareness of commonalities long taken for granted, one has to face the traditional methodological difficulties of coming up with valid indicators of the ‘sense of community’ underlying the transatlantic relationship. The US-EU nexus condenses – not without some distortion – many of the crucial issues relative to the transatlantic community identity at large (i.e. the link between liberal ideas and the role of the state in the economy, or how national identification is conceived and practiced on either side of the Atlantic). One aspect that makes this component of the transatlantic ideational relationship significant is that the US, aside from encouraging or actively advancing the establishment of European institutions, has also been serving as an archetype of integration, an ideal reference point that has not only been used for comparative purposes, but has also shaped discourses and prompted support or

opposition to the integration process. Evidence of the impression left by the ideal of the American integration on the EU identity, is the resilience of the notion of the United States of Europe. Not only the idea has endured the establishment of policy-making systems based on functionalist and intergovernmental models but it has also become a trope periodically reactivated in political debates – e.g. recently by the European Liberal Party as the true ultimate goal of integration, or by Eurosceptic groups, that have used it as a straw man to argue for the untenability of the same process. Yet, while the US and the EU share the constitutive value of creating unity from a plurality of polities (reproducing the idea of the latter following the ‘standard model’ of integration provided by the former), there is also a significant divergence in the *polity ideas* providing legitimacy to each process (Jachtenfuchs et al. 1998). While the US orders the relationship between plurality and unity through a paradigmatic federal solution, the Union’s polycentric arrangement draws its legitimacy from a complex combination of different polity ideas – intergovernmental cooperation, economic community, policy network and, to some extent, federal union as well – whose ratios change across levels of governance and policy areas. The pluralistic nature of the transatlantic security community has traditionally allowed for a diverse range of polity ideas to underpin its institutional and functional setting, and provided a favourable environment for a non-state polity like the EC/EU to develop and become a part of the community in its own right, alongside with its member. Admittedly, America’s support for the European integration odd experiment has never been unconditional or uncontested, given the distance between the two historical experiences, and the great difficulty of the majority of the American public – and elites too – in conceptualising and relating to Europe’s attempt at a different practice of sovereignty (Sbragia 2005). Yet, America’s long-time reservations about the legitimacy (and viability) of the EU as a partner – and an international actor *tout court* – have seemingly found a formidable outlet in an administration that establishes who has a *just* claim to a relationship with the US based on much less nuanced and inclusive criteria. Even compared with this long history of incomprehension, wariness and latent antagonism, the stance of Trump’s America stands out

for its proud lack of interest into, verging on overt hostility towards, the conceptual and practical subtleties of the EU political processes.

Again, the fluctuating and hyperbolic register used by a President with an erratic behaviour with complete lack of public office experience, exacerbated by an inconsistent communication strategy, advises supplementary caution in distinguishing mere verbal excesses from the manifestation of significant shifts in how the US conceives of itself in relation to the EU. With that in mind, expressions and practices seem to be more than mere blunders and indicate a significant ideological divergence to be in place. The current administration has hardly held back its frustration for being supposedly ‘taken advantage of’ by the EU, a subject very inconvenient to deal with due to its cumbersome decision-making processes, and often at cross purposes with the US.¹ Underlying this position is the idea that the Union openly defies the belief that ‘the nation-state remains the best vehicle for elevating the human condition’ – trumping any other instruments, international organisations and human rights protections included – as claimed by Trump in his address to the UN General Assembly.² Leaving aside Trump’s characteristic incoherence, the Presidential statement contains what seems the maximum concession that a policy posited on a Jacksonian-inspired primacy of America’s interests and views can grant to international cooperation. Provided that ‘all responsible leaders’ have abided by the obligation to respond to their own citizens, nothing prevents them from coordinating in order to further their respective fellow nationals’ conditions. The declaration signals a conceptual distance from the process of inter-/supra-national institutionalisation at the base not only of the EU’s identity, but also of an important part of America-Europe relationship, with the benevolent American oversight of the integration experiment.

Admittedly, the extent to which the Jacksonian populist principles informing the Trump administration can be equated with a revival of the nation-state as the fulcrum of America’s foreign policy is not clear (Mead 2017). Indeed, if one fo-

¹ “Working on major Trade Deal with the United Kingdom. Could be very big & exciting. JOBS! The E.U. is very protectionist with the U.S. STOP!” Trump tweeted.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDCqaJpim0Y>.

cuses on the social background of Trump's ascendancy, deeds and identity of his presidency can also be traced back to neoliberal trends that had already influenced the previous administrations. However, from an institutional point of view, when the President claims as he did at a recent rally in Michigan, that the EU 'sounds so nice' but it was 'literally formed to take advantage of the United States *and I don't blame them*' he delivers two blows (Scotto Di Santolo 2018). First, he downgrades the European integration project to a mere instrument of (unfair) commercial policy aimed at wringing 'one-sided deals, where the United States gets nothing in return'.³ In particular, this reductionist vision limits the identity of the EU as a 'regulatory state', so that the objection against the legitimacy of a bureaucratic entity to intrude upon the nation-state combines, with the aim of deregulating domestic economy and increase private-sector incentives in order to unleash economic growth (Pfaltzgraff 2017). Moreover, the profiteering profile attributed to the trade policy of the EU negates its role as promoter of sophisticated trade agreements.

Second, he ultimately negates the communitarian nature of the transatlantic relationship as a whole, within which the EU served as a sort of 'leading edge'. In doing so, the Trump Administration disregards well-entrenched (albeit shifting) mutual expectations about the special status of transatlantic relationship in the foreign affairs and the role played in it by the EU, achieved after decades of intense dialogue and interaction. In Trump's eyes, there is no transatlantic pattern nor tacit rule of the game that the US is not fully entitled to dismiss. Again, current changes in the transatlantic relationship are better investigated in light of the revision already started by Bush and carried on by Obama, which under many aspects also amounted to plain reduction of commitment. Even so, the Trump effect is a turning point in as much as it generates a collapse of the mutual social pressures that served as the sole safeguard against the incentive of each member to deny the existence of a understanding about the character of their relationship.

³ *Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, New York, 19 September 2017, viewed 9 July 2018, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>>.

3. The Trump effect on the liberal international order through the crisis of the US-EU relationship

The strand of US transatlantic foreign policy that resulted in the establishment of the EU and the US-EU relationship has frequently been associated with an overarching strategy of ‘order building’ pursued by the US based on the international dimension of the principles of liberalism (Sørensen 2006; Howorth 2010; Ikenberry 2012; Peterson 2018). The post Second World War incarnation of the LIO hinged on a binding strategy implying the use of a variety of instruments, spanning from territorial occupation and reintegration of defeated nations, to security alliances, legal agreements, economic interdependence and openness. Institution, connections and values granting substance and meaning to the order have varied across the decades and local actualisations. Although adaptability and endurance were given priority over internal coherence, staples of the order were a preference for rule-based international relations, multilateral institution, the modernizing virtues of free market and social openness. Within this varied setting, the West, based on its deep political and institutional ties and shared values and identities, acted as the anchorage of a much wider international order. The special position of the West was not just the corollary of America’s hegemony, largely posited as the necessary condition to the establishment of the order (Stokes 2018). Besides providing legitimacy to the world leader, the ‘political thickness’ of the Western community also provided a quantum of orientation to an otherwise extremely diverse system of states, transforming it into a more cohesive unit, of a potentially global reach, guided by a set of goals and values, but still flexible enough to even tolerate on its (ideological) outskirts authoritarian regimes – at least as long as they adhered to the anti-communist canon essential to any possible international actualisation of liberal principles. The EU has been a particularly advanced variant of the latest incarnation of the LIO, initially contingent on the neutralisation and integration of defeated Germany, and later to the maintenance and promotion of the most advanced version of the liberal principles index: firm support for multilateral institutions and norms; open markets and trade liberalisation; cooperative approaches to security;

and human rights and democratic values. In its constitutional connection with the US, the EU has stood out as a particularly sophisticated policy configuration – the thickest component of the politically dense part of the LIO, in a sense – that has foreclosed a return to the dynamic of anarchy just shy of the breach of the equally legitimate principle of national sovereignty (Ikenberry 2012).

The notion of LIO – and the end thereof – has made a dramatic comeback at the centre of public and scholarly debates when Donald Trump’s victory became a plausible result of the election. As a result, the crisis of the LIO – its dramatic transformation into an illiberal version of itself, or its demise – has come to be a popular interpretation of the unprecedented conduct of the US government since the new President came into office (Nye 2017; Shake 2017). Traditional arguments about ‘the crisis of the transatlantic relationship’ were brought together and conflated with the more fundamental issue of the potential collapse of the international societal arrangement that had held sway over the last six decades or so.

It is worth pointing out once more that focusing on the consequences of the emergence of Trump politics has only to do with research design and does not imply that the EU is just a helpless recipient of the US administration’s excesses, with no agency of its own in the current development of the LIO. In fact, as argued by Smith and Youngs (2018), the EU’s record in defending the liberal order looks increasingly mixed in some policy areas. While still relatively strongly imbued with liberal principles, in recent years the Union’s own approaches to global order and international challenges have turned to a more ‘selective or contingent liberalism’ (*Ibid.*). According to the authors, the latter is not just a conceptual compromise between interests and values aimed at more effective policies, in keeping with the ‘principled pragmatism’ introduced with the 2016 EU Global Strategy.⁴ The category of ‘contingent liberalism’ indicates the preparedness of the EU and its key member states to devise ‘policies that broadly defend liberal order but through tactics that are more eclectic, opportunistic and flexible than was previously the case’

⁴ *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016, <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en>.

(Smith & Youngs 2018, p. 55). This reassessment by the EU's of its own understanding of, and commitment to, the LIO has been generating effects that differ across policy areas. Yet, relations with the US and its hegemonic role constitute one of the cases where the EU's orientations appear to be increasingly contingent upon instrumental calculations of its own strategic and economic interests, rather than compliance with normative principles and images of self.

If that is so, the revisionist approach is far from being a prerogative of the Trump administration. Nonetheless, for analytical purposes only, the last part of the paper is focusing on how America's actions and ideas are likely to affect the role of EU-US connection in maintaining, adjusting, but also undermining the LIO. In order to do so, divergences and convergences are identified between the US and the EU in interests, interdependence, institutions and identities that may generate a significant impact on the order.

As previously established, the more long-term interests are, the more impervious they become to changes in comparatively less structural aspects like the turnover of public office, even top ones. Indeed, common 'geopolitical' interests can be denied or neglected, but hardly altered (Wickett 2018). At the same time, even material interests need certain basic understandings to become viable. According to the liberal order literature, during the Cold War era the US and the EC gained clear complementary benefits from the LIO. The rule-based nature of the latter provided America with legitimacy and deferred the decline of its hegemony, while offering the EC and its member states access to the leader and reassurance about its benevolent intentions, necessary conditions to the European experiment of supra-national integration. With the extinction of the common threat posed by the Soviet Union, the LIO was successfully re-set and enlarged, based on the prospect that pro-globalisation policies would provide citizens and companies across the world with sizeable benefits in terms of prosperity and life opportunities.

Arguably, it is in the aftermath of this transformation that the deep roots of the Trump effect are to be found, and the divergence between the EU and the US starts to increase (Burgoon et al. 2017). Until not long ago, the two partners

pursued their largely common or overlapping interests and fashioned their interaction based on a set of fundamental shared assumptions about the benefits of openness and liberalisation, which clearly did not rule out occasional contrasts, but ensured a somewhat interactive formation of preferences. The reckless politicisation of these shared assumptions by Trump with his ‘politics of insecurity’ is arguably among the main reasons for the crisis of the updated, globalising version of the LIO (Rojecki 2016). Singling out the LIO for failing to make good on its promises of prosperity, security and fairness has allowed Trump to tap into the sense of insecurity and disappointment of those who feel ‘betrayed’ by globalisation and seek solace into the idealised prospect of a ‘great-again America’.

Part and parcel of this ‘populist’ strategy is the wrecking of the transatlantic relationship, whose mere economic inconvenience comes to a head and becomes a matter of making justice of ‘normal’ people(s) until now prayed on by globalised elites. The Trump administration acts under the assumption that national interests are eventually always incompatible, and therefore each country has a logical and moral obligation to give priority to their own at any cost. Consequently, the attack against an aberration like the EU is waged not only blasting its supranational institutions, symbols and its very *raison d'être*, but also encouraging the member states (i.e. like-minded movements within them) to follow suit and fight for their own interests.

As for divergence between the two transatlantic partners’ approaches to regional and global institutions, the poor conditions of the US-EU relationship may have specific reverberations on the LIO. This is particularly true as far as the multilateral dimension of international institutionalisation is concerned – a feature that, while not essential to every local reification of the order, was essential to its overall functioning (Ikenberry 2012). The transatlantic community has served as a ‘controlled environment’ where the US’s coordination with the national policies of other countries – especially non-bilateral ones – could be ‘practiced’ based on a pre-existing common historical and political background. In general, the transatlantic dimension has acted as a stepping stone to more inclusive institutional settings lack-

ing such ‘substantive’ backup, but equipped with principles designed to order relations among those states (Ruggie 1992). This is particularly true when the attention is focused on the relationship between the US and the EU, given the active promotion of multilateralism carried out by the latter (Jørgensen 2006). If the American hegemon’s engagement in multilateral institutions has been traditionally ambivalent, Trump’s scepticism and blunt hostility to structures that are regarded as restraints on the rightful exercise of American power may have an impact that overwhelms the inherent resilience of US-EU institutional framework (Stewart & Forman 2002). In fact, the ultimate effect on multilateralism of the impact of Trump’s transactional, business-like approach to international relations may have an ambiguous effect. The EU (or those member states still committed to the integration process) may be encouraged to step forward and invest more effort in upholding the multilateral ideal and institutional realisations (Lehne & Grabbe 2017). However, this also entails the risk – depending on a myriad of contingencies, not least the US President’s unpredictability – of undermining the EU’s integrity, with some ‘splinter’ member countries seeing the multilateralism championed by the EU to be out-of-touch and engaging into the pursuit of their interests in ways that bypass or even defy norms and practices of the LIO. Then again, even a solid EU might find itself at cross purposes with the fundamentals of the order, at least to the extent that it pushes towards ‘contingent liberalism’. The risk in this scenario recalls old questions about the consistency of the EU as a ‘normative power’ (Manners 2002), as such pragmatic means might not measure up to the very LIO principles they were traditionally supposed to be protecting and advancing.

Along this line of reasoning, a move like the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – the so-called Iran Deal jeopardizes the only available instrument to monitor the country’s nuclear programme and regional hegemonic ambitions, aggravating the remaining signatories’ attempt to rescue the agreement with a tangle of primary and secondary sanctions that are going to hit European companies as well (Nephew 2018). Combined with the firm preference for bilateral deals and contacts, often outside a clear legal, principled or even con-

ceptual framework, the decision also risks unravelling the viability of institutional solutions as such, creating an incentive for other countries – EU members included – to opt out in favour of less demanding (and more instable) alternatives.

An analogous situation emerges with regard to the (economic) interdependence between US and EU, even more exposed to the administration's transactional bilateralism. In general, decision-makers are exposed to powerful structural pressures from leading sectors of the American economy to preserve and adjust any version of the LIO that allow them to continue to profit with national and foreign demands and remain integrated in global value-chains. Structural links and path dependencies jar with Trump's promise to put ordinary Americans first and 'drain the swamp'. The TTIP negotiations' freeze is representative of how interlocked the state of the transatlantic relationship and the LIO are (Korteweg 2017). In fact, the bilateral dimension of the partnership promoted by the EU (a preferential trade agreement to all ends and purposes) is *per se* just another manifestation of the enduring incongruity of European protectionism and the multilateral aspiration to an unreservedly liberal international trade system. The debates triggered already in the Nineties within the World Trade Organisation about this tension resulted in the notion of multilateralism and regionalism being complementary rather than alternative instruments for the management of complex interdependence. The tension between the two dimensions was to be resolved by the EU by applying the 'deep integration' model whereby market access liberalisation is underpinned by a robust set of rules and standards (Lamy 2002). As mentioned in section two, the novelty brought in by Trump's opposition to the TTIP is not so much economic nationalism (which would favour state interventionism), as the intention to dismantle market regulatory functions at national governments, international and supranational level in the name of unbundled mercantilism formulated in terms of national security (Ahmed & Bick 2017). In doing so, not only the US administration denies a distinctive function and feature of the EU, but also undermines the Union's role as one of the focal points of the rules-based global trading order, and offers a convenient excuse to free-trade sceptics in the EU to push their agenda. Even if the net result of deregulation *cum*

mercantilism was an increase in exchanges and protection of local production, and securing the right of governments to pursue reasonable policies, the erosion of the rule-based component of transatlantic interdependence would affect the LIO as a whole. The US-EU economic interdependency is still more open to (though not always compliant with) the compensation of third countries' needs and global externalities than it is reasonable to expect from any alternative national or regional pivot of the global trade systems like China (Schmieg 2015). Each in its own (variably inconsistent) way, the US and the EU have remained until today the relatively most reliable upholders of the rule of law at the base of the international economic order (Eckhardt & Elsig 2016). Whether the EU alone would be up to the same task seems at least uncertain if not improbable, given the powerful push for alternative (not necessary opposite) arrangements coming from emerging trade powers.

As for the effects on the LIO of the change of the US-EU relationship's identity and values, a number of them have been already touched upon while dealing with the other three categories. Multilateralism, for instance, is not only an institutional means of resolution of controversies, but has also served as the fundamental principle of the EU in its international action (Lucarelli & Manners 2006). As a fundamental feature of the EU international identity defined by contrast and affinity with the US, the principle has in turn determined the identity of the entire security community based on the normative standards provided by the LIO. The same goes for market regulations, economic openness or common interests, whose structural functions within the community depends on *meanings* that relate to values and principles of the LIO. Nevertheless, especially in times of 'crisis', ideational factors cannot be expected to unilaterally inform behaviour, as in fact practices have a reinforcing/undermining effect on them. Accordingly, to the extent that transatlantic partners retain a leading role in the current international order, sparser and less principled cooperation and openness between them affect the overall effectiveness of the order itself to orient behaviour as well as its normative value – i.e. the capability of bringing about meaningful and just conducts.

As mentioned, the US-EU relationship has lately appeared as a very delicate locus for the development of ‘populist’ resentment (Wright 2017). The processes of inter- and supra-national integration that resulted into the transatlantic security community, and the LIO-based values more or less consistently ingrained in it, are among the favourite object of criticism – and most effective sources of consensus – of political forces like President Trump and Eurosceptic parties. The frustrations of large sectors of the population against liberalism and internationalism are organised by populist movements whose rhetoric and arguments echo each other across the Atlantic. In that framework, Western institutions seem to be perfect targets and scapegoats: on the one hand, the EU, conceived as it is as a technocratic tyrant, or the mere vessel of German hegemonic strategies and fraudulent schemes at the expenses of the US; on the other hand, NATO and the values of transatlantic solidarity in general, attached as they are to a liberal model. In establishing a radically different set of political and economic priorities for America and Europe, populist movements and parties envisage a bona fide post-liberal and post-democratic international order. This is evidenced by the occasional, but not always extemporaneous utterance of positions that openly question the liberal and democratic values – e.g. Donald Trump’s admiration for the now virtually limitless permanence in office of President Xi of China, or Victor Orban’s death notice of liberal democracy (Walt 2017). On a day-to-day base, the diffusion of anti-establishment sentiments and discourses fuels intolerance towards principled practices like compromise, open debate and respect for the rules. It also chips away at both the efficiency and the legitimacy of liberal democratic systems upon which the LIO relies, especially in its Atlantic core (Peterson 2018).

Conclusions

To date, the presidency of Donald Trump has proved singular enough to raise as many questions concerning its impact on American and world politics, as those regarding the very analytical instruments through which such repercussions can be investigated. As it has been argued, in tumultuous times, International Relations theory may turn out to be just ill-suited to international politics apparently

poor in macro-tendencies, and have to give way to less-far-reaching foreign policy analysis (Peterson et al. 2016). Moreover, the perennial social science problem of the relation between structure and agency seems to have found in the incumbent US administration a strong case-study (Stokes 2018). If, on the one hand, Trump may well be regarded as the product of particular political, social and economic conditions, on the other hand the homeostasis of the structural factors underlying the liberal international order has been significantly impacted by his come into power. One may admit that, in the evolution of US foreign policy, agency has gathered relative weight compared to structure; still, agent-level factors like the presence of a professional US foreign policy community with generally conservative views and powerful constraints on presidential prerogatives also tend to mitigate the changes in long-term trends generated by the behaviour of people in positions of power (Peterson 2018). Yet, even though the idea that Trump has done little more than seizing the anti-globalisation sentiments the moment they were becoming ripe and turning them into a successful political platform, his character-defining quirkiness can hardly be overlooked (Clementi et al. 2018). Without putting too much emphasis on this aspect, the paper has argued that Trump is the expression of anti-establishment sentiments and a bitter disappointment in the ‘failed promises’ of the liberal (international) order, especially in its post-Cold War configuration – sentiments that run deep into the American population and resonate with analogous views in Europe. Yet, the paper has also argued that, having been able to tap into this widespread discontent, Trump has brought in an unprecedented level of unpredictability that – combined with his open disdain for long-established rules of the game underpinning interactions with other international actors – has already thrown into crisis the relationship between the US and the EU. To the extent that Trump does undermine this fundamental transatlantic connection, he can have a really critical impact on the LIO at large.

Neglecting or even impairing the US-EU connection does not necessarily lead to the complete demise of the current international order – as the rejection of spheres of influence, the protection of open global commons and against strategic

competitors, and the preservation of stability remain among the Trump administration's main foreign policy goals (Brattberg & Kimmage 2018). Nevertheless, disregarding as bluntly as the Trump administration does the complex, sometime even cumbersome, relationship with the EU amounts to disavowing at once two main accomplishments of the diverse LIO's incarnations: the redefinition of basic conceptual and political premises of relations among states based on the principles of liberalism (of which the EU was the most advanced experiment, constantly promoted and/or overseen by the US), and at the same time the favourable reception of an array of diverse domestic and regional arrangements of those values coexisting within the framework provided by the LIO and the value-laden transatlantic security community within it.

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