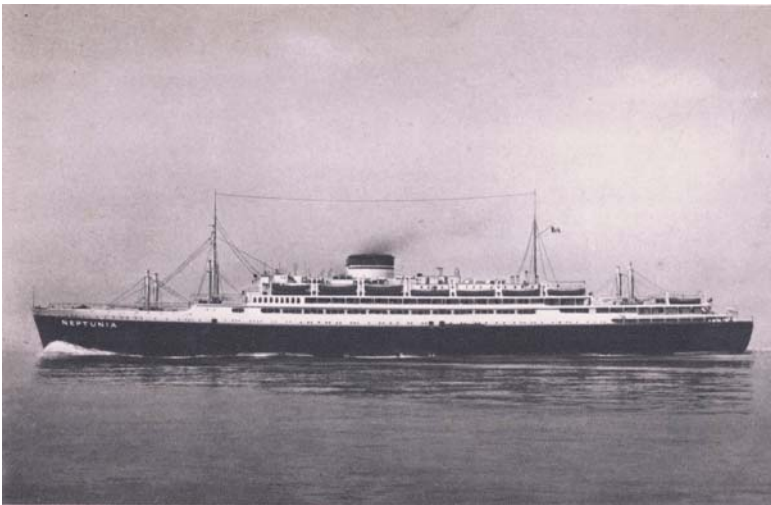


PAIX ET SÉCURITÉ INTERNATIONALES

06

2018



JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

(NOUVELLE SÉRIE- VERSION ÉLECTRONIQUE)



ISSN 2341-0868

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.25267/Paix_secur_int.2018.16

Citation: ROLDÁN BARBERO, J., «The Fractious and Fractured Western Powers», *Paix et Sécurité Internationales*, num. 6, 2018, pp. 13-17.

THE FRACTIOUS AND FRACTURED WESTERN POWERS

Las rebeldes y fracturadas potencias occidentales

Les Puissances Occidentales, entre fracture et fraticide

Javier ROLDÁN BARBERO¹

I. THE QUARRELS WITHIN EUROPEAN UNION

Western countries have traditionally managed and imposed their model, values and interests to the rest of the international community (they are used to calling and representing themselves as the international community as a whole). They usually are the privileged of the system, well adapted and confident. The international liberal order is institutionalized in a series of organisms, most of them born in the postwar period and enlarged and fortified after the cold war. Regional alliances like NATO and universal economic intergovernmental organizations like the International Monetary Fund are victorious and embody the western establishment.

However, last years are characterized by the decay and crisis of the political values defended by Europe and the USA. Democracy has a growing number of enemies and challenges outside and, more surprisingly, inside the own liberal system. Globalization, basically designed to widen the Western values and goals, exerts nowadays a boomerang effect bound to be repelled by the prosperous societies which are amid its discontents.

This phenomenon has repercussions on the field of security creating new threats and challenges in the “Old Continent”. A special report published in July 2018 by the European Council of Foreign Relations is provocatively and eloquently entitled “The nightmare of the dark: the security fears that keep Europeans awake at night”. The semester presidency of the Council of the

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EU exerted by Austria has underlined security as its priority, but security is nowadays a very holistic, transversal and somehow manipulated concept.

Undoubtedly, fears have a subjective and sometimes irrational component, but there are old and rising objective and public crossroads and frights. Many of them are shared by all European societies, although in different ways and degrees, and with different responses. Some of them are definitively private and specific from and for every country. Some States like Hungary, Poland and recently and more significantly Italy seem to hurt themselves through a self-inflicted damage process; not to mention the insensible Brexit decision. It is true and worrying that beneath the nationalistic explosion third countries, from abroad, are infiltrating their interests in these new populist, illiberal regimes. The Kingdom of Spain, for its part, is suffering a particular, acute and endogen problem that is threatening its rule of law and its territorial integrity.

Nonetheless, taking into account the interconnection, even integration, of policies and targets, the national malaise turns into European crisis and all together transmit a disquieting feeling about the present and future of the European Union.

One of the most perceptive streams of our times is the trend towards national egoism and lack of cooperative spirit, of solidarity. The solidarity is invoked and legally enshrined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union vis-à-vis the immigration policy (Article 80), but just in this matter solidarity is especially missing and it is entailing a huge internal and international upheaval in the European panorama with the denial of certain foundations of the integration and the undermining of the authority and primacy of European law and jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice. Perhaps the European Union has just adopted the legal framework of the European Solidarity Corps (Regulation 2018/1475) in order to countervail the symptoms of fracture ...

In general and media terms, the EU appears to be divided, sometimes abruptly, in a dichotomy of situations: founding members and adhered countries; North and South (above all in budgetary discipline); East from West (especially in political values); French-German duopoly versus the rest of the –“relegated”- member States; Pro-European versus Eurosceptic (Europhobic!) governments, etc. Maybe the most prominent and far-reaching political

schism, bigger than traditional categories of left and right, consists in the antinomy between nationalistic and internationalist conceptions of society and law. This outlook, this division about the will and capacity to address the European commitments explains the way towards fragmentation more than towards unity in the current European integration. The enemy –or at least the adversary- is often inside and not outside, for example as regards tax privileges.

Evidently, there are some episodic or lasting bilateral interstate frictions or the challenge posed by a particular country may be more or less influential on the others (the Italian example is more contagious and pernicious than the Hungarian one, for instance). However, the most polarizing factor in the European landscape is the tendency to blame the EU for the problems and praise the national performance instead. The use and abuse of the EU as a scapegoat is very frequent. As far as the migration policy is concerned, there are spats over whether the European Union is the problem or the solution, but the overwhelmed state always tries to boost the Europeanisation of this policy and to slam the European Union for its anguish.

II. THE QUARRELS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

As mentioned before, internal European matters are influenced and infiltrated by external powers and interests, which essentially try to distort the integration process and the democratic principles. The case of Russia is paradigmatic and outraging and its effects are diverse among different European States (violent and straight in the United Kingdom...).

This kind of situations must condition bilateral relations. In general terms, the European Union implements a variable geometry in regard to third countries and regions induced by the slogan “more for more”: a bigger level of cooperation and mutual trust depending on the degree of economic and political affinities. This way the EU tries to diversify and to distinguish its foreign policy, for example awarding Morocco an advanced status.

Certainly, internal and external matters are increasingly interlinked, in spite of the artificial separation of security strategies in the EU arena. The problems of migration or the foreign combatants corroborate this interaction of fields, the externalization of the most intimate and delicate security problems.

Consequently, it is not surprising that some countries like Hungary pose divisive and intolerant challenges to the one voice EU foreign policy in matters of human rights and migration, for instance. It is not surprising either that the vision and sensitivity of member countries regarding third States and international problems is quite different, for example if we speak of Russia or the Palestinian cause. We may consider that in front of so many international challenges and threats the EU is prone to be united and protected against the external world. It is now usual to speak about the “Europe that protects” in military or trade issues. But it is also true that it is becoming more and more difficult to attain a common position in issues like human rights as a corollary of the internal division in this regard, and defying the cornerstone of the European identity.

Furthermore, the crisis and decay of democratic values is almost worldwide, also in Latin America... and in the USA. This phenomenon undermines the entire international liberal order and specifically the Western alliance.

Firstly, the current US administration, with its unilateralism and arrogance, entails a serious risk for its own domestic values and interests. We hope that resiliency of the American democracy will be able to overcome this challenge. Besides, all that happens in the US has important repercussions in Europe: the financial crisis generated in 2008, the antiterrorist policy... A world based on the “every country first” premise is untenable. The new administration is boosting a traditional and visceral anti-Americanism within the European public opinion. This is nothing really new because the Marshall Plan launched by the US in 1947 is the seed of the postwar European associationism and the US shadow is always surrounding, also for bad purposes (as the Iraqi occupation in 2003 revealed), the European integration. Secondly, *trumpism* is a serious risk for the internal process of the European integration, since the national-populist movements in Europe is hailed and encouraged by the US administration. In third term, there is an additional threat for the Euro-American relation, which Trump would prefer to develop in a bilateral field in order to capitalize its diplomacy of fury and intimidation. Naturally, the national consequences for Europe of this commercial tit for tat are varied (the motor German industry is especially vulnerable to the American tariffs...). The trade war is the clearest sign of this disruption, but also in the sphere of security and defence there are disputes, undermining the credibility

of NATO, the longest and more successful political alliance in History. This spat has significantly fostered the need and the path for a strategic autonomy on the European side. Anyway, Europe is obliged to spend more and better in security goals. We can't rely on the US anymore, said the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, has added: "with friends like these, who needs enemies?" And paradoxically the bilateral relationship between NATO and the EU is being reinforced through some common projects and statements, the last one issued on 10 July 2018. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the bilateral relationship also has a private dimension, more and more influential, particularly embodied in the tech giants which pose, inter alia, commercial, security and fiscal risks for the European construction and challenge "European sovereignty" in general. And last but not least, the whole American foreign policy has a powerful influence in the state of international relations and in particular in the European external policy (both parties share the Western quota of responsibility in the past and present of the world), due to the persistent condition of the US as "indispensable nation". We may think of the consequences of the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement adopted in 2015 to fight Climate Change or the withdrawal from the nuclear agreement reached with Iran. The whole international liberal order and multilateralism is under threat and Europe must carry out its normative power to hold it. It is for the sake of the entire international community to preserve and promote the democratic values and the rule of law.

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SOMMAIRE / Janvier - Décembre 2018 / N° 6

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