

# Struggling for a New European Order: Salvaged or Newly Shaped\*

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## Abstract

The US-led and European partners supporting liberal international order has dwindled. A number of research has been conducted to explore reasons, starting point, the possibility of resurrection, and even the future scenarios of the international order. This is particularly important for the EU, in that the EU was built for a world that is peaceful, multilateral and driven by compromise inseparable from the liberal international order. The current situation of the crisis in the international order is also important to emerging powers notably China and Russia which seek for a new order best suitable for their own interests. In this sense, this paper explains the significance of the liberal international order to the EU, the necessity of salvaging an order or creating a new order, and important variables – elections held in 2024 across the EU, in the European Parliament, and the US, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, trans-atlantic partnership and EU-China relations – which possibly affect the EU to establish a new European order. In fact, the EU is unlikely to take the lead in forming a new international order. Nonetheless, the first task the EU should do is to acknowledge the crisis situation at present and to make a decision of the EU’s position and role regarding saved, reformed or newly shaped order.

## Keywords

European Union, Liberal International Order, Decline of Democracy, the 2024 elections, trans-Atlantic Alliance, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, China

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## I . Introduction: what has happened in the EU?

How can we describe the current situation of the EU or more broadly Europe? From economic to political and social dimensions, national and international headlines have been dominated by issues regarding economic recession, high inflation, rising inequality, security instability, migration crisis, the rise of populism, decline of democracy and economic, political and social polarisation. In a nutshell, nothing but negative and gloomy descriptions can be easily found. In addition, many questions and discussions – for example, when these phenomena started and will eventually end, what is the future development of these situations, and to what extent these situations could affect the future of Europe – have been raised; but the answer to these questions is ‘everything is uncertain yet’.

A number of research has mainly focused upon the reasons for those issues and the way for breaking them. Only one reason and solution cannot be pointed out to cover all the issue, as we have witnessed various events which have set the world on fire. The Brexit, the election of Trump as the US president, power competition between the US and China, Covid-19 pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and the subsequent economic and political turmoil are typical examples. Nevertheless, there is an implicit agreement that the liberal international order which was established after the Second World War and led by the US seems to be on the decline(Mearsheimer, 2019; Latham, 2022).<sup>1)</sup> This is particularly critical for the EU, in that the EU is considered as a ‘vanguard’ and the most loyal defender of this order(Bargués, 2023, p.2281).

It is also unclear when the decay of the liberal international order started;

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1) However, Mearsheimer(2019, p.21) argues the liberal international order started after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s when the US became the most powerful country in the world.

but it was the Trump administration when the EU felt uncomfortable in its alliance with the US since the US implemented its foreign policy running counter to the liberal international order. The Trump's foreign policy, 'America First', in particular, gave two important lessons for the EU: firstly, liberal international order established by the US and strongly supported by Europe seemed to be over because of the creator, the US. This does not necessarily make the EU a flawless defender of liberal international order. There has also been a criticism for the EU's foreign policy particularly in the EU's migration policy over practices of securitisation and closure, and violation of human rights through the EU's migration and bordering practices(Fassi, 2022, p.2261). Nevertheless, the EU has raised its voice especially during the Trump administration that the EU would be the leader of defending and consolidating the current order. The second lesson is that the EU, despite its intention and effort, has limited capabilities to be a leader. Apparently, the war between Russia and the Ukraine has posed security risks to the EU. The EU, however, failed to prevent Russia from attacking Ukraine and to be involved in international attempts of mediations before Russia's invasion. Security risk in Europe put the EU into re-focusing on the notion of 'strategic autonomy' in the security matter(Yoon, 2022a, p.60).<sup>2)</sup>

The falling liberal international order, power competition notably between China and the US, and the decline of the US hegemony and emergence of old, new and other powers mean the world already became a battlefield for countries which want to set up a new international order favourable to themselves. These situations urge the EU to more actively engage in forming a new order. In the same vein, it has been generally acknowledged within the EU that a new European order needs to be set up particularly after Russia's invasion of

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2) However, the issue of strategic autonomy has not been reached to consensus among member states because of their different understanding of security risks posed by Russia and the role of the US in the EU's security(Yoon, 2022b).

Ukraine which basically shook one of principles of the liberal international order, ‘multilateral rule-based order’(Jang, 2022, p.23). The priority should be given to shaping a new European order based on the agreement among member states, which gives the EU leverage to establish a new international order favourable to the EU’s interests and values.

In this sense, this article analyses important variables which possibly affect the EU to establish a new European order. In other words, what the EU should consider in forming a new European order is the theme of this research.<sup>3)</sup> For this purpose, the next chapter analyses the relation between the liberal international order and the European order, and the current crisis situation of the liberal order. The Chapter III explores risks and opportunities through selected, but significant issues which could have impacts on the EU regarding either international or European order-related policy-making. Selected issues – elections held in 2024 both within and outside the EU, the war in Ukraine, the US presidential election and trans-atlantic relations, and the EU’s policy towards China – could have its own individual impact, but this research emphasises they are intertwined. The chapter IV is the conclusion of this paper with the summary and implications for the EU.

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3) This does not mean that the EU must shape a new European order; rather, it means the EU should make up its mind retrieving the current order either as an international or European order, actively joining in forming a new international order or shaping a new European order.

## II. Crisis of the Liberal Order in the World and Europe

### 1. Crisis of the Liberal International Order

Since World War II, the liberal international order anchored by the US has been the dominant world order placing the liberal norm and value at the core (Brands, 2016, p.2). It is thus understandable that the US can be called as a kind of creator and then, leader and manager of the liberal international order. This liberal international order appeared to be more vigorous particularly after the collapse of the Cold War when the US became the unipolar power in the world.

Although there has been contestation regarding the liberal international order particularly between realists and liberalists, they share one specific feature of the US-led international order, which is based on the superpower of the US. Mearsheimer (2019, p.9) defines ‘order’ as “an organised groups of international institutions that help govern interactions among member states.” According to the realists, international institutions are obviously governed by rules great powers create and manage best suited for their interests. Ikenberry (2011a, p.1) known as one of the biggest supporters of the liberal international order explains it as a fusion of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the liberal order led by the UK and the US over the last two centuries. The notion of state sovereignty and great-power relations as the principles of the Westphalian project can be solved by liberal order projects based on open and rule-based relations (Ikenberry, 2011b).<sup>4)</sup> In order to overcome the realist problems of anarchy and security instabilities, the liberal order, according to Ikenberry (2009,

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4) For the development of the liberal international order, see Ikenberry (2011b) and Brands (2016).

p.71), has had to be built based on open markets, international institutions, rule of law, cooperative security arrangements, support for democracy, and multilateralism. The success of the liberal international order over several decades is possible because of military and economic power of the US backed by a network of alliance across Europe and Asia(Haass, 2018). From these perspectives, Ikenberry defines the international order the US established after the second World War as the liberal hegemonic order.

This order has been maintained, in that the US has provided public goods – particularly in the field of economy including trade benefits or economic developments and security – to countries joining this order managed by the US hegemonic power. But recently, this liberal international order has shrunk. This is also another consensus view between theorists of realism and liberalism, but several important issues – for example, when the crisis of the order started, what the reasons are, and what the next scenario will be – are still contested.

It is not the purpose of this research to discuss whether the liberal international order is desirable or not. No matter whether this order is good or bad, the waning of the liberal international order becomes a reality, which makes the global system unstable and uncertain. The architect of this order, the US, has shown, particularly under the Trump administration, its changed policies, for example, withdrawal of the Paris Climate agreement and the Iran nuclear Deal and deterioration of alliance relationship. The return of power rivalry, rise of protectionism, nationalism and populism, and the failure of roles of international institutions on refugees, environments and human rights are other symptoms of the crumbling international order, which have been recently witnessed. All these symptoms indicate the current order has been shaken on its core. Some are still optimistic on the continuity of the current order because rising powers notably China which is believed to challenge the US-led order has been also benefited from this order. Moreover, because of growing interdependence among countries in the areas of economy and even security, the

US and other rising powers acknowledge multilateral cooperation is required(Ikenberry, 2011b).<sup>5)</sup>

It is not certain where will be the final destination for the current crisis of the international order – whether the current order can be resilient to be back to the original track or whether a new international order by one power or multiple ones will be set up. It is certain, however, there will be various, but important variables which can influence the way of proceeding. The EU has taken this situation, the crisis of the liberal international order, more seriously than any other. It is mainly because not only have the EU and its member states been strong supporters for the order, but European integration has demonstrated how the liberal international order can work.

## **2. Uncertain Future of the European Order: Resilient or not**

*“[...] there would be no Liberal International Order(LIO) without the EU and no EU without the LIO.”(Bargués et al., 2023, p.2287).*

This means not only the EU itself but also its value and identity cannot be separated from the emergence of the liberal international order. The EU has seen itself as a persistent champion of defending the liberal international order, placing values of a rule-based order, free trade, and multilateralism particularly in the EU’s foreign policy at the centre of the EU. Defending the liberal international order represents the EU’s value and identity as well as the EU’s interest(Dworkin and Leonard, 2018). Obviously, the EU is considered as a typical example or a product of the liberal international order, in that the European integration has been realised during the development of the liberal international order; furthermore, the EU shared the values on which the liberal international order was built. This is why Ikenberry(2008) argued this (liberal

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5) Ikenberry(2011b) argues the US and other powers disagree only on the way of proceeding.

international) US-led order could not have survived without supports from European partners. In sum, trans-atlantic partnership has been the bedrock of the liberal international order with the US and Europe's shared commitment to such values as democracy, rule of law, openness, freedom and multilateralism(Dimitrova, 2020, p.1).

The EU has been publicly proud of its achievements and success of European integration, because this integration project has contributed to promoting peace within Europe for more than seven decades. The creation of the European community after the second World War bound member states to the extent that the war between them would be almost impossible. This is possible because member states, at least, realised nationalism brought the European continent into catastrophes, and thus eliminated it. Given the characteristics of a sovereign state inherited from the Peace of the Westphalia, however, we all know giving up sovereignty – even a part of it – and/or eliminating nationalism is never easy. The European integration project, therefore, has been recognised not only as a bold experiment in shared sovereignty but also as a unique combination of democratic institutions, a single market, the rule of law and open borders(Walt, 2016).

Despite the success – deepening and widening – of European integration project, however, Europe has faced the most critical situation and challenges due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is critical because the most successful story of European integration has been to achieve a goal of avoiding conflicts in the European continent. Furthermore, more challenges most of which are either directly or indirectly related to the war in Ukraine such as migration crises, economic turmoil and popularity of extremist parties in Europe have driven the European order to be more perplexed(“The EU stands ‘on the edge of a precipice,’ French President Macron warns”, 2019); hence, many see the year of 2024 will find the EU at a critical turning point. Ironically, this view is not new to the EU. It was already marked that the year of 2017 could be the

turning point for the EU with Brexit and Trump. The serious warning of possible disintegration of the EU was once spread out during the 2008 eurozone crisis. From important elections held in 2024 both within and outside the EU to growing war fatigue and the approaching result of the war in Ukraine, the EU will surely face a critical turning point; but the road ahead for the EU can be best described with unprecedented uncertainty.

It is true that European integration has been developed throughout overcoming various crises. This is why the EU has been considered to prove itself resilient(Goodman, 2023, p.2055), which also seems to confirm Jean Monnet's prophecy in his memoirs, "*Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.*"(Bongardt & Torress, 2023, p.1). The crisis which challenges the EU now is completely different from the crises the EU has faced and overcome before. While the EU has navigated its ways fundamentally based on its decision-making procedures of consensus or agreement among member states, the root of the current crisis lays in the foundation where the EU has been built upon.

Whilst it is still contentious, the EU's resistance to the falling liberal international order appeared to hit its stride during the Trump administration. Mearsheimer(2019, p.8), however, warns that Trump's rhetoric and policies would not be the sole reason to make international order in trouble. He argues there are fundamental problems Trump could successfully challenge the order. Nevertheless, it can be said the EU asserted itself to be the last guardian of the liberal international order.

More hurdles have challenged the EU's efforts of the resilience of the liberal international order. According to Bargués *et al.*(2023, p.2283), the Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine in addition to Trump's foreign policy have further re-directed the EU's resilience attempts. Trump's foreign policy and hereupon the crack of the trans-Atlantic alliance have led the EU to being more defensive turn in terms of the resilience of the liberal international order. This means the

EU began to be more concerned on its own resilience, that is to say, ‘an inward-looking move’(Tocci, 2020, p.192).

This is mainly because various events, mostly not within the EU, have requested the EU’s policy to indispensably be changed. ‘America First’ foreign policy under the Trump administration and the growing tensions between the US and China are the telling examples among others. But, the most significant event, from the EU’s perspectives, should be Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The geographical adjacency means it is critical for the EU’s security on the one hand; on the other hand, the time for decision is approaching to the EU regarding the membership of Ukraine to the EU and the future EU-Russia relations in the context of the Ukraine’s crisis. It is still too early to expect, but the result of the war between Russia and Ukraine can certainly have an impact on shaping a new European order.

As Mearsheimer argues, the 2016 election of Trump and Brexit were symptoms, not causes for the crisis of the liberal international order and European order(Muggah, 2018). The Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was clearly another even if it accelerates the decline of the international and European order. The main problem to the EU is not when the decline started, but the credibility of the European order starts to be undermined. While the EU openly emphasises the necessity of quick action and its intention to be a guardian, the EU failed to be clearly aware of the root causes; rather, those symptoms brought about the change of the EU policies.

### **III. A New European Order: Risks and Opportunities**

Nothing is certain to answer the question, ‘what is the future of the European order?’ The current European order can be salvaged or will be replaced. Another remaining, but important question is what the international order will be

and how the EU will set up the relations of the European order to international one – whether the EU will actively engage in forming a new international order for the EU’s interests or whether the EU will create an order only for the EU. In fact, the EU is unlikely to take the lead in forming a new international order. Nonetheless, the first task the EU should do is to acknowledge the crisis situation at present and then, to make a decision of the EU’s position and role regarding saved, reformed or newly shaped order. Given that the EU has been created on the basis of values and identities the liberal international order harbours, these values and identities should be embedded in a newly created international and European order. In this sense, the year of 2024 is critical for the EU, because various events will affect the EU’s decision. Therefore, this chapter discusses significant events both within and outside the EU which will give either risks or opportunities to the EU regarding its order-related policy.

## **1. Elections in 2024 and Decline of Liberal Order**

*The Economist’s* analysis(2023.11.13.) shows that nearly 2 billion people in more than 70 countries will go to the polls in 2024. Finland, Portugal, Slovakia, Belgium, Croatia, Austria, Lithuania, and Romania are the member states of the EU which will have either parliamentary or presidential elections or both in 2024. Belarus, Iceland, Georgia, and the UK are scheduled to hold either parliamentary or presidential election this year outside the EU. Most of all, the biggest cross-border election will take place on June 2024 with more than 400 million voters’ participation for the European Parliament. The number of elections scheduled this year in Europe is not the only reason for the centre of public attention; rather, it is likely to see the possible change of the government and/or the policy direction resulting from the elections which could affect the future of the EU. The results of the elections will show us how member states will be changed in terms of their policy directions and thus, to what extent these changes will affect the EU’s policy direction. All these elections held

within the EU will serve as the touchstones of the EU's policy directions hereafter.

It could be lucky that the EU has only these elections as variables to affect the EU's policy. Presidential Elections in Russia and Ukraine will be noteworthy events which could affect how the EU shapes a new order, although Ukraine election is likely to be cancelled under martial law(EIU, 2023), and Putin is highly expected to continue his presidency. The US Presidential election in November 2024 should be more influential than any other elections held in 2024. It is most likely to have a rematch between Trump and Biden although the majority of American public do not want("Trump vs. Biden: The rematch many Americans don't want", 2024). The triumph of Trump in 2024 election as many expect could undermine democracy in the US and result in the US policy change unfavourable to the EU.

The reason why the world is really worried about the elections held in 2024 is the possibility of the decline of democracy according to the election results. So-called, the 'illiberal' trend and its expansion does happen not only in Europe, but also worldwide. Particularly the right-wing populist parties have grown and gained more public supports across Europe<sup>6)</sup> with 'a more identity-based, nationalistic, authoritarian, security-oriented and anti-immigration policy directions'(Lefebvre, 2022, p.5). Setting aside the regimes of Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China, the similar symptoms have been witnessed with variations in other countries – for example, holding long-term power in Turkey, Israel and India, UKIP leading to Brexit vote, and the US policy under the Trump administration with a principle of 'America First'.

Narrowed down to the elections related to the EU, the political transition particularly in the European Council and the European Parliament according to

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6) According to Lefebvre(2022), the European political landscape in 2022 has changed with 10% rise of the far-right parties in Germany and Spain and a spread to Scandinavian countries.

the results of the elections will bring a shift in the EU's policies. The policies made and ratified by the European Council and the European Parliament are closely related to agenda the EU has valued such as the war in Ukraine and funding for Ukraine, the Middle East Conflict, migration crisis, protectionist measures in trade, the EU enlargement including Ukraine and green transition.<sup>7)</sup> It is important, therefore, how the European Council and the European Parliament will be composed of. A turnout is expected to be higher in this year's elections in Europe due to those controversial issues across the EU(GZERO, 2024.1.5.). The center-right European People's Party(EPP) and the center-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats(S&D) which lost the majority in the 2019 European Parliament election are predicted to gain more; but, concerns still remain that the challenges and threats by the far-right populist parties and government continue. In the similar vein, the European Council is expected to be dispersed across various affiliations including Hungary's unaligned nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban(Thurn, 2023.12.11.). Fragmentation in the major decision-making bodies in the EU means a difficult journey ahead to reaching an agreement and having an impact on the fate of EU-wide projects as well as the EU's future architecture, the European Order.

## 2. Ukraine's Crisis

The war between Russia and Ukraine has been longer than ordinary expectation. As many expect the prospect of a breakthrough is unlikely, the future development of Russia-Ukraine war is still unpredictable. This situation of a long-standing stalemate has recently raised two issues: firstly, war fatigue from the leaders and public notably in the West has emerged; and secondly, this has led to less support of aid to Ukraine especially from the West. In spite of

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7) According to *Reuters*(2023.12.3.), European far-right parties had a meeting in Italy hosted by Italian Deputy Prime Minister, Mateo Salvini aiming to be the third largest party in the European Parliament after EPP and S&D and to toughen the EU's approach on immigration and climate policies.

Ukraine's desperate needs and imminent demands for more Western support, things do not seem to be getting better. In addition to war fatigue, the possible change of political landscape in the US and the EU could make further aid blocked or unclear. The further US assistance to Ukraine was blocked in the US Congress on December 6, 2023 due to opposition from Republican demanding a stricter border restriction ("Republicans Block Aid to Ukraine, Jeopardizing Its Fight Against Russia", 2023). Furthermore, presidential election in 2024 could change the US policy on the war in Ukraine if Trump who is skeptical of more aid will be elected. The EU's \$54 billion financial assistance package for Ukraine has also been held up due to the objection of the far-right government in Hungary ("Beyond the front line", 2024; "European leaders brace for 'some kind of a new cold war' with Russia", 2023). The EU's continuing and further support for Ukraine also hinges upon the results of elections in Europe; that is, how the European Parliament and the European Council will consist of.

Before the war in Ukraine, the EU has undergone unprecedented crises and shocks such as the eurozone crisis, migration crisis, Brexit, and Covid-19 pandemic up to recently (Lefebvre, 2023, p.1). Nothing seems to be more serious than Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, which has shaken the foundations of the EU, its policy and the multilateral rules-based order. While these repeated shocks have given the EU every reasons to work closely (Mölling *et al.*, 2022, p.7), the EU's capabilities and leadership on foreign policy including security and even solidarity have come under growing scrutiny. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed the EU's and member states' economic and foreign policies particularly towards Russia such as Germany's paradigm shift in its foreign policy, 'Zeitenwende'. Still, reaching a consensus regarding issues on the war like sanctions against Russia has been on the verge of confrontation among member states.

The protracted war in Ukraine will eventually come to an end; but, this war has already left many questions and tasks to the EU. In spite of the EU's

sanctions against Russia and its attempt at reducing Russian energy dependency,<sup>8)</sup> Russia has been and will be a key country for the EU's security and economy, and eventually for a new European order. This means the EU needs to set its new relation to Russia on a new strategic footing. Apparently, a quick recovery of the EU's relation with Russia seems to be unlikely, given that, whatever reasons there are, Russia's invasion is clearly against multilateral rule-based order the EU has preserved. Nonetheless, the European security architecture cannot be built without consideration of Russia and the EU's relation with Russia. It is also closely related to 'how to deal with Ukraine' especially after the end of war. Apart from Ukraine's intention and possibility of joining NATO, Ukraine's membership of the EU is another key issue the EU copes with. All of these are intertwined with setting up the European security, including NATO reforms and the trans-atlantic relations which are critical to the EU's security.

Again, everything is not certain yet – when and how the war eventually ends, and to what extent and how trans-atlantic partnership will change after a new elected US president. Setting-up a new relationship with Russia and the EU's policy towards Russia could be affected by results of elections held across the EU and in the US. It is obvious, however, that the EU should restore the rule of law and liberal democracy which has provided the EU with peace and prosperity but has been shaken by Russia's war on Ukraine. This means reaching a common ground between the EU and Russia must be difficult.

### **3. Possibility of Repeated Crisis in the trans-Atlantic Relations**

As discussed throughout this paper, Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused major challenges in Europe and the world, and this is still under way with

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8) According to *Le monde*(2023.9.13.), while the EU has dramatically reduced Russian gas imports through pipelines, volumes of LNG transported by sea jumped by 40% at the first half of 2023.

uncertainty. For the EU, in particular, the war has recalled the importance and urgency of developing its common defence capabilities and ensuring strategic autonomy for energy due to the heavy dependence on Russian resources. What is worse, the EU has been concerned about the role of the US as a security guarantor of the EU, in that the internal policy issues becomes major concerns for the US more than its role as an enforcer of geopolitical order and its foreign policy issues(European Commission, 2023). Various reasons such as the decline of the US power and power competition with China have been already discussed, but the present state of the US disengagement – at least, less engagement than before – makes two results: the first result is this allows other powers notably China and Russia to be emerging as a competitor of sharing the role the US has played; and secondly, this awakes the EU from reverie of transatlantic alliance for the EU’s security to the harsh facts of its own defence capabilities.

Unforgettably, the EU has experienced the Trump’s antagonism to the EU from his big applause of Brexit, criticism on NATO and European member states, to trade war. It is more surprising when French European Commissioner, Thierry Breton recently discloses what Trump said at a meeting with von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission in 2020 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, “*You need to understand that if Europe is under attack we will never come to help you and to support you [...] By the way, NATO is dead, and we will leave, we will quit NATO.*”(“Trump vowed he’d ‘never’ help Europe if it’s attacked, top EU official says”, 2024.1.10.). This certainly damaged the trans-atlantic partnership which has been the central axis of the liberal international order. Furthermore, European leaders notably French President Macron who emphasized on military sovereignty,<sup>9)</sup> became aware of

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9) Macron says in an interview with *the Economist*(2019.11.7.), “*I don’t think I’m being either pessimistic or painting an overly gloomy picture when I say this. I’m just saying that if we don’t wake up, face up to this situation and decide to do something about it, there’s a considerable risk that in the long run we will disappear geopolitically, or at least that we*

being more committed to achieving and improving goals in terms of defence and security(Dimitrova, 2020, p.4).

From the EU's perspective, the US presidential election scheduled to be held on November 5, 2024 and its result, if the former President, Donald Trump wins, could cause more concerns to the EU. It is still too early to foresee who is going to win the 2024 election; however, an overwhelming majority of opinion polls has demonstrated Trump is more likely to be the next President of the US. In spite of possible decline of the US power, the US is still the most powerful and influential country, which means the result of the 2024 election is the most consequential for the security, economy, international cooperations, and alliance relations. No matter who wins the election, Bremer & Kupchan(2024) argue the 2024 US election will deepen the political division, test its democracy, and undermine the US credibility internationally. Trump's victory in the election could lead the trans-atlantic alliance to being more strained and leave Ukrainians and their frontline European supporters in the lurch(Berner & Kupchan, 2024, p.5).

The EU's attempt to uphold the values of the rule of law, liberal democracy, multilateralism, international cooperation, open trade and human rights can be at risk if Trump wins the election and persists in his belief. Given that setting up a new security order in Europe is an urgent need, the result of the US presidential election in 2024 may require the EU to seek for its own capabilities in the European security. This situation can consequently damage trans-atlantic partnership which was the foundation and advocacy of the liberal international and European order.

#### 4. EU-China Relations

*“Chinese Communist Party’s clear goal is a systemic change of the international order with China at its center.”*

This is what von der Leyen mentions in an interview with *Wall Street Journal*(2023.3.23.) and clearly indicates the EU’s perception of China. If this is true, it is the most serious challenge for the order the EU wants to maintain. The EU’s policy towards China was once clearly spelled out in ‘Strategic Outlook’ published in 2019; it says China is designated as a partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival. This also means that the EU’s view on China is not identical to the US mainly because of the importance of the world biggest market and existing potential of economic growth. As the warning and concerns on this view have increased, von der Leyen announces a new strategy of Europe’s China policy, what is called, ‘de-risking strategy’(European Commission, 2023.3.30.). One noticeable fact of this strategy is that not ‘de-coupling’ only but ‘de-risking’ is focused by ensuring diplomatic stability and open communication with China.<sup>10)</sup> There are, of course, a few variables of the EU’s policy towards China, which are the 2024 elections in member states and particularly in the European Parliament. Although the European Parliament is perceived to have relatively limited power, von der Leyen’s return as president of the Commission will be determined in the Parliament. A ‘de-risking strategy’ is possible when von der Leyen comes back to her seat again.

The main problem for the EU regarding China is China is seeking a new international order as the dominant player which serves as a counterpoint to the

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10) von der Leyen reiterates that the main focus of this strategy is to reduce economic risks from China particularly include reducing the EU’s heavy dependence on the critical raw materials from China(“China Wants to Be at Center of New World Order, Top EU Official Says”, 2023.3.30.). Kim(2023, p.10) argues that the Biden’s administration is likely to focus on ‘de-risking’ policy rather than ‘de-coupling’ from China in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election.

West, particularly in the Global South.<sup>11)</sup> If the current international order cannot be resilient, the EU should be more assertive in defending its security and interests in a new order founded on the principles of democracy, market economy and rule of law. Neither does China seek for a new international order the EU wants, nor does the EU align with China's vision for reshaping the international order(Graceffo, 2024). Therefore, China issue, coupled with other variables of 2024 elections in Europe, European Parliament and the US, trans-atlantic alliance, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is another significant factor that can affect the future of a new European order.

## **IV. A New European Order?**

The return of geopolitics is the term which can describe the current situation. It is believed that this is partly a symptoms of the decline of the liberal international order. The US-led and European partners supporting liberal international order has dwindled. A number of research has been conducted to explore reasons, starting point, the possibility of resurrection, and even the future scenarios of the international order. This is particularly important for the EU, in that the EU was built for a world that is peaceful, multilateral and driven by compromise inseparable from the liberal international order. Referring to the realist view, the current situation of the crisis in the international order is also important to emerging powers like China and Russia which seek for a new order best suitable for their own interests.

In this sense, this paper explains the significance of the liberal international order to the EU, the necessity of salvaging an order or creating a new order,

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11) China leverages its crucial position as an economic power to influence other nations to consider China as a different power which can stand up to a US-led order(Graceffo, 2024; "China Is Starting to Act Like a Global Power", 2023.3.22.).

and various agenda to be especially considered for (re)shaping an European order. Despite being still contentious in the fields of international relations theory, the creation and maintenance of the liberal international order has been possible thanks to the US hegemonic power and the strong support by the European allies. This is why the EU has been proud of itself as a guardian or as a defender of this order even during the Trump administration. The values such as democracy, rule of law, multilateralism and openness as the cornerstone of the current international order are the priorities the EU most values.

The EU's desire of the resilience of the liberal international order does not seem to be feasible. The decline of the current order has already become a reality; wars of conquest return, competition replaces cooperation, and nationalism, protectionism and populism spread out across the globe. Liberal peace, freedom and prosperity appear to be superseded by power rivalry between the former hegemony and emerging powers. They have been engaged in the fierce competition of shaping a new international order. This means that we are already entering into a multipolar world, not a unipolar world any more(Latham, 2022).

The remaining question is what the EU should do or what is the role of the EU in shaping a new order in this situation. Even if the liberal international order is in the EU's interests to preserve, the EU has already shown its limited role to keep the current order alive. The creation of the EU-led international order is far beyond the EU's capability. Even if the EU has the intention and ability to do so, whether the EU-led order has enough support, trust, and voluntary participation from other countries is still an open question; rather, the possibility seems to be low compared with the situation when the liberal international order established by the US as a dominant power.

Nevertheless, there are optimistic aspects in terms of protecting the EU's value and interests. In the world of multipolarity, the EU can optimise and defend its preeminence especially in the neighbouring region like the former

Soviet Union, the Mediterranean and all or parts of Africa. Apparently, the EU has been well recognised as an economic power rather than a military power. Because countries in those regions depend on the EU for their exports, FDI, ODA, infrastructure connectivity and labour mobility more than they rely on China, Russia and the US(Astrow *et al.*, 2023), the EU needs to turn its attention to neighbouring countries. This is the way of defending the EU's value and interests in a multipolar world. This is in collusion with President Macron's argument that the EU should strive to be a 'third power' with a third way approach of escaping from the US-China duopoly(Murphy, 2023). After Macron's state visit to China in April 2023, he insisted the EU should not become a 'vassal' in the US-China clash, but should be a third power in the world order along with China and the US("Macron sparks anger by saying Europe should not be 'vassal' in US-China clash", 2023.4.10.). In order to be a third pole in the global order, according to Murphy(2023), the EU should change its policy approach towards the global south, most of which have seen little advantage from a duopolistic order.<sup>12)</sup> The EU can also employ its consensus-building experience in decision-making with more assertive powers(Ioannides, 2022, p.367). The EU's emphasis on rule-based cooperation allows the EU to develop relations with like-minded countries and others who may share some of the EU's interests in order to protect its values.<sup>13)</sup> Lastly, there is a belief that Europeans have trust in democracy, positive attitudes towards migrants, and favourable perception of the EU(Bartels, 2023).<sup>14)</sup> It can be understood the public in Europe generally supports values which became the

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12) Particularly, Macron is worried that the US-China rivalry has a risk of Europe's absorption into the US block(Murphy, 2023).

13) von der Leyen also emphasises consolidation of the EU's relations with like-minded democracies, future members of the EU, wider neighbourhood and countries to promote interests and to advance values on the global stage. For more details, see European Commission(2022).

14) Bartels(2023) argues that democracy erodes from the machination of political elites which led to the decline of democracy, multilateralism and tolerance.

principle of the liberal international order and the EU has advocated. Promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity(Guiraudon, 2020, p.106) is necessary as the first step towards the order the EU wants.

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