

# Coping with Multipolarity: EU Values and the Stability of International Order

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# Coping with Multipolarity: EU Values and the Stability of International Order

## Abstract

The emergence of a multipolar order has led to concerted efforts to develop a more ‘realist’ edge to the EU’s foreign policy identity, emphasising interests, capabilities, and strategy. Multipolarity is believed to necessitate such a move because it is thought to bring about a more dangerous and unstable world, for which the EU’s normative power identity is thought poorly suited. Yet multipolar instability is not a foregone conclusion, but occurs in the absence of representative institutions, regional consolidation, efficient balancing, ethics of accommodation, and channels of diplomatic communication. EU values can contribute to the stability of the emerging order because many of those values at the heart of the Union’s international identity—multilateralism, regionalism, pluralism, flexibility, and diplomacy—can help bring about the normative conditions upon which a stable multipolarity depends. Drawing on debates on the relationship between polarity and stability, this working paper challenges the prevailing view of multipolar instability and highlights the importance of societal values in the EU’s foreign policy identity which can contribute to a more stable multipolar order. Our argument challenges the dominant view of multipolarity and helps clarify what is (and what is not) at stake in the debate over ‘normative’ and ‘realist’ foreign policy choices.

## Keywords

Multipolarity; European security; normative power Europe; Global Strategy; realism

## Introduction

The international system is becoming multipolar, with power diffusing away from Western states towards other regions, and a host of regional powers—many of them non-liberal—asserting themselves on the international stage. In Europe, the belief that a more unstable international order is beckoning has contributed to sustained efforts to rebalance the European Union's (EU) 'normative' foreign policy identity towards a more realist, interest-driven approach (e.g. Barrinha 2016; Economides 2018; Smith 2017). These concerted moves call for a careful appraisal of the nature of multipolar systems as well as the content of the EU's values-driven foreign policy. But insufficient attention has been paid to both of these in the existing literature on EU foreign policy. Dominant conceptions of multipolar dynamics tend to downplay factors which can mitigate multipolar instability, while prevailing conceptions of the EU's values-based foreign policy tend to focus only on those substantive (liberal) values which inform the Union's international identity.

These biases come at a cost, since they draw scholarly attention away from one of the principal ways in which EU values can contribute to the emerging multipolar order. The emphasis on multipolar instability precludes discussion of the contingent nature of multipolarity and the divergent pathways towards instability or stability which more diffuse systems may take. Meanwhile, the preoccupation with substantive values comes at the expense of sustained discussion of societal values, which specify appropriate conduct between international actors as opposed to specific conceptions of domestic order, and which are likely to play a significant role in determining the kind of multipolarity which emerges.

In short, the societal values with which the EU is already well associated can contribute to placing the emerging multipolar order on a more stable pathway and thus represent the key contribution the EU may make to ensure that a more stable multipolar order emerges. Drawing on scholarly debates on polarity and international stability as well as on the role of values in the EU's foreign policy identity, this working paper argues that the Union's values may contribute to bringing about a more stable multipolar order in five respects.

(1) *Multilateralism* can contribute to the emergence of a fair and representative institutional order that is able to regulate the conduct of states and can help inculcate the necessary spirit of recognition and reciprocity required for it to function.

(2) *Regionalism* is able to promote clear demarcations of responsibility between regions and powers, which stabilises regional politics and undercuts competition between powers, as well as promoting region-to-region co-ordination that can help overcome complexity.

(3) *Pluralism* can help to establish accommodative ethics that are tolerant of value differences, as well as identities that are mutually compatible, precluding costly and potentially disruptive attempts to universalise values.

(4) *Flexibility* can promote efficient balancing by preventing the ossification of the balance of power and can help prevent escalation of disagreements by compartmentalising individual strands of relationships.

(5) *Diplomacy* is able to contribute to the maintenance of communicative structures which aim to preclude the use of force and help to keep potential disputes out of the public eye where they are liable to be escalated.

Our argument proceeds as follows. The first section discusses the emergence of a multipolar international order characterised by the diffusion of power and the rise of non-Western actors, and charts the linkage between this systemic change and recent efforts to precipitate a ‘turn to strategy’ in the EU’s values-driven foreign policy. The second section examines the sceptical manner in which multipolarity has been viewed in Europe, arguing that the debate on multipolar (in)stability is much more open than the dominant view acknowledges. It argues that whether the emerging multipolar order will be characterised by stability or instability depends upon a host of factors, including the strength of institutions, the mapping between powers and regions, the presence of accommodative values, the effectiveness of balancing mechanisms, and the resilience of diplomatic practices.

The third section examines the EU’s values-based foreign policy, and considers how both substantive and societal norms will fare under multipolarity. It argues that the values required to strengthen the normative bases of multipolar stability—multilateralism, regionalism, pluralism, flexibility, and diplomacy—lie at the heart of the EU’s international identity and have long constituted integral elements of EU external action. In the fourth section we show how these societal values can contribute to bringing about a more stable multipolarity, describing each of the values in turn and highlighting the pathways through which it can help bring about greater stability.

The concluding section spells out the implications of our argument for theorists and policymakers. It argues that the distinction between realist and normative foreign policies is unhelpful, since much of the important variation in this regard is between different kinds of values, rather than between power and values per se. It argues that in the rush to endow the Union with greater capabilities values must not be left out of the equation, since they represent an important means through which the EU is able to shape the emerging order.

## The EU's turn to strategy

Discourses surrounding the EU's role in the world are shifting, commensurate with changes in the international order signifying the emergence of a more diffuse, more plural, multipolar world. The global distribution of power is shifting away from the West towards alternative power centres across the globe, spurred on by the economic flows from globalisation (Blagden 2015, 335). The United States (US)—along with its European allies—finds itself in a position of relative decline in its share of global power, marking the beginning of the end of decades of Western strategic, economic, and institutional primacy.

China is foremost among America's would-be global competitors (Buzan 2018; Friedberg 2015; Layne 2018; Schweller & Pu 2011), and the country is increasingly active in a host of regions—Latin America, Africa, South-East Asia, and Eurasia—not to mention its own near abroad (Ferdinand 2016; Vatikiotis 2017, 285-286; Yu 2018). The recent creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the closely aligned Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are examples of China's attempt to “alleviate an over-reliance on the US and promote an alternative order” (Beeson & Li 2016, 496). Russia, meanwhile, has sought to bolster its global position in recent years, pushing back against what it perceives as Western arrogance and encroachment in its sphere of influence, and in so doing reigniting tensions in Europe not seen since the cold war (Lucas 2009; Sakwa 2015). Russia's handling of the Ukraine crisis in 2014 was a clear signal of the country's increasingly assertive regional positioning: “It was one thing for Russia to interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine”, argues Cox (2017, 10), but “something else altogether to annex the territory of another sovereign state”.

Moreover, a host of regional powers, including Iran, Turkey, India, and Brazil are expanding their influence and increasingly seeking a global role commensurate with their enhanced status and capabilities, as well as recognition of their role as interlocutors for their respective regions (e.g. Hurrell 2018). Iran's regional assertiveness, marked by its rivalry with Saudi Arabia and its support for Assad's regime in Syria, has contributed to “its rising geopolitical profile” and strengthened its position during the nuclear deal negotiations with the West (Kausch 2015, 7). Turkey, meanwhile, can be positioned among the states which “assertively follow their own agenda, often against the tide and preference of dominant regional and global powers” (Kausch 2015, 9). Consequently, Turkey “pursues a cautious leadership claim” towards the region, assuming a mediating role in Middle East conflicts while strengthening its economic and energy ties with the Black Sea and Central Asia (Parlar Dal 2016).

India has become increasingly comfortable expressing its critique of the existing order and has condemned recent Western policy choices, including sanctions relating to the Syrian conflict and the NATO intervention in Libya. Both India and Brazil voiced their critique of the Western handling of Crimea by abstaining in the

UN vote on the matter and opposing restrictions on Putin's participation in the G20 meeting in Australia (Howorth & Menon 2015, 12). In all cases, these regional powers signal a greater confidence to claim their position on the regional and global stage, and to question Western dominance in international affairs.

To be sure, the US remains the most powerful actor in the system, and its structural power is likely to ensure that its relative edge endures (Beckley 2011; Cox 2012, 373-374; Quinn & Kitchen 2018; Stokes 2018, 142-143). But with other states holding a greater share of global power, dynamics and tendencies associated with multipolar systems will take precedence on the world stage, and a new ranking or grouping of powers will emerge. As Blagden argues, "conceding that China will not 'replace' the United States as the world's most capable military Great Power does not undermine the claim that America's lead will be reduced or equalled, or that other major western powers—Japan, Britain, France and Germany—will be matched and surpassed by some or all of the BRIC states" (2015, 335).

Moreover, not only is power now more diffuse than it once was, but the growing power of non-Western—and in some cases non-liberal—regimes is resulting in a more diverse international order where different worldviews exist side-by-side. "In parallel with [the] global power shift from West to East", argues Nathalie Tocci (2018, 1), "alternative visions of world order started surfacing". Strong state ideologies are on the rise in a number of countries, including Russia (Gat 2007; Sakwa 2008), while China's complex politics conveys a range of non-Western ideals, including state-led development, Confucian values, Han nationalism, and—supposedly—communism (Beeson & Li 2016; Schweller & Pu 2011). The rise of alternative power centres with diverse traditions and ideologies therefore undercuts notions of Western liberal universality which prospered in the immediate post-cold war context (Donnelly 1998, 11; Fukuyama 2006; Hobson 2008, 84).

Meanwhile, liberalism is challenged from within the West itself, with many constituencies in advanced democracies feeling that they benefit little from liberal internationalism and increasingly seeking to oppose the cornerstones of this order from within (Colgan & Keohane 2017; Ikenberry 2018; Ten Brinke 2018). Indeed, fault lines of partisan contestation within the West now divide supporters of globalisation from their critics as much as they divide the left from the right (Azmanova 2011; Zürn & de Wilde 2016). Combined, the rise of new power centres and the increasing heterogeneity of worldviews that characterise contemporary changes to international order herald the emergence of a new multipolar world order.

These changes in international order have not gone unnoticed in Europe. Indeed, widely shared uncertainty about the emerging global order and the relevance of Europe within it is driving concerted efforts to rebalance the EU's foreign policy away from the values-driven approach on which the EU's "distinctiveness as an international actor" is often said to be based (Youngs 2004, 415). Among policymakers and (some) publics, conceptions of EU normativity have become key aspects of the Union's mythology and of narratives of the EU's purpose in the world (Manners 2010). Within EU foreign policy circles, the idea of a values-based

foreign policy has traditionally been associated with the concept of ‘normative power Europe’ (NPE) and similar variants of this concept—civilian, ethical, liberal, and otherwise (e.g. Aggestam 2008; Duchêne 1973; Manners 2002; Rosamond 2014; Wagner 2017).

Yet efforts to endow the EU with more capabilities, a role in defence, and greater inter-operability have been stepped up markedly in recent years (e.g. Biscop 2018). Policymakers and scholars speak increasingly of European interests alongside values, and of the need for hard power to complement soft power, which together comprise the EU’s “turn to strategy” (Economides 2018, 34). The EU *Global Strategy* (EUGS), launched in June 2016, speaks of a “fragile world”, pointing to the need for “a more confident and responsible European Union” which is able to tackle these insecurities collectively (European Union 2016, 3-5). Indeed, the emphasis on a hard, capabilities-centred approach has also led to the jettisoning of a number of normative foreign policy goals (Nitoiu & Sus 2019), and while the EU’s approach will always remain ‘principle-driven’ to some extent, the Union is “actively redefining its goals in a more pragmatic, interests based manner” (Economides 2018, 29).

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Although it is not the only one,<sup>1</sup> multipolarity is a key driver of these trends. Aspects of the emerging, more diffuse multipolar order loom large in discussions on the change of focus in foreign and security policy. EU-Russia cybersecurity clashes, for instance, are said to have “pushed the EU from a normative power Europe discourse ... one step closer towards a discourse of a normal great power characterized by antagonism and confrontation” (Wagnsson & Hellmann 2018, 1170). The upheaval in Ukraine and the rapid souring of the Arab Spring, meanwhile, are held to have “tempered the EU’s normative self-confidence considerably” (Mälksoo 2016, 381). When it comes to democracy and human rights promotion, the failure of previous initiatives in the face of external push-back has led to greater emphasis on a case-by-case approach which is slowly “eroding its [the EU’s] identity as a normative power” (Juncos 2017, 2).

The EUGS, meanwhile, speaks of a “more unstable and more insecure” international environment in which “soft power will not be enough”, necessitating a greater emphasis on European interests and resilience (European Union 2016, 7, 10, 19). The EU’s justifications for a more realist, interests-driven foreign and security policy thus stem from changes associated with the emergence of a more diffuse international order, including increasing Russian assertiveness, fears regarding a ‘post-liberal’ world order, the risk of regional

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<sup>1</sup> There are also relevant internal drivers, since the EU regards foreign and security policy reform as a means of showing that the integration project still has life after Brexit (Sus & Martill 2019).

competition, perceived American disinterest in Europe, and the rise of complex crisis situations involving multiple major powers—such as the Syrian civil war.

Claims of a changing world order have had an important impact on the EU's approach to foreign and security policy, focussing more on strength and less on values. This calls for careful consideration of how the Union's core values are implicated by the shift to a more multipolar order. This requires, in turn, consideration of the dynamics of multipolar systems and the nature of the EU's values-based foreign policy. Our central claim in this paper is that insufficient attention has been afforded to both of these tasks, with a number of corresponding problems for our understanding of how the EU can (and should) deal with the onset of a more plural international order.

This is the case, we argue, in two respects: first, dominant perceptions of multipolarity in the EU overstate the extent to which multipolar instability is a foregone conclusion, ignoring in the process a number of important countervailing tendencies and mitigating factors which make the question of multipolar (in)stability much more contingent. In so doing, space for EU values to make a difference is effectively closed down, leading analysts down a more pessimistic route which places greater emphasis on hard power and military capabilities.

Second, prevailing views of the EU's normative approach to foreign policy focus overly on the fate of its substantive (liberal) commitments under multipolarity, at the expense of sustained discussion on the role which the Union's societal values—including multilateralism, pluralism, and diplomacy—can provide. Since substantive values will be subject to far greater challenge than societal values—for which demand will increase—this preoccupation serves to distract from a key linkage between EU values and the conditions necessary for working towards a stable multipolarity. The next two sections discuss both of these claims in more detail.

## Multipolarity: The view from Europe

The statements of European scholars and policymakers betray a sceptical view of multipolarity. Howorth (2010, 458) noted in 2010, for instance, that the “key metric against which to think about the challenges now facing the EU, will be that of an emerging *multi-polar* system which threatens to be anything but stable”.

Schinas (2012, 273) has argued that the “certainties of post-Second World War society, centred on a relatively stable monetary order and a well-established system of international relations, power politics and trade will no longer be in place to provide a comfort zone for Europe”. Smith (2013, 670) has spoken of the “complexity

and diversity of the challenge posed by the rising powers in a turbulent global arena”, suggesting that “we are now in a much less hospitable environment for the EU”.

Blagden (2015, 350) has claimed that the return of multipolarity is “likely to affect the European strategic context ... with implications for European states’ grand strategic choices” since “power shifts tend to produce tension, competition and an elevated risk of conflict”. Howorth and Menon (2015, 14) have claimed that “Europeans live in a world that is changing rapidly ... where the European neighbourhood is becoming ever more unstable, and where the threat of armed conflict looms large in many regions”. And Cox (2017, 9) suggests that “the world is likely to become more, rather than less, difficult for Europe as it moves forward into the 21st century”, while Falkner (2017, 389) has argued that “the outlook for Europe’s external relations has never looked so uncertain in the post-cold war era”.

The danger with which multipolarity is associated by many in Europe goes a long way towards explaining the recent interest in rethinking the balance of priorities between hard-power capabilities and values in the Union’s foreign and security policy. But there are good reasons to push back against this tendency to equate multipolarity with instability. For one thing, it is not so evident that Europe—and the EEC/EU—fared any better during alternative configurations of power, squeezed as it was “between the superpowers” during the cold war (De Porte 1978), and unable to convince its American partners of the virtues of multilateralism and non-intervention in the post-cold war era (Cox 2005). Given Europe’s demonstrated inability to translate its considerable resources into significant influence under such conditions, one might reasonably ask whether more diffuse configurations of power might afford greater possibility.

Another reason is the extent to which unit-level factors have influenced dominant views of the properties of systems in which power is more diffuse. The activities of Russia and China loom large in discussions of multipolarity, and arguably nudge views on the matter in a more pessimistic direction. But while unit-level factors do feed into system-level dynamics, they should not be conflated, since systemic properties also come to influence state behaviour (Singer 1961; Waltz 1979). Moreover, while the transition between international orders is often a dangerous time (Gilpin 1981), longer-term logics may differ markedly from this initial period.

A third and final reason is the absence of explicit theorising in the existing debate compared with earlier—predominantly American—efforts to address this question. Scholarship on the place of Europe in the emerging international order has said relatively little about the nature of multipolar systems or the contending dynamics pushing towards stability or instability. Without theorising these systemic dynamics, however, it is difficult to appraise what scope (if any) there is for the EU and its values in the emerging order.

Insofar as key aspects of the emergence of a more multipolar world lie behind these changes in EU discourse and foreign policy goals, a closer examination of multipolar dynamics and the relation between polarity and stability, is a necessary starting point. Multipolarity refers to a configuration in which power is divided relatively equally between more than two major actors, as distinct from configurations where power is concentrated in a single major actor ('unipolarity') or distributed relatively evenly across two powers ('bipolarity'). Multipolarity assumes that a small number of actors (the 'poles') have disproportionate power relative to other actors in the system, but it does not make any assumptions about the geographic distribution or ideological propensity of these actors. It also assumes that the actors are interacting with each other on a relatively frequent basis (Wohlforth et al. 2007, 160).

Two inherent attributes of multipolarity, which have animated much of the discussion over the unique properties of this configuration, are, on the one hand, the introduction of a greater plurality of interests and viewpoints, and, on the other hand, an increase in the degrees of freedom and the interaction capacity of the system (at least among the major powers) (e.g. Tocci 2018, 3). Beyond these inherent features, however, care must be taken in ascribing inherent properties of multipolar systems, since many of these remain open questions. This is especially the case when it comes to the crucial question of the stability of multipolar systems, on which there has been a sustained debate over the decades.

Debate on multipolar stability has a long lineage in the study of international affairs.<sup>2</sup> Much early scholarship on multipolarity took place against the backdrop of the cold war, as scholars weighed up the various factors associated with multipolar stability and instability, in the process specifying countless mechanisms—some more plausible than others—linking polarity with stability (e.g. Deutsch & Singer 1964; Gaddis 1986; Haas 1970; Kaplan 1957; Rosecrance 1966; Waltz 1964). Scholars presented as many mechanisms for multipolar stability as against it, and—inspired by behaviouralism—undertook a number of empirical tests (e.g. Haas 1970; Rosecrance 1966) which together proved somewhat inconclusive, and certainly did not settle the issue.

The emergence of the American 'unipolar moment' after 1989 (Krauthammer 1991) occasioned a further wave of theorising, this time focussing on the stability of unipolarity and the likelihood—and desirability—of a more multipolar world emerging, touching again on aspects of the multipolar stability debate (Kegley & Raymond 1992, 582; Kupchan 1998, 42; Layne 1993; Mearsheimer 1990; Waltz 2000; Wohlforth 1999). While some scholars viewed unipolarity as the most stable set of arrangements (e.g. Wohlforth 1999), others regarded the rise of a more multipolar world as not only inevitable, but also not as dangerous as many had predicted (e.g. Kupchan 1998).

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<sup>2</sup> Following Deutsch and Singer (1964, 390) we define stability as "the probability that the system retains all of its essential characteristics; that no single nation becomes dominant; that most of its members continue to survive; and that large-scale war does not occur".

As America's relative power has continued to decline in the decades following the end of the cold war, and as new regions and powers have begun to rise, a further wave of literature on the properties of more multipolar systems has emerged, characterised by a preoccupation with questions of interdependence and resulting in an abundance of new terms—including apolarity, non-polarity, inter-polarity—to better describe contemporary conditions (Etzioni 2013; Ferguson 2004; Grevi 2009; Haass 2008; Layne 2018; Tocci & Alcaro 2014).<sup>3</sup> Here again, the jury remains out on the question of stability, with some analysts highly pessimistic (e.g. Ferguson 2004) and others somewhat more optimistic about the prospects of a stable multipolarity (e.g. Grevi 2009).

Repeated investigations into the stability of multipolar orders show a complex picture characterised by tendencies towards both stability and instability. Indeed, several challenges to the notion of multipolar instability may be identified in the literature: first, scholars have identified a number of countervailing mechanisms which link multipolarity with increasing stability. Second, a number of works note factors which

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can mitigate the extent of multipolar instability (while not necessarily removing it entirely). Third, comparisons with other configurations of power suggest a host of reasons why unipolar and bipolar systems can tend towards instability under certain conditions. While these are all different *kinds* of explanation, for all intents and purposes they point in the same direction in that they highlight factors which contribute to making the link between polarity and stability more complex and more contingent.

In brief, the literature suggests that multipolarity is not inherently unstable, and the intrinsic attributes of multipolarity—complexity, pluralism, greater degrees of freedom—are insufficient by themselves to result in instability. There is not space here to summarise all of the mechanisms and attributes linking distinct configurations of polarity to either stability or instability as they appear in the vast literatures alluded to above. Rather, we discuss here five key areas of contingency associated with multipolarity in which outcomes may arguably tend towards either stability or instability. Specifically, these concern: (1) the strength of multilateral institutions; (2) the mapping between powers and regions; (3) the presence of accommodative values; (4) the effectiveness of balancing mechanisms; and (5) the resilience of diplomatic communication.

We deal first with the destabilising attributes of these five areas of contingency.

First, multipolarity, it is said, complicates global governance (Smith 2013, 661-662) and exacerbates the risk of collective-action failure, since “while emerging powers will increasingly contest Western hegemony, they will not want—nor be able—to replace it” (Laiidi 2014, 350).

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<sup>3</sup> Since the dynamics of such systems are fundamentally multipolar and coincide with key characteristics of multipolarity, we do not engage in the labelling debate here, and we continue to use the term multipolarity throughout the paper.

Second, multipolarity is said to be leading to inter-regional competition as rising powers vie with existing hegemonies for global prestige, as well as contributing to competition within regions as powers fight over local influence (Rosecrance 1966, 318; Schweller & Pu 2011).

Third, multipolarity, insofar as it results in the coexistence of incompatible identities and worldviews, is also held to create conditions for a ‘clash of civilizations’ between competing ideologies as well as the dangers of incompatible hegemonic identities (Coker 2019; Gilpin 1981).

Fourth, the balance of power logics prevalent under multipolarity are thought to promote instability, since balancing under such conditions is a more complex and less predictable game (Waltz 1993, 73), and since changes of allegiance can rapidly alter the balance between existing coalitions (Rosecrance 1966, 315).

Fifth, and finally, the rise of alternative power centres risks, according to some, “a major politicization or securitization of new areas of international life” as existing diplomatic avenues for conflict resolution fall by the wayside (Smith 2013, 656).

At the same time, scholars have also highlighted a number of respects in which multipolar systems may tend towards greater stability.

First, multipolarity is said to increase demand for multilateral solutions (Haass 2008, 45). On market logics alone, it has been claimed that, “as the number of possible exchanges increases, so does the probability that the ‘invisible hand’ of pluralistic interests will be effective” (Deutsch & Singer 1964, 394).

Second, conflict within and between regions is held to be diminished by the rise of benign regional hegemonies which “check the power of individual states, establish mechanisms for collective decision-making and initiative, and promote the spread of region-wide interests and identities” (Kupchan 1998, 48).

Third, a number of scholars speak of a multipolar order built on mutual respect, pluralism, and the acknowledgement of diverse viewpoints which will, as a result, not be marked by conflict but rather by coexistence (Tocci 2018, 4; Smith 2013).

Fourth, balancing is viewed by a number of scholars as a potentially positive mechanism, since under certain conditions it can allow interests “to aggregate to socially optimal outcomes” and also preclude both hegemony and damaging unilateral actions (Boucoyannis 2007, 704).

Fifth, it has been suggested that the continuity of diplomatic communication “embodying key processes such as deliberation, representation, communication and negotiation” would allow for a more stable multipolar order in which disputes between actors are handled without resorting to force (Smith 2013, 656).

What is clear from this discussion is that the consequences of multipolarity are not preordained, but rather need to be carefully examined, both in terms of how the change in polarity interacts with other factors, and what the precise mechanisms purportedly leading to (in)stability are. As these examples show, whether multipolarity will be stable or not depends on a number of key factors, including the strength of multilateralism, the mapping between regions and powers, the ability for values and identities to coexist, the fluidity of balancing mechanisms, and the extent of diplomatic communication.

## European values and societal norms

What role can EU values play in contributing to the emergence of a stable multipolar order? While the Union is making efforts to rebalance its foreign and security policy away from a values-based approach—citing concerns about a more plural, more uncertain, and less ‘Western’ order—the jury is still out on the exact shape that this new order will take. It is therefore pertinent to understand how relevant EU values will be in a multipolar order, and to what extent the EU should indeed prioritise its hard-power capabilities moving forward. In this section we examine the EU’s values-based foreign policy identity, focussing on two kinds of values, substantive and societal, arguing that the latter in particular will remain highly relevant in a multipolar world.

At the core of the EU’s values-based foreign policy is the Union’s commitment to substantive—many would argue liberal—values which form the basis of the EU’s own ‘foundational myth’ and which the EU seeks to externalise through its foreign policy instruments. These include the EU’s commitment to democracy, good governance, human rights, the rule of law, and open markets. These values comprise a major part of the EU’s ‘normative power’, on which there is a considerable literature (Rosamond 2014, 133; Whitman 2011).

For Duchêne (1973, 20), for instance, the EU’s core values are its “inner characteristics” such as “equality, justice and tolerance”, while for Manners (2002, 241) the EU is defined by “a commitment to placing universal norms and principles at the centre of its relations with its Member States and the world”, to the extent that it is “normatively different to other polities with its commitment to individual rights and principles”. Wagner (2017, 1405) emphasises the EU’s support for human rights and the tools which safeguard them, including the promotion of a market economy and free trade. What makes these values

substantive is that they are based on a specification of internal orders and their legitimacy, which implies a (liberal) view of how societies or communities should be ordered (Hobson 2008).

What the emergence of a post-liberal world order—in which non-liberal powers have a more prominent position—means for the EU’s ability to promote its conception of the good life abroad is a topic of intense current debate. There are a number of readily identifiable threats to the EU’s ability to promote liberal values abroad. For one thing, conditionality becomes more difficult in a system in which competition offers countries other, potentially non-liberal partners to engage with (Alden & Barber 2018; Condon 2015). The institutional order, meanwhile, if it is to achieve sufficient buy-in to survive, will need to accommodate the demands of non-liberal powers (Biscop 2019, 2). Moreover, the lustre of liberalism outside the region is reduced somewhat by the rise of alternative ideologies and the loss of liberalism’s perceived status as the only legitimate and viable basis for organising society (Falkner 2017, 393). This is one reason why multipolarity is thought to necessitate a move away from values in EU foreign policymaking.

At the same time, the EU’s global identity is also a product of how it views *international* order. Often referred to under the broader heading of ‘multilateralism’, the EU’s distinct sub-set of societal values are concerned more with the fabric of international order and the meaning of good international citizenship than they are with promoting a distinctly liberal worldview. Core EU values of diplomacy, multilateralism, non-intervention, pluralism, flexibility, pacific-ism,<sup>4</sup> regionalism, reciprocity, and supranationalism, as well as the Union’s commitment to peace, fall within this second category. Whereas substantive norms imply a view of

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what the relation of the individual is to political life, societal values specify how actors in the international community relate to one another and enumerate principles to govern these relations.

Societal values feature prominently in the literature on normative power, too, although the distinction with substantive (liberal) norms is seldom explored in detail.<sup>5</sup> Duchêne, for instance, identified a “sense of common responsibility and structures of contractual politics” as a key task for the EEC (1973, 20). The first ‘core norm’ of the EU’s normative power, according to Manners (2002, 244-245), is “the centrality of peace”, and frequent mention is made of the Union’s efforts to institutionalise international order. Aggestam refers to the establishment of a rules-

<sup>4</sup> Ceadel (1987) uses the term to describe actors committed to outlawing war but not averse to the use of force under certain circumstances.

<sup>5</sup> This is unfortunate, since the two kinds of values are very different and frequently come into conflict with one another. See Brown (1992), Slater and Nardin (1986), and Caney (1997) for discussions on the topic.

governed international order as a key aspect of the EU's cosmopolitanism (2008, 7), while Wagner (2017) argues that the heterogeneous nature of the EU contributes to its laudable ability to engage with a plurality of diverse international actors.

The effect multipolarity has on these values is distinct from the effect it has on the fate of liberal values, for two important reasons. First, societal norms are not concerned with the fate of liberalism, and thus are not directly threatened by the rise of non-liberal powers. Second, the rise of global pluralism increases the need for societal values able to regulate international order, if not actually making their realisation any easier. The remainder of this section considers this relationship in more detail.

Although this aspect of the EU's international identity is sometimes described as 'post-Westphalian', it is also mirrored in key norms associated with the classical international society tradition. This tradition, most closely associated with the English School of International Relations (IR), has as the cornerstone of its approach the specification of those institutions, values, and practices which allow states in an anarchical realm to form lasting and orderly relations with one another (e.g. Bull 1977). Adherents of the English School argue that the present institutions of global order are merely the outward manifestation of "the deeper institutional practices that structure modern international society" (Reus-Smit 1997, 555).<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary constructivist scholars, too, have emphasised the importance of these basic *grundnorms* for international order, since these act as standards which order and constrain behaviour and define rights and obligations (Björkdahl 2002, 15; Finnemore 2000, 702). These 'fundamental institutions', including reciprocity, law, and multilateralism, refer to the shared assumptions upon which a collaborative international order may be based. We may also place such practices as diplomacy, sovereignty, and pluralism in this category. As with the previous discussion, it is important to note that these are not liberal values per se, since the dictates of interstate reciprocity, multilateralism, or other norms concerned with the rights and obligations of states, may at times conflict with liberal (individualist) conceptions of rights (e.g. Chandler 2003).

Irrespective of this tension, however, societal norms have a crucial role to play in maintaining a stable international order. This is especially true of a multipolar world in which norms allowing for peaceful coexistence will come at a premium given the difficulty of managing diverse interests and worldviews. One may argue that the stability of the emerging multipolar system will depend on the extent to which the thinking of at least some major states will rebalance towards societal norms and away from substantive norms—liberal or otherwise. This is because a stable multipolarity depends on the strengthening, or maintenance, of norms supporting coexistence between nations.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Buzan (1993).

Indeed, in each of the five possible scenarios for the emerging multipolar order discussed in the previous section, norms are a key contributor to greater stability: the strength of institutions depends on underlying commitments to multilateralism, the mapping between regions and powers depends on the strength of regionalism, the compatibility of norms and identities depends on the existence of pluralist norms, the effectiveness of balancing depends on a willingness to ally flexibly, and the resilience of communication depends on a commitment to diplomatic practices. This is not to say that interests are unimportant, but rather that underlying societal norms linked to the aim of coexistence are important contributors to stability. A stable multipolar order will depend as much on the strength of underlying norms as it will on the distribution of power or interests.

Strengthening societal norms is one way in which the EU can contribute to the emergence of a more stable multipolarity, not least given the Union's credibility as a staunch adherent of values conducive to international collaboration. Five of the EU's societal values, we argue, are of particular relevance in this regard: multilateralism, regionalism, pluralism, flexibility, and diplomacy. Each of these core values, we posit, can help contribute in its own way to bringing about a more stable multipolar order.

*Strengthening societal norms is one way in which the EU can contribute to the emergence of a more stable multipolarity.*

Multilateralism entails a commitment to the establishment and to the use of fair institutions that are able to regulate the conduct of states as well as the reciprocity needed to ensure these work well. Regionalism promotes clear divisions of responsibilities between regions and stability within regions, as well as contributing to the emergence of region-to-region modes of co-ordination. Pluralism contributes to the development of accommodative ethics that are tolerant of value differences, and precludes costly and potentially disruptive attempts to externalise individual values. Flexibility promotes efficient balancing within the system and helps to provide information by communicating intentions. Diplomacy reinforces channels for non-force-based communication and helps reduce the political salience of disagreements.

These norms—each of which are intimately linked to the EU's identity as an international actor—can therefore contribute to the emergence of a more stable multipolar order, so long, at least, as they are internalised by the major global players and shared within the system. Table One below illustrates how the EU, through its societal values, may help contribute to the emergence of a more stable multipolar order.

**Table One: Aspects of multipolar contingencies and related EU societal values.**

Aspects of Multipolar Contingency	Path of Instability	Path of Stability	Related EU Societal Value	EU Contribution to Multipolar Stability
Strength of institutions	Lack of basic ground rules  Collective action problems	Shared agreement on rules of the game  Major actors committed to institutional order	Multilateralism	Promoting fair and reasonable rules  Commitment to institutional order
Mapping between powers and regions	Regions coveted by multiple powers  Absence of region-to-region co-ordination	Benign spheres of influence  Region-to-region co-ordination	Regionalism	Maintaining regional aims and ambitions  Strengthening region-to-region communication
Presence of accommodative values	Competing hegemonies and universalisms  Efforts to externalise particular values	Ethics of change and coexistence  Respect for sovereignty and non-intervention	Pluralism	Acknowledging pluralism  Robust anti-interventionist stance
Effectiveness of balancing mechanisms	Ossification of the balance of power  Balancing by issue precluded	Flexible system of balancing  Balancing on issue-by-issue basis	Flexibility	Maintaining flexible allegiances  Compartmentalising elements of relationship
Resilience of diplomatic communication	Signalling through force and costly signals  Disagreements aired in public	Communication through diplomatic channels  Decreased politicisation of disagreements	Diplomacy	Commitment to diplomatic channels  Practicing quiet diplomacy

The need for such values to be practised by other actors, of course, raises the question of the EU's limitations as an international actor. The EU is not the only actor in the international system, nor is it the most powerful (by a long way). The EU, as a regional economic organisation, cannot act coherently aside from the wishes of its member states. Moreover, its actorness is subject to the severest limitations in the fields of security and defence, where the member states continue to call the shots and resist incursions into the "last bastion of national sovereignty" (Menon 2011, 93).

The Union can, however, draw on a number of resources in order to convince other actors to follow its lead. To begin with, the EU has considerable market power, and is adept at utilising the power of the internal market and the demand for its regulatory model to influence countries outside its immediate region (Damro 2012). Moreover, as NPE scholars remind us, the EU is influential in some instances because of the kind of actor it is, and the increased levels of trust EU values and perceived neutrality can inspire (Manners 2002). When it comes to military power, the EU is a lightweight and the continental defence burden for Europe falls principally on NATO. Yet, through the CSDP, the Union is able to project force abroad in a limited number of (low risk) circumstances, and recent projects auger for greater collaboration and communitisation in

security and defence (Biscop 2016; Sus 2017; Tocci 2017). More importantly, many EU member states are major security and defence players in their own right, and in this sense the Union may be said to possess considerable latent capabilities, which may (in future) be converted into a credible capacity to project force abroad (Biscop 2018, 173; Niemann & Bretherton 2013; Thomas 2012).

This is not to say that the national foreign policy of major EU member states, most notably France, is inherently aligned with the normative foreign policy of the EU. The EU's foreign policy approach is shaped and inspired by the member states, but it is not merely a sum of its parts. Rather, the EU has its own international role conception, structured around its identity as an international, multilateral, and co-operative organisation. In a time of increasing uncertainty, however, the EU can be expected to pay increasing attention to the capabilities residing in its member states, and the ways in which these can be operationalised to advance the EU's international position.

Discussion of the limitations on the EU's future influence brings us inevitably, also, to the question of Brexit. The impact of Britain's withdrawal on the Union's foreign and security policy is something we have discussed elsewhere (Martill & Sus 2018; Ten Brinke et al. 2018). Suffice it to say here that it is not clear what the precise consequences will be, although fears of an unravelling of the EU have thus far proven unfounded. On the EU side, Brexit has spurred on a pre-existing process of further consolidation in key areas of external action, including defence. While the UK is a major security and defence actor in Europe, both Britain and the EU have acknowledged the extent of their common interests and pledged to continue to co-operate closely.

## The European contribution to multipolar stability

The foregoing discussion has shown that the belief that multipolarity necessitates a move away from the Union's values-based foreign policy is based on highly specific portrayals of the dynamics of multipolar systems and the nature of the EU's core values. Existing accounts tend to downplay countervailing tendencies that mitigate the instability of multipolar systems and focus exclusively on the substantive (liberal) values which the EU wishes to promote, rather than those societal values with which its international identity is equally intertwined. In so doing, these works fail to give due consideration to some of the most useful ways in which the EU can contribute to the emerging international order; namely, through working to promote societal norms that can help create a more stable multipolarity. In this section we examine in greater detail the contribution which five core EU values—multilateralism, regionalism, pluralism, flexibility, and diplomacy—can make towards the emergence of a more stable multipolar order.

*Multilateralism:* Multilateralism is the “cornerstone of the EU’s vision of a functioning, peaceful international order” (Economides 2018, 30). The EU has a strong and well-established commitment to multilateralism, rooted in its rules-based legal order. Scholars speak of “a natural preference for the creation of rules and regimes, expressed through processes of continual negotiation” (Smith 2013, 659). It is committed to acting through international institutions and to pursuing multilateral collaboration with a broad range of partners (Manners 2010, 81). The EU has a clear and demonstrated preference for multilateral solutions in a host of pressing issue-areas, including over questions of intervention (Toje 2005), climate change (Oberthür 2016), trade policy (Smith 2013; European Union 2016, 41), and in dealing with threats to international security (Cronberg 2018).

Multilateralism can help contribute to a stable multipolarity, since orders which feature representative and functional institutions are more stable than those in which the institutional order is either absent or has broken down (Smith 2013, 663). This is because institutions promote deliberation, regularise the stakes in transactions, and introduce veto points at which dangerous choices can be rejected (Axelrod & Keohane 1985). There are two ways in which EU multilateralism can help shape the emerging global order. The first is by setting standards and examples around which the expectations of other actors can cohere, acting as a useful starting point for those setting the new ‘rules of the game’. This phenomenon can already be observed in existing regional organisations, including MERCOSUR and ASEAN, where the EU has served as a model for structured co-operation.

The second is by assuming a leading role in modernising the current, Western-centred system towards “a new multilateral order” which is “more inclusive, flexible and resilient than the international liberal order of the past” (Tocci 2018). As Haass argues: “To succeed ... [multilateralism] must be recast to include actors other than the great powers ... Multilateralism may have to be less formal and less comprehensive” (Haass 2008, 55). With its support for a fairer allocation of costs and benefits, the EU can act as a credible ambassador of a new, more inclusive type of multilateralism. Indeed, the EUGS proposes ways to reform existing multilateral institutions, such as the UN and International Financial Institutions, acknowledging that “resisting change risks triggering the erosion of such institutions and the emergence of alternative groupings to the detriment of all EU Member States” (European Union 2016).

*Regionalism:* Regionalism, implying support for the institutionalisation of individual regions and the promotion of region-to-region co-operation, is a core EU value, rooted in the organisation’s own multi-level composition and its desire to export this model elsewhere. By promoting a clear division of responsibilities between regions and powers, as well as collaboration on an inter-regional basis, regionalism can contribute to a more stable international order. The EU has a comparative advantage when it comes to championing regionalism, not least because the organisation represents the most concerted efforts to institutionalise

international politics at the regional level. In addition, the EU also explicitly champions regionalism as both a key component of its identity and as one basis of its external relations. Inter-regionalism as a foreign policy doctrine is deeply rooted in the European Commission and has been growing in strength in recent decades (Söderbaum & Van Langenhove 2005, 250).

There are two aspects to this commitment. The first is its emphasis on contributing to the stabilisation of its own near abroad and its general reluctance to take on extensive commitments outside the neighbourhood. When it does go out of this area, moreover, it does so on the basis of engagement with regional partners and collaboration with other stakeholders, for example through strategic partnerships and missions with international partners such as the UN and NATO. The second is its promotion of regionalisation globally and its support for region-to-region communication. The EU supports parallel efforts to consolidate and institutionalise regional politics the world over, the aim of which is to boost stability at the regional level. It further promotes region-to-region co-operation and inter-regionalism on the international stage as the most appropriate basis through which global co-operation should take place.

Both of these commitments can help contribute to a more stable multipolarity, since this order will be more stable where there exists a clear division of labour (and responsibility) between individual powers and specific regions (Kupchan 1998), and where co-ordination is organised on a region-to-region basis (Söderbaum & Van Langenhove 2005). Where the mapping between powers and regions is clear and undisputed, countries are more aware of whose responsibility it is to engage with conflicts in a given region, and whose responsibility it is not, thereby removing a key source of instability. “Because even global wars start at the regional level”, notes Kupchan (1998, 42), “securing peace within regions is an essential first step toward securing peace globally”.

*Pluralism:* Pluralism is another value that has deep roots in the EU. The origins of European pluralism are multifaceted, and include the EU’s own experience in managing diversity as a multi-layered and complex political organisation (e.g. Marks et al. 1996; Nicolaidis 2018, 219) as well as the strength of communitarian political traditions in Europe (Martill 2019). Pluralist ethics contribute to the stability of a multipolar system by promoting acceptance of change, a belief in coexistence, and respect for sovereignty and non-intervention: a stable multipolar order requires that competition between the diverse worldviews, ideologies, and identities that comprise the system is kept at a minimum.

Multipolar orders are often characterised by mutually incompatible hegemonic identities and universalistic values, leading to competition and instability, or by accommodative ethics and mutually compatible identities, which permit coexistence and augur for greater stability. Key to ensuring stability among conditions of global pluralism is the development of an ethics of accommodation centred on the recognition of legitimate

diversity and disagreement (e.g. Rawls 2005). A multipolar order built on a shared commitment to coexistence and value-pluralism will be far more stable than one based on mutually incompatible notions of the good life.

The Union's willingness to acknowledge alternative viewpoints precludes it from experiencing an existential crisis each and every time alternative worldviews are ascendant. Instead, the EU insists that "the practical meaning of such principles [as transparency and accountability] will be fleshed out case-by-case", allowing for engagement despite differences, such as has occurred recently with Turkey vis-à-vis the migrant crisis, or with China regarding digital and trading opportunities (European Union 2016). And although the EU has been active in promoting human rights and democracy abroad, its opposition to coercive military intervention is hard-wired into the EU's self-identity and constitutes an important part of its commitment to a rules-based international order. This improves the EU's credibility vis-à-vis new actors, who might be suspicious of any attempt to universalise values in a multipolar world.

*A multipolar order built on a shared commitment to coexistence and value-pluralism will be far more stable than one based on mutually incompatible notions of the good life.*

*Flexibility:* The EU has a reputation for flexibility in its foreign relations, with regard both to its willingness to pursue meaningful collaboration with multiple global partners, as well as separating out the different strands of its relations. The EU has a demonstrated capacity not only to actively seek engagement with global partners, including China, but to do so over repeated American concerns. There are a number of explanations for European flexibility, including popular 'imagined geographies' of Europe as a mid-point between East and West, traditions of realism in European foreign policy that have prioritised alliance versatility, the EU's own diverse composition which allows for greater tolerance vis-à-vis external difference, and the EU's pursuit of a negotiated international order (Smith 2013).

This flexibility is key to facilitating efficient balancing and placing multipolarity on the track of greater stability. A multipolar order in which efficient balancing takes place between the major actors will be more stable than an order in which balancing is prevented from occurring. This means that the environment must be sufficiently flexible to allow actors to change allegiances, since otherwise the balance of power will become ossified into a potentially dangerous two-bloc configuration. Biscop has warned, for instance, of the dangers of a scenario in which the US and the EU find themselves rigidly allied against Russia and China (2019, 3). The EU's propensity to forge diverse allegiances in any case enables it to assess opportunities for co-operation on a flexible, case-by-case basis, which prevents the ossification of the system, one example being the use of strategic partnerships to develop a coherent vehicle for flexible co-operation with external partners (Ferreira-Pereira & Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira 2016; Blanco 2016).

Efficient balancing also requires the avoidance of contagion. The EU is more adept than others at compartmentalising aspects of its relations with partners. Compartmentalisation has an important role to play in keeping balancing efficient, and limiting the risk of individual balancing acts escalating into systemic conflicts. With regard to China, for instance, the EU is at pains to point out that there are collaborative and competitive elements of the relationship (European Union 2019), and it has taken a similar stance with Russia in handling the fallout from the Ukraine crisis. While some might regard this flexible stance as a sign of weakness, the ability to switch alliances and work with a wide range of actors confers important advantages in a diffuse world order.

*Diplomacy:* The EU's commitment to diplomacy is "a long established and multidimensional aspect of the European project" (Smith 2013, 655). Diplomacy provides actors with the ability to communicate decisions clearly and with sufficient time for disagreements to be resolved. The presence of strong diplomatic channels thus increases the opportunity for non-force-based communication and helps to reduce the political salience of disagreements. Diplomacy has served as a key tool for the EU to foster relationships with third states, and achieve internal consensus on wide-serving policy objectives. In contrast to the US 'sovereignist' approach—which presupposes the threat of force as a necessary prerequisite for diplomatic success—the EU's 'post-sovereign' or 'post-Westphalian' approach is based on a principled belief in the substitution of force for diplomacy (Smith 2013, 657).

Defined by former EU High Representative Catherine Ashton as the ability to "listen as well as talk" and to "work behind the scenes as well as in the glare of the spotlight" (Ashton 2009), the EU's 'quiet diplomacy' has enabled it to achieve important victories away from the immediate political limelight (e.g. Banim & Pejsova 2017). This is important, because the stability of multipolarity is contingent on the resilience of diplomatic practices. If actors fail to maintain diplomatic channels—if, for instance, they slide into isolationism, or allow themselves to be overly burdened by domestic distractions—then it is more likely that states will resort to force, or other dangerous styles such as brinkmanship and coercive bargaining (Rathbun 2014, 25; Van Evera 1984, 65).

Diplomatic communication helps also to forestall the possibility of dangerous misperceptions which can arise when the motivations of actors are unclear, and actions are subsequently perceived as more hostile than they actually are (e.g. Jervis 1976). Moreover, diplomatic practice helps to depoliticise disagreements, rendering them easier to solve. Where diplomatic norms are weak, actors lack the appropriate channels to address disagreements and avoid escalation. The EU's support for diplomatic channels and for the practice of 'quiet diplomacy' may, in this way, contribute both to the strengthening of diplomatic norms and to keeping the potentially dangerous politicisation of disputes to a minimum, subsequently contributing to multipolar stability.

## Conclusion

The EU has long been associated with a distinct, values-based approach to international affairs, such that the Union's identity is deeply intertwined with specific conceptions of normativity. Recent years, however, have witnessed a distinctive shift away from this normative focus towards a more realist view of EU foreign and security policy based on interests, capabilities, and actorness—among both scholars and policymakers. Given the significance of these moves, and the prominence of these discursive changes, this working paper set out to examine the relationship between multipolarity and EU values. We argued that existing understandings of multipolarity are prone to overstate the extent to which instability is predetermined and to ignore important countervailing tendencies that point towards greater stability.

Moreover, prevailing conceptions of the EU's values-based foreign policy apply far greater weight to the EU's substantive (liberal) values than they do to the Union's equally important preoccupation with societal norms, the latter of which have as their aim international coexistence and will be of increasing importance in a more plural global order. We argued, accordingly, that the dangers of multipolarity for the EU are not preordained, and that multipolarity is not necessarily unstable. Multipolar stability will depend on the presence of strong multilateral institutions, tight regional mapping, accommodative ethics, effective balancing, and active diplomatic channels. And many of the EU's deeply rooted values, including the emphasis placed by the Union on multilateralism, regionalism, pluralism, flexibility, and diplomacy, are precisely those values needed to guide the emerging order towards greater stability.

A number of implications follow from our discussion. The first is that discussion of the EU's role in the world would benefit from a more sustained, and critical, debate on multipolar dynamics than has been the case until now. The concept of multipolarity needs to be placed on a more neutral footing which acknowledges the tendencies towards stability and instability inherent in multipolar orders, and thus the challenges and opportunities that arise from this configuration of power. This is especially true in the field of European security studies, where views have tended towards the sceptical, and the dangers of multipolarity appear to come close to established fact.

The onset of multipolarity is viewed as a perilous development, one that Europeans are unable to affect, and which is likely set in stone. But as our discussion has attempted to show, the question of multipolar stability is more complex, and far less linear, than is often assumed to be the case. A number of factors impinge on the relationship between polarity and stability, making the question of the effects of multipolarity on Europe both an open and an interesting one. Careful examination of each of these facets of multipolarity is required in order to understand how the EU will fit into the emerging order. We are not the first to suggest that multipolarity may go one of two ways. But we are the first to offer a systematic discussion of which elements

of multipolarity are contingent, and which aspects of the EU's normative identity may contribute towards their strengthening.

A second implication is that the dichotomy between realist (power- and interest-based) and normative (values-based) foreign policy strategies (e.g. Zimmermann 2007; Smith 2011; Hyde-Price 2008) does not necessarily represent the most helpful distinction. Such a distinction does not capture the divergence between different kinds of values, nor the positive role which elements of normativity can play in coping with the onset of multipolarity. These societal norms are distinct from the substantive norms with which they are often listed, since they are concerned with the coexistence of a community of sovereign states rather than with the promotion of individual liberties per se. They are also associated with an international society tradition that is Westphalian in nature—in marked contrast to the view that Europe has transcended such an order—as well as with more progressive strands of political realism.

While it will become harder to promote substantive values under multipolarity, demand is likely to increase for societal values. Dealing with multipolarity requires not only attention to EU actorness and capabilities but also parallel efforts to promote and externalise those societal values which hold out the promise of contributing to a stable multipolar order and for which the EU is already a credible ambassador.

Multipolarity, then, does not occasion a rebalancing of values towards interests, so much as it results in the need to rebalance between different kinds of values associated with the EU's international identity; that is, away from substantive (liberal) values and towards societal values. This does not mean that the EU should give up on its laudable aim of promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance around the world, whenever possible. But it does mean it may need to be more cognisant of the trade-offs between different elements of its normative agenda.

A third and final implication concerns the place of EU values on the policy agenda. We have posited that the onset of multipolarity will bring a range of new challenges to the world, but will also provide an opportunity for the EU to make its mark in a new global order. The lesson for policymakers is to not throw the baby out with the bathwater as they seek to endow the Union with credible capabilities and risk jettisoning the values-based approach with which the EU has for decades been associated. We do not take aim at efforts to bolster the Union's security and defence capabilities, and nor are we critical of efforts to improve its actorness, since these will always remain necessary tasks in a Union of soon-to-be 27 member states where co-ordination is difficult and capability-development often sub-optimal. What is concerning is the move away from values occasioned by this discourse, and the concomitant risk that the EU's normative contribution to international order will fall by the wayside as a result.

Our argument is not incompatible, by any means, with the EU's self-declared endorsement of 'principled pragmatism'. Rather, we hope to have highlighted the extent to which the trade-offs involved are as much

between different kinds of values which the EU holds dear, as they are between its values and its interests. To this extent, continued discussion on the nature of EU values and their priority is a must as the Union enters the multipolar era. Viewing responses to multipolarity in terms of capabilities and interests not only misses one crucial area—societal values—where the EU has much to offer, but also places undue emphasis on precisely those areas where the Union is weakest; namely, its hard power resources. Ultimately, the EU's opportunity to influence the course of world politics lies in its ideas, rather than its capacity for coercive action.

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