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Introduction. Transatlantic Relations in times of Uncertainty: Crises and EU-US Relations.

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Abstract:
Ties between the US and the EU rival those between any other pair of international actors. This Special Issue makes conceptual progress and empirical contributions in accounting for if and how EU-US relations have been impacted by a context of multiple crises and a parallel change in US policies. All the articles find strong evidence to suggest that EU-US relations are weakening. This is partly a consequence of the EU's own, internal policies, as it becomes more unified and autonomous of the US in some areas, while fragmenting in others. Most importantly, it is a consequence of the two actors' increasingly diverging perspectives and positions on international issues, institutions, norms and indeed the value of the transatlantic relationship as such. Although the long-term effects remain to be seen, it is likely that the cracks in the foundation of transatlantic relations will continue into the present and foreseeable future.

Introduction.

Ties between the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) rival those between any other pair of international actors. After all, no other regions of the world are as closely connected in economics, security and politics as Europe and the US (Oliver 2016: 2, see also Alcaro, Greco and Peterson 2016; Frölich 2012; Hill, Smith and Vanhoonacker 2017; Ilgen 2016; Peterson and Pollack 2003; Sola and Smith 2009). As the EU confronts and seeks to deal with multiple crises, this special issue asks how, if in any way, this context of crises affect the US-EU relationship? Are EU-US relations imperiled following the EU's responses, or lack thereof? Or does the context of multiple crises offer opportunities to strengthen the transatlantic partnership? The question of US-EU relations has become all the more pressing since the 2016 election of U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump has already challenged some of the core principles underlying transatlantic relations since the Second World War, including the US defense guarantee, open trade relations and the support for multilateral institutions and agreements such as the Paris accord on climate change and the Iran nuclear accord. Some commentators even question whether Trump's actions are undermining the entire 'liberal international order', suggesting that the transatlantic relationship in itself is in a state of crisis (Ikenberry 2018. See also Rose 2018). According to

Fareed Zakaria, for example, "Trump appears to be walking away from the idea of America at the center of an open, rule-based international order. This would be a reversal of more than 70 years of U.S. foreign policy" (Zakaria 2017).

Against this background, the objective of this special issue is to make both conceptual progress and empirical contributions in accounting for *if and how EU-US relations have been impacted by the context of multiple crises which have beset the EU in recent years and the parallel change in US policies*. To help tease this out, the eight articles address one or both of the following questions: 1) Is the EU unified vis-a-vis the US in its dealing with crises, or are the EU member states becoming more fragmented in their response? 2) To what extent are US and EU relations strengthening or weakening in different fields? By offering an answer, we address several gaps in the literature. Not surprisingly, much has been written about transatlantic relations (examples include Anderson et al. 2008; Frölich 2012; Ikenberry 2018; Ilgen 2016; Peterson and Pollack 2003; McGuire and Smith 2008; Rose 2018; Peterson 2018; Sola and Smith 2009; Smith 2011). After all, 'the transatlantic relationship has been one of the central features of international relations since the end of the World War II' (Hanhimäki et al 2012: 1). Much has also been written about the impact of different crises on EU policies and institutions (examples include special issues by; Cross and Karolewski 2017, Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter 2016; Falkner 2016; Graziano and Halpern 2016; Hooghe, Laffan and Marks 2018; Niemann and Zaun 2018). Surprisingly little has however been written about *how, if in any way, this context of crises relate to and impact EU-US relations.* There are some articles exploring individual cases, including on EU-NATO relations and on Brexit and transatlantic relations (Bulmer and Quaglia 2018; Oliver and Williams 2016; Smith and Gebhard). However, there are no systematic studies across cases focusing on the context of EU crises and transatlantic relations. In a globalized world and in light of the historically close economic, political and security-related relations between the US and the EU, this gap in the literature is puzzling and is what this special issue attempts to address. Acknowledging that more long-term effects remain to be seen, this special issue thus seeks to produce more generalizable findings about contemporary EU-US relations and the status and characteristics of the transatlantic relationship than what has so far been provided in the existing literature. In so doing we also contribute to a better understanding of the factors that inform EU policies and responses to crises. The remainder of this introduction is organized as follows. We first set out the empirical background for the special issue, briefly discussing the context of crises and how we think of this

as an impetus to a likely change in the EU-US relationship. Thereafter follows a discussion of the analytical framework we apply in order to say something more general about contemporary EU-US relations, setting out four types of possible relationships. We then move to our findings. In presenting the findings, we organize the articles in three thematic areas that not only go to the core of the transatlantic relationship but that also allow us to systematically tease out more generalizable findings about if and how EU-US relations are changing in the face of crises and a changing US policy-orientation: (1) 'Foreign, Security and Defence Policy', (2) 'Multilateral Governance' and what we, building on Peterson (2018, this issue), call 'Structure and agency: US leadership and the transatlantic partnership.' We end by briefly summing up our overall findings in relation to the special issue's main questions. Although with some variation across the articles, the terms EU-US relations and transatlantic relations are used interchangeably in this issue, in line with Smith's definition of transatlantic relations as 'the overall set of relations between the European Union and the United States, within the broader framework of the institutional and other connections maintained via NATO and other institutions' (Smith, 2018: x).

A Perfect Storm: The context of crises and the EU-US relationship

Hardly a day goes by without observers and scholars commenting on the different crises and challenges the EU has been facing in recent years. Despite electoral setbacks faced by populist parties in France and the Netherlands in 2016 and 2017, nationalist, euroskeptic parties made significant inroads in the 2017 Germany and Austrian elections as well as the 2017 and 2018 Czech elections and thus continue to pose a significant obstacle to European unity. With the June 2016 Brexit vote, one of the EU's biggest and most influential member states has decided to leave the Union, thus posing an existential challenge to the EU after almost sixty years of continuous integration (Schimmelfennig 2018). Externally, the EU has to contend with a much more aggressive Russia making territorial claims or interfering militarily in the EU's near abroad. As a result of conflicts in Syria and other developing world hotspots, the EU has also witnessed an explosion of refugees and immigrants coming to Europe in search for a better life – 1,3 million asylum applications in the EU in 2015, 1,2 million in 2016 and 705,000 in 2017 (EUROSTAT 2018). In addition to these more immediate crises, the EU must also confront a number of more long-term challenges, not least the global financial crisis; as well as climate change and the environmental challenges associated with global

warming (cf. Caporaso and Rhodes 2016; Cross and Karolewski 2017; Hume and Pawle 2015; MacFarlane and Menon 2014; Mearsheimer 2014; Pop 2015). Many of these challenges are facing the US as well. In the US, anti-establishment sentiments have also profoundly changed US politics, evident not least in Trump's election as US president in 2016. There is a growing fear of Islamic terrorism following attacks both in Europe and in the US, such as the one in Orlando in 2016 and in New York City in 2017. The US is directly involved in the conflicts from which many of the refugees coming to the EU are fleeing. Similar to the EU countries, the US is facing more assertive powers with a different perspective on international regulation and governance than the one traditionally held by the Western states – rising powers who also increasingly make territorial claims it cannot accept, not least Russia in Ukraine and the Arctic, and China in the South China Sea. Long-term challenges linked to financial instability and climate change are also concerns that the EU and the US share, although at the outset, it seems as though they have more divergent than convergent views on these issues.

The numerous crises and challenges confronting the EU combine to form the 'perfect storm' of conditions that make this particular historical moment in transatlantic affairs so crucial to understand. Building on Ikenberry's definition of crisis as 'an extraordinary moment when the existence and viability of the political order are called into question' (Anderson, Ikenberry and Risse 2008: 3; Cross and Ma 2015), we start from the assumption that it is the collective weight of the multiple (both internal and external) crises that potentially is challenging the EU's ability to hang together and that in turn may affect its relationship with its core strategic partner and indeed the cornerstone of the post war international system or 'Atlantic Order'. Our intention is thus not to assess each of these crises and challenges *per se* but rather to use the context of multiple crises and the parallel change in the US' foreign policy orientation as the backdrop to and intellectual imperative for our analyses, which seeks to make a new contribution to the field of scholarly and policy analytical commentaries on the EU in crisis and the EU-US relationship.[1] While some of the articles do engage explicitly with individual crises such as the article comparing the Syria and Kosovo refugee crises, other articles examine the domain of security and defence issues and interrogate multiple crises in order to investigate the changing nature of EU-US security relations, including EU-NATO relations and the evolution of the EU as a security actor in the post 9/11 era. As EU-US relations form the core of the liberal global order, a substantive secondary theme

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[1] We are grateful to one of our reviewers for this suggestion.

common to several of the articles is that of global governance in times of crises. These articles generally tackle the question of world order and the varying (and waning) commitment to multilateralism with concrete examples such as the Paris Climate Accord, Iran nuclear deal negotiations and the failed TTIP agreement. Lastly, two articles examine how US leadership has important ramifications for US-EU relations, again in the context of multiple, overlapping crises.

For methodological reasons and since we are interested in US-EU relations in the context of crises foremost from an EU perspective, in the case study articles, we explore cases that are mainly or partly organized intergovernmentally in the sense that the EU member states ultimately can choose to withdraw or agree to common policies. Only in this way can we systematically study the level of EU integration or fragmentation with the backdrop of crises (question 1) as well as the development of putative collective or individual ties between EU member states and the US (question 2). In this way, we also acknowledge that the EU`s ability to deal with crises in the end often comes down the political will of the individual member states to cooperate and form common policies. We however also wish to underscore that the variation flowing from the differences in cases heavily situated in intergovernmental areas (security) and supranational areas (trade) is precisely what provides greater analytical and empirical leverage in macroscopic type of study such as this.[2]

Framework: *Crises and EU-US relations*

Table 1. Crises and EU-US relations

EU-US relations	Weakened relations		Strengthened relations	
Level of EU cohesion	Unified EU	Fragmented EU	Unified EU	Fragmented EU
Type of transatlantic relations	***Emerging EU super power***	***Unravelling EU-US relations***.	***US Hegemony*** Resilient and strong EU in	***Differentiated relations***.

	EU internal cohesion, independently of the US. External competition with the US, or different policies conducted.	EU unable to agree internally. Fragmentation of member states' positions and policies vis a vis the US.	cooperation with US. EU internal adaption of US policies and preferences. External division of labour	Strong transatlantic ties between a core group of EU member states and the US

In seeking to tease out how, if in any way, the context of crises and challenges have affected EU-US relations, the articles in this collection relate to four analytically distinct but empirically overlapping types of possible EU-US relationships, in line with the two questions raised. At the outset, multiple contemporary crises might both *unify* and *fragment* EU member states vis a vis the US (Question 1) and they might both *weaken* and *strengthen* transatlantic relations and cooperation (Question 2). Combining these, we call the four types of relationships 1) An emerging EU super power, 2) Unravelling of transatlantic relations, 3) US Hegemony and 4) Differentiated relations (see Table 1).

On the one hand, we might be witnessing a *weakening of transatlantic relations*. Notwithstanding the deep economic, strategic, and values- based ties between the EU and the US, transatlantic relations are facing a number of severe challenges. Already under Obama, US foreign policy reshuffled priorities such that Asia moved to the top of the agenda (Binnendijk 2014), diverting attention and resources away from Europe. US administrations have for a long time criticized the low levels of spending by EU member nations on defense particularly regarding contributions to NATO of which only the UK, Poland, Greece and Estonia meet the 2% GDP minimum (Bremmer 2016). For US actors concerned with defense policy, the Ukraine crisis, recent terror attacks and the war in Syria support a view that the EU does not expend enough resources for security. Areas of economic cooperation also reveal contentious splits between transatlantic elites in favor of expanded free trade and ordinary voters expressing anti-globalization

sentiments in the EU and the US (see Peterson 2018 this volume). The 2016 US presidential election strongly sharpened these tensions. Arguments raised by President Donald Trump regarding transatlantic security cooperation, even questioning the US' willingness to protect European states in cases of military threats, have increased fear amongst European countries that the US might not be willing to honor its traditional commitments (Economist 2016; Walt 2017). Contrary to the EU's policies and in spite of strong coordinated European efforts in opposition, the US has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear accord, the Paris climate negotiations and the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) (Smith 2018, this issue).

A weakened transatlantic relationship could also go hand in hand with a more cohesive and stronger Union, if the member states unify in their responses to the crises they are facing, suggesting the emergence of what we call an *autonomous EU superpower*. Studies have for example suggested that crises can trigger more EU integration to address shared challenges, leading to new policies or more delegation of powers to EU institutions in a variety of different policy fields affected by crisis (Cross and Karolewski 2017; Mény 2014; Majone 2005; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014; Schmitter 1970). In fact, the EU has already responded to developments such as the Ukraine crisis by further strengthening EU foreign and security cooperation (Cross and Karolewski 2017; Howorth 2018 this issue; Riddervold 2018; M.E. Smith, this issue), by claiming to take the global lead in the fight against climate change (Cross this issue), by remaining committed to uphold the Iran Nuclear Accord, and it is strengthening its ties with China in support of the global, liberal economic order. Theoretically, the possibility that crises weaken transatlantic relations could for example be in line with a neo-realist 'soft balancing' hypothesis, suggesting that rather than accepting the status quo as the US' junior partner, the EU aims 'to increase both its autonomy from the United States and its ability to act on the international scene' (Howorth and Menon, 2009 p. 731; Posen 2006). That the EU is becoming more unified, stronger and more independent of the US in different fields would however also be in line with perspectives underlining the difference rather than the similarities between the US and the EU. In particular, due to its focus on multilateral norms and institutions, the EU is often described not only as a soft but also as a 'normative' or 'humanitarian' power (see for example Kreeutz 2015; Manners 2002; Riddervold 2011; Sjursen 2015).

It might however also be that the EU member states are not able to unify in response to crisis, but instead are becoming more *fragmented* in their responses to contemporary challenges. As is well documented, cooperation among EU member states within EU institutions can be a thorny undertaking. In light of all the crises that have beset the EU in recent years, realist observers have in particular pointed to the EU's inability to act and criticized its lack of appropriate joint policy-responses to contemporary challenges such as external migration or a changing international security landscape (see for example Macfarlane & Menon 2014; Mearsheimer, 2014; Posen, 2014; Walt 2014.). External actors might also serve to undermine EU unity, for example through attempts to 'divide and conquer', as we have seen on issues linked to access to natural resources (Russia) or in relation to trade (China; Riddervold and Rosen 2018, this issue). If not coordinated in the EU, special relationships between the US and some member states might also contribute to internal EU fragmentation (Smith 2018, this issue). A context of parallel crises may in other words also fragment the EU project and in combination with a weakening relationship hence lead to what we call *an unravelling of EU-US relations*.

On the other hand, despite dramatic headlines of unprecedented crisis in transatlantic relations and calls for a 'transatlantic divorce' (Walt 2017), crises could potentially also unite the US and the EU in common responses under continued US leadership and thus *strengthen EU-US relations* in important areas. We call this possibility *US Hegemony*, suggesting that the US continues to lead the transatlantic relationship, but with a stronger and more united Europe as its partner. Notwithstanding Donald Trump's shifting but mostly skeptical comments about the EU, many US leaders and politicians have expressed a strong preference for a unified Europe in the EU, able to speak with one voice, that can form a reliable junior-partner to the US both in Europe and globally (Anderson 2018 this volume). According to some studies, a division of labor between the US and the EU is moreover developing in dealing with international conflicts. While the US often responds militarily to crises, the EU is more of a 'soft power' (Cooper 2003; Nye 2004; Also see Howorth and Menon 2009). Theoretically, building on the neo-realist concept of bandwagoning, crises could lead to stronger transatlantic ties if the EU accepts the US' hegemony and joins forces with it as a junior partner, in response to particular structural challenges or as part of a geopolitical balancing game (Walt 1998; Waltz 2000). Following a liberal intergovernmentalist approach, one may also expect strengthened ties to form between the two owing to economic interdependencies and common interests in the face of financial challenges

(Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009). Other more constructivist and historical institutionalist perspectives would instead focus on factors such as the impact of existing institutions, long-term socialization and common values and norms of appropriate behavior when explaining why an EU-US partnership may prove to withstand shifting US administrations and even strengthen in the face of crises (Anderson et al. 2008; Elgström and Smith 2006; Sola and Smith 2009, Anderson 2018 this issue, Peterson 2018 this issue and Smith this issue). After all, according to Ikenberry, the strong US-led relationship between Europe and the US sometimes referred to as the Atlantic Political Order has rested not only on common strategic interests and threat perceptions, but equally importantly, on shared values and institutional platforms (Ikenberry 2008. Also see Anderson 2018 this issue).

Lastly, instead of a strengthening of EU-US relations taking place between a coherent EU on the one hand and a dominant US on the other, there is also the possibility that ties could strengthen between the US and a group of EU member states only, cooperating within the EU's institutional structure in response to particular challenges. Rather than uniting the EU in *cooperation* with the US, we may hence see both of these scenarios playing out, through what is often referred to as *differentiated integration* in the EU (Leuffen et al 2012). If, for example, a subset of EU member states decide to integrate further, overall or in certain policy fields, and also cooperate more closely with the US in these policy areas, we may witness what we call strengthened *differentiated transatlantic relations*.

Findings: A weakening EU-US relationship
Foreign, security and defence policy.

Foreign, security and defence policies have traditionally been at the core of transatlantic relations, and three of the articles in this special issue, by Jolyon Howorth, Michael E. Smith, and Marianne Riddervold and Guri Rosén, address this topic, exploring both EU unity and EU-US relations in the domain. Where is EU foreign and security policy going and what is its relationship to NATO and the US? In a changing and more uncertain world, following Brexit and the election of Trump, how autonomous is the EU really, and what do EU developments imply for the EU-US relationship in the security domain? In relation to the special issue's questions, overall, our foreign and security policy articles suggest that the crises context has resulted in a slow *weakening of traditional US-EU security relations*. The three articles also show that the *EU is becoming more unified and more*

independent of the US in its foreign and security policies. Clearly, most European states still rely on the US as their main security guarantee. Moreover, as these articles also underline, if facing a severe threat, the EU and the US will stand together, for example in relation to Russia or China. However, one should not underestimate EU developments in the foreign and security policy domain. We also find that this development is driven by a combination of factors, including an ability to band together in the face of common external threats and challenges, the EU over time learning from experience, and the gradual realization that the EU must take more responsibility for its own security. The EU and the US' increasingly diverging approaches to security and defence also further serve to fuel this development. Although perhaps not a superpower, the EU is without doubt more autonomous and indeed a stronger foreign and security player today than ever before, and it expresses a clear ambition of further strengthening its strategic autonomy. As highlighted by M.E Smith's article, this ambition will in itself probably influence the EU's ability to integrate even further in this domain. Well aware that one cannot predict the future, it is thus also reasonable to assume that the future organization of European security and defence somehow will involve the EU – either in cooperation with NATO, somehow integrated into the NATO structure, or in a more independent and stronger version of the EU's common security and defence policy.

In his paper on the future of European Security and Defence, ***Jolyon Howorth*** addresses this last point directly, asking how EU defence can move forward and resolve the tension between the EU's ambition of "strategic autonomy" laid out in the 2016 EU Global strategy on the one hand and the role of NATO and the US in European defence on the other. Much in line with the special issue introduction, Howorth lays out three options for the EU for common defence: If the EU is still too divided to integrate further in the area of defence, it could decide to rely totally on US. However, since European dependency on US military power is no longer an US policy option, this would result in a *fragmented Europe* and *weakened transatlantic relations*. The second option would be for the EU to spend more on military capability but not enough to protect itself from nuclear threats or exert any force in Asia. In this case the EU would be more *unified* but the transatlantic relationship might stay *weak*. The final scenario is one in which the EU spends enough to handle all security and military threats independently and implies that at minimum the EU is equal to NATO, a scenario that Howorth views would both *unify Europe* and *strengthen transatlantic relations under US Hegemony*. In favour of this third scenario, Howorth makes an argument for merging the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) into NATO and

slowly taking over the leadership away from the Americans. In contrast to Smith's paper on multilateralism (see below) which locates forces for weakened EU integration and weakened transatlantic relations in internal differentiation across policy areas, Howorth views one crisis in particular –Brexit—as impetus for closer *cooperation* among EU member states in common security and defense. With Brexit, the positions of the remaining large powers on the question of greater military capability—France and Germany—are much closer together than the stark divide that previously existed between the UK and France preceding the Brexit referendum. Howorth presents the European Defence Union or CSDP-redux as evidence that Brexit indeed has prepared the way for deeper integration in European security and defense.

Michael E. Smith approaches the question of US-EU security cooperation from a different angle than Howorth by tackling the question of why there is so much variation in US-EU security cooperation despite the fact that both partners face and recognize common threats posed by multiple crises such as the Euro crisis, terrorism and refugee and humanitarian crises. M.E. Smith finds that much of the variation we observe in transatlantic relations comes from the EU itself, as the EU's growing experience in international security affairs in response to crises and challenges affects the EU's thinking of its own international role. Although both the US and the EU are still committed to a strong partnership through NATO, the EU is increasingly learning to forge its own path in international security affairs instead of simply following the US' lead, hence suggesting a *weakened transatlantic relationship characterized by a stronger and more autonomous EU foreign and security policy*. In particular, the EU seems to have a different view on what constitutes appropriate foreign policy behaviour than the US, it has a wider set of policy tools, and its conflict intervention and involvement is often viewed as more acceptable by other states than those conducted by the US or NATO. Together with the EU's own ambitions and confidence in the foreign and security domain, as well as its increasing ability to back up its foreign policy aims with action, he concludes that it is increasingly likely that the EU will play a greater role in international political and security affairs in the coming years. In turn, this means that EU-US relations may be headed for more transatlantic conflict if the EU decides to further develop its own strategic autonomy, and if the two continue to disagree about the role of multilateral security cooperation as an alternative to unilateral policies often favored by the US.

Two areas where the EU indeed is developing a stronger and more independent role vis a vis the US are in relation to rising powers China and Russia. Does military intervention define the

scope of emerging superpower status? Or put another way, is conventional military capacity the minimum criteria for the EU to be said to emerge as a stronger and more autonomous voice in US-EU relations? For ***Marianne Riddervold and Guri Rosén***, the answer is no, and this is in part owing to the ability of the EU to sometimes recast problems the US interprets as solvable solely with the hammer of military intervention as problems of trade or diplomacy. Riddervold and Rosén conceptualize the rising powers of China and Russia as taking crisis proportions as the US and EU are forced to adapt to a multipolar world where previously the US was the unquestioned single global hegemon. In addressing the question of how the rising powers have impacted EU integration and US-EU relations, the authors find that EU-US relations have not been characterized by balancing in the neo-realist sense. Rather than the EU playing the expected junior partner role in tandem with the US as senior partner,they find evidence of the EU forging its own path in service of its ambition to be considered a global player in its own right, in line with Howorth and M.E. Smith's argument. The EU has not simply followed the US' lead or demands. Nor is there evidence of coordination between the EU and the US on the South China Sea. Riddervold and Rosén's main finding regarding the impact of the Ukraine crisis and the South China Sea dispute on transatlantic relations is that although the US and the EU cooperate broadly in security questions, the EU also shows clear signs of independence in approaching security concerns rather than following the US lead. To the extent that the EU continues to pursue its own path, US-EU relations can thus be said to be *weakening as the EU purses an emerging superpower status*.

Multilateral Governance

A second key pillar of the transatlantic relationship is the multilateral, international institutional and normative order, established after the Second World War by the US and evident in particular within the UN framework. Three of our articles discuss EU-US relations and issues of multilateral governance. The three papers share the conclusion that EU-US relations are weakening, but for different reasons, and with the level of EU coherence varying widely across the cases. While Mai'a Cross (2018) argues that the EU is emerging as a superpower in a weakening EU-US relationship in the international climate regime, Akasemi Newsome (2018) and Michael Smith (2018) find evidence not only of a weakening relationship between the EU and the US regarding their attachment to multilateralism and human rights, but also of a more fragmented EU.

Cross' article explores EU unity and EU-US relations in light of the climate crisis by addressing the question of how the US could take credit for the Paris Climate Accords in light of the extensive

US record of opposition to prior climate change negotiations. Cross answers this by considering the underexplored role of the EU in the success of Paris. She argues that not only has the EU been unrecognized for the strong negotiating position it developed to deliver the Paris Accords, but also that the EU arrived at its position of leverage in competition with the US to be the leading global actor in this specific area. Cross' paper thus provides evidence for a *unified emerging EU superpower and increasingly weakened transatlantic relations within multilateral climate negotiations.* In this view of the EU as an *emerging superpower,* able to extract and export its policy preferences in response to the climate crisis, Cross underscores the importance of the EU's Green Diplomacy Network as an epistemic community. EU diplomats took advantage of the time between accords, particularly in the years before Paris, to proactively approach and cooperate with developing countries to help them meet the targets to be set by the Paris Accords. Cross also notes that the narrative and discourse around climate action changed as a result of the EU's diplomatic labor, hence identifying the mechanisms behind the EU's success in establishing agreement. In dialogue with social constructivist work such as Cornish and Edwards 2001; Cross 2016; Elgström and Leonard 2006, Cross' argument for the EU as an *emerging superpower* in this domain highlights the features of the unique issue of climate change and specific possibilities for the EU to assert itself in a dominant way. Over several years, member states have readily pooled resources and expertise, supported legislation and set targets in response to the climate crisis via European institutions. Not only has climate policy been an area of deeper integration within the EU, the EU has been able to export a relatively *unified* vision of climate policy abroad. This is owing in no small part to the fact that the means of exporting the EU's preferences in climate policy play to its 'soft power' strengths in diplomacy and trade. When considering transatlantic relations in response to the climate crisis, the main role of the US has been as an opponent of joint, binding multilateral action. The climate change crisis is therefore clear in its impact on *weakening transatlantic relations* for the consistent way the US and the EU have staked opposite positions on the need for aggressive policy action as the necessary response to this crisis.

Also *Akasemi Newsome* (2018) finds that *transatlantic relations are weakening.* Since the Second World War and the establishment of the UN and the international human rights conventions, the joint commitment to human rights has been one of the shared normative underpinnings of the transatlantic relationship. On a declaratory level, we also find this commitment demonstrated in founding EU and US documents such as the U.S. Constitution and

Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of European Union and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Interested in the extent to which the EU and the US actually live up to these ideals in practice and what this tells us about developments in transatlantic relations, Newsome examines the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on transatlantic support for human rights and hence US-EU relations. To do this, Newsome explores the EU and the US' willingness and ability to live up to their human rights obligations vis a vis refugees in a comparison of the Kosovo and Syria crises. Newsome finds that *EU-US cooperation is weakening in relation to human rights*, and that the EU is struggling to come to a common position, hence risking *fragmentation of the EU* over a topic that has often been regarded even as part of the EU's external identity. In contrast to for example Smith, M.E. Smith, Cross and Riddervold and Rosén 's papers who argue that development *within* the EU also contribute to a weakening of the relationship, her main finding is that the most important determinant of the strength of transatlantic relations lies with the US' role as a leader. By comparing the two crisis, Newsome finds that transatlantic cooperation area has weakened owing to the withdrawal of US leadership. While the Kosovo refugee crisis led to increased transatlantic cooperation as the EU was pushed into greater cooperation under US leadership, in the Syrian refugee crisis, both the EU member states and the US have acted unilaterally and have not lived up to their human rights obligations. A big difference between the Kosovo conflict and the Syrian conflict has been that the US has been unwilling to provide leadership, both militarily and diplomatically. Absent US leadership, Newsome argues, the European countries have moreover remained divided both over how to deal with the crisis and over how to engage the US and contribute to resolving the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus, she concludes, vis-a-vis the refugee crisis we see a fragmented EU in a weakening relationship, suggesting an *unravelling of EU-US relations* in this domain.

Finally, **Michael Smith**'s article discusses the interconnectedness between changing transatlantic relations on the one hand and what he refers to as the contemporary crisis in multilateralism on the other. To explore the roles played by EU-US relations in the crisis of multilateralism, Smith addresses three questions: What the crisis of contemporary multilateralism implies; what roles the EU and the US have played in this crisis, and lastly, what current and future position the EU and the US, and hence the transatlantic relationship, have in the multilateral system. Substantiating the argument that there indeed is a crisis in contemporary multilateralism, Smith shows how transatlantic relations are both a reflection of this crisis as well as contributor to

it. Exploring the EU-US relationship along the three key organizing principles in the multilateral, global system – norms, institutions and negotiation – he makes the argument that there are significant disintegrating and fragmenting forces at play in US-EU relations, as an ongoing crisis in multilateralism fuels further crises in multilateral cooperation. According to Smith, this crisis in multilateralism stems largely from an increasing ambiguity about what the EU and US roles and positions on multilateralism amount to now that they both face internal and external challenges on a variety of fronts. In the EU, the rise of populism, Brexit, and a common impetus among member states to seek special relationships with the US in a more uncertain environment undermine the EU's ability to speak with one voice and continue its deeper integration project. Contrary to Cross, Howorth, M.E. Smith and Riddervold and Rosen, but similar to Newsome's findings, Smith's findings indicate that the *EU is becoming more fragmented* in its internal dealings with multiple internal and external crises and challenges. For the US, it is the prospect of rising powers and multi-polarity that brings the biggest element of uncertainty to US decision-making. The US faces internal challenges as well, owing to tensions between nationalist and somewhat more cosmopolitan orientations among political elites, high-lighted not least by the populist Trump movement (Also Peterson 2018, this issue). Illustrating his argument, TTIP failed because the crisis of multilateralism renders it unclear which EU will show up in transatlantic and other multilateral forums, and because member states sought special deals in parallel to a common EU position. Similar ambiguities are evident in the Iran nuclear deal. Thus, although the EU and the US are enmeshed in a veritable "forest of institutions dedicated to managing transactions and the inevitable disputes between the EU and the US" that forms a regime of "transatlantic governance" (Smith 2018; X), Smith argues that this has not been enough to keep transatlantic multilateralism going. Instead, the transatlantic relationship is 'uncertain, fluid and thus by implication unstable' (Smith 2018; X) and hence likely to continue to weaken, resulting in something in between the *differentiating and unravelling transatlantic relations*.

Structure and agency: US leadership and the transatlantic partnership
Our two final articles, by Jeffrey Anderson and John Peterson, address the potential impact of structural and agency-related factors on the transatlantic relationship, by empirically discussing the importance of who occupies the White House. While one article primarily confronts the Trump phenomenon, the other focuses mainly on the Obama presidency, comparing this to that of Trump.

In his paper, *Jeffrey Anderson* takes stock of the transatlantic relationship one decade after Anderson, Ikenberry and Risse in 'The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order' (2008) explored whether or not this relationship was in crisis owing to the Bush administration's policies and the Iraq war in particular. Arguing that the number of crises facing the EU and indeed the transatlantic relationship as such exceed anything we have seen since the second world war, Anderson applies Ikenberry's framework of what constitutes a crisis in the Atlantic Political Order to explore transatlantic relations under the Obama administration before turning to changes following the election of Donald Trump. Comparing the Obama years with Trump's recent actions, Anderson argues that although it is too early to draw long term conclusions, empirics suggest that *the transatlantic relationship is weakening.* Indeed, the transatlantic relationship also had to deal with crises and challenges in the Obama years such as the Snowden affair, as well as those under George W. Bush. However, the transatlantic relationship overcame these pressures. Under Obama, this was to a large degree owing to the reemergence of a common perceived threat from Russia following its annexation of Crimea. More importantly, however, Anderson argues, the relationship regained a stable footing because the main norms, institutions and sense of community underlying the Atlantic Political Order remained intact. Although the Americans and the Europeans disagreed over interests such as how to deal with terrorism, the US never questioned the importance of the relationship as such or the importance of common institutions and regimes such as NATO or EU-US relations. This is where the current situation differs from previous crises, as Trump questions the very commitment to and normative underpinning of this relationship. This is also why Anderson predicts that the transatlantic relationship itself might be in crisis this time and that it might take more to regain confidence than ever before. After all, even if much of Trump's actions remain rhetorical, if trust in the US' commitment to common institutions and the very transatlantic relationship withers, a transatlantic partnership gets all the more difficult to uphold over time.

Finally, *John Peterson*'s article considers the implications of the crises context and in particular the actions of Donald Trump on US-EU relations by contextualizing this question in terms of the agency of political actors and the structure of the international system. Peterson links the survival of the liberal international, institutional order, of which he views the transatlantic alliance as a core component, as especially significant for the future viability of US-EU relations. In particular, he is interested in whether or not the Trump administration's agency will lead to changes that threaten the transatlantic alliance and indeed the liberal international order, or if there is evidence to suggest

that the structure of the international system and the transatlantic relationship is strong enough to constrain the impact of Trump as a change agent. Adding to this, Peterson also explores the impact of domestic politics on the transatlantic relationship. Peterson considers the empirical cases of crisis such as the rise of Trump and Brexit in order to argue that because liberal internationalism no longer has domestic political support, the liberal order, US-EU relations and democratic stability in the US and EU are bound together and potentially endangered. In Peterson's discussion of Donald Trump's presidency as a crisis for US-EU relations, he portrays a US administration taking the lead in shredding transatlantic relations by casting doubt on the validity of Article 5 of NATO, demanding billions from European allies for security guarantees, attacking free trade and expressing affinity with authoritarian leaders. Thus, echoing other conclusions in this issue, US (dis)engagement is playing an important role in *the weakening of transatlantic relations*. Peterson then turns to the question of whether Europe can rise to fill the power vacuum. While he is reluctant to label the EU *an emerging superpower,* Peterson does show evidence that the EU has taken important steps to integrate further in foreign and security policy, in line with Howorth, M.E. Smith and Riddervold and Rosén's findings discussed above. The increased cooperation he observed in NATO and under Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) where 25 of 27 member states have committed to increased military partnerships was fueled in large part by Brexit, not only the change in the US presidency. In the conclusion, Peterson returns to the link he has made between internal democratic politics in both the US and the EU on the one hand, and the future of the liberal order and the transatlantic alliance on the other hand. In his view, what prevents the EU from attaining superpower status as well as a strengthened transatlantic alliance is that citizens in the North Atlantic share a rising disillusionment with the traditional political classes and outcomes in western democracies as well as globalization more generally. In the end, in Peterson's view, this domestic factor is what in the long term will pose the most severe challenge to the transatlantic relationship and the liberal order more broadly.

A transatlantic relationship in crisis?

This special issue set out to explore *if and how EU-US relations have been impacted by the context of multiple crises and the parallel change in US policies under the Trump administration.* To do this, the eight articles in this collection address two questions: 1) Is the EU unified vis-a-vis the US in its dealing with crises, or are the EU member states becoming more fragmented in their response? 2) To what extent are US and EU relations strengthening or weakening in different

fields? Our findings are clear: All the articles find evidence to suggest that *EU-US relations are weakening in the context of contemporary crises and a changing US administration*. This weakening of EU-US relations is partly a consequence of the EU's own, internal policies. Although stopping short of designating the EU as an *emerging superpower*, four articles suggest that the EU has become a significantly more autonomous actor in relation to the US, particularly in the area of foreign and security policy, as the EU member states stand together in the face of crises and changing US policies (Cross, Howorth, M.E. Smith and Riddervold and Rosén). On the other hand, two articles instead argue that the EU member states are fragmented in their relations with the US, instead suggesting a fragmentation or differentiation of EU-US relations (Newsome and Smith). Most importantly, however, the observed weakening of EU-US relations is a consequence of the two actors' increasingly diverging perspectives, policies and positions on international issues, institutions, norms and indeed the value of the transatlantic relationship as such. As summed up in Michael Smith's article (Smith 2018: X), we observe a 'decline both in the salience and in the solidarity of the broader transatlantic relationship, which has historically been based on commitments to shared values and institutional affiliations both within and outside the transatlantic arena.'

So what are the broader implications of these findings? What can we expect of the future EU-US relationship – is the transatlantic relationship as such in crisis? As Peterson (2018, this Issue) argues, the answer to this question largely depends on our assumptions about the relative importance of structure and agency in understanding international relations. While an actor-focused approach puts emphasis on more immediate factors such as the impact of Trump as a potential 'change agent' (Peterson 2018, this Issue), more structurally oriented perspectives would predict that the very existence of established institutions and norms will have a long-term stabilizing effect on the transatlantic relationship, allowing it to survive various crises and a changing US leadership. After all, as Anderson discusses in his article, this is not the first time the EU-US relationship is in crisis. Nor is this the first time the EU is facing severe crisis. What the findings across the articles in this special issue suggest, however, is that contrary to previous periods, today, also the institutional and normative structure of the transatlantic relationship as such is being challenged. Individual actions, a multitude of crises combined with increasingly diverging perspectives on the value and importance of multilateral cooperation and norms, less public support, and a decrease in trust between the two allies together serve to weaken the

transatlantic relationship. Although one should be careful not to predict the future, the combination of all of these factors suggest that the transatlantic relationship is under more pressure today than in any other period since its establishment after the Second World War, putting the strength of the transatlantic, institutional structure to a particularly hard test. To return to Ikenberry's definition of crisis, this indeed seems to be 'an extraordinary moment when the existence and viability of the' transatlantic relationship 'are called into question.' Although the long-term effects remain to be seen, it is likely that the cracks in the foundation of transatlantic relations will continue into the present and foreseeable future.

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