



Can Europe learn to play power politics?

by Zaki Laïdi

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The European Union can no longer rely on its considerable soft power to achieve its goals on the world stage. Faced with competition from the US, Russia and China, aggressively pursuing their national interests, the EU needs to reform and learn how to play power politics. That is the crux of a new Centre for European Reform essay entitled '[Can Europe learn to play power politics?](#)', by Zaki Laïdi, professor of international relations at Sciences Po and advisor to senior government officials.

The EU project, with its liberal model of shared sovereignty, was designed against the idea of power politics. Over decades the American security guarantee led Europe to focus on its common market and trade policy and leave strategic issues to individual member-states or its US protector. But the world has become increasingly adversarial and challenging. President Donald Trump is treating America's traditional allies as a burden and has stepped up a trade dispute with Europe. China, and Russia are also acting unilaterally to further their national interests, sometimes flouting the international order to get their way, and weaponising trade and technology.

Europe has reacted by retaliating against US tariffs and declaring China a systemic rival. But it – including the new European Commission – needs to go further and take needs to go further and take a more proactive stance with the following reforms: introduce qualified majority voting on a number of foreign policy issues; build a strong European defence industrial base; develop a European military force that can project power; and strengthen the global standing of the euro through the creation of a capital markets union and a European safe asset. The EU should also look to make more of its soft power, on trade for example, the EU should seek a Euro-Pacific agreement with countries that form the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership to sustain and protect the multilateral system.

"The European Union, which was built on a vision of economic inter-dependence and multilateralism, faces an unprecedented challenge as its global competitors weaponise the tools of soft power like trade and technology to pursue their national interests. The Union must face up to the reality that powerful political forces seek its failure, if not its disappearance, and reform accordingly. Europe has a rendezvous with power politics which it cannot afford to miss," said Zaki Laïdi, a professor of international relations at Sciences Po and former adviser to Manuel Valls when he was French prime minister and Pascal Lamy when he was European Commissioner for Trade.

Note for editors:

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