CARNEGIE EUROPE

APRIL 2025

A Turning Point, or Not? Principles for a New European Order

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Introduction

Leaders and analysts concur that Europe stands at a turning point. European governments and European Union (EU) institutions have been spurred into action by the vertigo of Trumpian mayhem. Virtually all leaders' speeches now promise a commitment to step up and ensure the European continent can better take care of itself. European governments have accelerated and extended increases in defense spending and upgraded support to Ukraine. Significant change is afoot.

Yet, it is not clear that this new environment is really set to change the European order in fundamental ways. A minimalist version of the turning point would take the form of bigger European defense budgets and reinforced backing for Ukraine but little more. It would involve extremely important policy changes in the security sphere but hardly represent an epoch-defining inflection point. A maximalist version of the turning point would consist of deeper and more structural changes to the foundations of the European order.

An open question that hangs in the stirred-up geopolitical air is whether European governments and the EU collectively will, in time, move from minimalist to maximalist versions of the region's turning point. The antiliberal challenge in the era of U.S. President Donald Trump is to boost hard-power defense capabilities in important ways; but does it also invite a wider reimagining of European integration? Expectations are high that Europe will step up more assertively to protect its interests, but what form does and should "Europe" take in this sense?

The structures of the current European order are not optimal in the new conjuncture and need to be reshaped: The Europe that exists is not the Europe that is needed. If European governments and the EU were to follow through on their assertions that the continent

requires historic change, they would need to consider a more robust, more flexible, and more democratic form of integration. Shifting the architecture of the European order into a new phase would require a radically redesigned political and security alliance that goes far beyond today's narrow focus on military mobilization.

A New Turn

In a chorus of statements, European leaders and ministers have concurred that the current moment is one of deep, historic significance and a game changer for the European order. French President Emmanuel Macron has defined this as a "turning point in history" that requires "unprecedented decisions."[1] European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has stressed that for the EU, "something fundamental has shifted."[2] European Council President António Costa has insisted the EU stands at "a defining moment."[3] British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has spoken of a "once-in-a-generation moment for [Europe's] collective security" and believes the region is at a "crossroads in history."[4] And Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares has declared that the continent faces "a historic turn" and that this is "Europe's hour."[5] Many other similar statements could be cited from the last several months.

Writers, analysts, think tankers, journalists, and commentators seem to agree. A standard narrative has emerged that Europe faces a "moment of truth" and that "innovative formulas" are needed to advance European interests.[6] Some insist that the crisis moment "has reignited a dormant sense of European purpose" or that "a different kind of Europe" is emerging in 2025.[7] Others feel that Trump has already unleashed a new era of deeper European cooperation.[8] A common view is that as the EU moves to "transform the way we protect ourselves," this will "force a radical rethinking . . . of the nature of the EU."[9] In other words, deeper integration across the board will be needed to sustain Europe's military buildup.[10] The *Economist* believes that a "radical rethinking of how European nations confederate" may be emerging.[11]

Much policy change is underway. After many false starts in the last decade, European governments and EU institutions seem to be injecting real substance into their security commitments. In addition to government pledges to raise defense budgets, the European Commission has published an apparently landmark white paper on defense to take forward the Readiness 2030 plan. This initiative aims to mobilize €800 billion ($864 billion) through loans, money repurposed from other EU budget lines, and flexible fiscal rules to enable investment.[12] There are plans for a joint purchasing mechanism for defense equipment, and a new forum is set to gather European commissioners for security priorities.[13] Germany's loosening of its debt brake, which had imposed strict borrowing limits, is widely

seen as an especially momentous change for allowing rearmament. New proposals on common debt financing may be relevant for other policy areas, too. Alongside all this, new European packages of support for Ukraine are in the pipeline.

Of course, it might be pointed out that such commitments could be far more ambitious. Most governments remain reluctant to push defense spending beyond the equivalent of 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and many are setting spending targets that are still two, three, or four years into the future. The EU as a whole has refused to replace the €20 billion ($22 billion) a year given by the United States to Ukraine, even though this amounts to only 0.1 percent of the bloc's GDP.[14] As the bigger countries talk in grandiose terms of Europe taking on bold leadership roles, behind the scenes they have diluted EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas's €40 billion ($43 billion) aid plan for Ukraine.[15]

Despite these limitations, a powerful dynamic of securitization is now predominant across Europe. European governments have stressed the need for major steps forward in cooperation for many years—in the eurozone crisis, in the COVID-19 pandemic, and after the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Perhaps ironically, after years of threats from authoritarian regimes, Europe has been jolted into action by the illiberal shift of the United States, which Europe had tended to criticize for being too zealous in promoting liberal norms.

While these policy changes in securitization are of enormous significance, it is less clear what they mean for the core institutional structures of the European order—what is often referred to as the European project. It is ritually asserted that crises propel integration forward in successive cycles. The notion of the EU "failing forward," identified by various scholars, reflects the notion of crises nudging the bloc into deeper cooperation but in ways that are insufficient to fully resolve deep-seated problems.[16] In line with this, and contrary to much official rhetoric, the boost to cooperation in defense does not yet entail any strong push for a more general advance toward deeper European reordering.

There was a flurry of activity and debate about EU institutional reform after the Russian invasion in 2022, but this did not produce any significant breakthroughs. The EU chose not to follow through on recommendations for institutional reform from the Conference on the Future of Europe, a series of citizen-led debates from 2021 to 2022. Support for EU treaty change appears to have dwindled in the last several years. Levels of effective policy integration plateaued through the 2010s, and governments have not supported any major change to the EU's core institutional parameters.[17] While there were calls for the long-standing notions of multispeed and multitier Europe after the 2022 invasion, there have been no systemically designed moves toward this form of European order.[18] The ideas for such institutional reform presented by a Franco-German expert group in 2023 have not found their way into policy debates or concrete government proposals.[19] Contrary to some initial predictions, the war in Ukraine has not generated strong dynamics of European state building.[20]

Despite many leaders stressing how necessary far-reaching change has become in 2025, there are few signs of willingness to contemplate a redesign of the European project. Although leaders' rhetoric is all about change, many of their actions and aims seem to be about preserving the current European order. The focus is on strengthening selected areas of EU policy coordination and keeping the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alive. European commitments to increase defense spending began in the late 2010s—EU member states' military spend grew by 65 percent between 2020 and 2024—and represent a line of continuity more than a radical turn.[21]

Similarly, while so-called securitized Keynesianism may prove to be a significant development in economic policy, it builds incrementally on existing policies: Since the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these have been moving toward a kind of neointerventionism, or what many experts refer to as an era of neostatism, driven by both the pandemic and green-transition imperatives.[22]

There is increasing talk of flexible coalitions of the willing, and meetings of a so-called E5 format—France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom (UK)—on Ukraine may point toward agile patterns of cooperation. Some see incipient moves toward deeper cooperation among small groupings of Northern European states outside EU institutions.[23] Yet, governments have still not advanced plans for any overarching multitier European order, despite many years of ruminating such a model. There remains a huge distance between ad hoc talks among five states about a reassurance force in Ukraine and a genuinely new Europe—notwithstanding much commentary that implies the contrary.

Likewise, rather than ushering in a new political order that enhances democratic accountability, the EU is leaning heavily on existing processes. For its Readiness 2030 plan, the commission is using a treaty article that avoids both national vetoes and the European Parliament. Many national governments have expedited defense-spending increases through exceptional measures that bypass parliaments. Politicized security debate is only now beginning in EU member states, with doubts about defense spending coming from left and right—deliberation that might have been more apposite before governments made big defense-spending commitments than after. Tellingly, even those skeptical of the current discourse of a turning point take EU leaders to task for failing to follow through on defense-budget increases and not for their unwillingness to address wider political questions.[24]

In the most general sense, the EU's institutional settlement has stood largely unchanged since the Lisbon Treaty came into force sixteen years ago. In terms of its core polity, the EU remains a hybrid confederation that mixes formal national sovereignty with some supranationalism and some intergovernmental coordination. Over the crisis-battered years since the early 2000s, few have celebrated the status quo of the European order, and yet it is the setup that persists. And in line with this trend, the current crisis could still die down to leave European defense spending modestly higher but without changing the way the European

order organizes itself, projects power, or legitimizes its decisions. Governments may move to sensitize the current European order to security challenges but without crafting comprehensive change that fully moves this order into a new era.

Transformation Imperatives

There are a number of reasons for thinking that deeper change is required. These are evident at several levels.

The International Context

Governments created the structures of the European order as part of the broader West, with these two aspects of the liberal order symbiotically linked and mutually sustaining. For a while, the specific features of the European order also offered the prospect of softening differences with Russia through the EU's inclusive notion of border drawing that was one of the union's defining logics. Now it appears that the European order will exist in a very different context: the United States at odds with Europe and more of a spoiler than an anchor to the European project, Russia emboldened and once again taking territory in the east of the continent, and China a much more constraining, systemic threat than before.

The minimalist European vision of change fits with the U.S. push for more European defense spending, but it sits less neatly with Trump's broader challenges to a Western democratic alliance. EU leaders commonly label Trump transactionalist, but his foreign policy is almost the opposite of the pragmatic give-and-take of this concept; rather, it threatens a more ideological menace. More broadly, many in the Global South insist that Trump's anti-liberal turn will not push other powers toward cooperation with Europe but embolden them even more strongly to contest European precepts of liberal order.[25] The EU risks being left as the only remaining status quo power, and this is unlikely to be a sustainable position for its existing order. The EU's emerging Trump-balancing strategy of partnering with not-very-liberal powers in the name of defending the liberal order is of questionable strategic coherence.

So, if the minimalist reading is that European governments need to heed Trump's insistence that they boost defense spending, the maximalist interpretation is that the region faces a deeper structural challenge that embodies major shifts in global order and power balances—and therefore requires more qualitative change in the organization of the European order. While the reshaping of the global order ritually elicits a straightforward plea for more EU unity, it might more convincingly invite a deeper refounding of the processes that sustain the European order.

The depth of international change suggests that European governments need to work back from a wider vision of a future global order and fit the institutions of the European order around it. This approach would be an inversion of the current one of retrofitting processes and structures that were designed for fundamentally different aims and times. It would recognize that current efforts to salvage the transatlantic alliance rest on a fragile hope that deflects European governments from deeper underlying trends—that Trump is a symptom as much as a cause of today's turning point. If the emerging era undercuts core principles of justice in international relations, the ramifications are likely to be far-reaching to the extent that the current European architecture was based on just these premises.

The EU Level

A standard European response to any crisis is that the most necessary priority is to deepen EU integration. Yet, this looks increasingly problematic. The fact that the EU did not reform itself deeply in response to any other crisis in recent years—the eurozone crisis, the pandemic, the 2022 invasion—has contributed to citizen grievances that now drive a second wave of nationalist populism. Each time the EU pushes such reform down the road by agreeing on notable steps forward in one or two policy areas, but without updating the basic shape of the European project, these underlying problems, strains, and divergences deepen.

The route toward completing European political union looks even harder now because a schism has opened not only between Europe, on the one hand, and the United States and other illiberal powers, on the other, but also between the liberal and illiberal camps within Europe. In fact, the European hard right itself seems to be pulled in different directions: Its identity strand is aligned with Trump, while its nationalist strand bristles at U.S. actions against European interests.

These divergences surely call for deeper thinking on Europe's organization and identity. EU decisionmaking processes mean that the Hungarian and, currently, Slovak governments can prevent many EU reforms, and other governments may join these belligerents in the future. After more than a decade of discussions about how to exert leverage over such internal illiberals, the current moment calls for radical action on this long-festering problem. As the strategic price of Hungary's ability to block much EU action rises, other member states arguably need more radical ways to leave Budapest behind.[26] It cannot be sustainable in the long term for the EU to rely on the tactic of using ad hoc procedures to issue statements on behalf of all member states except Hungary.

The absence of EU reform is most serious in relation to Ukraine and other candidates for membership. The EU had the chance to reform enlargement radically and innovatively after 2022, but it chose not to do so. While the EU has certainly moved forward with accession talks with Ukraine, the process looks too slow to match the pace of current events. If there is a peace plan or if the dynamics of the conflict shift abruptly in other ways, Ukraine needs to join some kind of protective organization in the short term.

Some EU leaders suggested in early 2025 that the union is speeding up its technical work and that Ukraine might join by 2030. But even if this were to happen, the time frame is still too slow to have any operational bearing on the immediate conflict. Moreover, many doubt the 2030 incentive and note that one or more EU member states may still block enlargement. In addition, practical forms of EU cooperation with Western Balkan candidate countries outside the still-in-doubt enlargement process are coming to the fore, but again without clarity on the strategic end point or how these forms relate to Europe's systemic future.[27]

The grounds for a multitier or multispeed European order have become more compelling. Given the deepening tensions and widening divergences between European states, the model of European cooperation in this new challenging era cannot and will not be neatly one-dimensional. In many spheres, more supranational cooperation and centralization are necessary and feasible. In others, this is less the case. In some areas, more agile and speedy crisis responses are needed, and yet more local accountability is also germane to repairing popular concerns over moves forward in EU integration. Many practical governance arrangements in recent years have moved toward network-based models of cooperation quite different from the legal-institutional centralism of the standard EU template.

This multitier format for reordering would involve a lot more than one or two coalitions of the willing, as such groupings need some kind of institutional umbrella and connections between policy areas. Far-reaching change will not flow from ad hoc arrangements on defense that are superimposed on the unanimity-based machinery of the EU's common foreign policy.[28] A more radical route toward such differentiated structures of European order is needed, as the prospects of governments agreeing on the form that such a model should take appear slim: The EU's skeptical states may be critical of the union but do not accept being relegated to a second tier.[29]

Leaders and officials frequently lapse into a familiar posture of assessing a crisis in terms of whether it has the positive outcome of prompting more EU integration. This presupposes the primary end goal is further development of the prevailing model of European integration. It is a stance that sees crisis management as instrumental to this ostensibly higher purpose. But ironically, if there is convergence across national borders today, it is at least partly on illiberal agendas in Europe, the United States, Russia, and elsewhere. If wisdom in the EU has always been associated with those who caution against radical change to the integration model, it should today invite a radical rupture.[30] Prioritizing extant EU processes is not synonymous with preserving the wider European order.

Defense Structures

An aim of simply keeping NATO alive is inadequate and out of line with tectonic power shifts. Even if the United States can be persuaded to stay engaged in European security, just carrying on with the alliance as at present is unlikely to be the best vehicle for cooperation.

If EU defense-spending hikes are about giving European governments prime agency and responsibility in all matters of security—and not just about a few modest additions to equipment stockpiles—then that is a different premise from the one that NATO enshrines.

Incoming German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has even raised the question of "whether we will still be talking about NATO in its current form."[31] While pushing for European nations to spend more on defense, the Trump administration is unlikely to transfer control of major security matters to Europeans within NATO structures. For now, the United States seems intent not only on Europeans shouldering more of the defense burden but also on imposing American interests more stringently in the region—a combination that should push European governments toward bolder reordering.[32]

Moreover, the pressing need is not simply to spend a few additional percentage points of GDP on military capabilities but to more effectively articulate hard power and other aspects of security. A security alliance that underpins the European order today needs to fuse defense policy with a wider set of security and strategic functions: addressing climate geopolitics, defending democracy, and stemming the root causes of conflicts, instability, and migration flows. This is especially true because these are the issues from which the United States is pulling back almost entirely; Europe must now be the standard bearer for these rules-oriented notions of security.

A wider understanding of security should not be used disingenuously to divert funds from core defense—as many suspect to be the case with Spain's push to include climate spending within defense targets.[33] But it is essential to ensure that defense spending is directed toward a coherent and comprehensive notion of what European security requires. Contrary to now-common journalistic assumptions, defending Europe is not the same as defending liberal democracy. Current debates on military spending give a false impression that the military dimension of security can be disconnected from these other elements; the focus on saving NATO masks the need for a deeper, more qualitative change in thinking about European security. And NATO is also flunking its biggest test, arguably, by refusing to allow in Ukraine, the one European country that patently needs security protections in an immediate sense.

The scale and nature of the required defense upgrades calls for deeper, order-related change and a new understanding of warfare. This means making choices about whether the aim is simply to dissuade Russia or to deploy capabilities to defeat it. It will be impossible to sustain a common and autonomous European defense base without a fundamental change in the way economic policies are organized as well.[34] The huge sums to be invested jointly in defense also need to be underpinned by stronger democratic accountability; a meaningful security union requires change in national politics across Europe. European states are pushing for another round of common debt before they have put in place a political process to decide how to pay back the common debt they incurred from the post-COVID-19 rescue package.

With European defense spending already well above Russian spending, it is surely reasonable for the EU to have a robust democratic deliberation over the rationale behind the decision to plow huge amounts of extra funding into weapons production with such urgency. Cutting out duplication in military equipment and systems requires each member state to renounce the idea of a comprehensive national arms industry. For this, all states must be confident that they will mobilize fully to protect each other, and this, in turn, requires a far deeper sense of a single political community than currently exists.

Moreover, beneath the current security-focused reactions to the Trump administration, underlying shifts in economic, technology, and energy models pull in the direction of stronger mechanisms of local control—yet governments still appear to be denying such structural transitions as they pursue set-piece international initiatives.[35] The fraught moment cannot simply be about increases in defense spending while everything else stays the same; rather, it needs a completely new social contract on security and order to underpin the European project.

Other Institutional Options

Diplomats might reply that they have long recognized the case for systemic change and already designed new initiatives to infuse this commitment with substance. Yet, while configurations other than the EU have been tried, they have largely failed. The main initiative in recent years that contained elements of reordered European strategic cooperation was the European Political Community (EPC). This includes all European states except Belarus and Russia and began in October 2022. There have been five EPC summits since then, with over forty leaders participating in each of these. While there have been few concrete deliverables from the summits, the EPC's purpose was expressly to allow general strategic discussion and planning among the widest possible grouping of European states. The community was framed as being directly relevant to the war and support for Ukraine, but with a more systemic role as the kernel of a wider European order.

The EPC has, however, proved to be too broad and too content-free to gain traction as a major element of any pan-European strategic design. Several key leaders, for example Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, have not attended the more recent summits. Some states have tried to keep the EPC free of EU-related issues, while others see the community as a way of linking EU agendas to the wider continent. Some have talked of the EPC functioning as a kind of outer circle of the European order, but this has not materialized: No template has been designed to link such circles or levels. The EPC contains many prominent members of the now-rising Illiberal International, and this complicates cooperation in the forum.

Meanwhile, the community's non-EU states have been supportive but not especially proactive in pushing for the EPC to gain more concrete relevance and agency, despite the forum supposedly being aimed at them precisely. The UK has been positive but has not given the

EPC much priority; Turkey appears to have lost interest; and other states, like Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Serbia, have drifted back toward Russia in preference to being part of a pan-European alliance formed to counter Moscow.

Refoundation

It is hardly surprising that a minimalist version of Europe's turning point is more likely to take shape than a maximalist one. Institutions are sticky: They endure in forms that outlive the reasons for which they were originally created. The institutionalist school of thought explains behavior in terms of institutional structures and legacies that persist over time and do not shift easily, a feature that is clearly relevant to the history of the European project. Injunctions to change are legion in Europe; genuinely systemic change is rare in practice. Certain values and assumptions are embedded in extant institutions and processes that are hard to change. If no cooperative structures existed today in Europe and had to be designed from scratch, few would devise them in the way they now exist. So, is the current moment of sufficient magnitude to unstick this institutional stickiness?

The much-used social-science concept of critical junctures is useful to this question. These are defined as moments of discontinuity when change becomes possible and pathways open up for overturning the weight of institutional legacies.[36] When a critical juncture occurs, many factors determine whether it results in deep change, but the shake-up at least opens the possibility. The transformational dynamics outlined above strongly suggest that Europe's current cluster of challenges is grave enough to constitute a critical juncture. They create the potential for far-reaching, even transformational change—even as the weight of the institutional status quo complicates such a transformation.

For now, a clear mismatch is glaringly evident between government and EU rhetoric of a moment of historic change, on the one hand, and policy responses that seem designed to head off transformational imperatives, on the other. Up to now, those calling for change have assumed modest steps will suffice: rises in defense budgets through and alongside improvements to existing institutional arrangements. Defense building is not analytically or intellectually exacting: Governments need to spend more, spend it quickly, and spend it on the right capabilities. The conceptually more difficult question is what kind of structured order is needed to navigate current and future challenges, and here, there are few signs of concrete visions or templates to guide day-to-day decisions.

Recent experiences of European crises suggest that EU institutions and governments will adhere to the minimalist version of what they narratively define as a turning point. In all the crises the region has suffered since the early 2000s, formal rhetoric of breakthrough change was abundant, and yet such change did not materialize. But what if, this time, leaders could be taken at their word? What are the implications of their claims that this is

a transformational turning point? This is the imperative that should be guiding European political debates: What must governments do to give substance to their declarations that a fundamental shift is needed in the way Europe is run?

The shape of a constitutive European refoundation must flow from the transformative rationales identified above. The current structures of the European order suffer from several clear shortcomings when set against these dynamics: an institutional divide between defense and other aspects of security and geostrategy; the inclusion of some states that would be better excluded, and the exclusion of some states better included; a relative lack of scope for differentiated cooperation across policy spheres; rigid and heavy institutional processes and structures that militate against strategic agility; and a paucity of democratic accountability to legitimize key EU-level decisions.

If European governments were to attach priority to addressing these shortcomings, they would usefully be guided by several mesolevel principles. The new structures of the European order would have a more robust standing toward the wider international order and be fashioned explicitly to cultivate a more resistance-oriented nexus with that global order.[37] As Europe moves to take more responsibility for its own defense, it would close the divide between hard-security structures and other areas of cooperation. Structures would be built around a far wider concept of security, different from the very narrow current focus on defense budgets.

Integration would be more flexible, allow for different degrees of participation, and be imbued with more fluid processes for entry and exit. Alongside a core of political and security cooperation, different constellations of states and institutional arrangements would form across internal policy spheres. A nucleus of states would push forward major, systemic change, rather than simply coalesce on one or two specific questions. And this new model of regional order would need to be rooted in more citizen involvement: A more robust Europe will come from Europeans, not primarily from national governments.

The template of a wider European political and security alliance would include EU and non-EU states but not those that now contest core liberal and order-based values: Hungary and the nondemocratic countries in wider Europe. Current ideas for a coalition of peace-keepers in postwar Ukraine apparently include Turkey, and yet the Erdoğan regime can surely not be a partner in holding illiberalism at bay internationally, as it is clearly part of that illiberal wave. Erdoğan's lurch toward an even more ferocious authoritarianism makes it plain that entirely ad hoc coalitions of the willing cannot be the basis for a reconstituted European liberal order: Counterbalancing soft-autocrat Trump with hard-autocrat Erdoğan hardly seems a robust, coherent geostrategy for preserving a liberal notion of political order.

With the EPC looking too broad and thin, a structure is needed that sits between the EU and the EPC and does not include authoritarian states. For this to work well, EU member states would need to be a lot more flexible toward including the UK, Norway, Switzerland, and others. The UK, in particular, would need to be a lot more flexible in cooperating with

EU member states. Both the UK and the EU would need to be more constructive in cooperating well beyond their fairly modest security pact currently in the pipeline. A new structure would encompass multiple areas of foreign, security, and other policies—and, in this way, would be very different from other suggestions for deeper European coordination on specific hard-security matters and military mobilization.[38]

These reflections deliberately do not offer a detailed map for a precise type of new institutional arrangement, but rather guidelines to help orientate debate on what kind of order-related thinking might be appropriate in the current moment. Every recent crisis in Europe has unleashed talk of "turning points" and commitments to reshape the European order, and in each case, such change has failed to materialize. The current crisis seems to be following a similar pattern and has not yet unlocked deep, structural reform to European cooperation. It might still do so—but this will require governments to entertain far more systemic change than they yet seem minded to. And it will require powerful leadership in terms not simply of stirring speeches or emergency meetings but of leaders willing to push concrete, long-term, cooperative arrangements outside institutional boxes.

A chorus reaction might well be "But this time is different." This might indeed prove to be the case, but Europe is a long way from a real, systemic breakthrough for now. In each previous crisis over the last twenty years, many observers and policymakers have also insisted "This time really is a watershed," only for policy shifts to be gradually diluted and shoehorned into existing institutional structures. Each time the drama of a crisis recedes, it has left in its place a European order modified but not redesigned—and the European journey continues in an old car fixed with new parts, not in an upgraded model. Critical junctures have turned out not to be so critical in the systemic legacies they bequeath.

At present, either European leaders do not quite believe their own grandiose rhetoric, or they are failing to think through its full implications. Either this is, in fact, not quite the historic moment that European leaders suggest, or European governments need to take far more radical steps commensurate with the gravity of the situation. The dizzying dangers of the current moment show how severely a more illiberal world will undercut European interests. These dangers surely call not just for solidified hard security but for a reconstitution of the core liberal principles that supposedly sustain the European order. For this, European governments need to break the status quo, not tweak to preserve it.

About the Author

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