

Westlessness? Challenges for the EU's Soft Power Approach

ALEXANDRA LUDEWIG

University of Western Australia, Perth

alexandra.ludewig@uwa.edu.au

Abstract

The West claims to be an economic and political power. However, its moral authority seems increasingly pilloried in many places. Some political scientists even speak of “Westlessness”: populism, nationalism, right-wing extremism, terrorism and democratic fatigue are some of the symptoms. This disunity of many people in Western industrialised nations is nowhere more evident than in relation to the contested topic of immigration. It polarises societies, as it is precisely here that legal convictions clash with ethical and moral ones and subsequently fail in the attempt to create Realpolitik. This article will trace the events that led to the neologism “Westlessness” being coined, before it will contextualise responses from within and without to this diagnosis and use the EU’s responses to the so-called refugee crisis from 2015 until the present as a test case for its future in solidarity and unity.

Keywords: Westlessness, Western values, EU migration, refugee crisis, illegal immigration Regional

Introduction

2020 went down in the annals as a seminal year for the acceleration of historical change. As Australian former Ambassador to the United States, Kim Beazley, noted, looking back at the year in politics: “The world we inhabit nowadays has seen many of the principles and certainties of the post-World War II international order severely challenged” (Beazley, 2021, p. 3). This affects how we conduct foreign policy, how we practise soft diplomacy and how we perceive nations and trading blocs, including the regard in which people and ideologies are held, among them the so-called “West”.

Terms such as “the political West” or “the Western project” are notoriously difficult to define. For some, the political and legal parameters are central as they think about Western liberal democracies: their separation of powers and the autonomy of business and science with regard to government, state and religion, as well as democratic structures. For others, it is more about ethical and moral categories such as human rights, freedom and equality. In 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell, Weede reminded his readers: “At the heart of Europe’s success story were the restrictions of state power, the rule of law and secure ownership rights” (Weede, 1989). That rule of law came into sharp focus in 2020 when the EU’s budget negotiations were in danger of stalling as a result of the objections by some member nations to aspects of EU policy, in particular regarding fundamental issues such as the separation of powers or journalistic

freedoms. Even in many EU member states where the rule of law is less contentious, civility was not necessarily guaranteed.

Before the advent of social media and the internet had created an environment of problematic individualism and heightened agitation that spilled from the virtual to the real, Weede had warned that in the “culture of narcissism” of late capitalist society, and its egotistical behaviour would be considered normal and unavoidable, and this would inevitably lead to the gradual dissolution of existing social structures. Has too much Western freedom led to the undermining and potential demise of the West? Or have responses by world leaders between 2016 and 2020 undermined the idea and ideals of “the West”? In this context, former US President Donald Trump’s twittered egotism and lack of civility as much as his “equivocal attitude to such linchpins of the western alliance system as the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)” come to mind, just as do those of other world leaders, among them “Russian President Vladimir Putin’s critique of the ‘liberal idea’ as ‘obsolete’ in June 2019” (Schlesinger, 2020, p. 1548).

Senior German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger has gone so far as to diagnose a resulting “Westlessness” in order to identify this problem (Ischinger, 2020). The term is a pun, of course, but what does he mean by “Westlessness”? Neither the Oxford nor the Macquarie dictionaries have thus far included the term which was coined in 2020 in the lead-up to the annual Munich Security Conference (MSC), a gathering of around 300-500 senior figures from close to 100 countries, chiefly international leaders from industry, science, politics, economy, media and defence. As the MSC is mainly dedicated to debating current and future security challenges, its motivating sensibility is, ergo, angst or a feeling of insecurity. And the term “Westlessness” expressed just that: a sense of having lost something or lacking something.

As Winter and Moir note, crisis has long been “a motive force in European history, memory and thought, as well as in reform and revolution as in complexly related responses to critical, landmark moments of change” (2019, p. 3), but so far this crisis of “Westlessness” seems to have offered an opportunity primarily for others. International observers from outside “the West” were quick to put their finger on it: According to Chinese observers, such as Wenshan Jia, Adjunct Professor at Shandong University, the term bemoans “a loss of cohesion, a loss of a mission and sense of direction among the Western countries [...] a call for Western countries to overcome their internal divisions and make the West more Westful” (Wenshan Jia, 2020); a thinly veiled call to unity for the West in its dealings with China, the so-called “Meddle Kingdom”, and Russia, “Putemkin’s State”, as the 2020 *Munich Security Conference Report* called them (Ischinger, 2020, pp. 30 and 34 respectively). At the time of its intense debate in early 2020, the diagnosis of Westlessness was also “a call for more Europeaness and less American Trumpism” (Wenshan Jia, 2020). These Asian analysts of the Munich Security Conference contrasted the West’s lack of unified goals with their own success stories of alignment and cooperation. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha pointed to ASEAN (Chinese News, 17 February 2020), while China engages in its own multilateral Belt and Road initiatives in the Global South, even if they come with their own set of impediments and exploitations. So the term and responses to it are far from straightforward.

The aim of this article is twofold; firstly, to contextualise responses to the diagnosis of “Westlessness” which highlight the fact that the dominant narrative about the virtues

of the European project is complicated from within and without the EU, and secondly, to use the EU's refugee policies from 2015 until the present as a test case for the clash between ideal and reality of so-called Western values which will determine the future of European integration.

Westlessness or Westfulness

The term "Westlessness" seems to be the opposite of Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis which was widely referenced in the 1990s. Then professor of international political economy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Fukuyama, the author of *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), touted the triumph of western liberal democracy after the end of the Soviet Union and the global communist-capitalist divide. His diagnosis, however polemical in intent, was heavily criticised after its first appearance in essay form, before the events surrounding 9/11 seemed to deal the final blow. The following month, Fukuyama published a rebuttal to his critics in the *Wall Street Journal*. Not even the concluding paragraph has dated well, where Fukuyama asserted: "We remain at the end of history because there is only one system that will continue to dominate world politics, that of the liberal-democratic West." (5 October 2001) The hybris expressed therein jars for several reasons.

Both Fukuyama's and Ischinger's world views remain rooted in West-centrism. For both of them "the West" is at the centre of their perspective and logic, and the phrase serves as an antonym to entities such as the East, Russia, China and the Orient. Each of these terms, as McNeill described them in his study of the meaning of "the West", is "a function of who says it and for what purpose" (1997, pp. 513-514). Irrespective of the purpose, the mere use of the term "the West" and, by implication, its analogue, the Global North, gives currency and meaning, albeit different values, to a concept that even from within the EU some regard as anachronistic (Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Margrethe Vestager, quoted in Carr & Erber, 2020; p. 216).

The idea of the West as tied to capitalism and development also surfaces in the concepts of two other contested expressions used as antonyms of "the West": the Global South or the Third World. Devoid of geographical meaning, these terms have not only played their parts as signifiers for a set of global relations of dependence and inequality, but also for a worldwide project and an ideological orientation that has long encapsulated common values and goals (Stavrianos, 1981, p. 35). Just as Westlessness, with its associated crisis of common values (*Wertegemeinschaft*), loss of leadership role (*Verlust des westlichen Gestaltungsanspruchs*) and general feeling of unease and uncanniness, according to Ischinger (2020), was diagnosed as a return to individual or national responses to crises (cf. Bunde et al., 2020), the concept of Westlessness was contrasted by some politicians and analysts in their accounts of Westfulness. India's Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar used the latter term in recognition of the end of an era, the high time of Westfulness, due to the perceived waning of the superpower USA, to which others believed to have found their own answers; either "more Europe" (Carr & Erber, 2020, p. 216) or "increased cultural and ideational diversity" (Reus-Smit, 2018, p. 7) and a new form of "international system consisting of several international orders" (Flockhart, 2020, p. 530).

A perceived waning of the idea and ideal of "the West" has been the subject of laments at least since Spengler's *Decline of the West* a century ago. Regularly and habitually,

academics, politicians, thinkers “have been debating its ‘crisis’, pondering its chances of ‘survival’, and considering its ‘suicide’”, as Bavaj points out (2011). One strong proponent of the idea that there are dangers in feeling uneasy about a perceived “exaggerated mood of Western decline”, as “these gloomy projections rest on exaggerations of China’s power and western weakness”, is the author of *Do Morals Matter?* (2020a), Harvard professor Joseph Nye. He refers to a conversation with former Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, in which the latter referred to “the ability of America to draw upon the talents of the whole world and recombine them in diversity and creativity [in a way] that was not possible for China’s ethnic Han nationalism” (Lee Kuan Yew cited in Nye, 2020b). By logical extension, the same holds true for the EU, if only it does not close its borders to new arrivals; for strength would lie in immigration, so long as it can be controlled.

Competing narratives of crises and successes

Over the last decades, the EU has been affected by multiple crises (Fabbrini, 2019). Mass migration, globalisation and nationalisation seem to have created, especially within Western Europe, ‘winners’ and losers’ (Kriesi et al., 2008), even prior to the Global Financial Crisis and its specific European reverberations.

In the cosmos of political cartoons, Europe has been depicted as a snail and as a hydra, as a snake pit or a pigsty. The European Union can be a sick man, an old woman in a wheelchair, a neglected child or a sad woman. Europe found itself mocked as a deflated balloon, as a race car without an engine, as a derailed train, as a sinking ship or as a jumbo jet too big for a runway. The Continent has been portrayed as a barren mountain range of EU summits, as a garbage dump of files, as a befouled land of plenty with lakes of milk and wine. Europe in caricature is a house of cards, a ramshackle home, a burning hut, a crumbling temple (Fichtner, 2021, p. 17).

Even if it is just facing turmoil and not yet perceived to lie in ruins, it seems never far from yet another crisis.

Most recently, Covid 19 exposed further the many difficulties of European integration, unity and solidarity; problems with reporting, documenting and responding to virus outbreaks and infection clusters; from Austria’s Ischgl to Italy’s Bergamo and from sourcing personal protective equipment to producing and distributing vaccines. In particular, Brunazzo and Mascitelli have recently pointed to “the disarray and uncoordinated response to migration” and “the tragic impact of the Corona virus pandemic” (2020, p. 29) as failures of the EU on a grand scale. According to them, all of these developments have led to an increase in Euroscepticism among many long-standing member states, including its founding member Italy, so that “political elites could no longer take for granted the EU as a resource around which to mobilise political and electoral consensus” (2020, p. 22). As a result, attitudes toward EU integration have become more differentiated and Ullrich Fichtner poignantly diagnoses: “Financial crises became identity crises and refugee crisis spiralled into existential crises” (Fichtner, 2021, p. 17).

This faltering support for legitimising ideology or the emergence of Westlessness are indeed rooted in foundational values of the liberal international order no longer proving certain or providing certainty: “The uncertainty surrounding the value base of

the liberal international order”, according to Flockhart, “is not something that happens through mere disappointment with policy failure” (2020, p. 521), and has a lot to do with failures to celebrate European successes beyond the inner-European freedom of movement for people, goods and services. In his essay “How Europe Became a Model for the 21st Century”, Ullrich Fichtner, editor-in-Chief with Germany’s highly influential and respected magazine *Der Spiegel*, defiantly points to the EU’s immense and unrivalled market power (measured both in total economic output as gross domestic product / GDP and GDP per capita), its strong international partnerships both in relation to existing and emerging relationships in trade and aid. Foremost, however, his argument goes, the EU is setting standards that are, even now, the envy of, and the role model for, many:

Technology companies in California build their devices according to EU regulations. Cocoa producers in Ghana and Ecuador are transforming their operations to meet European standards. In Argentina, Israel and Russia, plaintiffs are suing internet companies and invoking the ‘right to be forgotten’ that was formulated in the EU. Regional blocs of countries on South America are organizing themselves along the lines of the EU. Laws drafted in Europe are adopted almost verbatim into national law in countries around the world. Fast food companies [...] are taking chemical additives out of their products because the EU doesn’t allow them. [...] the composition of the plastic in sneakers around the world [was changed] to make less toxic, EU-complaint goods. [...] Europe’s view of data protection [...] has quickly become a global standard that no company and no country can ignore (Fichtner, 2021, p. 19).

Even the London-based weekly magazine, *The Economist*, had to admit repeatedly that today’s globalisation is actually a “Europeanisation”: “Increasingly, globalisation resembles Europeanisation.” (*The Economist*, 8 February 2020). By logical extension, Europe, or more precisely the area of the EU, remains the aspirational goal for many other players in relation to trade, value setting and as a popular destination for asylum seekers and other migrants.

The ongoing refugee and migration crisis

Ever since the dissolution of the Old World Order, hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants have taken their chances and set out to find peace and prosperity in Europe. Whether their entry point has been along the Black Sea, the Mediterranean coast or across mountain ranges in the Balkans, their first EU country of landing was rarely the desired final destination. The point of entry, however, became de-facto the processing responsibility, leaving the communities, regions and, ultimately countries, to deal with medical, administrative and legal challenges involved in registering and assessing the newcomers.

In view of the recent global movement of people, which presents itself on a scale that has not been experienced since the end of the Second World War, it has been obvious that the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Regulations proved no longer workable (Ludewig, 2017). However, this insight has not led to a new and unified approach with the European Union, but provoked unilateral actions by many of its member states, ranging from Italy temporarily closing its ports and forcing ships with migrants on board to berth in other countries (Brunazzo & Mascitelli, 2020, p. 28) to Hungary

forcibly deporting migrants and asylum seekers to Serbia in clear contravention of international as well as EU laws (Dunai, 2021).

If Westlessness is diagnosed as a return to individual or national responses to crises – at times wilfully ignoring international laws, conventions and basic human rights – than the ongoing refugee and migration crisis in Europe is one of its tests, as it is here that classic “western” values of freedom, tolerance, the rule of law etc. are being subjected to pressure by populist and increasingly authoritarian interest groups. In this environment the supranational cohesion of the EU has increasingly been pressure tested and ultimately started to fragment.

Particularly the countries along Europe’s periphery – which Angela Merkel primarily sought to protect with her decision in 2015 not to close Germany’s borders to large treks of refugees – have since found it difficult to juggle national with supranational priorities as the stream of new arrivals at times ebbs but never stops to flow. Major refugee movements in the wake of the social and political upheavals in the Middle East and parts of Northern Africa contribute to this just as much as economic migrants and those fleeing areas of health concerns. The issues of migration and asylum polarise nations and put not just the EU under intense pressure, as legal, ethical and moral imperatives clash with economic imperatives and ethno-cultural systems. Ironically, it is this indecision and the lack of a unified effort as a powerful bloc that helped create in part the current refugee situation in Europe.

A particular challenge for the “West” has been its relationship with the “Far East” and Africa. After the Arab Spring the EU did not follow up on its moral support for the emerging democracies with trade deals and a genuine interest in the well-being of the local populations. In many cases the West continued to support the dictators whom many locals wanted to oust. In late 2020, France’s President Emmanuel Macron even bestowed his country’s highest order, the Légion d’honneur, on the Egyptian ruler Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who is in some circles referred to as “the butcher of Cairo”. Years after the Arab Spring many in the West still either supported the despots that many in the region wanted to dispose of, in Egypt, Tunisia, but also Syria, or showed a costly indecisiveness:

It was not the West that intervened in Syria, but Iran and Russia – on the side of the regime. In Libya, NATO intervened, but left the country alone after the fall of Muammar al-Gaddafi. In Yemen, the West gave free rein to ally Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates when they bombed civilians. This was the real sin of the West after 2011: it made itself politically irrelevant in the Middle East. The USA withdrew further and further under Barack Obama, Europe left the field to Iran, Russia and Turkey. The EU and NATO remained spectators, although Europe has also suffered from the chaos in the region to this day: the consequences were the refugee crisis of 2015, the spread of IS, jihadist tourism by Europeans to Syria and Iraq, and finally the attacks by IS terrorists in Paris, Nice and Berlin. The destabilisation of the Middle East contributed to the reshuffling of the political landscape in Europe, to the rise of right-wing populists – and, yes, also to Brexit, for which the fear of migrants was a reason in 2016. The inability of Europeans to stop the catastrophe in Syria has thus also made the continent more insecure (von Rohr, 2020).

Indeed, the European refugee crisis, that peaked in 2015/16, continues, not least due to the indecisive actions and mixed messages coming from within the EU, outlined above.

The UN continues to report record numbers of people on the move world-wide (around 80 million) and while numbers are down for 2020 in countries such as Germany, the contact zone has shifted from Europe's geographic centre to the periphery and from policy setting to practical (and earlier) intervention. According to Frontex's annual report, the areas of concern are these days on the Balkans, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Greece (Frontex, 2021, pp. 16-19). As such, the focus has shifted from soft diplomacy to hard border protection on the EU's outer rim. In doing so, the EU has also responded to a unifying sentiment in many member states: the rise of anti-immigration rhetoric and citizen's groups forming. As such, the fear of migrants and asylum seekers has pushed Britain largely out of the EU but ironically unities many in Europe in terms of the right-wing populism that has gripped many parts of the West. Anti-migration groups throughout Europe openly condone the at times violent behaviour of border guards, working on land and sea, and favour conditions in detention centres that are likely to discourage others from arriving, such as those situated in parts of Greece and Croatia (Beirich & Via, 2020, p. 12).

The refugee camp on the Greek Aegean island of Lesbos is a case in point. The European Union endeavoured to (re)define its asylum policy by establishing the Mória Reception and Identification Centre, also known as the Mória Refugee Camp. It soon grew beyond capacity, and makeshift accommodation expanded into nearby olive groves. To stem the flow of new arrivals and by way of dealing with further overcrowding, the EU struck a deal with Turkey in 2018, building on earlier agreements with Turkey which had already been signed as early as 2016. All these efforts were designed to control, if not deter, the crossing of refugees and migrants from Turkey to Greek islands and hence into the EU, but did little to address the root causes or offer long-term solutions. Over the following years, little progress was made, while many setbacks were suffered. In 2020 up to 15,000 people resided in the Mória Refugee Camp provisionally, until more than half of them were made homeless after a fire destroyed accommodation and surroundings. On 5 September 2020, the night of the destructive fire, press photographer Angelos Tzortzinis captured an image showing a ten year old boy carrying a younger child away from the flames (2020). With this photo, Tzortzini took out the UNICEF Photo of the Year award in 2020 and highlighted – as only images can do – the sad reality of the EU's response to its refugee management as not extending its foundational values to those most in need.

In its own press release the EU acknowledged in 2017 that “the arrival of more than one million asylum seekers and migrants to Europe in 2015 exposed serious flaws in the EU's asylum system.” In response the EU Parliament “has been working on proposals to create a fairer, more effective European asylum policy” (EU Parliament, 2017). Years later, the EU could still report little progress, admitting freely: “There are gaps and shortcomings in the EU's policy on returning migrants, MEPs say in a resolution on the implementation of the Return Directive, which sets out common rules for the return of non-EU nationals who do not have the right to stay in the European Union.” (EU Parliament, 2020).

Indeed, the efforts the EU has undertaken over the first decades of the 21st century were primarily aiming to “control irregular immigration” with the help of Frontex (2021)

which has become the European Union's fastest growing agency. The agency's budget has grown from just over 6 million Euros in 2005 to over 460 million Euros in 2020. By 2027, Europe's tax payers will have funded Frontex to the tune of 5.6 billion Euros (Christides et al., 2021, p. 75). According to its mission statement and 2020 annual report, this is pursued by focusing on shutting down routes by fortifying borders and stepping up the use of detection technology from surveillance planes and drones to satellites. Its activities also involve making an example of trespassers by criminalising their conduct and detaining them. Moreover, refugees and migrants in Greece and Libya trying to reach western Europe have accused EU border protection agency Frontex of taking part in illegal deportations known as 'pushbacks' (Schmitz & Seferi, 2021), actions since then confirmed and exposed as illegal. Unabatingly, Frontex plans to deploy up to 10,000 border guard to the EU's external borders over the coming years, where they will work together with national security forces. The establishment of the standing corps is one of the EU's most important migration policies and the occasionally ruthless methods employed by Frontex to deter and hinder asylum seekers from crossing into the EU are likely to even please and appease many in its member states, according to Giulia Lagana, a migration policy expert with the Open Society European Policy Institute (Lagana quoted in Christides et al., 2021, p. 78).

International laws in relation to human rights guarantee the right to asylum for anyone seeking protection from political or religious persecution. Refugees' claims are assessed with a view to asylum being refused or granted, either temporarily or permanently. These international human rights standards have been accepted by all EU member states. Yet the principles agreed to under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, have not prevented many member states from interpreting their obligations differently. This was particularly obvious when the so-called Visegrád Group (also referred to as V4; namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, cf. Ivanova, 2016 and press release from 2020, visegrad_group.eu) rejected mandatory quotas for all EU member states relating to their intake of migrants and refugees awaiting their hearings in Greece and Italy. This refusal to share burdens within the EU exposed the absence of a common approach as much as a disregard for common values.¹

Another development that highlights the double standards and lack of values damaging the West's international standing relate to the – at times aggressive – rhetoric against “illegal” refugees, by which in popular parlance those persons are branded, who in the main have left Africa or the Middle East as economic migrants. At the same time, EU member states such as Malta, Cyprus and Bulgaria have sold at a premium their passports, and thus EU citizenship, to foreigners seeking safer havens for their wealth and prosperity (Hornig, 2020, pp. 98-99). This creates effectively two categories of economic refugees, those with the means to buy themselves into the EU and those who have to rely on the asylum system, irrespective of how broken the latter may appear. In an attempt at stopping the sale of so-called “Golden Passports” which for Malta alone yields an income of 1.4 billion Euros per annum, then President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, reiterated that: “European values are not up for sale” (September 2020). However, consultancies and agents continue to promise that, for example, Euro 900,000 will buy anyone Maltese citizenship, granting

¹ Divergence between the Visegrád Group and the EU started with the 2014 Ukrainian crisis (cf. López-Dóriga, 2018 and Stepper 2016).

travel permission without visa requirements to 180 countries, and would thus be a passport nearly as good as a German one (Hornig, 2020, p. 99). Just like people smugglers it is a business model selling hope and an image of a “Golden West” that may not exist for much longer.

Conclusion

To summarise, the West still remains an economic and political power, but its moral authority seems increasingly pilloried in many places. Part of the problem may be the EU’s failure to inspire with its success stories. Anu Bradford, professor at New York’s Columbia Law School and author of *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World* (2020) points towards the EU’s relative soft and quiet approach to power and international relations as its recipe for success. Ironically, it may be at times too quiet about its direct and indirect positive influences. As Joseph Nye reflects on his distinction between soft and hard power, he points towards the necessity for “smart power” in order to bridge and overcome shortcomings of current strategies (2008).

The term “Westlessness” was coined to identify this gap between ideal and reality of the West in the contemporary environment of crises, and this term has proven resilient. Following a liberal interpretation of the Schengen Agreement that was not supported by all the Union’s members, German Chancellor Angela Merkel refused to close Germany’s borders in 2015 when faced with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants. Her response to this humanitarian crisis made shortfalls in EU policies abundantly apparent. More importantly for our theme, it rendered the underlying Westlessness clear: this was not merely a failure in institutional and/or bureaucratic operations: it opened up a gap between loosely held ideals and political realities at the grass-roots level of the West. The ensuing encounters with refugees and illegal migrants have become a litmus test for core values of the West, as much as the European Union.

Not least, the unabated popularity of the EU with asylum seekers and migrants should remind us that outsiders appreciate and clearly see hope, successes and something to aspire to in the area and in relation to the values of “the West”, something which many from within the West and the EU have failed or forgotten to fully appreciate. The EU is still perceived as a vehicle for prosperity and a guarantor for peace and stability by many in the world based on its achievements; achievements lost from sight by those who have come accustomed to taking them for granted, often from within.

The EU’s goals have been defined most recently again: “Preserving peace, saving the world’s climate, ending the destruction of nature, protecting people, increasing prosperity, improving lives, seeking happiness. According to one critic: “Most Europeans believe these goals are so self-evident that they barely even hear them” (Fichtner, 2021, p. 21). Fichtner continues: “As such, they are in danger of failing to see” that the EU has been “successful in transforming an entire Continent – a place where people tore each other up for centuries – into a model for the 21st century.” (2021, p. 21) This echoes Merkel’s controversial claim “Wir schaffen das!” (“We can manage this!”), a credo German Turkey correspondent Popp sees as paradigmatic for the West, when he reiterated: “That [this “yes, we can do” attitude] is the spirit of the West, a good, humanistic, optimistic spirit” (Popp, 2020). That seems not or no longer to be the case now in many parts of Europe. The “Westlessness” of populism, neo-nationalism, right-wing extremism and democratic fatigue appears to be ongoing.

To China and Russia, now presenting the most serious threats to Western power since the Soviet Union, recent developments such as the refugee crises must feel like a strategic gift. The woes of the EU, its inability to formulate a common foreign policy, let alone a common strategic position and migration policy, was and continues to be a void for others to fill. Essentially, the EU's lack of collective action as many of its member states dwell on narrowly-defined national interests, is a gift to others, yet not to the global refugees. As Nye is never weary of stressing, "allies, friendships and legitimacy [are] the greatest assets the West has" (Nye, 2020b), and reminding oneself of these assets and values might help overcome a loss of confidence.

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