

## **Vienna Lecture on the European Union**

# **Triumph and Crisis of the Liberal International Order: Insights from the EU**

**24 April 2018, 5 pm**

Institute for European Integration Research  
Apostelgasse 23, 1030 Vienna  
(near U3 station Kardinal-Nagl-Platz)

**Lecture:** **Berthold Rittberger**, Chair of International Relations, Department of Political Science, University of Munich

**Comments:** **Tina Olteanu**, Department of Political Science, University of Vienna

**Alexander Somek**, Department of Legal Philosophy, University of Vienna

**Andrea Komlosy**, Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna

**Moderation:** **Peter Slominski**, Institute for European Integration Research, University of Vienna

**Welcome:** **Gerda Falkner**, Head of the Institute for European Integration Research, University of Vienna

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This lecture will be held in English, questions can also be asked in German. The event will be followed by a small reception.

Registered and unregistered participants are welcome but we kindly ask for your registration at [eif@univie.ac.at](mailto:eif@univie.ac.at) or +43 1 4277 22401.

## **Abstract**

The liberal international order currently experiences a manifest legitimacy crisis, which is often associated with attributes, such as “Brexit”, “Trump”, or, more generally, the rise of anti-liberal forces challenging the prevailing liberal international order (LIO). I contend that the current crisis of the LIO is, at least in parts, a homemade crisis. While the LIO exhibits self-reinforcing characteristics, it simultaneously provokes reactive sequences, which weaken the existing institutional order. In a first step, I characterize the progressive institutionalization of the LIO as a path-dependent development, characterized by self-reinforcing mechanisms: Ideational self-reinforcement highlights the stickiness of the rationalizing promise of IOs, operating as putatively unbiased and technocratic problem-solvers. Functional and power-based returns stabilize the existing order since the LIO has also created beneficiaries with vested interests. In a second step, I argue that these self-reinforcing mechanisms have triggered a self-undermining process, which is poised to destabilize the LIO by breeding dissatisfaction with the LIO. The interplay of two characteristics of the LIO – IO’s predominantly technocratic legitimation rationale as well as the political authority they command – are responsible for creating a normative legitimacy gap contributing to the erosion of its social legitimacy, i.e. the legitimacy beliefs held by the LIO’s constituents. To illustrate the plausibility of this self-undermining process, I turn to a highly developed sub-order of the LIO: The EU presents a ‘most-likely case’ in which the conditions triggering self-undermining tendencies should be present and particularly strong.