

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

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 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.