

Matthias Waechter [ed.]

Europe – Against the Tide



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Akademie
Otzenhausen

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The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

ISBN 978-3-8487-5071-9 (Print)
 978-3-8452-9276-2 (ePDF)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-3-8487-5071-9 (Print)
 978-3-8452-9276-2 (ePDF)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Waechter, Matthias / Marhold, Hartmut (eds.)

Europe – Against the Tide

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168 p.

Includes bibliographic references.

ISBN 978-3-8487-5071-9 (Print)
 978-3-8452-9276-2 (ePDF)

1st Edition 2018

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The third volume of our policy paper series, collecting the contributions published online by the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE) between summer 2016 and a year later, reflects some significant changes as well as some continuity in European integration and international relations: The international system undergoes a period of accelerated change, mostly due to a more than unconventional stance of the President of the United States, putting into question some of the assumptions of the post-1945, or at least post-bipolar world order, namely the relationship with Europe, as well as the cooperative approach to future US-China relations. Consequently, several papers deal with these tendencies in contemporary global international relations – facets of the secular move away from US global hegemony and the equally secular rise of China, predictable as such to some extent, surprising and disconcerting in its actual form.

Europe seems to have gathered its wits, after a period of destabilisation: the dispute over the immigration challenge and its (mostly failed) test for European-wide solidarity, and the Brexit vote of the British electorate has been overcome by a tightening of relations between the 27 remaining member states – the mess, which will inevitably strain the British economy, society and politics after leaving the EU is perceived as a warning throughout the EU: Brexit did not split the European Union, but intensified the common search for European solutions – a second topic reflected by our series of essays.

The continuity of European integration despite Brexit does not mean that Europe is an Island of the Blessed – the fundaments of European political and cultural identity, as spelled out in the basic treaties of the European Union as well as in many of the EU member states' constitutions, are questioned, challenged and sometimes overridden by right-wing populist movements, which in some countries come close to or even accede to power. The worst seems to have been avoided by the electoral victory of Emmanuel Macron over Marine Le Pen – France is a cornerstone, of course, of European democracy and an open society. The discomposure about the widespread attempts to overrun European democracy is a third focus of our series.

On the whole, the topics of this volume reflect – without claiming to be representative – central evolutions of Europe in a bewildered world, looking for orientation, renewal and stability at the same time. The challenges ahead will not lower the strain on Europe to play a stronger role in solving its problems at home and at a global scale.

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