Policy Brief

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THE EU AND MULTILATERALISM: NINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The EU needs to focus on some key challenges as a new international order takes shape. First, it needs to develop better internal mechanisms for coordinating its positions in order to strengthen its voice and make it a more effective actor externally. This should occur through the everyday work of the European External Action Service (EEAS) diplomatic representation in coordination with other institutions with external relations responsibilities, through greater powers being invested in single EU chairs and through coordination amongst member states' foreign policies. Second, the EU needs to rethink its external action and embrace the idea that multilateral policies, when effectively implemented, shape the world order and create the best environment for protecting and boosting the interests of the EU, its members states and, most importantly, its citizens. Finally, the EU must act flexibly and imaginatively to encourage hybrid forms of regional partnerships, formal and informal cooperation, both in the European area and beyond, and recognize that regionalism, in particular that following patterns comparable to those of European Integration, is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The aim of Regionalism, as well as that of Multilateralism, is the provision of public goods and the promotion of peace, democracy and sustainable development, not a specific organisational form.

Promoting and defending EU interests is a critical part of what the EU does and should do, and the Union needs to conceptualize multilateralism not simply as a means of promoting values and institutions, but as a means of advancing its interests through multilateral policies and institutions.

As the superpower among regional organisations, the EU must tread lightly. It should encourage a plurality of cooperative forms – whether or not institutionalised – across Europe, the Neighbourhood, and beyond.

The Union should continue to encourage regional integration around the world, but in dealing with other regions it needs to show flexibility, not simply building institutions but devising cooperative strategies that take into account very different capabilities to organize.

Combining internal capabilities (national diplomatic services and the EEAS) and creating a stronger 'single EU chair' is necessary to make the EU more effective externally.

The essence of Multilateralism is very close to the *raison d'être* of the European project: European Integration could be considered as the World's most developed multilateral arrangement, but a unique one due to its political *finalité*. This explains why multilateral instincts are deeply rooted in the EU's identity as an international actor, almost a part of its DNA. The Treaty on European Union states clearly in the chapter devoted to the Union's external action that it 'shall promote multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations' (Art. 21). But including a commitment to multilateralism in the treaties is one thing, and honouring that commitment in everyday engagement in multilateral negotiations and institutions is a different matter altogether.

Nine Recommendations

In July 2007 the European Commission issued a call for proposals on the EU and multilateralism within the Social Sciences and Humanities of the 7th Framework Programme for Research. Three proposals were selected, each of them bringing together an international partnership of research institutions. Each team, for the last three years, has been approaching this issue using very different theoretical, methodological and thematic approaches. At the end of these three years, the projects known as Mercury, EU-GRASP and EU4Seas, which had kept connections throughout, came together to compare their results and conclusions, and to draft a set of joint policy recommendations.

The following nine points are the result of research and debate about the EU and multilateralism and are intended to convey some of the ideas that have emerged in our seminars and documents. We present them as a contribution to the EU-wide debate on the role of the European Union in global and regional multilateralism. They do not aim to summarise the vast amount of empirical evidence and analytical materials produced by the three projects, nor can they definitively represent the opinions of all the 25 institutions from 17 countries that are part of the three consortia. They are presented here in a condensed and highly simplified format with the intention of stimulating debate and reflection amongst all sorts of stakeholders, from citizens to EU decision-makers. Their objective is to help bridge two gaps: one between rhetorical commitment and practice, and the other between expected and actual outcomes of the EU's engagement with the World. These two gaps can also be described as the answer to two related questions: Is the EU honouring its stated commitment to privilege multilateral solutions in its external actions? And is the EU achieving its objectives when it engages in multilateralism?

1. The EU must adapt to changing global multilateralism. The redistribution of power on a global scale and in wider Europe, pushed by the emergence of new centres of power and the urgency of global challenges (the financial crisis, climate change, maritime security, to name a few), highlights the need for more robust forms of multilateralism that deliver global public goods and contain emerging rivalries. But the main assumptions about global multilateralism need to change: the new multilateralism will no longer be the exclusive preserve of states, nor will it be hierarchically organised in highly institutionalised organisations. The proliferation of multilateral regimes in the last two decades is shaping a 'Multilateralism Mode 2.0' characterized by the diversification of both the multilateral playing fields and multilateral actors. This more open multilateral system brings with it more opportunities for the EU. To take advantage of them, however, it needs to first come to grips with a new situation where asymmetries, variable geometries and one-of-a-kind agreements will be the rule, rather than the exception. The EU must be steady in its promotion of multilateralism as an ideal, but extremely flexible in its multilateral practice, and find ways – for which EU governance seems particularly well fitted compared to the traditional diplomacies – to engage with legitimate sub-national, multinational and transnational non-state actors and their networks. At the same time, it must find innovative ways to address the problems of absent, competing, obsolete or ineffective multilateral structures that exist both at the regional and global level.

2. Dealing with a multipolar world of regions When engaging with regional organisations, the dream of a 'world of regions' modelled on the image of the EU often results in a fixation on institutional questions and, as a consequence, when institutions are absent or fail, a lack of strategic vision. The kind of institutional support that has benefitted both small subregional organisations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, and much larger ones, such as the African Union, are investments that should not be lightly abandoned. But the EU institutions must be flexible enough to work with other institutional structures or simply to create alliances with groups of countries that are promoting multilateral solutions in their regions and on the global scale, such as those of Latin America and of Africa. The parallel between the EU and other regional organisations, however, should not be replaced with a tendency to see the EU in constant comparison with the USA and the emerging powers, trying to act as their mirror image, or adopting their behaviour and, even less, their interpretation of power. The sui generis character of the EU is a strength in global multilateralism, and should not be abandoned lightly.

3. Internal decision-making determines the ability to succeed in Multilateralism. The close compatibility between European Integration and multilateralism does not mean that the EU will automatically succeed as a multilateral player; indeed, the complex internal negotiations to reach a common position can make it much harder to play a decisive role in global multilateralism. Of the many reasons that explain the difficulties the EU has in global multilateral settings, the one which stands out is its lack of internal cohesion. The stark contrast between the EU's ability to play a role in trade negotiations in the WTO compared to the fiasco at the 2009 Copenhagen UN Climate Change Conference, for example, illustrates the point. If it wants to become a successful multilateral player, the EU must expend more effort using the combined capabilities of the EU institutions and of EU national diplomacies to convince third parties, and less time negotiating amongst EU member states.

4. Single voice, single chair. The EU is more successful in global multilateralism when it has a unified voice; the best way of ensuring this simple voice is often, but not always, to occupy a single, EU chair. This could be particularly important in the UN Security Council, as well as the IMF, the World Bank, the Contact Group for the Balkans, the G20, the P5+1 negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme, the Minsk Group and numerous other multilateral fora. This issue is extremely sensitive for member states, as illustrated by the efforts of some EU member states to sit at the G20 table when it was activated. However, it is no longer acceptable to consider membership in international organisations and in smaller multilateral fora (such as contact groups) a crucial issue of sovereignty when so many decisions that affect both citizens' lives and national politics are already highly integrated. Monetary policy is, given the current situation, the most blatant example. The EU is needed to solve many global issues, and a normative argument in favour of a single strong voice should be made to politicians and citizens to circumvent the monopolies that national diplomatic services guard at an unacceptable cost in terms of both increasing European influence and solving urgent global challenges.

5. Multilateralism is a strategic choice which serves EU interest. Success in multilateralism must not be judged only from a purely normative perspective – multilateralism as an objective per se – but also for its effectiveness, or lack thereof, in the production of public goods and the advancement of EU goals. But EU interests must not be too narrowly defined. Contradiction between values and material interest is a common concern for EU policy-makers and analysts. When the value at stake is the promotion of multilateralism, however, this contradiction is often more apparent than real. When seen in wider perspective, both of time and of issues, promoting multilateral frameworks at the expense of some immediate material interests is rational. Norm-based contexts which produce multilateral policies constitute a better environment for the EU than crude power politics, which test its cohesion and almost invariably put the EU at a disadvantage. This is one lesson that EU member states have learned from their own engagement in European integration and that the EU as a whole must not forget: strengthening the system is sometimes worth the loss of an immediate negotiating goal.

6. Coherence in values does not confer a higher moral ground. Being flexible in the forms and modalities of multilateralism to circumvent the rigidities of an exceedingly institutional approach opens the possibility that the EU be accused of applying double standards. Coherence is a crucial value for success in the mid- to long term, and the best way to ensure it is to apply uniformly the principles and values of the EU. But neither this normative approach, nor the success of European integration itself, confer a higher moral ground to the EU in its relations with individual countries or with less cohesive and integrated groups of states. Despite all its efforts to promote regionalism across the planet, the EU has alienated other regional groups by stressing its unique level of integration and demanding special treatment. Nowhere is this more obvious than at the UN, when the EU lost a first vote to upgrade its status and could only win it after backtracking. Smaller sub-regional agreements on the peripheries of the EU, for example in the Black Sea, have shown that EU policies can make it considerably harder to maintain, let alone strengthen, looser forms of integration as the EU privileges its own strategies (enlargement, neighbourhood) over genuine multilateral cooperation.

7. The Union must make space for other organisations in Europe. Multilateralism is also changing in Europe. The EU is the most advanced and most successful expression of multilateralism, but it is not the only game in town, and it should not behave that way. Despite the enlargement and neighbourhood rhetoric, the EU external border has become the strongest dividing element on the Continent. The EU needs to rethink its policies in order to open some space to wider (OSCE, NATO, Council of Europe) and narrower forms of multilateralism. This rethink is needed not just to uphold the EU's own commitment to multilateral solutions, but also to avoid a new polarisation on the Continent (the so-called 'spectre of a multipolar Europe') and the alienation of key players in its immediate neighbourhood. Even fragile and imperfect forms of regionalism, such as the ones found around the Baltic and the Black Sea, can act as steps towards an EU-style permanent peace. The usefulness of such weaker forms should not be judged, as the European Commission tends to do, by whether their norms and practices are formally compatible with the EU's own, but rather by whether they are helping to produce the changes in behaviour, atttitudes and sense of identity that will provide the foundation for non-violent problem solving and ultimately, a deeper-reaching integration. Some of the organisations that are not purely regional but play a role have been overlooked by the EU because they do not conform to categories of EU foreign relations: for example, GUAM has been overlooked in the post-Soviet space, and the EU has stressed the cooperation that would be 'desirable' (for example, in the Southern Caucasus) rather than supporting the one emanating from the countries of the region.

8. The EU has power, but its fragmentation must be overcome. The normative drive to promote multilateralism can only be meaningfully satisfied when the EU develops the required capabilities. 'Market Power Europe' has been used to describe a powerful set of capabilities in economic issues, in particular those related to trade. But in other areas, this power is mostly fragmented and diffuse. The EEAS should provide a new arm to the EU's activity in regional and global multilateral forums; nonetheless, its impact will remain limited for as long as the member states' diplomatic services continue to keep substantial parts of their own multilateral engagement disconnected from the EEAS and from other EU institutions. From intelligence to public diplomacy to military force, the EU's multilateral involvement is limited by not having its own capabilities. In the case of peace missions, member states not only have to contribute the capabilities, but even to fund their own participation. Further development of CSDP, including a common mechanism for financing missions and further joint military and civil capabilities will be crucial to increase the preparedness and effectiveness of EU action. The good news is that the indispensable (and most expensive) capabilities exist already at the hands of the member states, and they just need to be made operational in a joint manner, as ESDP/CSDP missions have shown in places like the Balkans, Africa and the Indian Ocean.

9. The EU must look outward and be prepared to listen and to lead. There is growing demand for multilateral policies in the global and regional arenas for a increasing number of issues, from the fight against climate change to disease control. The USA has shown awareness that unilateralism is seldom the way to go, and the emerging powers still prefer systems that will constrain the West. There is, therefore, demand for more multilateralism and, arguably, demand for a larger European role. One thing the Euro crisis proves, for instance, is that the whole world wants a strong Euro and a strong EU in international monetary affairs. This stronger European role can only be played in a substantial way that is consistent across a broad spectrum of issues if the EU acts as a cohesive actor. In this most challenging hour of European integration, when the main achievements of the EU are under unprecedented tension, the Union can not afford to look exclusively inwards. Nor can it delegate its role in shaping global multilateralism to unpredictable combinations of the larger EU member states.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES. Collaborative Research Projects on the EU and Multilateralism

The EU and sub-regional multilateralism in Europe's sea basin: Neighbourhood, Enlargement and Multilateral Cooperation

www.eu4seas.eu
FP7-SSH-2007-1, No.225382.
Duration: 01/01/2009 – 31/12/2011

EU4Seas embraces 8 partnering teams (4 EU and 4 non-EU countries). It examines sub-regional multilateralism (theory and practice) in 4 maritime basins (Baltic, Black, Caspian and Mediterranean Seas) and aims to advise the EU on how to handle relations with these spaces.
The project focuses on 4 areas of study: Politics&Security, Environmental&Maritime Issues, Energy&Transport Issues, the Four Freedoms (free movement of goods, services, capital and people).

Results: Policy Papers, Scientific Papers, Interview Database, Seminar Reports, Journal Articles.
Partners: CIDOB (Spain), CPRM (France), IAI (Italy), ICDS (Estonia), IIA-CSS (Iceland), CES-METU (Turkey), ICPS (Ukraine), CNIS (Azerbaijan).

Changing Multilateralism: the EU as a Global-regional Actor in Security and Peace

www.eugrasp.eu
FP7-SSH-2007-1, No.225722.
Duration: 1/2/2009 – 31/1/2012

EU-GRASP encompasses 9 partners (5 EU and 4 non-EU countries). It contributes to the analysis of the current and future role of the EU as a global actor in multilateral security governance, in a context of challenged multilateralism.
It examines the notion and practice of multilateralism and theory, deepening certain aspects with case studies on Regional Conflict, Terrorism, WMD Proliferation, Migration, Energy&Climate Change, Human Rights violations.

Results: Case studies, Working Papers, Journal Articles, Policy Briefs, Foresight Studies, PhD Theses.
Partners: UNU-CRIS, University of Warwick (UK), University of Gothenburg (Sweden), Florence Forum on the Problems of Peace and War (Italy), KULeuven (Belgium), CIGI (Canada), Peking University (China), ISS (South Africa), Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Israel).

Multilateralism and the EU in the Contemporary Global Order

www.mercury-fp7.net
FP7-SSH-2007-1, No.225267.
Duration: 01/02/2009 – 31/01/2012

MERCURY comprises 9 institutional partners (7 EU and 2 non-EU countries). It was formed to critically examine the European Union's contribution to multilateralism. It explores multilateralism as a concept, an aspiration and a form of international order.
It does this by mapping modes of multilateralism and analysing key aspects of EU multilateralism: EU institutional and policy dynamics, interactions with external regions and strategic partners, and the EU's performance in a multilateral context.

Results: Journal Articles, E-papers, Policy Papers, Glossary of Terms, DATEX database.
Partners: University of Edinburgh (UK), University of Cologne (Germany), Charles University (Czech Republic), IAI (Italy), Sciences-Po (France), SIPRI (Sweden), University of Cambridge (UK),University of Pretoria (South Africa), Fudan University (China).