

# Putting Humpty-Dumpty Together Again?

## Trends and Issues of Efficacy in Multilateralism

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### Resumo

#### Recompondo *Humpty-Dumpty*? Tendências e Questões de Eficácia no Multilateralismo

Desde há muito que o multilateralismo tem os seus paladinos. A União Europeia tem seguramente estado na linha da frente da sua defesa – designadamente como tributo para o seu próprio soft power e enquanto expressão de ideais tais como a criação de um sistema internacional baseado em regras e instituições. Tal tem tido lugar num quadro em que o andar dos processos internacionais não tem dado apoio claro à noção de que estes seriam objectivos exequíveis e na ausência de corroborações regulares de um sucesso da estratégia de abordagem pela via do soft power da União. Talvez não surpreendentemente, nos últimos anos a UE tem começado a teorizar condições de institucionalização de um “multilateralismo eficiente” – a sugestão implícita sendo a de que, caso bem gizado, o multilateralismo pode de facto vir a produzir frutos. Por intermédio de três exemplos e de um thought experiment, essas invocações são criticamente avaliadas. A atenção centra-se em três processos – o envolvimento com a África subsaariana, o Processo de Paz do Médio Oriente, e o EuroMed – e nas várias medidas correctivas por via das quais a UE tem tentado desenhar abordagens multilaterais mais “eficientes”. A discussão é lavada a cabo tanto no contexto da eficácia como no da legitimização.

### Abstract

*Multilateralism has for a long time had its paladins. For one, the EU has of late been at the forefront of its defense – namely as a tribute to its own “soft power” and as an expression of ideals such as that of the creation of an institution and rule-based international system. This has come about even as international political processes give no clear support to the claim that these are achievable aims and absent any sustained evidence of success for EU’s soft power approaches. Perhaps not surprisingly, the EU has lately begun theorizing conditions for institutionalizing an “effective multilateralism” – the suggestion being that, if duly engaged in, multilateralism may indeed come to work to task. By means of three examples and a thought experiment, such claims are critically evaluated. The focus is placed on three processes – engagement with sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East Peace Process, and EuroMed – and various corrective moves through means of which the EU is vying for more “effective” multilateral approaches. The discussion is placed in the context of both efficacy and legitimacy.*

For many years now, multilateralism has been hailed as a panacea and one to which the EU is particularly prone<sup>1</sup>. Much as I think multilateralism is indeed on the rise – and that this is a good thing – I also deem it is high-time for that perception to be duly nuanced. To my mind, the theme I chose to address is a difficult one, but it is also certainly both rich and timely. It is timely since it shows that diplomats and politicians concerned with foreign affairs have moved into a pro-active search for a better adaptation – and thus a greater effectiveness – of their external engagements, looking for policy design in manners which are strategic rather than merely tactical and reactive. While it is not clear that they will manage to find successful blueprints, it is surely interesting to note the quest is ongoing. To my mind, the theme is also rich, and I believe this reflects a growing awareness – arising in Portugal, in Romania, and in the rest of the European Union, and very much everywhere else as well – that the international environment is changing in fundamental ways. The fact that for some years now the theme of “efficiency in multilateralism” has been discussed in all sorts of *fora* manifests a new “conventional wisdom” on what is nowadays called for in terms of research and understanding of the internal dynamics of a contemporary international system which was quite different only a few years ago<sup>2</sup>.

So what may I say about such a well-worn topic that could be of any interest? In this as in all cases, one should start by trying to put things into perspective. Multilateralism does, of course, have a long history – as has belief in multilateralism as a formula. But this has also been a history of changes in its modalities, following pressures for adaptation which are, again, making themselves felt. Inside and outside Europe a new kind of multilateralism has been brewing which (although we may argue it has of late scored some successes) has yet to find its way and still has to prove its real worth. For lack of a better term, and as a means of pinpointing its

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1 This paper is partially based on the text of a presentation in Poiana Braşov, Transylvania, Romania, on the 31st October 2008. The venue was the XVIIIth edition of the *The International Course for Young Diplomats 'Nicolae Titulescu'*. The general theme of the 2008 Course, which I was asked to ‘wrap up’ in a Key-Note talk, was “*Multilateralism between legitimacy and efficiency at the start of the 21st century*”. Given the dryness of the topic, I deliberately retain, in this published version, the oral characteristics of my original manuscript.

2 To the extent this *prise de conscience* has involved diplomats from all over the world, this pairing of awareness is significant. When we speak of diplomacy, or of international politics, we must be sensitive to the evidence that it is really not possible to dissociate these two dynamics – a first one, which is related to the fluidity of contemporary international environments, and another, a second one, linked to our new political modalities of response to it. This muddle is indeed what makes my theme a difficult one – on top of the fact that, of course, guessing at the future is always a hazardous enterprise, particularly when we are challenged to do so in rapidly shifting regional and global contexts, as is nowadays patently the case.

biting edge, it has been called *effective* multilateralism – the expression underlines a model for ‘resolving’ one of the most problematic domains of the urgently needed reconfiguration of an old international procedural mechanism used for ensuring an acceptable Westphalian form of political participation of different actors, namely multi-laterality.

At one level, the eventual success aimed at by the contemporary policy quest – the hopes of those blessed by an often deeply held conviction that multilateralism may be a key for the solution of some of the apparently irreducible conflicts of interest we face – is of little relevance: the attempt itself is interesting and well worth trying to understand. For believers, holding on to the conviction is an essential exercise, to be sure. In the ever more unstable and less predictable international scenarios in which we find ourselves (after 1989 in Berlin, 1991 in Moscow, 1991 and 1992 in Baghdad and Mogadishu, 1995 and 1996 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1999 in the Kosovo, 2001 in New York, Washington, and then Afghanistan, 2003 in Iraq, 2004 and 2005 in Madrid and London, and August 2008 in Georgia), it is surely absolutely crucial that we rapidly manage to re-design multilateral procedures so as to bring them up to speed – at least for those who trust their eventual efficacy as a panacea. And it is deemed urgent that we do so, maybe not simply out of a messianic set of beliefs, but also out of realist prudence.

But the effort is not merely worthwhile for those who actually place trust on the efficacy of multilateral procedures. For the more cynically inclined – or at least the more uncertain ones – the very effort itself of trying to establish ‘effective’ forms of multilateralism deserves careful and detailed critical analysis – if only to spot its insufficiencies and thus prepare the ground for ‘less unrealistic’ alternatives. This means both identifying obstacles in the current formats of multi-laterality and then surmounting them by the stipulation of new rules of the game – and perhaps, even, by devising a new game-plan which may, or may not, include it – and if they include ‘effective multilateralism’ may have to do so in a mitigated manner. Albeit I partake of some of the hesitations of cynics as far as these matters are concerned, in this presentation I shall stop short of taking such a last step.

Without excessive ambitions, in the next few pages I try to sketch a few ideas on how the choices may be carried out – while noting some of the difficulties with which we still have to cope in deciding if multilateralism may really be adequately reformed. In what follows, I shall start with a few ideas on the concept of multilateralism, mostly on the notion of what many recent European authors have come to call *effective* multilateralism. From there I will go on to a brief circumscription (identification would be too strong a word for my efforts, I think) of some of the most important lacunae, or gaps, remaining in our European approach to the new

emergent type of multilateralism and our generation of it – and I will advance some suggestions on how we should try to deal with the various outstanding issues this brings forth. I will then move on to argue that a more *active* European participation (in the sense of a more *efficacious* one) of the international arenas today requires from us a careful reflection on the specific ‘rules of engagement’ that we actually use to interact with contemporary international scenarios – namely on the possible modes of multilateralism with which to pattern that very engagement, but also more than that. My point here will be to show the inconclusiveness of the available data on EU multilateral efforts: the EU has not used multilateralism in a sufficiently robust way for our experiences to constitute convincing tests as to its real worth. Finally, I shall use the opportunity to make a few more general comments on some of the details of the progression of multilateralism towards the present state of affairs Europe sees itself in, at this crucial post-Lisbon Treaty juncture – and in doing that, I will want to raise some questions which hopefully may be of use to trigger what I hope will be a fruitful subsequent discussion.

A word of caution, or rather a safeguard: throughout, my posture will be pragmatic, rather than purely theoretical, although I do not hesitate, here and there, to venture into concepts by taking a few ‘theoretical turns’.

### **On our European revision of the role of small and medium-sized States and other actors in the world**

Some background is both useful and appropriate – and, although I shall touch upon nothing new, I will do it from an angle I consider useful for my purposes here: mapping issues. Recent years have witnessed an increased attentiveness to the importance and role of small and medium-sized States (be they European or not) as well as to those of other, non-State, actors, as global players. Namely, that has allowed us – indeed it has forced us – to leave behind earlier dismissive notions of non-State actors, and of small and medium-sized States, as rather light-weight powers, or even as ‘civilian’ ones. This, in turn, brought us a deeper understanding of these entities (Europe provides us with clear examples of what I am trying to convey) as promoters of what I shall call *global public goods*<sup>3</sup>, a contentious concept,

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3 Following a classical economic definition, global public goods can be thought of as global goods which are, simultaneously, non-rivalled and non-excludable goods: that is, goods such that consumption of those goods by one individual does not reduce their availability for others, and that no one can be effectively excluded from using them. Air, heat, or, less trivially, knowledge

to be sure, but surely an emergent reality. Ponder on the following for a second. The list of such budding public goods includes, perhaps most importantly, security; and no State can, today, achieve that alone, either for itself, in terms of security and defense, say, or for others, in terms of international policing, for example.

Without more than merely skimming the surface of the matter, let me focus for a moment on the implications of abandoning our earlier dismissive notions. Note that as we construct a new 'identity' for small and medium-sized States and non-State entities in the contemporary post-bipolar and post 9/11 world (Europe remains a choice example), one of the foundations – and even touchstones – of the very act of building has been the re-designing of an *effective multilateralism*. So, we may ask, for example, what the reach of this assertion is, in the context of security as a regional, or even a global, public good?

At one level, of course, such a claim of an enhanced role of small and medium-sized States and other actors in the world simply reflects a consciousness that we must work on the assumption that, in a globalizing international environment and in the presence of very powerful entities, small and mid-sized States and NGOs cannot achieve important objectives *alone* – and with this I want to stress the evidence this assertion actually reflects a firm confidence that it is important to build a *rule-based alternative* to both the superpower negotiations of old (or the Great Power ones of even older times) or instead of relying, simply, on the venerable bilateral strategic relations we got used to for so many generations before that. I also want to stress what appears to be an obvious corollary of such a move: that we, in Europe, tend to believe we must do so for the purpose of erecting *robust forms of global governance*, something we think globalization is sorely lacking – and see so we for example tend to envisage the current financial (and soon also economic) crisis as an unfortunate event which has made evident to everyone. In Europe, in other words, we live under

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(according to Joseph E. Stiglitz and many others), downloadable shareware are obvious examples of this category. At a less tangible level, and for the purposes of the present communication, so are things like security, international rules of conduct, and international organizations. The class has been extensively used in academic publications in the last decade or so. For seminal UN-produced batches of empirical studies on the relatively recent concept of 'global public goods', see the two collections (eds.) Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg and Marc Stern (1999), *Global Public Goods*, Oxford University Press, and (eds.) Inge Kaul, Pedro Conceição, Katell Le Goulven and Ronald U. Mendoza (2003), *Providing Global Public Goods. Managing Globalization*, also at the Oxford University Press. For a criticism of the notion that security (not quite defined in the same way) could be a public good, see Hans-Hermann Hoppe (1989), "Fallacies of the Public Goods Theory and the Production of Security", *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* IX, 1: 27-46. For a more 'constructivist' reading which allows for a building of security as a bundle of global public goods, see Ian Loader and Neil Walker (2007), *Civilizing Security*, Cambridge University Press.

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the often deeply-held conviction that *global institutions* and *multilateral approaches to international problem-solving*, are appropriate responses to our current needs, and the desire they should be made *more effective* – even if, after repeatedly trying and failing to build security via such means, we end up concluding that they are in practice insufficient ones.

With this in mind, let me now begin to focus on efficiency and multilateralism, my chosen theme. Efficacy in multilateralism is not an easy objective to achieve, unless strong convergences are found or generated – something I shall want to come back to time and again here. And even when sufficient levels of ‘internal’ efficacy are reached, external ones – the co-optation, or at least the consent, of big powers – loom heavily on the horizon as a further barrier which must be overtaken if we are going to get anywhere with our hard-fought consensus. This, of course brings up a further problem, one which comes together with every major change, and that is: how do we make our new strategies *legitimate* (meaning, recognized, both internally and externally, as adequate, proportional, fitting) – and thus followed by all. This is an issue I shall touch upon as I move along, without ever digging too deeply into it.

Again, allow to go back to my choice European paradigm and note that – perhaps indeed largely as a result of these kinds of considerations – the EU regularly claims to promote a certain model of international relations, a peaceful and voluntaristic style, which presumes a willingness, on both the side of Europeans and on that of its interlocutors, to play the game in that very way. The claim is backed by real action: the “normative plus public diplomacy” path along which we construct this identity of Europe in the world – or those of small or medium-powers, be they States or NGOs – is one of the major cornerstones of the building we are carrying out, so there really have been systematic attempts at an *effective multilateralism*, or *plural dialogue*, if you will. This is, of course, something that tends to go down well in terms of ‘legitimacy’. It goes without saying, of course, that it also means that in an international context where multilateralism is *not* the rule, the EU finds itself in an ever more difficult position as it tries to exert its influence. But that, when it does, it is again seen as doing something ‘noble’ – and thus somehow more *legitimate*. This is at the root, I would claim, of what we diffusely, and time and again somewhat disconcertingly, call ‘European soft-power’. In a famous 2007 ‘policy brief’, Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard have talked about, in precisely this context, of the rise of ‘herbivorous powers’<sup>4</sup>.

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4 In their Ivan Krastev e Mark Leonard (2007) “New World Order: The Balance of Soft Power and the Rise of Herbivorous Powers”, *Policy Brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations, London.

Why does Europe do that, why does Europe insist on threading that soft normative path? What is behind this European attitude, apart from the obvious fact that in the absence of *hegemony*, or of a *decisive military potency*, it is actually *the only way* for Europe to carry on – a sort of *European default setting*? Going back to what I stated earlier, this probably simply means Europe works on the basis of its awareness that it *cannot* achieve important objectives *alone*, and that it believes that it is important to build a *rule-based alternative* to bilateral relations, for the purpose of strategic macro-regional and global governance. In other words, Europe threads that path as a result of a realistic self-assessment of her own capacities – and so as to look good in the eyes of her interlocutors, of course.

In the face of weaknesses in such modeling, Europe often resorts a sort of *defensive secondary elaborations*, namely the claim that multilateralism in fact sometimes does not work according to plan, but when it does not this is mostly the outcome of poor design of the multilateral path taken. Looking back at the EU posture in the last few years brings that to the fore very clearly, or so I believe. We Europeans underpin our approach with the enthusiastic claim of a recognition that global institutions and multilateral approaches to international problem-solving are indeed appropriate responses to our current needs, but only if they are somehow rendered more efficient. This is by no means a politically neutral claim: as a result, the EU ostensibly promotes *a certain model* of international relations – and one which, note, to a large extent, reproduces Europe's own fascinating experience of integration. So, no matter what cynics might want to throw at Europe, there is quite a substantial amount of good faith in our approach – even if, as many believe, it is a rather naïve one.

Note too that this notion of a more influential role of traditionally 'obscure' small or mid-sized powers (be they State or non-State ones), or of Europe<sup>5</sup>, in global affairs, is, of course, at least in European canonical interpretations of these matters, closely linked to the concept of 'effective multilateralism' or the lack of it – and this is one belief that buttresses many of the changes we today witness in diplomacy and in even in foreign policy. How is this so? In a series of steps, I want to gradually and cumulatively break up these constructs by displaying their internal mechanics, as it were.

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5 I use the term 'Europe' here, as a short-cut expression, in the sense of the European Union, of course.

### On the idea, or notion, of effective multilateralism

The concept I am talking about, that of *an institutionalized rule-based international future*, stands out in the European Security Strategy as ‘the development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order’<sup>6</sup>. Although it might sound like wishful thinking, in fact this assertion is not very new, and not even very challenging. And it is noteworthy only for a lingering neo-realist inner fear that rule-based orders are ineffective things: the true political challenge we face, therefore, is to prove that such an order may produce desirable results. But is this really so? Are neo-realists completely wrong? Do rule-based orders really work?

For a programmatic expression of this, allow me to quote a politician and friend, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Professor João Cravinho, on a very similar point: “the challenge [facing this strengthening of international society and its rules and institutions] is in fact a considerable one, namely because it requires strong internal coordination and a common external position in a wide range of policy areas, and following from this there must be strong positions which must be backed up by appropriate resources, be they diplomatic, financial or even occasionally military”<sup>7</sup>. A question: is this inventory of the problems we must face – coordination and convergence, and also means – a sufficient one? And, if so, how does that translate into foreign policy?

I shall try to answer this in what follows, but first a quick initial stock of what I have underlined so far. Independently of my intrinsic hesitations as to the

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6 Much of what follows in this and the next subsection critically addresses rather directly the rather ‘politically cautious’ position of many EU ‘solidarists’, namely João Gomes Cravinho (2008), in “Putting Effective Multilateralism to the Test. The Case of EU Engagement in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Negócios Estrangeiros* 12. The quotation refers to the text of a presentation by the Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, who presented his communication in Brussels, 11-12 October 2007, in the European Council, in the presence of the European High Representative, Javier Solana, at a Policy Planning Directors informal meeting which I co-Chaired during the third Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. Albeit my framework is rather different from his, in the present communication, delivered in Romania, I do not veer too far from João Cravinho’s position, which I consider to be in many senses exemplary, albeit insufficient, at least as concerns the difficulties faced to render contemporary multilateralism effective. Quite deliberately, in fact, I follow the template set by his paper. I do not, however, share the solidarist belief set – I deem this wishful thinking – which tends to see dialogue as sufficient, particularly in an international order in which very real and irreducible conflicts of interest prevail.

7 *Ibid.*, João G. Cravinho, *op. cit.*: 12. Cravinho’s approach in this particular paper is of course much more ‘political’ and normative than my own.



effectiveness of this ostensive European strategy, in short, I have hinted at the suggestion (or, at least, I have tried to insist) that, if we are to take the concept of a new institution and rule-based international order seriously, we *must* assume that effective multilateralism is much more than a general and abstract guiding principle. To be serious, we must actually believe effective multilateralism constitutes, rather, *a very specific framework*, albeit one that has clearly *not yet* been sufficiently adapted to changed international circumstances, much less *operationalised*. We may want to refine this further: effective multilateralism, if we want to trust there is to be any hope at all it will work according to plan, should *not* be conceived merely as *the sum total* of our own individual engagements with the engagements of others. It must be both more and less than that and partly external to it; to work, it must be institutionalized – this is the very minimum we must believe if we want to claim we actually take at all seriously the concept of “a new institution and rule-based international order”.

The assertion may sound banal, but it is not. As we have painfully learned, achieving that institutionalization is not always as easy as it sounds. Tripwires abound – so at issue is not just our manifest lack of experience. For instance note, too, as indeed João Cravinho stressed in the paper I quoted above, that a really effective multilateralism has to be developed within the context of an international system which includes institutions and mechanisms that do not always function at all well – the still un-reformed UN is a sad example, here, as are the Bretton Woods institutions, another, still, is the rather inglorious Central Asian Shanghai Cooperation Organization<sup>8</sup>, to stick to a handful of cases only. Effective multilateral efforts are also embedded in the context of international norms that are sometimes ambiguous or even contradictory – such as the text of the UN Charter and that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the relation between the rather new ‘responsibility, or duty, to protect’ and the rule of non-interference in the

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<sup>8</sup> A side-comment on a theme which does not relate directly to the resent paper, but that bears on it and, particularly, on the challenges facing effective multilateralism in the Caucasus and Central Asia. For an interesting prospective six-year old study on the role of the Shanghai Five in the region, see Sean L. Yom (2002). “Power Politics in Central Asia. The Future of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization”, *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 6 (4): 48-54. On the general geopolitics of Central Asia, as concerns US-Russia relations, see Dmitri Trenin (2003), “A farewell to the ‘Great Game’? Prospects for Russian-American security cooperation in Central Asia”, *European Security*, vol. 12, no. 3-4: 21-35. Given its different angle of approach, it is worth reading Sergej Mahnovski, Kamiljon T. Akramov e Theodore W. Karasik (2006), “Economic Dimensions of Security in Central Asia”, RAND Corporation. A more recent study, post-Georgia invasion and the 5 Day War, is Sergey Markedonov (2008), “Caucasus Conflict Breaks Old Rules of the Game” *Russian Analytical Digest*, 45: 2-6, Zurich, [www.res.ethz.ch](http://www.res.ethz.ch).

internal affairs of sovereign States; or, again, the tension, patent for instance in justifications offered for the recent invasion of Georgia by Russia between the Westphalian principle of the 'sacredness' of borders and the Wilsonian one of 'self-determination'.

It is easy to make further claims. Another barrier is more straightforward: many States are simply not really interested at all in multilateralism – or not for all matters. In actual fact, many oppose the very idea of having to negotiate with others in what concerns their protection of their own interests. Big powers take that sort of stance as a rule, but they are by no means the only ones, as a handful of contemporary small- or medium-sized ambitious States and non-State entities like the profusion of recent radical Islamist groupings clearly show us. All of this militates harshly against the operationalization of the idea, most surely. So this means that, while effective multilateralism represents a commonly accepted end-result, the necessary mechanisms, or ways, to move it forward in practical terms are, therefore, not always evident. Maybe they are not even possible. For those who believe in them, those mechanisms must be found, nevertheless, if we want to have any well-founded hope of influencing the future. Europe has led the way in such trust in multilateral 'composition of interests'. This is why I believe that it is vital that, as Europeans, should spend time sharing ideas on the meaning of the concept, and try to find ways of possibly streamlining it and of making it operational – or, instead, to draw limits on our fashionable notions of its worth.

For believers, although this is most certainly not going to be an easy task, it is clear they consider it is not an impossible one. That trust should not come as a surprise: if we believe we can make multilateralism work, we need to identify difficulties and then we must face up to the issues which we think hinder its effective operation and we must then try to resolve them one by one. So, taking a step back, what are these difficulties, these hindrances – and are they surmountable by effective forms of multilateralism?

**Some of the lacunae remaining in our procedural approach to the emergent multilateralism which global governance requires**

Leaving aside, if only for a moment, all the 'externalities' which structurally militate against effective multilateralism, what, then, are the intrinsic lacunae that have to be filled-in if multilateral action is conceivably to be streamlined? Or, in other words, insofar as we trust its potential effectiveness, what should we do if we want to attempt to amplify its actual efficacy as far as regional and global governance

are concerned? What are the challenges we face at this 'internal', technical, level in the pursuit of that aim? What should we have to readjust?

One particular challenge I have already touched upon is the sustained and coherent management of the complex maze of relations in which we currently operate in our globalizing world. Latching onto the European example again, I want to be fairly clear at the outset: surely if we want our multilateralism to be minimally effective, a careful management of it is vital. And this is not really there at all, yet – although, in practice, we seem to have reached some level of agreement on a joint *vision* of how this could be achieved: Europe, the “old Europe” at least, does seem to thrive for an institution- and rule-based international order and appears to trust the notion that it is indeed achievable. So what stands on our way, what are we not looking at that hinders success we believe the multilateral institution- and rule-based formula should have? Clearly identifying obstacles becomes crucial: if one holds that belief, surely a good strategy for surmounting the lack of mechanisms necessary for multilateral efficacy will be to identify obstacles, or challenges, and then to address them one at the time – cleaning the slate as it were, so as to render a re-design of multilateralism viable. So what is our initial challenge? That is, which lacuna should be addressed first?

Allow me this thought experiment. Following the order of the issues raised earlier, let me begin from a general plane, and allow me to break matters up, as it were: as has time and again been stressed, there is, in the international conjunctures of today, a multiplicity of international *institutional* actors, each with his own agendas, and in our daily chores we must as a rule engage with them in a multiplicity of dialogues – on a bilateral, a regional, and a global level. So here is the challenge: it is essential that we know how to tightly articulate both with and among them our global, regional and bilateral approaches – and that identify the extant positive feedbacks among them – rather than permitting them to erode and undermine us and each other. This is particularly pertinent when we think of the challenges of adapting multilateralism to the emerging multi-polarity of the international order. In Europe, we have been investing strongly in bilateral strategic dialogues with other regions and with individual countries, with a view to ensuring what has been called ‘the multi-lateralization of multi-polarity’ and, at that level, we need to ensure that there is a broad coherence of approach among our efforts and those of our partner entities – whoever these may be. The challenge, at this level, is one of *congruence of strategic modes of approach*.

A second challenge we run into when trying to set up the necessary mechanisms that will help us along in building an effective multilateralism concerns our efforts to articulate the different dimensions which have to be taken into account

when addressing a collective international problem and how we want to combine responses into what I would call effective *multi-dimensionality*<sup>9</sup>. *An example of this is the need for articulation and coherence of our security and development agendas in terms of other engaging international (as well as national) actors at a multilateral level, to go for an obvious case. What do we understand by 'strategic goals'? And how do we relate our vision of country and that of our regional integration entity (say, Europe) as a provider of global public goods for the fulfillment of those strategic goals? These are questions which, in each and every case, must be addressed carefully and as fully as possible. Here, instead, the additional challenge, notice, is one of integration of planes of action.*

A third challenge we face – in actual fact one which is a strong trigger of either efficacy or inefficacy in what concerns multilateralism – is the integration of the idea of ownership and partnership into the multilateral equation, one that does not do so as a mere formality, but as an actual component, or a parcel, of the account. Or, to reframe it in slightly different terms, one that actually leads to the effective achievement of tangible results. This notion becomes clearer if formulated negatively: as I have read somewhere (I think the *Herald Tribune*, sometime in 2007, as I was flying to the Balkans for a Conference) “there is no known case in History in which anyone washed a rental car”. At a more theoretical level (perhaps *general plane* would be a more accurate expression), if you will, this concerns the issue of the material concrete links established between what is now fashionable to call *stakeholders*, of course. At this third level of complexity in what concerns an effective multilateralism, the heart of the matter would then be, in other words, in the answer given to an implicit question: how do we integrate the perspective of our partners into our policies? Here, the challenge is clearly one of *reciprocity* and *collective political participation*.

Finally, and in a sort of fold, a matter of appraisal: how do we *really* – that is, how do we in practice – *assess* the effectiveness of multilateral engagements? Do we do it, this assessment, by the careful implementation of well-tested multilateral mechanisms, or instead by the achievement of results in the concrete cases? As has

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<sup>9</sup> Even if they appear to be similar mechanisms, multi-laterality and multi-polarity are very different things. A simple thought-experiment shows that clearly *ad absurdum*. Although it may be tempting to think of a matrix here, which would combine linearly multi-polarity and multi-laterality, this is not really so – it would not do, for example, to talk about the ‘multi-polarization of multilateralism’ as a symmetrical arrangement to the ‘multi-lateralization of multi-polarity’ since, of course, that would require (or imply) the ‘coagulation’ of political blocks, be they regional or political-ideological ones. From a more inclusive perspective, we can say that it is precisely because ‘laterality’ and ‘polarity’ operate on different planes and exhibit different degrees of inclusiveness that multidimensionality is an attribute (or a property) of globalization.

repeatedly been noted, this sounds like an almost *technical* question but in effect it is actually a highly *political* issue. Just think of the recent polemics around the ongoing financial crisis and how evaluations have played there. The very definition of results is, not seldom, *in itself* a political issue – and this is frequently where things go wrong: when, for instance, we claim certain objectives as the ones we want to chase after, but we then, in reality, set up mechanisms that actually, knowingly or unknowingly, pursue, or result in, different consequences. Let me be concrete, here. Approaches carried out, in the EU context, to matters pertaining to the often over-rated European Neighbourhood Policy, or the establishment of Special Association Agreements, are a good case in point. As are sanctions policies, or international fiscal, or on the contrary, liberalizing, measures – they often have wholly unexpected results. This fourth and last challenge addresses, in turn, matters of *functional and structural adequacy*.

So here is a list of challenges for believers in multilateral paths to a rule-based international order. Does drawing up such a roll lend us a hand? Will facing up to these concrete gaps and filling them in one by one be enough for multilateralism to be rendered substantially more efficacious – and thus our efforts more efficient? A few litmus tests are in order, and I will turn to that next.

### **A few cases of EU engagement in various matters and in three regions, Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean**

A handful of European examples may be brought up, if only to simply illustrate more concretely what I have been trying to point out via this thought experiment, as I called it. Europe has been so keen, lately, in engaging in multilateralism as its choice strategy, that it is not difficult to pick and choose cases.

Engaging Russia, for instance, would be an obvious topic, particularly since the latest August 2008 invasion of Georgia and its subsequent recognition of the independence of ‘South Ossetia’ and ‘Abkhasia’. It would be easy too, for example, to look at Europe’s special mode of establishing foreign policy and diplomatic ties with China, or India – or to unveil the details of our push for mechanisms for containing global warming. For reasons of economy, and again following a well-worn template, I prefer to stick to three paradigmatic and more clear-cut cases, that of the EU’s involvement with Africa, the Middle East, and the Southern Mediterranean. I shall do this only superficially, rather than actually dig in to any depth; my aim is merely to characterize a modality of engagement, rather than attempting any in-depth analysis.

Concerning involvement with these three very different regions, it is clear that we cannot yet develop anything like a blueprint, or even a handbook, of effective multilateralism. But keeping in mind what I have pointed out before, we can surely have an educated idea of what mechanisms and what type of internal and external thinking and coordination Europe actually needs if it is to put into motion the instruments necessary if we are to even hope to achieve our avowed objectives in these different contexts in which Europe is engaged. Or, instead, conclude that maybe this is either not a feasible path, or it is one that does not move fast enough to counteract the many challenges we must face. That is - and to be blunt - by testing our beliefs, we may easily identify gaps and lacunae in our endeavours.

### *Sub-Saharan Africa*

In Africa the European Union now has a good window of opportunity in which to enhance effective multilateralism, and this is what underlines its commitment to the few decisions arrived at in the 2007 EU-Africa summit, and above all to the joint strategy and the other relevant documents. The existence of a timid but important regional integration process across the continent (the African Union, the AU), creating a counterpart with which to establish a strategic dialogue was an important step. This provides not only more ownership in the relationship but also a ground for rooting a European dialogue with the different interlocutors distributed on the continent, as well as with other non-African bilateral or multilateral actors. We should not focus so much on the engagement of Europe *in* Africa, but more on the engagement of Europe *with* Africa. This is an example of the issue of ownership through partnership<sup>10</sup>.

The Joint Strategy that EU and African leaders approved in Lisboa in December 2007, at the tail-end of the third Portuguese Presidency, thin as it was, amounted to a direct answer to this concern. It implies a big shift in the paradigm of our relations with Africa. Not all went well. More than simply the Robert Mugabe issue, which divided the EU in what concerns the Summit (or, at least, led to an expectations demarcation of the UK and the Netherlands from the other member-States) and

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10 Something which has been a long time coming. It is not only that Africa was for a very long time now treated as an almost entirely passive recipient of aid in those areas Western donors found to be important. Even within Europe, to stay with this one example, for the tensions between the Commission and member-States as far as "aid" is concerned, see Maurizio Carbone (2007), *The European Union and International Development. The Politics of Foreign Aid*, Routledge.

somewhat limited the scope of its ambitions, there was a largely unexpected anti-colonial rhetoric and posture for some African leaders which had a negative impact on the hopes raised for a full-fledged partnership effort. Those were hindrances, to be sure.

But although much was left to be desired, this was not a wholly unsuccessful story. Even though things did certainly not go as smoothly as hoped for<sup>11</sup>, the different partnerships that will almost surely be launched as a result indicate that there are a number of issues/challenges that the two continents agree to tackle jointly – and, promisingly, in a framework of ownership through partnership. The multilateral approach of the new EU-Africa strategy is also evident in the efforts being made to reinforce institutional links between the two sides, placing the EU and the AU institutions at the core of the process, and cooperate in labouring to strengthen integration efforts in Africa.

How the EU shall manage to combine this multilateral approach with the important bilateral relations it and many of its member-States already have with some key African countries is one of the major challenges that the Union will face in the coming years. We can only hope the appropriate lessons have been learned. China and the US are moving in, so we now have competitors – will our model work better than theirs?

### *Middle East*

The Middle East is another case in point. I shall be brief, here: in terms of results: looking back at EU engagement in the region for the last few years, it is clear that a multidimensional approach has been lacking. The EU is the most important donor to the Middle East, but it is not sufficiently involved in other dimensions of engagement with the region, namely security and the regional and often difficult to tackle political matters.

The EU's effort has mainly been geared to maintaining the multilateral framework (the so-called *Quartet*) – and results in this case mean mainly not being made subaltern and make sure we are capable of staying in the game rather than simply

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<sup>11</sup> A recognition of this, at least at the public level, was sadly lacking. Both national and international accountability are still, unfortunately, not what they should be. The few critical voices which were raised concerning the lack of progress in the Summit were quickly accused of sabotaging an ongoing process: it seems that for many politicians, even those with anti neo-realist proclivities, 'international anarchy' provides an excellent excuse for forgetting basic democratic principles.

being side-lined as irrelevant. The EU-Middle East pattern of engagement is also an example of how concrete results are dependent of other dynamics in which Europe, unfortunately – as a ‘herbivorous power’ – has not been capable of being more than a minor player<sup>12</sup>. Annapolis was a patent demonstration of this.

So the EU engagement on the Middle East has regrettably been more of a counter-example than an instance of effective multilateralism at work. But we would be bad students indeed if we do not put to good use the lessons learned there.

### *Mediterranean*

The formal EU pro-active relationships with the Southern Mediterranean are indeed an interesting example of the Union’s multilateral approach to foreign policy. With NATO as the possible exception, the EuroMed Process is a policy that has no equivalent in the relations that other international players (the United States, for example) have with the various States in the Maghreb region. It is also multidimensional – the three baskets which compose the Barcelona Process since its inception<sup>13</sup> do cover a wide range of areas; and their in-built feedback loops are such, that achievements in one area are bound to produce a spill-over effect for other areas. Perhaps because of the absence of any accession expectations, the EuroMed Process as a framework is, in a sense, a choice example of the EU’s multilateralism at work more than the European Neighbourhood Policy.

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12 In spite of the hasty nomination of Tony Blair for a frontline role. It would be absurd to offer a bibliography for a theme and an area which have been the object of reams of published and unpublished materials. For a well balanced overview, it is sufficient to read the small but exquisite, Pierre Levy (2006), *Le Moyen Orient*, Les Carnets du CAP (Centre d’Analyse et Prévision, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères), Paris.

13 In the interests of the economy of the text, I do not want to go into too many details, but some comments and data are surely apposite here. In the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, celebrated in the Barcelona Euro-Mediterranean Conference during a Spanish Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers (the Conference was organized so as to strengthen EU bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries in the Mashriq and the Maghreb regions), the Euro-Mediterranean partners established three main objectives for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which correspond to just as many ‘baskets’: 1. The definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue (this was called the Political and Security Basket); 2. The construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area (entitled the Economic and Financial Basket); and 3. The rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies (the Social, Cultural and Human Basket). In a truly idealist Kantian Democratic Peace theory spirit, Javier Solana, then Spain’s Foreign Minister, called for the creation of a ‘ring of Friends’.



Although, in good truth, not a very successful one, as there is a serious issue of ownership: thirteen years after Barcelona, we are still struggling to find a framework for relations which our many Southern Mediterranean partners consider as in any strong sense their own, and there are enormous shortcomings in terms of South-South integration – so the attempts to export our model have not been at all successful. What is lacking, in this case? Does the fact that Southern partners, unlike EU neighbours to the East, have no membership prospects explain the failure? Are these the limits of the Union's soft power strategy? Will Nicolas Sarkozy's *Union pour la Méditerranée*, now that Germany no more opposes it and as we are trying to actually establish it as a functioning institutional setting, work according to plan?<sup>14</sup> Will Istanbul, or NATO?

So, note, in this as in the other examples, the stock which may be taken of our thought experiment is not famous. It is not even conclusive, as a matter of fact. And I do not think choosing other examples would make things better – we would still have to face up to the evidence we simply do not have a basis for

### **An overview and some conclusions**

Trying to stick close to what I have been going on about, let me try to bring all this together in a more or less coherent whole and at a higher level of inclusiveness – or at least in a *grander scheme*. Given the crispness of my theme, I shall forego the temptation to summarize what I have said so far, namely the serious hesitations I have and the quasi-recipes I not so obliquely suggested in my thought experiment. In what follows, I will simply attempt placing my considerations in wider historical

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14 Of all the possible bibliography, a few articles will suffice which touch on most of the points made: Sinem Akgül Açıkmeşe (2005), "Management of Security in EU's Neighborhood: Union's Tactics Revisited", *Perceptions*: 1-25; Andreas Marchetti (2006), "Widening without Enlarging. The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus". The unpublished paper is available (29th October 2008) at the site of the *European Stability Initiative* at, <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=yu&id=198>; Ingo Peters and Jan Bittner (2006), "EU-US Risk Policy in the European Neighborhood: the cases of Moldova and Georgia", in (ed.) Kari Möttöla, *Transatlantic Relations and Global Governance*, Brookings Institution; and Michelle Comelli (2007), "Building Security in its Neighbourhood through the European Neighbourhood Policy?", in *European Union Studies Association (EUSA)*, an unpublished paper presented at the 10th Biennial Conference, May 17-19, Montreal, Canada. The full text is available (29th October 2008) at <http://aei.pitt.edu/7787/01/comelli-m-02b.pdf>. See also Armando Marques Guedes (2009), *A Guerra dos Cinco Dias. A Invasão da Geórgia pela Federação Russa*, Instituto de Estudos Superiores Militares e Prefácio, Ministério da Defesa, Lisboa [preface by Admiral Álvaro Sabino Guerreiro].

and analytical frameworks. So rather than offer a 'solution' I shall restrain myself to trends as concerns efficacy and legitimacy, which I envisage as a background to what I have discussed so far.

I want to begin by reiterating that it is certainly no news to stress the evidence that we have been, for quite a while now, witnessing a marked propensity for increased multilateralism. Allow me, nevertheless to give this largely cumulative process a sort of brief genealogical rundown, highlighting some of its markers, as it were. This is an easy endeavour, as a matter of fact, as for our purposes here, a cursory glimpse will be sufficient. After slow motion stutters in the Vienna Congress in 1815 and the installation (allow me to call it that) of 'conference diplomacy' from then on – in what was called the Concert of Europe – we have, indeed, seen it coming of age all throughout the 'short 20<sup>th</sup> Century' (the period that begun in 1914 in Sarajevo, or even 1918-1919 in Versailles, and that ended, at best in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 'Wall of Shame', and, at worst, in 1991, with the implosion of the Soviet Union. After a brief 'unilateral moment', to coin a variation on the famed 'unipolar moment' idea, the 21st Century saw a rather acute speeding up of this process of multi-lateralization. Perhaps one of the reasons for this was an unforeseen consequence of the new 'uni-multipolarity' which arose. As things went, the dismantlement of the USSR and the end of the bipolar world order led to the then curiously unexpected fact that both a 'multidimensionality of planes' and a *multicultural layer* were increasingly added on to this multilateralization. Because of this, the stakes have been raised for both legitimacy and efficacy, of course – they are now much tougher to achieve.

Unfortunately, that is not the only manner in which stakes have been raised. Having already looked at multidimensionality, it is proper to now focus a little of the associated multiculturalism, something I have not really looked at yet. I say *curiously unexpected* because, of course, with hindsight, it appears to have been inevitable – I do not mean to sound like a Huntingtonian here, advocating the inexorableness of the emergence of 'civilizational blocs', much less like a Spenglerian defender of a world checkered by 'great civilizations'; but it is surely interesting to note in passing that feelings of inevitability tend to be prospective, not *retrospective*, and so this mid-90s feeling constitutes a fascination, as a reversal of that common pattern. At any rate, there you are, the 90s spelled multilateralism enhanced *plus* multiculturalism emergent.

One predicament we must face up to is that such increased complexity is here to stay – in fact, there is a lot going on suggesting the trend might even accelerate. Much indicates these systemic pressures will continue unabated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – and at the risk of making a banal assertion, let me emphasize that they embody

what we may perhaps safely look at as largely irreversible trends for *global integration* on the one hand, and on the other for some *multi-polarity*. Given the rise of regional integration processes as both a stepping stone toward global integration and a mechanism of resistance to it, we should also expect this progression to be a multi-level affair. So it is to be expected that the resulting tendencies shall continue to be felt and shall push us for an ever more multilateral and multicultural diplomacy, even as the realities of power continue to eat away at its fringes.

This predictably laborious and non-linear progression will not, I believe, really amount to a trivial affair, since when quantitative change reaches a critical mass it normally turns *qualitative*. In other words, albeit eroded and slowed down by State resistances, multilateralism will continue to enhance its centrality and possibly come to take center-stage in world politics. But it will not be the old multilateralism. And it will less and less appear to us as a sufficient solution – as more and more it will be seen as a structural feature of the ongoing slow-motion transition from an international system into an international society.

So it still has implications, *but*, I want to argue, following my EU examples, *as a path rather than as a panacea*. Now, without going so far as detailing what should be included in future versions of a more attuned European Security Strategy, allow me to take an additional step. Should that be the case, we must be ready for a *novel type of diplomacy* to come about. As has often been stressed, that future landscape will bring to the fore new questions of both efficacy and legitimacy, given that the changes which are inevitably going to occur as concerns the very bases for relationships among States and between States and other emergent international actors. Moreover, the seemingly inexorable rise of what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye famously called, back in 1977, *complex interdependence* between international actors<sup>15</sup> will undoubtedly change things even further – so it is not unlikely, I believe, that we shall be faced with major changes on the definition itself of what will be an efficient multilateralism – as well as on our view of what multilateralism in actuality is. Multilateralism will surely increase; but it will do so as a new rule of the game, not as a magic wand we must simply perfect for it to actually fulfill its healing tasks. I would venture to say such changes are very likely indeed. And those non-trivial changes will surely render efficacy and legitimacy into targets which will become much harder to reach.

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15 Without adhering totally to their perspective (or rather, to its applicability to the complexities of contemporary 'globalization') I am alluding, of course, to the nowadays classical work of Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (2000, original 1977), *Power and Interdependence*, 3rd edition, Longman.

I do not want to go into this in detail here, but just look at it from the perspective of negotiations, for example. What is clear is that zero-sum games are going to become rarer and rarer in the upcoming international panoramas - which simply means, mostly, that accommodations will become more and more imperative, precisely as they are rendered more difficult to swallow, to use a metaphor, given the brute fact of the multiculturalism of the context in which they take place. That is, because they shall most probably become more and more alien to our 'background' point of view and preferences as they in a more and more sustained manner arise out of *other* preferences and points of view. Note, by the way, the fascinating asymmetry here, as concerns the emergence of this multiculturalism: alterity will be felt by Western diplomats as they have to, say, take into account Indian or Chinese, or Brazilian and Russian outlooks and modes of operating [to use only a few BRIC examples] and not simply their own; while Russians, Brazilians, Chinese and Indians will, for the first time, within the modern Westphalian State system, be able to help define the negotiating playing field; rather than, as has always so far been the case, be forced to play by rules almost in their entirety defined by Western powers. In both cases, notice, much will change; namely at the plane of their 'geometry of accommodations', to coin another concept.

Going back to my theme, this, of course, raises further obstacles and challenges to the establishment of an effective and legitimate multilateralism which aims to promote, as its horizon, the building of an institutional-and rule-based international society. Obstacles which add to those more 'localized' ones I earlier broached. This is something the EU and other entities bent on multilateralism would do well to take into full account. The challenge, here, is more generic, in a sense, and it is one of drawing and erecting *a common language for exchanges and accommodations*.

So, to cap things off, can we go further still? I believe we can, indeed, identify, or at least *circumscribe*, more difficulties which need to be addressed and surmounted if we are to hope for a more effective multilateralism with our feet well planted on the ground, so to speak. I am not sure more than that is feasible. The changes I have been mapping loom large on the horizon. Institutions, largely mechanisms designed for domesticating change, tend to often display great difficulties in dealing with it; and so this cannot but mean trouble, domestically-generated trouble. One example will stand for all. Ministries of Foreign Affairs, like most if not all governmental organizations, run by addressing conventional wisdom, not by challenging it. So their tendency is, quite naturally, to manage crises in terms of familiar patterns. And here lies the problem: increasingly, that will not do. So MFAs and their diplomats will in the predictable near future be faced with losses both at the level of *efficacy* and at that of *legitimacy*, as formal inadequacy of one sort or another eventually

sets in. Sooner or later, they will be pushed to adapt to the structurally changed circumstances in the cavalcade of complex interdependence thickening up will surely bring on us all. Note that that is not simply a matter of having to address more *entities*, and ever *different types* of an increasing number of entities – regional and global governance ones, formatted anew, will *also* increasingly make themselves felt, and therefore playing the diplomatic game shall, as a result, be deeply altered *as concerns its very rules*. I want to be very clear here: *one concerns the relationship between “soft” and “hard” forms of power* – and this is unfortunately something the pious belief on multilateralism *per se*, as a panacea, does not allow us to really see. We must be ready to face up to the evidence that we are now facing an international system in transition which is likely to turn our environment into one much more unpredictable than it perhaps ever was. And we must get ready for the adaptive moves that demands of us. This will only be possible if the new European External Action Service is designed in a manner sufficiently flexible to fit into the new and fast-changing political ecosystem in which we all now find ourselves – in other words, if it is tuned into a revamped European Security Strategy. The challenge, then, is also one of *learning to assume a stance of a wide-band preventative matter-of-factness*.

This, in actual fact, is precisely the type of thing ‘modern’ diplomacy was designed for in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. It is up to you to make sure diplomacy does not wither away into insignificance, but is, once more, changed into a novel and more *robust* format, as it historically so often did. This, too, is what foreign policies have changed since time immemorial. Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Defense, *corps diplomatiques* and foreign policy makers are surely among the entities and organisms which should take good note of that as quickly as possible – by raising a new breed of diplomats capable of meeting the new challenges is urgent. May we be up to the task, and blaze the new trails rather than just buy into recipes we cannot be sure are adequate ones, and whose track-record is not too convincing.

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