

European External Actions in a Multilateral Arena: An Analysis of EU Relations with Brazil

by Eleonora Poli

ABSTRACT

Relations between the European Union and Brazil have often become stuck in a “vicious circle” of progress, stagnation and even temporary regression. Most recently, EU–Brazil cooperation was undermined by the 2008–9 “Great Recession”. The handling of the economic crisis absorbed Europe’s and Brazil’s governments alike, so much so that a Strategic Partnership signed in 2007 was seemingly relegated to oblivion. Yet, the EU is aware of Brazil’s strategic importance as a regional actor and a partner in multilateral fora. In the current multipolar (or non-polar) world order, the EU needs to relaunch its role in the international arena by going beyond “the usual suspects” and cooperating with new partners. Brazil has all the potential to be one of these new partners.

European Union | EU Global Strategy | Brazil

keywords

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the world has witnessed the emergence of new dynamics within the traditional framework of international relations. From a bipolar and then a unipolar system led by the United States, the world has evolved a multipolar or non-polar system, whereby old and new international players interact; identify areas of convergence; and, when possible, negotiate upon reciprocal divergences. In other words, global power now shifts fluidly from one centre to another.

After being seriously affected by multiple crises, the European Union is now attempting to revitalize its role in the global arena.¹ Since the United States' global engagement is declining, with President Donald Trump apparently bent on replacing multilateral agreements with bilateral deals, the EU needs to broaden its pool of partners and build a more independent global course of action.² To succeed in this endeavour, as was underlined by the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) presented in 2016 by the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini, the EU has to improve cooperation and strategic partnerships with other regional powers, such as Brazil. Even if Brazil and the EU face very different internal and external challenges, there is room for improving bilateral cooperation, acquiring reciprocal benefits and boosting their global roles.

¹ Michael Emerson and Renato Flôres (eds.), "Enhancing the Brazil-EU Strategic Partnership. From the Bilateral and Regional to the Global", in *CEPS Paperbacks*, October 2013, <https://www.ceps.eu/node/8512>.

² Maria Demertzis, André Sapir and Guntram B. Wolff, "Europe in a New World Order", in *Wirtschaftsdienst*, Vol. 98, No. 13 (2018), p. 24-30, <https://archiv.wirtschaftsdienst.eu/jahr/2018/13/europe-in-a-new-world-order>.

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Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to assess the state of affairs of the EU–Brazil partnership. To do this, it will analyse the ways in which the EUGS has been shaping EU external action, serving as a basis for a renewed European international role. This analytical step is instrumental in highlighting how the EU should improve its relations with Brazil. Indeed, while the EUGS has not focused its attention specifically on Latin America it has provided some strategic guidelines on how the EU should boost its role in the global arena that are pertinent to its relations with that area of the world.

1. The EU Global Strategy: a new approach to global politics

The multiple challenges with which the EU has been confronted since the onset of the 2008–9 “Great Recession”, ranging from Eurozone governance to migration management, have undermined its capacity to mediate between competing national interests and, consequently, to be proactive in the global arena.³ This was the backdrop against which the office of HR/VP Mogherini launched in 2015 a process to re-create intra-EU consensus on a broad foreign-policy platform. The process – based on regular consultations between the HR/VP office, other EU institutions and the member states – eventually resulted in the EUGS in June 2016.

The EUGS is premised on a number of assumptions concerning major changes in the international system that rendered the 2003 European Security Strategy obsolete.⁴ The rise of new powers, especially China; a changed US attitude towards Europe; and the ascendancy of several regional powers make it necessary for the EU to broaden the range of its relationships, forging new bonds with countries and organizations (both international and regional) beyond “the usual suspects”. Indeed, power in the international arena now has a multiple nature: it can be economic, military, financial or even knowledge-based.⁵ It is divided between several national, regional and international players, spanning public and private organizations. This international and interconnected arena has grown so complex, the EUGS underlines, that EU countries need to cooperate more in order to count more. No European country, not even Germany, can hope to compete with such powers as China and India in terms of economic size, resources or population.⁶

From the above premises, the EUGS has developed an innovative approach to the Union’s external actions. First, by aiming at the promotion of European interests

³ Thomas Christiansen, “The European Union and Global Governance”, in Anna Triandafyllidou (ed.), *Global Governance from Regional Perspectives. A Critical View*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 209-232.

⁴ Nathalie Tocci, “From the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy: Explaining the Journey”, in *International Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (July 2017), p. 487-502.

⁵ See Susan Strange, *States and Markets*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2015.

⁶ Nathalie Tocci, “Who Do I Call If I Want to Call the US?”, in *Politico*, 14 March 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/who-do-i-call-if-i-want-to-call-the-us>.

and values on the world stage, it embraces a “global” rather than a pure “security” dimension. Second, it does not depict the EU as a solo leading performer, but rather looks at it as an orchestra conductor who harmonizes member states’ policies. Furthermore, by acknowledging that we are living in a time of what might be termed predictable unpredictability, the EUGS calls for the adoption of “principled pragmatism” and “responsible engagement” in order to bring about positive change in the global arena and in the ways in which the EU relates to that arena.⁷

The EUGS identifies the strengthening of the Union’s international partnerships as a key priority in sustaining a rules-based international order and providing effective global governance. Unfortunately, when it comes to Latin America the EUGS has little to say. The region is referred to merely as the southern part of the Atlantic Partnership – and Latin American countries, including Brazil, are not even mentioned in it. This is probably due to the fact that bilateral relations between the two sides of the Atlantic have traditionally been based more on trade and commercial interests than on security affairs. Yet, the EU might well find in Brazil a valuable partner when it comes to revitalizing its role in the global arena and fostering a stable international environment.

2. The EU’s relationship with Brazil

Brazil and the EU are no unknown quantities to each other. Forms of diplomatic cooperation between the two date back to the 1960s but were strengthened in the mid-1980s when Portugal and Spain acceded to the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the EU, and “Europeanized” their well-established bilateral relations with Latin America.⁸ EU–Brazil bilateral ties were formalized in 1992 with the signing of a Framework Cooperation Agreement.⁹ Since then, building on a variety of mutual interests and values, the EU and Brazil have established a political dialogue in several policy areas, including climate change, organized crime and terrorism. Cooperation with Brazil also proved strategic in promoting the EU’s relations with Mercosur the common-market project that involves Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. The EU and Mercosur signed a Framework Cooperation Agreement in 1995, and they are currently negotiating a

⁷ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/331>. See also Nathalie Tocci, *Framing the EU Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World*, Cham, Springer-Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

⁸ Miriam Gomes Saraiva, “The Brazil-European Union Strategic Partnership, from Lula to Dilma Rousseff: A Shift of Focus”, in *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (February 2017), p. 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7329201600117>.

⁹ European Economic Community and Brazil, *Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the European Economic Community and the Federative Republic of Brazil - Exchange of Letters ... on maritime transport*, OJ L 262, 1.11.1995, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:21995A1101\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:21995A1101(01)).

free-trade agreement.¹⁰

Against this backdrop, multiple drivers led the two parties to establish in 2007 the EU–Brazil Strategic Partnership;¹¹ this was followed by several sector dialogues and two Joint Action Plans, which introduced a range of new issues into the bilateral discussion, such as climate change, sustainable energy and the fight against poverty. One additional merit of the Strategic Partnership lays in its establishing a path for boosting cooperation in multilateral fora and revitalizing political dialogue between the EU and Mercosur. Yet, the degree of reciprocal engagement at the bilateral and multilateral levels has been modest.¹² Initial optimism about a closer relationship was undercut by the 2008–9 financial and economic crisis, the handling of which relegated EU–Brazil cooperation to the bottom of governments’ lists of priorities. Although Brazil seemed to manage the international financial crisis reasonably well, with its gross domestic product falling by just 0.1 per cent in 2009, political infighting, corruption scandals and deep polarization undermined the country’s internal stability.¹³ On a multilateral level, Brazil has sought cooperation with its BRICS partners – comprising China, India, Russia and South Africa – more often than it has reached out to the EU.¹⁴

If internal issues and alternative partnerships distracted Brazil, the EU too was busy with grappling with its own crises. The economic downturn, which later evolved into a sovereign-debt crisis, problematic relations with Russia, crises in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean, the rise of nationalism, the refugee crisis and the controversial deal with Turkey, to name but a few, all contributed to distract the EU from Brazil. The EU’s resistance to challenging the status quo in multilateral fora could hardly be reconciled with Brazil’s goal of reforming international organizations.¹⁵ The one exception to this pattern – namely, Brazil

¹⁰ European Commission, *Roadmap for EU - Brazil S&T cooperation*, October 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/research/iscp/pdf/policy/br_roadmap_2017.pdf.

¹¹ European Commission, *Towards an EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership* (COM/2007/281), 30 May 2007, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52007DC0281>; *EU-Brazil Summit Joint Statement*, Lisbon, 4 July 2007, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/er/95167.pdf.

¹² Mario Telò, “UE-Brasil: conceitos e abordagens convergentes/divergentes ao multilateralismo. A visão da UE para um novo multilateralismo é um parceiro confiável?”, in Felix Dane (ed.), *Temas de uma agenda estratégica entre Brasil e União Europeia*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2014, p. 17-48, <http://www.kas.de/brasilien/pt/publications/38557>; Richard G. Witman and Annemarie P. Rodt, “EU-Brazil Relations: A Strategic Partnership”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2012), p. 27-44; Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, “The European Union’s Partnership Policy Towards Brazil: More Than Meets the Eye”, in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2016), p. 55-77; Elena Lazarou, Bruno Theodoro Luciano and Felix Dane, “10 Years of EU-Brazil Relations with an Enlarged Europe”, in *The Enlarged European Union in Times of New Challenges*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2015, <http://www.kas.de/brasilien/en/publications/40723>.

¹³ As the 2014 Operation Car Wash outlined, several members of the ruling Workers Party were implicated in a corruption scandal involving the national oil company Petrobras. In 2017, President Dilma Rousseff was eventually removed from office via impeachment ostensibly on grounds of breaking budget laws and former President Lula was arrested in 2018.

¹⁴ Laura C. Ferreira-Pereira, “The European Union’s Partnership Policy Towards Brazil...”, cit.

¹⁵ Susanne Gratius, “Brazil and the European Union: Between Balancing and Bandwagoning”, in

joining Germany (plus India and Japan) in an attempt to procure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council – was highly divisive in Europe and certainly cannot be counted among the examples of cooperation between Brasília and Brussels.¹⁶

Traditional Brazilian preferences for “South–South” relations were challenged by former President Dilma Rousseff and her successor, Michel Temer, both of whom highlighted the importance of stronger links with developed countries and the EU.¹⁷ Yet, foreign-policy positions often diverge, on issues such as the Iran nuclear deal (the EU had abruptly dismissed an early attempt by Brazil and Turkey to reach an agreement with Iran in 2010), military interventions or the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Claiming to be an influential representative of emerging countries still brings advantages to Brazil,¹⁸ even if such a view does not always coincide with that of the EU. The Union is nonetheless aware of Brazil’s salience when it comes to cementing strong global alliances and moving from a reactive to a more proactive approach to global governance.¹⁹

3. The EU and Brazil: current and future paths for cooperation

The EU and Brazil have no significant, let alone existential, conflicts of interest or values. On the contrary, Brazilians and Europeans share a common cultural heritage. By taking stock of the multiple internal challenges that they both face, they could more easily build workable paths for closer cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

One area in which both parties can certainly strengthen cooperation is trade. Given that Brazil accounts for around 30.8 per cent of the EU’s total trade with Latin America, and is the third main destination of European foreign direct investment flows, both Brasília and Brussels would benefit from the free-trade agreement currently under negotiation as part of the EU’s Association Agreement with the Mercosur countries.²⁰

ESPO Working Papers, No. 2 (July 2012), <http://fride.org/publication/1040/>.

¹⁶ Miriam Gomes Saraiva, “The Brazil-European Union Strategic Partnership, from Lula to Dilma Rousseff...”, cit.

¹⁷ Raquel de Caria Patrício, “The Relationship between Brazil and the European Union: Converging Interests and Divergent Strategies – the Stagnation of the Strategic Partnership”, in *Journal of Education and Social Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 2017), p. 33-42, <http://jespnet.com/journal/index/2405>.

¹⁸ Karim Ekström and Leonardo Miguel Alles, “Brazilian Foreign Policy Under Lula: from Non-intervention to Non indifference”, in *Political Perspectives*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2012), p. 9-29, <http://www.politicalperspectives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2-Brazilian-Foreign-Policy-under-Lula-Ekstrom-and-Alles3.pdf>.

¹⁹ European External Action Service (EEAS), *From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy Year 1*, June 2017, <https://eeas.europa.eu/node/37869>.

²⁰ Katharina Luise Meissner, “Resorting to Bilateralism: The EU, MERCOSUR, and the Strategic Partnership with Brazil”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2018), p. 51-66. See also European Commission website: *Trade Policy: Brazil*, last updated 4 July 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/>

Although the EU might have to reach a compromise in order to make its food market accessible to Brazilian products, while Brazil will have to abandon certain forms of industrial protectionism, firms on both sides of the Atlantic would certainly benefit from greater access to each other's huge markets.²¹ Better economic performance in both the EU and Brazil could result in higher employment and improved living standards, which would be particularly beneficial for Brazil. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), more than 50 million Brazilians (around 25 per cent of the population) live below the poverty line, with an income equivalent to 4.50 euro per day.²² In the case of the EU, stronger trade relations with a country as big as Brazil could be advantageous not only for large companies but also for small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, an ambitious free-trade agreement with Mercosur could contribute to meeting the EUGS-identified priority for the EU to positively transform, "rather than simply preserve", the existing global dynamics in order to create mutual and shared advantages.²³

While economic arrangements are still under negotiation, it is undeniable that the EU and Brazil can improve cooperation in this area. When it comes to security – which is still a central objective, even if not exclusively of the EUGS – Brazil and the EU seem to have few common interests or mutual challenges with which to justify a strategic partnership.²⁴ When it comes to traditional security threats, their agendas are different. In the EU, terrorism has become a major threat, increasing negative perceptions around migration flows and fuelling nationalist narratives of dangerously porous EU borders. Terrorism is not an issue in Brazil, whose security agenda is more focused on domestic challenges such as drugs trafficking and organized crime. The EU could be of help to Brazil when it comes to implementing institutional reforms, training and exchange programmes between intelligence services.²⁵ Several initiatives have already been developed by the EU

trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/brazil; Eur-Lex website: *Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement between the European Community and Mercosur*, last updated 4 May 2007, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=legisum:r14013>; ELANBiz, *Fact Sheet ELANBiz: Trade Agreements Brazil*, February 2017, <https://www.elanbiz.org/documents/20182/56028/Trade+Agreements+Brazil/041144de-783c-40a5-9b86-d3dc262700dc>.

²¹ Cecilia Malmström, *The Benefits of Open Trade with Mercosur*, Speech at the conference "Free Trade as a Motor of Growth: Future EU-Mercosur Agreement", Madrid, 3 July 2017, <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1683>; Raquel de Caria Patrício, "The Relationship between Brazil and the European Union...", cit.

²² Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), *One Fourth of the Population Lives on Less than R\$387 a Month*, 15 December 2017, <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/en/2184-news-agency/news/18835>.

²³ Sven Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European Characteristics", in *EGMONT Security Policy Briefs*, No. 75 (June 2016), p. 4, <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/?p=19958>.

²⁴ European Commission, *Annex 15 of the Commission Implementing Decision on the 2015 Annual Action programme for the Partnership Instrument Action Fiche for EU- Brazil Sector Dialogues Support Facility*, <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/3/2015/EN/3-2015-9106-EN-F1-1-ANNEX-3.PDF>.

²⁵ Antonio Ruy de Almeida Silva and Maíra Siman Gomes, "Contemporary Inter-State Armed Conflicts: Factors and Processes Involved", in Jan Wojschnik (ed.), *Might and Right in World Politics*.

to fight against transnational organized crime. AMERIPOL EU, for example, aims to enhance international cooperation between law-enforcement and judicial authorities, while GAFILAT EU does the same with regard to the fight against money laundering. Similarly, CRIMJUST focuses on criminal investigations and criminal-justice cooperation. The EU has also been active in the fight against drug traffic across the Atlantic. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Prevention of the diversion of drugs precursors in the Latin American and Caribbean region (PRELAC) project aims at strengthening the capacities of national administrative-control authorities in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to prevent the manufacture of cocaine as well as other drugs.²⁶ The implementation and development of such programmes could certainly allow the EU to strengthen its partnership with Brazil.

Global challenges such as climate change, which has a number of security-related implications, are areas in which expanded multilateral cooperation should be pursued. As a result of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the EU indeed seems more motivated than hitherto in building climate alliances worldwide. Brazil is certainly a partner to look at in this respect, especially considering that one of its central priorities in the fight against global pollution is the protection of the Amazon, which is relevant to the EU as well. Brazil has tried to mediate between the European quest for legally binding commitments and China's and India's support for voluntary carbon-emissions reduction.²⁷ Brazil stands for differentiated but mandatory responsibility between the countries of the Global North and South. As such, it could become an important partner of the EU in the development of green energy.²⁸ Over the last 40 years, having to protect the most extensive area of forest in the world, the largest reserves of hydropower and agricultural land, and the largest stock of biodiversity, the country has made massive investments in renewable energy (between 2005 and 2009, it reduced carbon emissions by 25 per cent).²⁹ This was the background for an EU–Brazil joint proposal for the regulation of the carbon market at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015, which served as a basis for the agreement signed subsequently. Brazilian and European views might not be always in alignment – but, even so, climate change and green energy are very promising areas in which a common multilateral agenda could be

XIII Forte de Copacabana Conference, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016, p. 12-27, <http://www.kas.de/brasilien/pt/publications/46765>.

²⁶ For more details see the EU Cocaine Route Programme website at <https://cocaineroute.eu/projects/prelac>.

²⁷ Susanne Gratius and Debora González, "The EU and Brazil: Shared Goals, Different Strategies", in Giovanni Grevi and Thomas Renard (eds.), "Hot Issues, Cold Shoulders, Lukewarm Partners: EU Strategic Partnerships and Climate Change", in *ESPO Reports*, No. 2 (November 2012), p. 11-21, <http://fride.org/publication/1086/>.

²⁸ Carolina Guimarães and Nadine Piefer, "Brazil: (Future) Green Energy Power and Strategic Partner for the EU?", in *Comparative European Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January 2017), p. 23-44.

²⁹ Aline Ribas and Roberto Schaeffer, "Brazil-EU Energy Governance: Fuelling the Dialogue Through Alternative Energy Sources", in Michèle Knodt, Nadine Piefer and Franziska Müller (eds.), *Challenges of European External Energy Governance with Emerging Powers*, Farnham and Burlington, Ashgate, 2015, p. 173-194.

advanced by both parties.

Conclusion

In the last few years, both the EU and Brazil have faced serious internal crises that have undermined their capacity to play globally as leading actors. Compared with its position in 2007 Brazil has lost influence, and from being perceived as a rising power it is now considered to have nothing more than regional dominance. Similarly, the EU has seen its internal and external legitimacy decrease. Against this backdrop, it is clear that both parties have an interest in strengthening mutual cooperation.

So far, however, the EU's relationship with Brazil has been mostly based on commercial interests. This is understandable to an extent, as the two parties have different external rivals and face different internal challenges. Yet, elements of cooperation should be further explored and developed in the security field – particularly, in the fight against illicit trafficking.³⁰ Moreover, elements of security cooperation can be certainly found in the need to foster environmental protection, which is very important to both Brazil and the EU. More broadly speaking, Brazil shares EU's fundamental interest in a more effective and representative multilateral system, as well as in rules-based regimes of international cooperation. The strengthening of multilateralism can, and should, be the framework for a more strategic cooperation between them.

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³⁰ Susanne Gratius, "From Soft to Hard Power? Security and Geo-Economics in Brazil-EU Relations", in Jan Woischnik (ed.), *Might and Right in World Politics. XIII Forte de Copacabana Conference*, Rio de Janeiro, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016, p. 71-79, <http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/20546-1442-5-30.pdf>.

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