

## **STATE AND MULTILATERALISM, A THEORETICAL APPROACH. TRANSFORMATIONS IN A GLOBALIZED INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY**

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### **Abstract**

The State, classical international actor, has had to readaption to the new dynamics in the International Society and has given prominence to other actors. In this logic, it´s relevant to analyze the role in the international system after the Cold War to evaluate whether it is still an actor capable of responding to the functional needs of the society. For this, reaffirms its commitment to multilateralism as a response to the main issue on the international agenda. Namely, is reactivated as an ideal tool to manage structural changes, despite the different interpretations of United States, the European Union or the BRICS. The object of this analysis contribute to the academic debate and focuses on studying the transformations of the State in the globalized international society where multilateralism has become a concept discussed and a common practice in the international discourse, despite its complexity and the different visions and interpretations by different actors. Multilateralism granted the State a path of cooperation and understanding as a guiding principle and foreign policy legitimizing discourse.

### **Keywords:**

State; Multilateralism; United States; European Union; BRICS; TIMBI

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### **I. Introduction**

The changes occurred in the current International Society evidence mutations, significantly affecting the State, which remains the classic actor of the international system, even though other international actors have been gaining prominence and power. Following this logic, it is still pertinent to persist in the analysis of the role the State plays in International Relations, especially when at present, in a globalized society, it shares its traditional supremacy with other actors.

Therefore, there are several reasons that contribute to keeping these analytical dynamics on the role of the State in the international scene. In the first place, the State is the institution that has achieved the most advanced level of development as a form of socio-political organization. In the second place, because as the classic actor of international relations, it has had to adapt to the changes of the globalized International Society. In the third place, because it is the main subject of sovereignty. In the fourth place, because it designs public policies based on the political-economic space of the different International Societies. In the fifth place, because it holds the legitimate monopoly of violence; and, in the sixth and last place, because the evolution of the International Society itself has modified the role of the State, going from a Westphalian system of powers to a multipolar one, after a period of bipolarity. At present, there has been an emergence of some new international actors that have increasingly more power and prominence (Barbé, 2010) and that contribute to modify the policies in force.

Even though the State is one of the most studied actors from a multi-disciplinarian point of view and the word State is one of the most used words by the different Social Sciences, the analyses on this actor are focused on two main levels: national and international. However, the perspective of an insoluble reality is diluted: the interaction between the two levels, due to the dynamics of interdependence generated in the current International Society. In this sense, Ulrich Beck, adopts such approach when stating that this International Society, transformed by globalization, is in need of a cosmopolitan analysis that should overcome the classic "national look" approach. Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the Westphalian logics to apprehend the current dynamics which increasingly condition politics, economy and safety.



In the last decades, and due to the globalization processes, the ability of the State to continue complying with basic functions has been questioned: "the notion of the State as a self-governing unit seems to be more like a normative demand, than a description of reality" (Held, 2002). In this sense, relations of interdependence overpower the States' abilities and jurisdiction, through the application of other frameworks of regulations, as well as the transnationalization of finance and the economic process (production, distribution and consumption). Furthermore, the emergence of new transnational actors, the appearance of challenges at different levels and global safety risks in a broad sense, the weakening of national identities and sovereignty erosion are decisive factors that question the role of State as an agent capable of providing answers to the functional needs of society.

Likewise, we find reactivating elements of the currency of the State as a determining actor of the international scene, among these we should mention international cooperation, the reinforcement of international organizations and the recent prominence of regionalism as answers of the State and new alternatives to the multi-level governance. Therefore, the State reasserts its bet on multilateralism as an answer to current challenges. That is, as of the end of the XX century, it is reactivated as a suitable tool to manage the structural changes of the international system, in spite of the different interpretations made of it by the international actors.

In this sense, the actors in the international system face these mutations with differentiated answers: "The United States continues to push an hegemonic multilateralism, the EU promotes a normative multilateralism, developing countries practice a defensive multilateralism and the emerging ones promote a revisionist multilateralism based on differentiated practices and goals, discursive legitimations and narratives" (Sanahuja, 2013:27).

While the U.S.A. had been participating during the last Republican administrations in a higher unilateral performance or, in other words, an "institutionalization of unipolarity," the Democrat administrations of presidents Clinton and Obama practice a more inclusive performance, resorting to multilateral forums looking for a stronger consolidation of specific actions of their foreign performance. For the EU, due to its own integration experience, multilateralism is positioned as an imperative by virtue of its own identity and acknowledgement as international actor in a context of sovereign States (Natorski, 2012). In relation to developing countries, multilateralism has become a decisive tool, for its normative and institutional framework, channeled through the United Nations' system or in private regional organizations. Due to the processes of power shifting, emerging countries are in a better position to demand normative and institutional reforms and a higher balance in the international order, with the purpose of achieving symmetric alternatives of cooperation.

This analysis is focused on assessing the State's transformations in the globalized international society, where multilateralism has become a debated concept and a common discursive practice in the international scene. In spite of its complexity and the different viewpoints and interpretations of the different actors, multilateralism provides the State with a channel of understanding and cooperation as a foreign policy governing principle and legitimating discourse.



Starting from a brief historical narration regarding the evolution of the State in the international system, this article intends to contribute to the academic debate and identify the answers depending on the positioning of the different state actors in the international system (United States, EU and emerging countries -BRICS/TIMBIs<sup>1</sup>-). That is, the different answers each one has depending on their idea of multilateralism, putting together a multidisciplinary approach broadly based on International Relations. Following this logic, the intention is to study the correlation between the international structure and the variations regarding power epicenters in the current international system. Therefore, the analysis is based on the premise that the State has had to adapt itself to the changes in the international system in order not to lose power and competitiveness, thus increasing its abilities. Multilateralism is precisely the most suitable tool as re-adaptation strategy, niche of opportunity, to adjust its position in the international system.

## **II. Continuity of the State as central actor in the international system**

The history of Europe, a consequence of different complex transformations, is, to a great extent, the history of the modern State as political community (Truyol and Serra, 1974: 30-41). The modern state is the way in which societies have built their political organization. It is the State that draws the community together, since that community, as such, does not exist before. In the Westphalian order we can observe the exclusive and central role of the State as actor in the system and center of power within a still anarchic structure, which could only be mitigated by the principle of balance of power, which means that each State has to protect its own interests and safety, or, in other words, each State is left to fend for itself. (Del Arenal, 2002).

Westphalian States are mainly structured "around reality and distribution of power, purely interpreted in relational terms and mainly understood in political-military terms, and based on the role performed by the great powers that used to act as a directory in relation to itself" (Del Arenal, 2002: 23). Therefore, the Westphalian order implies two main characteristics: the establishment of permanent and increasingly sophisticated diplomatic relations, in practice as well as in coding; and the external and internal dimension of the States which has had a broad influence on the normative, political and theoretical development of international relations.

Along these lines, and by way of summary, we can restate that the concept of the modern State-nation implies, as stated by Held, a series of innovations to the State itself and, hence, to the International Society. Among others, we should mention territoriality, the monopoly of violence, the notion of impersonal power structure and legitimacy. That is, Westphalia establishes the development of sovereignty as organizational principle of the States (Barbé, 2007: 165).

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<sup>1</sup> Turkey, India, Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia. Since the term BRICS was created to refer to emerging economies, there has always been debate in relation to whether these members should be kept, if new international actors should be included or if the group should be rebuilt. Professor Jack Goldstone of the George Mason University, researcher for the Brookings Institution, in its article entitled Rise of the TIMBIs (2011), published in Foreign Policy, holds the theory that BRICS should give way to TIMBIs and proposes the absence of China and Russia in the following decades in this new bloc since their abilities are changing, especially their demographic patterns and exports level, together with a political system which is still too rigid, obstacles that could stall their progress.



Since the appearance of the Westphalian interstate system, the structure has suffered important changes, highlighting the numeric variation of States with an ability to have influence on the international order. After the Congress of Vienna, the concert of great powers incorporates eight nations (Austria, France, Great Britain, Russia, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) that end up being reduced when the last three lose potentiality in the balance of power. At the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX, some countries enhance their abilities, which signifies improvements in their position in the international structure of power. The United States, Germany, Italy and Japan are incorporated to the directory of great powers until then European.

After the World War II, there is another decisive event regarding the numeric variation of the States that are part of the directory of great powers, not because of the disappearance or formation of new States, but because the United States and the Soviet Union enhance their abilities, becoming superpowers. As a consequence, the structure of the international system is oriented towards a bipolar configuration of power, where the technological factor, that is, the nuclear potential, deeply alters the competition and socialization schemes developed by the system units. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the power of the international system tends to decentralize in a higher number of actors. However, it does not lose its oligopolic nature, in accordance with Raymond Aron's terminology. In fact, in spite of all these changes, there is a permanent directory of great powers that concentrate higher quotas of power in relation to an extensive number of States.

The State is reasserted as a main actor at several levels; for sure, it has had to face the new challenges and risks brought by globalization such as destatization, deterritorialization and power relocation. In this sense, new international dynamics have been generated in which interstate cooperation has blurred the line that separates national from international. States are forced to search for formal mechanisms of voluntary and permanent cooperation, creating independent entities destined to achieve collective goals (Sobrino Heredia, 2006: 43).

Going deeper along these lines, we can affirm that in an increasingly interdependent world, multilaterality has become an appropriate answer to face the demands of the XXI century. An answer that "cannot be understood without referring to the States-nation and to a Westphalian order based on the principle of national sovereignty" (Sanahuja, 2013:p. 31). The progressive increment of state activity in international institutions is evident. This is motivated by a cause and it leads to a consequence. In relation to the first one, States are incapable of satisfying new collective needs *per se*; regarding the second one, States are drawn to cooperate in the light of these development and transnationalization processes. Therefore, multilaterality becomes a valid tool that settles the contemporary international order, with the permanent purpose of laying the foundation of peaceful relations between States.

### **III. State-globalization dialectics**

The globalization phenomenon has generated broad debates in different scientific disciplines, in which the issue of the State is inserted in these dynamics of reflection due to the core transformations this process entails. Several authors support the hypothesis that the globalization process has produced a significant loss of presence of the State in the social dynamic, in a double aspect: at a national level and in the



international scene. However, it is appropriate to introduce a balancing point since the changes that the sovereign State has been experiencing imply the necessary re-adaptation to this new international reality, in which multilateralism is an explanatory variable that allows for an ontological review of power.

As of the 80's of the past century, the analytical production regarding globalization has been abundant. In this sense, many of the transformations experienced by state societies and by the International Society itself are explained, to consider different characteristic features of the current international order. However, globalization could not be understood without other prior phenomena, since coinciding with authors like Castells or García Segura, there are four processes which are continuous in time and of different nature and effects that affect the International Society: worldization, increasing interdependence, humanization and globalization (Castells, 1997 and García Segura, 1999). Therefore, the new post-World War II International Society is very different from the one that characterized international relations as of the Peace of Westphalia. The consequence has been the birth of a new post-Westphalian global International Society, characterized by the weakening of some actors, such as the State, which defined the previous period, and the empowering of other non-state actors, such as the transnational companies, International Organizations, government-owned and not, and above all, the individual.

In spite of this weakening, the International Society continues to be state-centric, where this international actor is confirmed as the only form of political organization. "In this sense, statization constitutes the maximum expression of worldization of the logic and the Westphalian model of International Society, by dividing the world society into sovereign political units, equal in rights, with clearly marked borders, but evidently unequal in terms of power and development" (Del Arenal, 2008: 21).

In the new international society, there has been a change in the nature and distribution of power. If in the Westphalian society power was identified with State, in the information society, power is a mutating, multidimensional phenomenon expressed in economic terms, but also, in cultural, technological and information terms, and, less and less, in military terms. Moreover, there is a change in the traditional base of power: the territory, which is no longer considered an essential element, and it is replaced by other elements which are not always tangible, such as communicational, financial or commercial networks..., (Del Arenal, 2008: 31). Authors like Thomas Risse question concepts like multipolarity "to describe a partially globalized world in which States are only one of the different centers of power" (Risse, 2008).

A direct consequence of the shift in the distribution of power is the increased number of new actors, which previously did not hold the economic or the political power, and in this new International Society emerge trying to establish a new inclusive international order, while demanding normative and institutional changes, together with a more balanced system. We are referring to the emerging powers, which are mostly referred to using the acronym BRICS (China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa), created by Goldman Sachs (Sachs: 2003). These States concentrate an important percentage of the global population, 40%, and are consolidating their economic position, questioning the traditional western supremacy of the previous society, from a more spirited positioning of multilateralism.



The main challenge faced by these States is turning their demographic relevance, their territorial extension and their economic potential into political power capable of having influence on the international system, even though they are already identified as relevant actors in the regional scene. Unlike in the past, these emerging powers have looked into strengthening the multilateral forums that currently enable a more equitable representation. A clear example is the answer to the financial crisis provided by the G-20, a forum which is more representative than the G-8 or any other reduced and select group that does not turn out to be legitimate or efficient for the resolution of global issues.

While bilaterality is defined by the principles of exclusion and negotiation, multilateralism participates in the logic of complementarity. In this sense, it implies a suitable model to analyze multiple and varied relations, even though it is not a generalized reality yet, and it could even be classified as embryonic, in spite of some already consecrated processes –the UN General Assembly, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN Conference on environment and development in Rio or the Convention on Climate Change in Kyoto...-

#### **IV. Multilaterality as a theoretical approach**

The study of International Relations entails the analysis of transforming structures. From this point of view, it is appropriate to assert that the classic formal logic of the post-World War II International Society is oriented towards a bipolar configuration of power, where the United States and the Soviet Union become superpowers as a consequence of an enhancement in their abilities, mainly the military ones. The evolutions of the international system, before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, sharpen the academic focus on multilateralism as an instrument of relation, while extending the participation of the States in multilateral forums, in pursuit of common interests and goals after the loosening of the restriction produced by the bipolarity of the Cold War. The article developed in John Gerard Ruggie's book contributes to the academic debate. This is a classic but controversial example, which focuses on the normative dimension of this concept.

Multilateralism is a tool, in regards to the decision-making process, where consensus and negotiation between the parties are essential. For Ruggie, multilateralism is "an institutional form that coordinates relations between three or more States based on generalized principles of conduct, that is, principles that specify the adequate conduct for each type of action, disregarding the particular interests of the parties or the strategic demands that may appear in each case in particular" (Ruggie, 1992:14). Therefore, for this author the focus is not on the ability to coordinate national policies between countries, but on that this is done based on certain principles of relation. His idea differs from "the quantitative and functional definition of multilateralism, which is broadly used, among others by Robert Keohane, for whom multilateralism is the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more States. Through *ad hoc* mechanisms or through institutions" (Barbé, 2010).

Caporaso states a difference, in an attempt to make a contribution to the intellectual debate, between multilateralism of multilateral. The distinction made by this author introduces an interesting conceptual debate, for two reasons; in the first place, because since the decade of the eighties and throughout the nineties they were present in the



political discourse of the main actors in the international system; in the second place, because many authors, mainly from the North American academic scene, try to limit these terms and create a definition applicable to political science and international relations.

In this sense, it is pertinent to define both terms, what they consist of and if they are useful to face the new challenges posed in the XXI century. "The terms multilateral and multilateralism suggest some linguistic consideration. The noun comes in the form of an *ism* suggesting a belief or ideology rather than a straightforward state of affaire" (Caporaso, 1992: 601). "The term "multilateral" can refer to an organizing principle, an organization, or simply an activity. Any of the above can be considered multilateral when involves cooperative activity among many countries. "Multilateralism" as opposed to "multilateral", is a belief that activities ought to be organized in a universal (or at least a many-sided) basis for a relevant Group, such as the Group of democracies" (Caporaso, 1992: 603).

Even though both terms imply cooperation between States, multilateralism refers to a set of beliefs and values on which the international policy should rest, this being a proposal in which to coordinate international relations. On the other hand, multilateral is an organizational principle, that is, the functioning of an organization or just an activity. Likewise, this idea is defended by a significant number of politologists and internationalists, and it is reflected on the works of Ruggie, Martin, Keohane or Cox, who states that "multilateralism appears in one aspect as the subordinate concept. Multilateralism can only be understood within the context in which it exist, and that context is the historical structure of World order. But multilateralism is not just a passive, dependent activity. It can appear in another aspect as an active force shaping World order" (Cox, 1992: 161); that is, multilateralism is a dynamic phenomenon of rules and organizations that do not remain unchanged and it introduces a clear intention of shaping the global order in a framework of understanding and cooperation between States.

The evolution of multilateralism "should be seen in relation to the transformation of the entire international society: of the structure of power, of the nature of the State, of the relations between State and society, of the prevailing ideas. Multilateralism (or each type of multilateralism), from this point of view, is nothing but the product of a certain type of international society" (Costa, 2013: 11-12). The evolution of the historical structure, in Cox's terminology, of the international society produces three types, "multilateralism of the coexistence, of cooperation and of the solidarism. Each one of these types of multilateralism is an expression of a concrete type of international society, but so far all of them have proved autonomous and resilient enough to survive (more or less) to the conditions that made them possible, so that each one of the phases has gone through an accumulation of a sedimentary layer of rules. These phases are analytical constructs, ideal types, but they pretend (tentatively) to have a correspondence with the historical reality" (Costa, 2013: 12).

In relation to the first one, the multilateralism of the coexistence, which represents the starting point, possesses a marked Eurocentric character in terms of power, since the United States or Japan focus on regional or domestic questions. Its goal is to "restrict and coordinate the action of the States to allow each of them the highest freedom to pursue their national interests with minimum interference or imposition from the rest" (Burley, 1993: 127). This multilateralism of coexistence prioritizes the avoidance of



confrontation over the resolution of common conflicts, showing its weaknesses before the challenges of a society in evolution. In relation to the second one, the multilateralism of cooperation is founded on the new relations that arose between the States after World War II, based on one proposition: interstate cooperation as a solution to international problems, as stated by the preamble to the Charter of the United Nations. In this sense, Burley considers that the United Nations system marks an inflection point between the rules of coexistence and the cooperative efforts, as embryonic as they might be in this period. The third type of multilateralism (solidarism), which starts as of the end of the Cold War, that is, the end of the eighties, is characterized by an increased number of international organizations together with an "increasingly more assertive promotion of universalized liberal regulations by international institutions and a budding global civil society" (Rüland, 2012: 257).

Finally, multilateralism brings about two variables, a political dimension and an economic one. In this sense, multilateralism in the political dimension, more general and macro, refers to the institutional architecture that is originated in the cooperation between States to face common challenges (climate change, terrorism, global poverty, drug trafficking...). In its economic dimension, limited to the sectoral level of the economic-commercial policies, it addresses the coordination of the actors that participate in the multilateral relation. In this sense, Cox expresses himself in the following terms: "economic multilateralism meant the structure of World economy most conducive to capital expansion on a World scale; and political multilateralism meant the institutionalized arrangements made at that time and in those conditions for interstate cooperation of common problems" (Cox, 1992: 162). This approach can be completed with Ruggie's contributions, who states that multilateralism possesses a quantitative dimension, regarding the number of States, and a qualitative dimension, depending on to the values such States should hold, "in short, the nominal definition of multilateralism misses the qualitative dimension of the phenomenon that makes it distinct" (Ruggie, 1992: 566).

There is no doubt in that the international system which arose after World War II implies a milestone in the establishment of new forms of interstate cooperation, on top of the propagation of multilateral regimes and institutions which have promoted the concurrence of "global values," never before experienced (democracy, governance, human rights, poverty reduction...). However, in practice, the multilateral system does not respond to such values and there is a resistance by the States to act in a multilateral manner, prioritizing the defense of their welfare and security interests. In international relations, this dichotomy (unilateral-multilateral) is put forward as a debate between relative vs. absolute profits (Mersheimer, 1995). Against this logic, the altruist purpose of multilateralism consists of establishing rules of behavior for the satisfaction of the countries; as well as developing institutions that favor international cooperation.

## **V. Assymmetric behaviors in the face of multilateralism: United States-European Union**

International actors have different points of view in relation to multilateralism, based on the historical context and the actors' own interests. The United States, as military and economic superpower has been a part in the construction and design of the



institutions we know as multilateral forums, originated after World War II. With the fall of the Soviet Union, comes the opening, in the theoretical level, of a favorable framework for the reshaping of the international order after the rupture of the bipolar system. Without going back to past ages, and focusing on the last decades, we can observe an evolution in the United State's foreign policy. With the termination of the bipolar world and the military victory in Iraq (1991), intervention backed by the United Nations, it gets into what Robert Kagan calls the *unipolar moment* that "predisposed the United States even more for the use of force abroad and to behave as an *international sheriff*, on the basis of some unrivalled military abilities" (Sanahuja, 2008: 302), reasserting the neoconservative position of the international order.

Following this logic, Robert Jervis "has qualified the United States as *revisionist hegemon* by trying to modify some multilateral institutions and rules that, paradoxically, have, to a large extent, been created by the United States, and for that reason, grant it a higher quota of power. In other words, the *hegemon* would not be finding itself comfortable in its own post-war <hegemonic multilateralism>, and for that reason would be pretending to establish new rules and institutions to provide legal coverage and legitimacy to an essentially unilateral performance -which would illustrate the formation of <coalitions of the willing> instead of acting through the United Nations, the NATO or other international organizations- and pose less restrictions to its freedom of action" (Sanahuja, 2008: 304).

For the United States, multilateralism is not a belief, it is an instrument applicable to specific issues in the global agenda, regardless of whether Democrat or Republican administrations have used this practice to a greater or lesser extent, causing a weakening of the multilateral system, as analyzed by Fred Holliday: "George W. Bush's victory in 2000, marked the end of a decade and a half of George Bush Sr.'s and Bill Clinton's model of foreign policy. A model which was compatible with multilateralism and with international rules, even those referred to the use of force, which supported the first Gulf War, or the interventions in Kurdistan, Somalia or Haiti. That policy had already been rejected by George W. Bush before the S-11 attacks in New York and Washington. After those attacks, the United States foreign policy has fluctuated between a stark unilateralism, and the attempts to adapt international organizations to its own interests. Iraq's War, in particular, has shown that Washington's interest in the rules of the United Nations was limited to obtaining their support and legitimacy, but if this could not be obtained, it would not avoid the attack. For the Bush administration, it was enough to show a symbolic interest in the allies' will and to enhance without deceit the United States' national interest and the patriotic sentiment" (Mesa, 2006: 3).

The neo-imperial viewpoint held by the US power has its own limits, political and economic limits, particularly in the financial and military ground, and it is also expensive to maintain. This is reflected in periods like the current one, marked by a context of international economic crisis. To rectify what Paul Kenney calls the "*imperial disproportion*" of the United States, the evolution towards a multilateral order induces to abandon the lack of appetite for multilateralism. It will be with president Obama when we can observe a swift concerning his predecessor's policy, where multilateralism is a natural space for the maintenance of leadership, observing, at a discursive level, a higher approach to these principles, especially, during the first period of his administration. However, with the recent stance of intervening in Syria it has been



shown that this is not only a certainty, but a need, since it is not the time for unilateral performances.

In this sense, the United States multilateralism is assertive. On the one hand, it advocates for international organizations, contributing with financial support (it contributes with 22% to the UN budget) and, on the other hand, its interpretation is tightly associated to its national interest, which implies a strategy, that is, the mean to achieve a goal. In short, even though the Obama administration has been reasserting its commitment to multilateralism, this does not mean that it is positioned as a key instrument of its foreign policy, unlike Canada or the European Union.

To sum up, the multilateralism for the United States may be a suitable answer to counteract the cost implied by unilateral performances in different scenes (climate change, safety, terrorism...), but also to face the new challenges of the current global agenda that would otherwise be hardly solved in a unilateral way. For that, it has reinforced its cooperative relation in forums such as the G-20, which even when it symbolizes the difficulties of a multipolar order, it is represented as an alternative to a classic institutional system, being a relevant example the United Nations that turns out to be inefficient to prevent breaches of basic game rules; or the obsolete of its structure, mainly the Council of Safety's, since, it answers to a post-World War model which was very different to the current one; or the lack of efficient means to satisfy the needs of the global agenda, marked by transversal challenges.

The European Union has a relevant role in regards to multilateralism. As of the post-Cold War period, and even before, "the commitment of the European Union to democracy, human rights, development and the struggle against poverty, peace processes and multilateralism has contributed to create a powerful positive image of the Union as a *progressive and civil actor* (...) We observed a strengthening in its will to become a global actor capable of actively participating in the formation of the principles, rules and institutions that constitute the international system through its singular identity as *civil power and normative actor* based on values. These values, on top of constituting its international identity, would also become a source of its soft power, by exercising influence through non-coercive means" (Sanahuja, 2013: 40).

The European Union, multilateral by nature, states its commitment to efficient multilateralism, a term suggested at the Strategy on European Safety (2003), which implies a useful tool to achieve global governance through International Law, shared rules and principles agreed upon among equals. Along these lines, the European Union Treaty (section 21.2.h) regulates that the foreign policy has to be committed to an "international system based on stronger international cooperation and good global governance."

Even though Brussels has turned efficient multilateralism into a vertex of foreign performance, we can not hide the divergences there have been surrounding this term even between functional multilateralists, for whom it is a tool, like others, and normative multilateralists, for whom it is a principle of interaction. Likewise, there are dissimilarities regarding its application, while community powers use *unilateralism* and *minilateralism* as instruments of foreign policy, smaller member States find in multilateralism a way to defend their own interests with a higher possibility of success.

Efficient multilateralism is a main goal and a relational framework with preferred partners. The approach applied in the nineties sits on strategic associations with



regional base. However, currently, bilateral relations are reinforced with a pool of prominent actors, as a process prior to the efficient multilateralism with which it is intended to give collective answers to the challenges of the global agenda, under the wing of binding international regulations and multilateral entities.

The promotion of an efficient multilateralism on behalf of the European Union is, up to a point, paradoxical when the progress experienced in its composition as an only actor (addition of 28) would imply a relative weight loss in multilateral organizations in which it has a representation and power that is no longer proportional to the one that it effectively has in the international system. In fact, it is worth wondering to what extent the efficient multilateralism it promotes benefits or negatively affects its interests, "and to what extent it does not constitutes, facing the future, one of its strategic options to promote the modification of the multilateral system towards its progressive transformation into a more appropriate system of global governance, on the base of relinquishing institutional power in it in favor of other actors" (Montobio, 2013).

## Conclusions

The current International Society shows changes in the international actors, being the State the one that has gone through more changes. This actor, decisive in the international system, has seen its prior exclusiveness, prominence and autonomy modified as a consequence of dynamics of interdependence and of a series of new international realities that separate the International Society of the past from a human, transnational and global one, like the current one. The State has suffered an important weakening and it has even been questioned but, nonetheless, it still maintains a prominent role, although it shares prominence with other booming international actors.

From Westphalia up to this date, interstate relations and the oligopolic distribution of the international system remain a constant. The association between the economic and political-military power maintains a directory of great powers, that is, a small group of state international actors that possess higher abilities in terms of power and always in relation to other units of the system and that, based on this position, exercise a decisive role in the international scene. Proof of that are the new emerging States, BRICS, or even in an immediate future, the TIMBIs, that explain a new configuration of power and the development of a different polarity, with the purpose of locating themselves better in the international system. Following this logic, multilateralism positions itself as governing principle of international relations, used in a different way based on the States own interests. Some meaningful examples are the different relations of the United States, the EU or BRICS with multilateralism.

Multilateralism has become an important resource in the international political discourse, which does not mean it has the same importance in the global agenda. Likewise, it entails a complex practice since it is not conceived and interpreted in the same way by the different actors that form the International Society. Multilateralism is a belief, a form in the rules that should rule the relations between States, in the face of the multilateral, an adjective that modifies a certain type of internal organization. In this sense, it is worth mentioning that as of the World War II, there has been an explosion of multilateralism and of multilateral organizations, as niches of opportunity, in which the States make a bet in pursuit of its defense as tool of their foreign action and to face global challenges. It would be worth wondering if the current multilateral



system has the proficiencies and instruments needed to face the challenges posed by the international agenda.

Based on the different narratives, goals, practices and discursive legitimations, we can observe different visions of multilateralism. The United States as unipolar power, considers its values universal, which distorts the essence of multilateralism. In regards to the stance of the European Union, it is worth mentioning that it promotes a normative multilateralism that mainly reflects European values, which contradicts the essence of the concept, since the current international society is increasingly more cosmopolitan and demands agreements based on diversity. Developing countries practice a defensive multilateralism and the emerging ones a revisionist multilateralism.

The weakness of the international system in responding to the challenges of the global agenda; the emerging role of the new state and non-governmental actors with a clear calling to influence and reshape the structure of the global foreign policy; the consolidation of new blocs and the strengthening of other regional blocs, reflect the deficits of the international system. In this sense, the limited answers of institutions like the United Nations, redirect the situation towards new mechanisms *ad hoc* like the G-8 and the G-20, where the decision-making process results more effective, although the international democratic legitimacy is reduced since they are exclusive.

The global strategic scene has changed decisively. The US unipolarity is questioned by emerging powers, especially China, the European Union to a lesser extent, but also the other members of the BRICS and the TIMBIs, which have appeared with strength and impose their style, demanding higher quotas of power. Even non-state actors, such as the non-governmental organizations have been slowly acquiring more influence and demand a prominence in accordance with their specific weight. Therefore, in an international system like the current one which significantly digresses in organizational, geopolitical and economic issues, from the previous ones, the new challenges faced by the system, in the last decades, have to be faced multilaterally.

Within the current international economic crisis, distortions are even more evident. In this crisis occurring in the "center", the countries in the "periphery" play an important role contributing to the maintenance of the financial system, which shows their economic ability and solvency together with the interdependence and acknowledgment that the negative effects of the crisis have global repercussions. Joined to this feature, the economic crisis implies a reconsidering of costs by the classic actors (mainly the United States, the European Union, Japan...), reflecting the worsening of divergences which go further into the predominance of the collective over the national. Even when emerging powers have global interests that are clearly manifested, they may not be fitted to face responsibilities of leadership and financing at an international level, especially on the subject of international safety.

The XXI century multilateralism is too interdependent and complex. It demands a new framework of cooperation which, on top of the balances of power, should take into account the diversity of the current challenges and the need to reassert a normative model. To sum up, the strengthening of the multilateralism is generating a greater legitimacy in the decision-making processes, either through *ad hoc* instruments or through those institutions with a global calling to protect collective interests.



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