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Power needs partners

Together, Europe and the Global South have the resources they need to uphold a rules-based international order

As the international order comes under increasing threat, defending multilateralism is essential to safeguard state sovereignty and a rules-based global system. For Europe and the Global South, this is strategically vital — especially as shared values are eroded, unilateral action becomes more commonplace, and economic and military power is being exploited to gain leverage. But ensuring multilateralism remains legitimate and effective is about more than just preserving the status quo. We need far-reaching reforms to make it more representative, more functional and better aligned with the realities of a multipolar global system.

The end of the Second World War saw the birth of multilateral institutions that are now struggling to manage armed conflicts, trade disputes and global crises in a multipolar world. The UN Security Council seems unable to bring about peace negotiations in ongoing conflicts, while the World Trade Organization is reluctant to get involved in unilateral tariff disputes. This does not need to spell the end of multilateralism, though. Rather, it shows the strain on political institutions. Where international law once prevailed and directly impacted state sovereignty, there is now a vacuum. A space where territories, strategic resources and logistics routes are openly disputed: from Latin America (as we saw in Venezuela) to Europe (as in the case of Greenland).

Towards real partnership

In working with countries of the Global South, such as Brazil, Europe needs to pursue three key priorities. First, it needs to reform its 20th-century concept of multilateralism and its institutions, which no longer reflect the reality of a multipolar international system. Second, it must expand and diversify its strategic partnerships to reduce its vulnerabilities and strengthen its economic and political autonomy. And third, it should transform its transnational cooperation in a way that goes beyond purely intergovernmental relations, especially with growing domestic political tensions within countries.

Having witnessed how patently ineffective the UN Security Council has been, Donald Trump championed the creation of an international 'Board of Peace' in early 2026. But this is not the kind of multilateralism advocated by Europe and the Global South. It is a unilateral response to a multilateral crisis: an arrangement designed and controlled by Washington, leaving no room for manoeuvre or meaningful collective deliberation. In practice, it functions like an accession agreement that concentrates strategic decision-making in the United States. The goal should not be to replace the UN with ad-hoc mechanisms, but to reform it. Expanding and rebalancing the Security Council – with stronger involvement from countries such as Brazil, India or South Africa – is essential to reflect the geopolitical realities of today.

As for expanding and diversifying strategic partnerships, the agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, for example, carries significance well beyond free trade. In a fragmented global economy, this represents a commitment to integration between regions that adhere to shared rules, predictability and institutional cooperation. By linking markets, production chains and complementary technological capabilities, it creates a global economic space that can attract investment, foster innovation and create high-quality jobs. Mercosur countries bring with them an industrial base, strategic resources and expanding markets, while the EU's contribution comes from its technological prowess, regulatory expertise and coordination in high-value-added supply chains.

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Cooperation on critical raw materials and rare earths is a particularly crucial part of the strategy. European investments focused on technology transfer, local value creation and developing production chains in Brazil – under stringent environmental and social standards – can improve the quality of investment in Mercosur. In return, this can strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy in procuring the raw materials it needs for the energy and digital transitions. There is a solid foundation for this kind of integration already: the largest German industrial hub outside Germany is located in none other than São Paulo. In light of the unilateral tariff measures imposed by the US since 2025, deeper bi-regional cooperation offers a path towards strategic balance in an environment increasingly rocked by trade disputes.

The last point goes beyond intergovernmental relations. Sovereign states are not monoliths: they are influenced by internal conflicts and changes of government, and their domestic political dynamics have a direct impact on their foreign policy. So, cooperation must not be limited to governments alone. Strengthening transnational networks between political parties, social movements, universities, foundations and civil society organisations is critical. The far right already operates in a highly coordinated way at this international level. Democratic forces need to do the same.

Together, Europe and the Global South have the resources they need to uphold a rules-based international order. The European Union offers regulatory force and institutional capacity, while the Global South brings political, demographic and economic legitimacy. In a world where economic and military power is increasingly being leveraged as a political tool, this kind of partnership is not just a 'nice to have' — it's a strategic must.



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