

The European Union as a global actor in times of crisis: view from outside

This article focuses on the perception of the European Union as a normative power and how this influences the Brazilian impression of the European Union as an international actor in the milestones of a transforming international order. The “times of crisis” we refer to here relate not only to the financial crises European countries are experiencing but also their consequences on the integration process itself. Above all, they relate to the international dimension: a more fragmented global order marked by a deeper pluralism in terms of ideas and behaviors, as well as the emergence of new actors who seek to influence international politics and modify the balance of decision making regarding themes of a global dimension.

The European Union as a normative power

The projection of principles and values beyond its borders, based in its political and social model and a western world vision, has been one of the European Union’s main tools as a global actor. These principles are directed towards the defense of the democratic regime, human rights, social cohesion, economic liberalization and regional integration. This movement would stem from identification of the EU, and European countries, with these principles of peace and international stability, as well as with a new conception of sovereignty. According to this

trajectory, in terms of politics and academia, the EU has been characterized as a normative power that acts as a diffuser of ideas in different ways of a traditional state structure (even a federalist one) and in better condition to overcome what is defined as specific national interests (or Hobbesian interests).

However, this projection of principles and values produced different results in the nineties than it has today. International and regional situations are different. Since 1970, EU countries have been demonstrating a behavioral tendency based on a new way of linking the principles of domestic politics to external actions. EU actions when facing questions of international politics were initially brought forward by the European Political Cooperation, from the Treaty of the European Union, within the framework of a Common Foreign and Security Policy, paved the way for this new behavioral pattern. This internal/external link did not express itself as a proposition of a world government in accordance with an internal democratic government (which would be the equivalent of a Kantian scheme of a confederation), but was oriented to project their domestic political organization beyond Europe’s borders (in accordance with western liberal thought and its defense of some social standards). This behavior was then described as *civilian* power towards international issues².

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This European behavior – as well as its world vision – has its origin, on the one hand, in the trajectory of action of European countries in different multipolar scenarios in recent centuries and, on the other hand, the success of its political model and integration process. This would suggest confidence in the validity and efficacy of its principles and, in the landmarks of international politics, also achieved through their strategies.

During the 1990s, this new type of EU procedure contributed significantly to the inclusion and defense of the principles of democracy and human rights in the international agenda. Moreover, this indirectly promoted the beginning of a debate – though a mild one – about the normative dimension of international relations. Examined from a constructivist perspective of structuring a new international order, this European preoccupation with democracy promotion (not only from the Union or its member states, but also from non-governmental organizations and of imprecise public opinion) projected in the construction of this order would contribute to the production of normative effects.

The 2010 decade, however, presents different characteristics. A more fragmented scenario, marked by a moment of crisis and change due to multipolarization after September 11th and the United States invasion of Iraq, which aggravated the economic dimension due to the financial crisis that occurred in the United States in 2008, that hit European countries even more forcefully. This context opened space for the rise of new actors –emerging countries – as well as alternative world vision's other than that of 1990's predominant liberalism. The experience of a crisis in the core of the European Union hampered projection of a European model, insofar as the financial crisis tore down the liberal strategy adopted until then and raised questions regarding the future of the integration process.

In this scenario, differences of conceptions and priorities of principles such as democracy and human rights between the EU and emerging countries appeared in some cases. The perception of the EU as a normative power will no longer serve as a tacit consensus. On the other hand, preferences for the adoption of different strategies in order to implement these principles will be prioritized over global security. A tension between respect for some principles and respect for State sovereignty is evident during the handling of crisis situations (the most recent example being Syria). As an aggravating element, at the same time that the EU presents itself as a normative power of value diffusion, some European countries take part in military initiatives that result in civilian deaths.

In order to reinforce multilateralism, disseminate its principles and values, facilitate dialogue with internationally relevant countries and construct long term strategies and projects with these countries, the EU has been substituting its principal tool for interaction with Southern countries during the 1990s –inter-regionalism – for the establishment of strategic partnerships with emerging countries. These partnerships indicate a vast improvement in relation to previous dialogues since they include a larger number of themes referring to global governance.

The Brazilian vision of Europe

In the context of these initiatives, in 2007 a strategic partnership was signed between the EU and Brazil. This partnership, although seemingly initially successful, has not demonstrated significant results. It is important to highlight that Brazilian diplomacy perceptions of the EU have not been clear. Europe has three distinct channels for relations with Brazil: from the country to the EU; bilateral relations with one or more of EU's member states; and the EU with Mercosul. For Brazilian diplomacy, from a

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realist perspective, some member states of the EU – especially Germany, France, Spain and Portugal - are considered important partners, while the EU collectively is identified as an actor that systematically brings complications to Brazil in negotiations of more complex themes (such as commerce), in which the European Commission is the main interlocutor. The perception of the EU as a normative international political actor has not yet been precisely defined and, politically, Brazilian diplomacy has shown a preference for intergovernmental relations.

The strategic partnership between them includes formal reinforcement of multilateralism and the quest for collective action in the areas of human rights, poverty, the environment, energy, Mercosul and stability in Latin America. An underlying explanation for this initiative could be issues related to the idea of global governance. On one side is Brazil's active role in international themes such as the Doha Round; Brazil's identification as a possible representative of Southern countries; the EU's quest for partnerships with emerging countries and the stagnation of EU-Mercosul political dialogue as a result of the incorporation of Venezuela into the trade bloc. From the Brazilian perspective, a strategic partnership could deepen relations with an important economic actor mainly in the field of investments and technology transfer, as well as potentially provide international prestige and acknowledgement for the country and facilitate Brazil's entrance into what Brazilian diplomacy understands as "directory of the great".

The results of the strategic partnership, however, were limited until the end of the Lula administration. Annual summits managed to establish commitments to deeper cooperation in the fields of alternative energy and

environmental change.¹ The environment, however, is a complicated issue for the Brazilian administration, due to the fact that it faces strong internal opposition and concessions in this area are difficult. In the field of international cooperation, in 2008 Brazil and the EU signed a Joint Action Plan for the implementation of triangular initiatives in African countries. In 2010, EU negotiations with Mercosul countries restarted, but so far have not managed to achieve considerable results and the outlook is grim.

Convergences on joint actions in multilateral fora have not been easy to achieve. If on the one hand European countries were identified as important allies in a review of international institutions, on the other, there was also visible disagreement on important themes. There are some examples such as the UN vote regarding the Iranian nuclear program in 2010, as well as the cases of Libya and Syria during Dilma Rousseff's administration. Divergences also exist in regard to the IMF, whom Brazil pressured to raise its participation quota, in alliance with the BRICS. Regarding an eventual nuclear disarmament process, Brazilian diplomacy has adopted a different position than the ones of France and the UK (countries within the EU that have nuclear weapons). Concerning the defense of Human Rights, during Lula's administration the issue was not considered as important as building partnerships with emerging partners. Rousseff's administration launched its position on this matter by voting for an investigation into alleged rights violations in Iran. However, this behavior has no continuity and this vote was not enough to realign Brazilian interests with European preferences on central issues of international politics. As an example, the use of the "responsibility to protect" doctrine is questioned by Brazilian diplomacy, who has

¹ Consult more about the theme Gratius, S. Brasil y Europa hacia 2015. *Policy Brief* n.49. Madrid, FRIDE, fev.2011.

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been implementing another dimension in its discourse: “responsibility while protecting”.

In these areas, Brazilian strategy has oriented itself towards a soft revisionism of international institutions, which identifies more closely with the visions of other emerging countries. In this field there are few expectations regarding modifying the role of the EU in Brazilian foreign policy. Brazilian projection onto the international scene has been guided on the belief in autonomy and universalism and Brazilian diplomacy seeks to project the country on the international scene based upon its profile of leadership among Southern countries. If there are coincidences regarding roughly the defense of multilateralism, European countries are perceived as more satisfied with the current dynamic of international institutions.

Another area where there could have been more convergence is South America. During Lula’s administration, Brazilian presence in the region was augmented exponentially, not only in terms of technological cooperation and investment, but also as unifying power in the political arena. In this context, not only the EU but also Brazil would defend multilateralism in the region, democratic regimes, social cohesion and the fight against poverty. From a European perspective, Brazil began to be seen as a possible leader of South American countries, capable of contributing to greater stability in the region. Furthermore, there could be a more covert European interest in strengthening Brazil’s leadership to counter Bolivarian socialism; so as to boost Brazilian leadership and support the “Brazilian path for Latin-American development that would conciliate market and state, generating growth and promoting social inclusion”². However,

² Ayllón Pino, B. e Saraiva, Miriam G. La Asociación Estratégica UE-Brasil: significados e implicaciones en el contexto de las eurolatinoamericanas. *Revista Española de Desarrollo y Cooperación* – VI Cumbre entre

despite expectation convergences, for the Brazilian government to undertake a joint action with the EU in the region would neither be necessary nor desirable. Brazil has been acting autonomously in relation with its neighbors and a tacit alliance with the EU could awaken suspicions and harm the construction of its leadership in the region. On the other hand, if during the Lula administration – mostly due to the influence of the president’s party – an approach for anti-liberal governments in the region was sought, with Dilma Rousseff the European expectation that the new government would decrease its support to these governments has been counterbalanced by the strengthening of the Itamaraty presence in the process of foreign policy formulation with its traditional principles of non-intervention.

In the area of triangular cooperation, highlighted in the Joint Action Plan, there has been some progress. Brazilian cooperation with African and South American countries with fewer resources grew during the Lula administration, providing Brazilian with donor country status. Besides the Joint Action Plan Brazil-EU, Brazil has already implemented triangular cooperation initiatives during the last few years in African countries with some member states. But, if on the one hand, triangular cooperation efforts extends the capabilities Brazilian international cooperation and provides international visibility to the country’s actions, on the other hand, cooperation on development implemented by the European Union and its member countries happens within the OECD, while Brazilian cooperation policy presents itself as alternative option, it is within the framework of South-South cooperation, which is formally exempt from compliance. The Brazilian government seeks to detach itself from the profile of

la Unión Europea y América Latina y el Caribe, special edition. Madrid, IUDC, 2010, p.51-65.

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North-South cooperation and there are divergent positions within the Brazilian formulators of foreign policy regarding the efficacy of this kind of trilateral cooperation.

Finally, Brazilian expectations of increasing European investments in Brazil through the partnership have not been successful. The financial crisis undergone by some European countries (and the Euro Zone as a collective) hinders the structuring of economic projects on the short term.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important that the EU and the European countries are partners with whom Brazil shares common principles, as well as motivations to seek an approach, but with whom Brazilian diplomacy has differences regarding strategies, perceptions and preferences with respect to the current international order. Brazil's external view of the EU has not coincided with European initiatives to contribute to multilateralism and the diffusion of norms. International leadership sought by Brazilian diplomacy has an individual characteristic, and the role of the country as a global player is strongly founded in the autonomy and universalism principles that guide Itamaraty. Furthermore, the soft revisionism that has driven Brazilian foreign policy is not found in the dissemination of EU norms, an important identity

During a time of internal crisis in the EU and an external one in a changing global order, with divergences, it's important to think about new models of behavior and international integration of both emerging countries and the European Union. The way to cope with this new fragmented scenario is to not allow it to perpetuate the patterns of the 1990s.

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