THE EU'S ROLE IN RESTRUCTURING POST-CRISIS GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Luca Cinciripini

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

REGROUP

REBUILDING GOVERNANCE AND
RESILIENCE OUT OF THE PANDEMIC

Culminating more than a decade of crisis in Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has opened an important window of opportunity for institutional and policy change, not only at the "reactive" level of emergency responses, but also to tackle more broadly the many socio-political challenges caused or exacerbated by Covid-19. Building on this premise, the Horizon Europe project REGROUP (*Rebuilding governance and resilience out of the pandemic*) aims to: 1) provide the European Union with a body of actionable advice on how to rebuild post-pandemic governance and public policies in an effective and democratic way; anchored to 2) a map of the socio-political dynamics and consequences of Covid-19; and 3) an empirically-informed normative evaluation of the pandemic.

@regroup_horizon

www.regroup-horizon.eu

@regroup-horizon

info@regroup-horizon.eu

@regroup_horizon
@eupolicy.social

Executive summary

This policy paper addresses the European Union's (EU) role in restructuring global governance in the aftermath of two significant crises: the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The document explores the interconnected crises and their impact on the international system, assesses the responses of international institutions, and formulates actionable policy recommendations for the EU. The goal is to enhance the EU's effectiveness in responding to global crises, reinforce its resilience, and contribute to the reform of the global governance system.

The pandemic exposed significant weaknesses in the global governance framework, particularly in the areas of international health security and crisis preparedness. Disruptions in global supply chains underscored the need for the EU to enhance its internal market resilience and strategic autonomy, especially regarding critical goods and the industrial system. Although the EU's initial response was fragmented, it later managed to coordinate efforts through mechanisms such as the Next Generation EU recovery plan and the COVAX initiative for global vaccine distribution.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused a severe geopolitical crisis that has tested the international system's ability to respond to violations of international law and regional instability. The EU, along with the US, led a unified Western response by implementing sanctions against Russia and providing support to Ukraine. This crisis underscored the EU's need to diversify its energy sources and highlighted the importance of addressing food security issues arising from the conflict.

The combined impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine has accelerated existing trends towards a more multipolar and fragmented global order. These crises revealed vulnerabilities in both the EU's internal mechanisms and global governance structures. Despite initial challenges, the EU demonstrated adaptability and took significant steps to address the crises. However, the need for a more cohesive and strategic approach to global governance remains critical. The EU must leverage these experiences to strengthen its role as a global actor and advocate for a more resilient and effective international system. Based on this evidence, recommendations can be formulated on the role the EU can play in responding effectively to global crises and regional implications, contributing to the restructuring of global governance:

o Championing a reform of the multilateral system: the EU should advocate for reforms in international institutions to improve their effectiveness in managing global crises by actively engaging in reform efforts to enhance the effectiveness,

inclusivity, and accountability of global governance institutions. Diplomatic initiatives and strategic partnerships will be crucial to achieving these goals, and the EU could aim to shape a more equitable and responsive global governance architecture.

o Dual strategy to engage rival powers and like-minded countries: Strengthening alliances with like-minded partners and engaging in diplomatic efforts to address global challenges should be a priority. In parallel, cooperation with rival powers on global public goods and transnational challenges such as climate change and international trade should be deepened, preserving the EU's core principles and values.

o Promotion of sustainable partnerships with the Global South: the transnational nature of the challenges faced by the multilateral system requires systematic co-ordination with the actors encompassed in the Global South. First, this necessitates addressing their lack of representativeness within international institutions and, subsequently, fostering partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and resource allocation mechanisms to empower these nations in shaping international norms and decision-making processes.

o Protection of Public Goods through regulatory power and diffusion of international standards: the EU can leverage its regulatory influence to promote high standards and actions globally, contributing to a fairer, sustainable, and human rights-respecting global order and the protection of public goods such as, among others, the environment, healthcare, and digital regulation.

o Combining internal cohesion with the development of the EU's actorness: pursuing internal cohesion or strategic convergence among member States is key to making the EU an effective international actor, by prioritising the reinforcement of EU competencies in crucial sectors like health and foreign security policy, and by promoting more efficient decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the EU has a pivotal role in shaping the future of global governance. By implementing these recommendations, the EU can enhance its capacity to respond to global crises, support a resilient and equitable international system, and reinforce its position as a leading global actor.

Introduction

In recent years, Europe has experienced a series of interconnected crises amidst significant global trends driving major changes in the international system, especially global power shifts and the shift in globalization (Greco, Marconi and Paviotti 2023). These were already underway before the pandemic crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. They have merged with systemic factors such as the climate, financial and migratory crises to shape the European Union (EU)'s role as an international actor in a framework of increasing distrust towards a Western-led international order (Leonard 2017; Nye 2018) and growing rivalry between powers following the erosion of liberal consensus.

This paper seeks to identify actionable policy recommendations on the role the EU can play in responding effectively to global crises and regional implications and contribute to the resilience and reform of the global governance system. In the next two sections, the multiple ramifications of the Covid-19 and Ukrainian crises will be assessed, particularly their impact on the international system and the results displayed by the reaction put in place by international institutions to face these issues. The two sections aim to highlight not only the effects produced by the crises on international institutions and the European Union, but also to stress the positive and negative results achieved by them in addressing the challenges posed by Covid-19 and the invasion of Ukraine. In this context, critical lessons can be drawn for the future of the multilateral system and the role the EU can play in this process. Based on these findings, policy recommendations will be provided in the final section, focusing on what actions and policies the EU can implement to relaunch global governance and contribute to its restructuring process.

A multi-level assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis

The pandemic crisis was an external shock that impacted the international system at various levels, from the domestic level of nation-states to the multilateral system. It also triggered a multilevel reaction by the international system and institutions, including the EU, that showcased both the strengths and weak points of the multilateral system.

International organisations faced unprecedented pressure to coordinate responses, share information, and facilitate collaboration among countries and the pandemic highlighted the need for stronger international cooperation and coordination to address

global health emergencies. In doing so the crisis exposed weaknesses in the existing global governance framework, with some international organisations struggling to respond effectively due to institutional constraints, funding shortages, and political tensions among member states, raising questions about the effectiveness of multilateralism in the face of complex, transnational challenges. Moreover, the pandemic prompted international organisations to reassess their priorities and mandates in light of evolving global challenges, underscoring the importance of global health security and resilience, and investment in pandemic preparedness.

Although the initial emergency was purely health-related, the crisis quickly expanded to encompass social, political, and economic aspects (Greco, Marconi and Paviotti 2023). Specifically, the early stages of the crisis caused significant disruptions to the supply chains of medical equipment, necessitating the reconfiguration of industrial production and a partial contraction of global trade flows (Brenton et al. 2022). Some authors have identified signs of a 'slowbalisation' process, which refers to a structural slowdown in globalisation (Lossani, Scinetti and Scutifero 2023). These challenges have also emphasised the crucial need for critical goods within the EU, leading the EU institutions to thoroughly consider the resilience of its internal market and the strategic autonomy of key industries. This is particularly important in relation to the green transition and critical materials (Greco, Marconi and Paviotti 2023).

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the internal market of the EU and its industrial system. Supply chain disruptions, restrictions on movement, and shifts in consumer behaviour have led to significant challenges for businesses operating within the EU. The internal market areas targeted by the measures taken by the EU have regarded the free flow of individuals, including commuters, business travellers, and tourists; the free flow of goods; consumer protection; exemptions and administrative flexibility on aspects of VAT and customs (Marcus et al. 2021). Many industries, particularly those reliant on physical retail and tourism, have experienced sharp declines in demand and revenue. On the other hand, sectors such as e-commerce, healthcare, and digital services have seen accelerated growth. The EU has responded with various measures to support businesses and mitigate economic fallout, including financial assistance programs, relaxation of state aid rules, and initiatives to strengthen the resilience of supply chains. Overall, the pandemic has increased the awareness of the benefits of the digital and green transition, which needs to be coupled with adequate investments and political drives. However, disparities in economic performance among member states have widened, highlighting the need for greater solidarity and coordination in the EU's response to future crises. While most supply chains quickly recovered, the pandemic unveiled weaknesses, as many businesses were initially unable to cope with shortages in supplies caused by closed borders and closed manufacturing sites. Moreover, the pandemic has underscored the importance of digitalization, innovation, and sustainability in reshap-

ing the EU's industrial strategy for long-term resilience and competitiveness. (de Vet et al. 2021).

The pandemic crisis pushed international organisations to coordinate and implement a coherent response to the crisis, and the difficulties that occurred contributed to highlighting the weaknesses and deficiencies of the international organisations. The pandemic has raised important questions about the effectiveness of the international system in managing global crises and avoiding fragmented and delayed responses, which can result in higher human and economic costs. The assessment of the effectiveness of the responses undertaken by the multilateral system, and the impact of crises on it, is mixed (Ayuso 2023). Some authors highlight how limitations in terms of authority, decision-making autonomy, and operational resources may hinder the organisations' ability to respond to crises (Debre and Dijkstra 2021). Specifically, criticism has been directed at the WHO's initial response to the pandemic crisis, particularly regarding the slow implementation of measures to contain the pandemic's spread, which highlighted the WHO's limitations in terms of authority and capacity (Yang 2021). The WHO's initial delays in declaring the outbreak of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and in issuing clear guidelines for countries, slowed the responses of other actors in the multilateral system, including the allocation of funds by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), and political decisions from plurilateral institutions such as the BRICS, G7, and G20 (Larionova and Kirton, 2020). The lack of preparedness and coordination contributed to difficulties in sharing information, expertise, and resources, leading to inefficiencies in the response efforts. International institutions struggled to ensure equitable distribution of medical supplies, vaccines, and financial assistance between developed and developing countries, giving way to fragmented and uncoordinated responses. The EU, for example, created its mechanism to acquire vaccines (EU Vaccine Strategy), paying little attention to developing countries in the first moment and exacerbating disparities in healthcare outcomes and economic impacts. To complicate the response from international institutions, national competition and lack of collaboration in exchanging information and securing adequate funding emerged. However, despite the complexity of the multilateral context, innovative solutions have been found to encourage institutional change (Ayuso 2023; Eisl and Rubio 2024). To promote vaccine equity worldwide, advocating for fair allocation and affordability, WHO launched the COVAX initiative, co-led by the EU, aimed to ensure equitable access to vaccines, especially for lower-income countries. Initially, the joint efforts of the WHO and EU under COVAX were considered unsatisfactory due to the bilateral initiatives of individual countries and the challenges in liberalising vaccine production and distribution. However, COVAX later succeeded in distributing significant doses of vaccines to Global South countries. Despite this, vaccination coverage in certain contexts remains below average (Ayuso 2023; Eisl and Rubio 2024).

As for the EU, despite the initial lack of a coordinated response, which caused criticism and tensions among member states, it subsequently attempted to respond to the crisis by strengthening its health coordination capacity by bolstering medical supply chains and activating its civil protection mechanism, as well as creating a common plan for the procurement of medical equipment and vaccines. The Union's success in procuring vaccines from outside Europe appears to have been effective (Eisl and Rubio 2024). These achievements have contributed to the EU's actorness in the health sphere by developing good practices that could be replicated in other crisis scenarios (Eisl and Rubio 2024). Internally, the EU has prioritised coordinated action among member states to combat the pandemic. To address the socio-economic downfalls of the crisis, the EU created the Next Generation EU, a EUR 750 billion economic recovery plan aimed at supporting the member states most affected by the crisis and promoting investment in green and digital transitions.

Simultaneously, the EU aimed to take a leading role in the global response to the pandemic by promoting international cooperation and supporting equitable access to vaccines and treatments (European Investment Bank 2020). Through a Joint Communication by the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU adopted a new approach, labelled "Team Europe", which aimed at developing a single framework of action combining resources from all EU institutions (member states, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development - EBRD) (Eisl and Rubio 2024). The Communication reaffirmed the EU's position as the largest global donor and its commitment to leading the response to the pandemic. This approach prioritised three main areas: addressing immediate emergency and humanitarian needs, strengthening healthcare systems, and mitigating economic and social repercussions. The Team Europe approach aimed at aligning EU actions with its core values and strategic interests, supporting global coordination efforts, and endorsing multilateral solutions to the crisis. Initially, the EU's response focused on meeting urgent needs by pooling existing financial resources. However, planning beyond this phase was challenging due to uncertainty surrounding the crisis.

The EU adopted ambitious responses and sought to play a constructive role in the global response to the pandemic, despite internal challenges. However, the crisis also highlighted the need for reforms and increased efforts to strengthen the EU's resilience (Goniewicz 2023).

The global implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred during a time when national actors and international organisations were still grappling with the economic, social, and political aftermath of the pandemic crisis.

Part of the international community responded resolutely to Russian aggression, condemning the invasion and implementing diplomatic, political, and economic measures to counter Russia's actions. On 2 March 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution rejecting the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and demanding that Russia immediately withdraw with an overwhelming majority of 141 against 5 votes (Gowan, Gibson and De La Fuente 2023). Russia's violation of international law has produced a largely united reaction from the West, with the US and the EU adopting similar positions. They expressed broad support for military and financial aid to Kyiv, as well as sanctions against Moscow (Haesebrouck 2024). However, despite the cohesion of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), responses from non-Western actors, notably China and India, have been contradictory. Beijing has strengthened its ties with Russia, while India has taken a more ambiguous position by not publicly condemning the invasion of Ukraine and North Korea directly supplied weapons to Moscow (Tellis 2022). The countries of the so-called 'Global South'[1] exhibited less support for the condemnation expressed towards Russia. In 2023, the UNGA approved a nonbinding resolution (A/RES/ES-11/6) voted by 141 members, containing a request to Russia to end hostilities in Ukraine. While only 7 members voted against the resolution, notably Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Russia and Syria, 45 members either abstained (32) or were absent (13). Among the abstentions were significant international actors such as China, India, Iran and South Africa and, generally, 45 out of 52 were among the world's poorest and least industrialised countries (Amighini and Garcia-Herrero 2023).[2] Consequently, the events at the UN demonstrated the weaknesses of the current multilateral frameworks and their limited impact on countries that have been more exposed to the influence of actors such as Russia and China from an economic and military perspective (Gotz et al. 2023; Kostakos 2024). The Russian invasion resulted in dramatic increases in energy costs, inflation, and major disruptions of global trade and supply chains (Greco,

1. According to the United Nations Finance Centre for South-South Cooperation, the definition of Global South is "a synonym for terms such as developing countries, least-developed countries, underdeveloped countries, low-income economies. Global South is used to describe countries whose economies are not yet fully developed and which face challenges such as low per capita income, excessive unemployment, and a lack of valuable capital". (https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-south-countries)
2. Focusing on the African continent where Russian involvement has been consistent in the last few years, the six major UNGA resolutions related to the war in Ukraine since March 2022 show that, overall, 140 African states voted in favour, 18 against while 166 abstained or were absent (Gotz et al. 2023).

Marconi and Paviotti 2023). Additionally, the use of food resources as a hybrid tool had dramatic consequences for the most dependent countries on food imports from Russia and Ukraine (Glauber and Laborde 2023).

The consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine also spilled over into the financial and military spheres. Firstly, the US and EU decision to disconnect some Russian banks from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) and to freeze Russia's foreign reserves. This decision, which was labelled by some authors as "weaponisation of finance", might have accelerated existing trends of fragmentation with potential future repercussions on the international monetary system and the global financial order (Bilotta 2022). Secondly, the military escalation signalled the centrality of NATO and the United States as a major security actor in Europe (Greco, Marconi and Paviotti 2023). The decision by Finland and Sweden to abandon their policy of neutrality by requesting to join the Atlantic Alliance may confirm NATO's role as a major security provider in Europe.

The conflict also had significant repercussions on international and regional manage-ment of migration. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the EU were at the forefront of dealing with the consequences of the most massive wave of Europe-an migration since World War II. The EU implemented the Temporary Protection Direc-tive to provide temporary and immediate protection for individuals from non-EU coun-tries. This directive offers temporary legal protection to Ukrainian refugees who are fleeing from war (Carrera et al. 2022). In addition, the IOM adopted a series of short- to medium-term measures to address the crisis, working closely with Member States and the EU (Ayuso 2023). Among these, are the creation and development of protection programmes and green corridors between Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to facilitate movement to safer locations, while on the one hand implementing measures for the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in hosting countries. On the other, assisting people affected in relocating or assessing their possibilities of returning to their homes (Ayuso 2023). Overall, the IOM's limited institutionalisation allowed for an agile response to the crisis by enhancing its agency capacity (Ayuso 2023).

The EU reacted to the international crises generated by the war in Ukraine focusing especially on the consequences of the war in the energy and food fields, such as a shock in energy prices, a dramatic hike in the inflation rate and broader disruptions to global trade, supply chains and the supplies of agricultural products and fertilisers (Greco, Marconi and Paviotti 2023). In response to energy and food supplies used as a means of pressure by Russia, the EU resorted to initiatives such as the Joint Gas Procurement Mechanism and the FARM initiative. The former aimed at improving the energy security of the EU through a strategy of joint natural gas procurement, reducing dependencies on external suppliers and coordinating natural gas purchases among member states to obtain better supply conditions. The latter, aimed at ensuring global food security, sta-

bilising food markets and supporting farmers (Eisl and Rubio 2024). However, the impact of these initiatives on EU actorness is assessed as moderately negative due to a lack of internal cohesion between member states, the asymmetric impact of food and energy crises and a high level of fragmentation and tension between EU member states, especially France and Germany (Wax 2022). The compound effect of these factors played a significant role in hampering the capacity of the EU to act as a relevant actor in facing these crises (Eisl and Rubio 2024). Furthermore, the EU's initial capabilities in these areas were limited, and the crisis has exacerbated national differences instead of promoting internal cohesion. For instance, the energy price crisis had asymmetric effects on individual nation-states, with varying repercussions depending on their previous energy dependence on Russian gas. This led to a prioritisation of national interests, which limited the EU's ability to act cohesively in the international arena. Regarding FARM, EU action was also characterised by fragmentation and inefficiency due to the uncoordinated actions of France and Germany (Eisl and Rubio 2024). The EU's inability to position itself as a leading international actor in energy and food crises is therefore attributed to the lack of coordination and poor internal cohesion on these sensitive issues, which have affected individual nation-states in varying ways (Eisl and Rubio 2024).In addition, there have also been actions to support Ukraine directly on multiple levels: economic, military, and political. The EU has provided military assistance worth around €33 billion to date, including through the European Peace Facility for the supply of arms, ammunition, and military training. On the economic side, the Union has provided support amounting to €143 billion, including €81 billion in financial, budgetary, and humanitarian assistance, €33 billion in military support, €17 billion in support for refugees within the EU, and €12.2 billion in grants, loans, and guarantees provided by EU member states (European Council 2024b). Lastly, the EU leaders decided to open accession negotiations in December 2023. In this troubled context, the EU played a significant role in responding to the crisis by implementing economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia, such as freezing financial assets and embargoing exports of specific goods and technologies. In February 2024, the EU approved its thirteenth sanctions package against Moscow, including measures against individuals and economic, financial military and energy sanctions aimed at weakening the Russian economy and undermining its war effort (European Council 2024a).

Diplomatic relations between the EU and Russia were also restricted, as well as any trade cooperation. The US, Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) have imposed similar restrictions, focusing particularly on freezing assets of major Russian financial institutions and imposing restrictions on transactions in US dollars and their operations in the UK; personal sanctions against Russian oligarchs, government officials, and their families, including asset freezes and travel bans; banning the import of oil, natural gas, and coal from Russia and restricting the export (BBC 2024).

In this context, the European security architecture and part of its component organisations were put to the test by the Ukrainian crisis. In the weeks following the outbreak of the war, the Council of Europe decreed the expulsion of Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine (Council of Europe 2022). The work of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE), on the other hand, was continually slowed down by Russia's use of its veto power. This has raised questions about the functioning mechanisms of the organisation itself and its ability to maintain efficiency and pursue its goals in its current state (Friesendorf and Wolff 2023). Simultaneously, even from national initiatives, new multilateral forums have been established on an institutional level to integrate and reshape the European security architecture due to the deteriorating relations with Russia. An example of this is the European Political Community (Scazzieri 2023).

Overall, the contribution of the EU to tackle the consequences of the war in Ukraine has been mixed. On the one hand, the support for Ukraine and the sanctions imposed against Russia demonstrated a firm commitment to the international liberal order. On the other, the capacity of the EU to act effectively to defend its interests towards the downfall of the war, especially against food and energy crises, has been modest due to internal divisions and fragmentation.

Policy recommendations: the EU's contribution to restructuring global governance

The Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia have profoundly disrupted the global landscape. These crises have exposed vulnerabilities in the existing global governance framework, necessitating a strategic response from the EU. The combined challenges posed by the pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis have significantly impacted the EU's international standing and influence. As the EU navigates these crises, it is increasingly poised to play a pivotal role in reshaping global governance. Looking ahead, critical policy recommendations will explore how the EU can strategically contribute to the restructuring of global governance frameworks. By leveraging its economic strength, diplomatic networks, and commitment to multilateralism, the EU has the potential to lead transformative efforts that foster greater stability and cooperation on the international stage.

Championing a reform of the multilateral system

The crises in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic have underscored both the strengths and limitations of global governance, prompting the EU to advocate for reforms of the multilateral system. While recognising the importance of robust and effective multilateralism, the EU should also be aware of the need to ensure that multilateral structures align with its interests and principles.

The EU views the promotion of strong multilateralism as vital for addressing global challenges collaboratively. However, it should refuse to passively accept multilateral frameworks that do not reflect its values or adequately represent its interests. Instead, the EU should seek to actively engage in reform efforts to enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and accountability of global governance institutions.

Through diplomatic initiatives and strategic partnerships, the EU could aim to shape a more equitable and responsive global governance architecture. This involves advocating for reforms that strengthen multilateral institutions' capacity to address emerging threats, promote human rights, uphold the rule of law, and foster sustainable development. In light of the necessity for reform of the current global governance structure, it is of paramount importance to address one of the most significant challenges currently facing the multilateral system: the difficulty in ensuring adequate representation for all global actors.

The lack of representativeness and inclusiveness have emerged evidently in the debate about the reform of the United Nations Security Council, whose percentage membership compared with overall UN membership has decreased to the current 7.8 per cent (Pirozzi et al. 2023). The principles that must be promoted in the UNSC reform framework are in line with those that must also be ensured in other international institutions. These include the need to ensure efficiency and legitimacy, as well as accountability and transparency. Some of the instruments proposed for the reform of this body, such as the enlargement of the membership category and regional representation, could therefore also offer answers to other international institutions, especially to provide concrete answers to those countries that are now showing increasing distrust towards the multilateral system in its current form. (Pirozzi et al. 2023). In the case of the WHO, it would be necessary to enforce its standards and guidelines in order to address two issues encountered during the pandemic: the lack of authority and the difficulty in utilizing its regulatory expertise and tools to enhance its executive capacity.

By promoting a process of reform in global governance, the EU strives to ensure that multilateralism remains a cornerstone of international relations, capable of effectively addressing the complex challenges facing the global community while safeguarding the EU's interests and principles.

Dual strategy to engage rival powers and like-minded countries

In conjunction with institutional reforms, the EU should pursue a dual strategy in restructuring global governance. Firstly, it should deepen cooperation with rival powers on global public goods and transnational challenges while preserving its core principles. This entails engaging with countries like China on shared concerns such as climate change and international trade, while upholding principles of democracy and human rights. This twin-track approach involves promoting reforms within existing multilateral institutions to enhance engagement with rival powers, alongside establishing new international agreements or partnerships with like-minded countries. The complexity of transnational challenges like climate change, global health, digitalization, food security and international trade, among others, necessitates broadening the scope of involved actors to set up common rules while maintaining red lines regarding the EU's fundamental values. Existing multilateral structures retain residual legitimacy crucial for addressing such complex challenges.

However, limitations exist in fully representing the EU's values when engaging with actors like China, which hold contrasting principles. In such cases, closer cooperation with like-minded actors becomes crucial, particularly in areas like human rights and democracy promotion. The objective of the dual strategy, and thus the strengthening and reinforcement of existing multilateral structures, is also to reduce the risks of excessive recourse to the instrument of ad hoc agreements with individual countries.

While exclusive partnerships among a few EU member states and like-minded countries can overcome political obstacles, they risk exacerbating multilateral governance fragmentation. International cooperation is increasingly taking on regional characteristics or forming forums, as seen in the G7 or BRICS, but also in areas such as trade with the proliferation of regional trade agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. Broader forums like the G20 offer a balance to accommodate diverse actors on common challenges, but persisting political differences may hamper deeper cooperation. An integrated approach between the two strands can enable the EU to maintain channels of cooperation with different actors, diversifying the relationship according to the challenges and issues at hand. In addition, replicating past experiences involving private actors, such as GAVI - The Vaccine Alliance or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expert groups on Artificial Intelligence (AI), could be avenues for the EU to explore. This multifaceted strategy aims to integrate efforts effectively and navigate the evolving global landscape while upholding the EU's values and principles.

Promotion of sustainable partnerships with the Global South

The EU faces the imperative task of reestablishing its ties with the Global South, encompassing a wide range of countries, by adopting innovative strategies and replicating successful partnership models. The growing relevance of these countries in the international scenario, and the transnational nature of the challenges faced by the multilateral system require a holistic perspective and systematic coordination between different actors. A comprehensive approach is essential, prioritising the interests and needs of the Global South in global governance reform agendas. This necessitates fostering partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and resource allocation mechanisms to empower these nations in shaping international norms and decision-making processes. Various crises, from climate emergencies to geopolitical tensions like those in Ukraine, have fuelled distrust among Global South countries towards the West and post-World War II multilateral institutions. To bridge this gap, the EU should transcend traditional aid approaches limited to lending programmes and acknowledge the diversity within the Global South. Many leaders from these countries feel underrepresented in key multilateral forums like the UN Security Council, the G20, and major financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB). In 2023, the African Union (AU) was made a permanent member of the G20 after multiple requests from the regional organisation. Rectifying this democratic deficit is crucial for engaging the Global South. The EU can leverage its influence within existing institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, to ensure timely resource allocation to address international and local crises in Global South countries. Considering that the eurozone holds the largest vote share in the IMF (21 per cent), and 33.2 per cent of the vote share at the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Iveson and McNair 2023), the EU could leverage its vote share to ensure lending responses to the needs of countries in the Global South. The reform of financial institutions and innovative use of market power and monetary policies by the EU could be key to engaging these countries and ensuring the sustainability of specific policies and targets, such as the green transition. Platforms like the Global Gateway can amplify the EU's efforts, especially in addressing shared challenges such as climate action. Additionally, the EU can develop bilateral cooperation agreements or promote its initiatives, like the Global Gateway, to enhance its geopolitical relevance and provide added value to Global South partners. The EU's ambitious Global Gateway Initiative aims to promote global connectivity and address infrastructure investment needs worldwide, further enhancing its role as a proactive global actor committed to equitable and sustainable development. In order to make the Global Gateway an effective tool to achieve its goals, the EU should firstly aim at improving its resources and delivering concrete results efficiently, Secondly, it should also be considered as a political approach especially towards the Global South, improving the engagement and the communication strategy towards those countries. By viewing

the energy transition as an opportunity for economic transformation, for example, the EU can collaborate with Global South countries to exploit green energy resources and boost prosperity while protecting the environment. Over the years, the EU has built an extensive network of partnerships with emerging powers, covering various domains such as trade, aid, climate change, and security. Strengthening these relations demonstrates the EU's commitment to multilateralism and positions it as a champion of multilateralism. Through political dialogue, trade, investment, and development assistance, the EU has a history of cooperation with Global South countries, making it well-suited to deepen engagement in these regions. Recent initiatives like the Indo-Pacific strategy signed in 2021 and partnership agreements with African, Caribbean, and Pacific states in 2023 underscore the EU's commitment to fostering broader engagement beyond Europe (Brender 2024).

Protection of Public Goods through regulatory power and diffusion of international standards

The EU possesses significant regulatory power that extends beyond its borders, allowing it to set standards and enact actions at the international level in various fields such as climate action, healthcare, and digital regulation. In these sectors, the EU has already promoted standards that have been replicated elsewhere or necessitated adjustments from other actors. Additionally, recent interventions like those concerning Artificial Intelligence (AI) or the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) are potentially replicable.

In terms of climate policy, the EU's initiatives such as the Emission Trading System (ETS), have set regulatory standards that influenced legislation in California and China. Meanwhile, the European Green Deal's commitment to carbon neutrality and its integration of climate considerations into various policy areas, including finance, could reinforce the EU's role as a global standard-setter in environmental policy and have mainstreamed climate considerations into the global debate.

In healthcare, aspects such as vaccine procurement and medical equipment can be considered public goods, and the EU's role in facilitating access to vaccines and medical supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic highlights its capacity to act as a regulator in this field, or its ambition to frame out a role in this sense.

Similarly, in the digital sphere, the EU has sought to regulate digital activities through initiatives like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that has set out minimum standards and obligations valid anywhere. More recent efforts, such as the Artificial Intelligence Act passed by the European Parliament in March 2024, aim to establish a common regulatory framework for AI. Proposed by the European Commission in April

2021, this act awaits approval from the EU Council, showcasing the EU's ongoing efforts to set global standards in digital regulation.

Overall, the EU's regulatory power enables it to influence international standards and actions in various sectors, including climate action, healthcare, and digital regulation. Through initiatives like the European Green Deal and regulatory frameworks like the Artificial Intelligence Act, the EU continues to shape global governance and promote its values and principles on the international stage. In all these sectors, the EU can leverage its regulatory experience and economic-political influence to promote high standards and actions globally, contributing to a fairer, sustainable, and human rights-respecting global order. Through collaboration and advocacy, the EU can play a pivotal role in shaping global norms and values.

Combining internal cohesion with the development of the EU's actorness

In order to redefine its role and bolster its influence in international affairs, the EU must emphasise strategic convergence among its member states. This entails both strengthening EU competencies in vital sectors like health and foreign security policy and fostering greater cohesion and cooperation among member states. By aligning national interests with overarching EU objectives, the EU can solidify its position as a cohesive and influential global actor.

Within the EU framework, cohesion and actorness are crucial factors determining its effectiveness and impact globally. Strategic convergence and cohesion are crucial for maximising the EU's effectiveness and relevance in a rapidly evolving global landscape. By prioritising the reinforcement of EU competencies in key sectors like health and foreign security policy, and by promoting more efficient decision-making processes, the EU can navigate challenges and capitalise on opportunities more effectively. Through concerted efforts to bridge divergent interests and foster a shared vision of European solidarity, the EU can emerge as a more cohesive and influential actor globally. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed the disjointed response among EU member states, necessitating a more coordinated EU-level approach to public health crises. By bolstering EU competencies in pandemic preparedness, vaccine distribution, and cross-border healthcare cooperation, the EU can foster greater cohesion in safeguarding its citizens' health. At the same time, a high level of internal cohesion and the ability to implement the Union's competencies in the common vaccine purchases prompted a higher level of EU's actorness (Eisl and Rubio 2024).

Similarly, in foreign security policy, recent geopolitical challenges emphasise the importance of a unified EU stance. Strengthening EU competencies in defence cooperation,

diplomatic mediation, and conflict resolution mechanisms can facilitate a more coherent and assertive EU presence globally, enhancing both actorness and cohesion.

It can be concluded that the formal competencies of the EU in specific sectors can only be effectively utilised when accompanied by a high level of internal cohesion. This plays a crucial role in supporting the emergence of EU actorness and it appears as a necessary element. This cohesion should not be viewed as a static condition; rather, it can evolve over time, influenced by the impact of crises. Where high levels of internal cohesion cannot be achieved, it becomes essential to promote strategic convergence among member states. In conclusion, the EU has a vital role to play in shaping the future of global governance through proactive leadership, strategic engagement, and principled advocacy. By championing institutional reforms, fostering dialogue and cooperation with both allies and rivals, prioritising the needs of the Global South, and leveraging its regulatory powers to protect public goods, the EU can help build a more inclusive, resilient, and equitable global order that advances the interests and values of all its member states.

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