

Multilateralism: The Ideological Matrix of the European Union

Written by Goran Ilik

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Multilateralism is a significantly complex term to define. In a minimalistic connotation, I could define it as an activity of at least three (international) entities in creating international relations. Or, as defined during the Cold war, it is an international form of governance, practiced by a few international entities. Hence, comes the essential matrix of this term, so it can be said that multilateralism, as such, refers to the number of entities and their activity, instead of the form of organization. But at the same time, it alludes to and demands proper institutional interconnection of those entities.

In this paper, I will fundamentally present the crucial and key definitions of multilateralism as a term, in order for us to obtain a theoretical basis which will serve us in the further research and conclusion of the essential components of the European perception of multilateralism as its ideological matrix. Or as the author Laurent Cohen – Tanugi writes: “multilateralism, global governance through law, and pacifism – Europe’s ideological baggage (...)”. [1]

Besides that, I can emphasize that the multilateral method implies a *polyvalent* and *multidirectional action* by three or more international entities aiming to fulfill their designated goals. In order to define multilateralism more precisely as a term, I could use the definitions given by Keohane, Ruggie, Morgan and Caporaso which are acknowledged as exceptionally relevant theoreticians in this field. Keohane transcends his multilateral theoretical opus, through *the practice for coordination of national policies in groups of three or more states*. Ruggie, on the other hand, defines this term as:

An institutional form which coordinates behavior among three or more states on the basis of ‘generalized’ principles of conduct – that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence. [2]

Hence, interpreting these two formulations or definitions of multilateralism as a term, it can be ascertained that multilateralism presupposes and deeply incorporates principles of mutual leadership, contractuality, formality and institutionalization of the groups and their actions, and all that based on *coordination as their premise*. The elements of this term are closely tied to the sides / entities, i.e. their minimal number, as a technical prerequisite for creating a multilateral atmosphere, necessary for practicing multilateralism as a method of solving concrete international questions, thus achieving coordinately and contractually their anticipated goals. Starting from there, the first of these definitions is treated in theory as a *nominal definition* (according to Keohane), and specifically aspectuates *interdependability* as a prerequisite for the coordination of the entities. The second definition, however, the one set by Ruggie, is treated as *qualitative*, as it refers to the essence of what multilateralism is, since: “(...) what is distinctive about multilateralism is not merely that it coordinates national policies in groups of three or more states, which is something that other organizational forms also do, but that it does so on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states”. [3]

Morgan, on the other hand, handles this issue through the prism of its real applicability, instead of the simple application of norms as a dominant criterion, emphasizing the *activity of the sides involved* in the intensification of their mutual collaboration on a higher level by widening their collaboration in those spheres of their interactions,

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where it almost doesn't exist.[4] This means, according to this author, that multilateralism is raised to a level of a leading, motivating and orientation principle, for which greater activity is needed by the sides/entities (state and non-state entities) for *finding mutually preferential positions* for *expanding and intensifying mutual collaboration*, openly accepting *interdependence* as a utilitarian good, aimed at realizing their *mutual* goal. For the benefit of further defining this complex term, a significant role is played by James Caporaso, a relevant theoretician of the EU, especially in the part of its ideological and political profile, treating it even as an *ideology*, i.e.: "as a 'belief' or an ideology on how to organize international life",[5] because as a term, it's more than obvious that it contains the terminological, ideology suffix "-ism". Additionally, he also constitutes a *substantial* definition of multilateralism, which has as a starting point the thesis that multilateralism refers to *coordinated activities* between at least three states, in accordance to *concretely established principles* (identical position to Ruggie) i.e.:

As an organizing principle, the institution of multilateralism is distinguished from other forms by three properties: indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity. Indivisibility can be thought of as the scope (both geographic and functional) over which costs and benefits are spread...Generalized principles of conduct usually come in the form of norms exhorting general if not universal modes of relating to other states, rather than differentiating relations case-by-case on the basis of individual preferences, situational exigencies, or a prior particularistic grounds. Diffuse reciprocity adjusts the utilitarian lenses for the long view, emphasizing that actors expect to benefit in the long run and over many issues, rather than every time on every issue.[6]

Through this exhausting and systematic definition, as regards the marking of the key aspects and principles of multilateralism as a term, its exceptional complexity and at the same time the challenge to explore it is simultaneously ascertained. Apart from the key principles, which encompass institutionalization of the relations between the needed number of entities, i.e. norming their relationship (internally) and their relations with the world (externally), there is a reciprocal diffusion, which arises from *sharing* as a benefit of the affirmative interdependence between those entities, and of course the general ruling principles, as yardsticks and guidelines for the specific activities of the states.

Apart from these definitions, as theoretical guidelines in the operationalization of this term, it is also necessary to mention the meaning of the UN, as an implicitly global and *a priori* multilateral giant, which starting from its being, essentially affirms this term as an algorithm for managing international relations, and does so, mostly by affirming and practicing multilateral diplomacy. In this sense, Shashi Tharoor (former UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), emphasizes the position and the role of the UN in creating a multilateral climate by naming it *a preeminent institution of multilateralism*, and then says that the UN as such, provides (or tries to provide) a forum, where sovereign countries from all around the world can assemble, and in such manner, so that they can share the baggage and the responsibility for the problems with which they are currently or incidentally facing.[7] Since the end of the Cold war, the UN has been opening itself to the international environment more and more, while relativizing the *realpolitik* perception of international politics, thereby allowing non-state entities to take a stand of their own, and participate in the process of counseling and formulating global politics.

Starting from its progressive trend of diffusing multilateralism as an idea and practice, it emphasizes that the multilateral institutions established in the 20th century, represent global parameters for embodying and diffusing this progressive, cooperative and contractual method, in each sphere of international politics, suitable for managing international relations, as a policy opposite to the policy of strength (*machtspolitik*) and balance of power. But, besides the idealism of this Wilsonian discourse in understanding the international politics, a great number of renowned scientists, as James Muldoon dubs them, regardless of whether they are realists or internationalists, claim that the central issue of the present, isn't actually whether the UN is relevant, nor whether its proclaimed multilateralism is true, but rather the legitimacy of America's power. Muldoon, in that sense, discusses that realists have long "written off" the UN, treating it as irrelevant fiction, which masks the essence of international politics – the power.

Contrary to that, internationalists have been claiming that the UN provides a vital political and diplomatic frame for the actions of its most powerful member (the USA), thus embedding the American power, as well the power of other countries, "in international institutions, where the use of force would be subjected to international law." But, what frightens the internationalist camp, however, are the unilateral circumstances and their potential prolongation (probably during the presidency of Barack H. Obama), which during the presidency of George W. Bush, succeeded

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in alienating much of the international community and the UN.

But nevertheless, in accordance with that kind of fundamental determination by the UN, the EU has encouraged itself to promote, practice, and also affirm the values of civilization in a multilateral manner, doing so by sharing those values with other players on the global stage. That inspiration of the EU by the UN, and its normative foundation, is emanated through EU's documents, which are narrowly connected to this issue. According to that, below in this paper, I could stress the key legal, political and declarative act, with which the EU "scooping" from UN's multilaterality, but at the same time inspired from its own multilateral and plurilateral nature, draws and legitimates its multilateral philosophy, raising it to a level of functional ideology as its ideological matrix.

Before I start to analyze the essential being of its "multilateral ideology" as dynamic algorithm for practicing influence, i.e. articulation of its own international power, it is necessary for me to emphasize the symbol of European multilateralism, which appears as a substantial résumé, for everything presented up to this point in this paper. According to that, the symbol of the European outlook on multilateralism, accepts three basic postulates: **(co)operation, (co)optation and (co)ordination.**

These principles, directly underline the multilateral status, nature, and determination of the EU regarding the international relations, because cooperation presupposes implementing adequate forms of collaboration, especially through institutionalizing that relations, which we talked about previously. Accordingly, the EU, can base its political influence on two levels, both *formally*, through connecting, networking, or institutionalizing its relations with other entities, and *informally*, through its model as a virtuous exemplar, where according to Romano Prodi, the Union represent a "living example" of success in achieving peace. But, as regards the formal aspects of practicing its influence in the world, or the legitimizing and constitutionalizing the *cooperation* with other entities, as an axiom of its specific, multifacial, and polyvalent international power.

Then, through *co-opting*, it accepts to be a part of a certain group of international entities, which acting mutually complement each other, thusly accomplishing together their anticipated goals, thereby maximizing their gains by collaborating. And as a third element of the symbol of European multilateralism, comes the term *coordination*, which construed means: common organization, norming, and disciplination of mutual relations, i.e. political attitudes, in order to achieve some preferential goals.

Further below in this work, multilateralism as a European preferential matrix, will be elaborated through its *normative prism*, while taking into account its normative nature, with which the need to analyze its key legal and political document, with which it manifests, declares and norms its multilateral determination, becomes inevitable.

The normative prism of European multilateralism

The normative prism of European multilateralism in this paper will be elaborated through its significant political act, which subtly herald and affirm, the European Union ideological matrix. As the first document, which deserves primary attention, comes the remarkable (albeit forgotten) "Declaration on European identity", which regardless of its declarative and ceremonious nature, actually emanates the EU ideological matrix and its multilateral agenda. Its genesis (adopted in 1973), however, is located immediately after the initiating of the European Political Cooperation with the Luxembourg report, as an informal system of mutual political coordination, co-opting, and mutual activity on an international scale. From the introductory part of this report, arises the ambitiousness and enthusiasm of the member countries to define their position in the international system, and their will to define the collective, European international identity.

In that direction, the determinations of revising the common heritage, interests, and special obligations of the member countries with third countries, the estimation of how much they act unanimously in their relations with the rest of the world and the obligations that arise from all that, as well as the reverence of the dynamic nature of the European unification, were clearly and unambiguously stipulated. These three main determinants actually represent fundamental axiological postulates for the further profiling of the European multilateral agenda.

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The **first postulate** of this declaration, exactly regards the unity of the nine member – states of European Community (EC), which indicates their strong will for further intensive unification of Europe, and the need to build and establish its international identity. And all of that, based on the values and determinations that stem from the common cultural heritage, interests, and acts stipulated in the Treaties of Rome. As a result of those treaties, the common European market, i.e. the European Customs Union, the common institutions of the EC, the common policies and the mechanism of political collaboration, were constituted. From the determination of EC member – states, in times of (hyper)tense inter-bloc relations and bipolar (re)allocation of global political power (between the USA and USSR), their will to establish an international identity of Europe, in order to transform itself into one single and autonomous international entity, able to take *multilateral actions* at global level, was firmly manifested. And all that, as an international entity with its own originality and international recognition, in order to take a functional and constructive stand on the global political stage, as an autonomous political entity and a buffer of bipolar hypertension.

As regards the **second postulate** of the same declaration, special attention is paid to the European identity compared to the world. Hence, comes the essential need to define the European international identity as an undeniable condition, which would guarantee the perseverance and further development of Europe, as a separate political entity worldwide. According to that, “the Europe of the Nine is aware that, as it unites, it takes on new international obligations”. [8] With this declaration, they declare that:

European unification is not directed against anyone, nor is it inspired by a desire for power. On the contrary, the Nine are convinced that their union will benefit the whole international community since it will constitute an element of equilibrium and a basis for co-operation with all countries, whatever their size, culture or social system. [9]

In this direction, since the determination of the EU of becoming a foundation of collaboration with all countries is accentuated, it would be useful to mention that, starting from its specific, hybrid and multifacial international political nature, it builds its identity of power based on collaboration as an element of its ideological matrix. That is why, if not as a superpower, the EU in the 21st century, could at least be treated as a medium, or a *multilateral agora*, which through its ideopolitical and international Kantianism, will initiate the creation of new, and the preservation of existent multilateral organizations. In that manner, the member – states of EC, saw the unification of Europe as a potential lever to becoming a player on the global political scene in a unified and common manner, in the role of a single international political entity, with its own autonomous identity. As an activity, founded on the determinations of value of the Charter of the United Nations, and a crucial prerequisite of providing “a more righteous basis of international relations, greater protection of the independence and equality of countries, the prosperity, and a warrant for the greatest safety possible, for each country equally.” [10]

With the **last postulate** of the declaration, the meaning of the process of integration and unification of the European continent was stressed. For this purpose, adequate principles were conceived, the respect and implementation of which, was supposed to facilitate and enable the production of harmonic and constructive international relations, generated by the *mutually agreed* foreign policy of the member countries, aimed at the fulfillment of the European multilateral agenda.

The European Union’s multilateral agenda

Based on that, the member countries of the EC have also stipulated their international political preferences, i.e. they enjoined “the agenda” of their multilateral international activity. That meant that:

The Community will implement its undertakings towards the Mediterranean and African countries in order to reinforce its long-standing links with these countries. The Nine intend to preserve their historical links with the countries of the Middle East and to co-operate over the establishment and maintenance of peace, stability and progress in the region. [11]

In the spirit of collaboration, mutual interests and traditional ties, the EC decided to take action in order to deepen the

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aforementioned, in relation to other countries and regions, and in the direction of establishing and maintaining peace, stability, and prosperity in them. From this determination, the European readiness and audacity in the will of practicing its autonomous international power, as a separate political entity, with its own identity and clearly defined goals in the international activities, is clearly visible. Apart from the anticipated relations with: the Mediterranean, Africa, the Middle and Far East, the EC underlined its special relations with the USA, based on common values and common heritage. Hence stems the conclusion that those relations weren't and won't be a conflict in the future determination of the member countries of establishing their own distinctive, autonomous and original international identity. In that direction, it was anticipated that the member countries of the EC: "are ready for a constructive dialog and development of the collaboration with the USA, in the spirit of equality and friendship.[12] Through this determination, the EC underlined the meaning of the relations with the USA, but at the same time underlined the need to acquire its own autonomy and originality in international activities. Autonomy and originality, proclaimed on the foundations of equality, dialogue, friendship, and the need of promoting the universal values of civilization, as a mutual responsibility of all the countries in the world, thus responsibility of the EC and USA, as full partners on the world political scene.

Apart from the relations with the USA, through this declaration, the EC also talks of developing relations with other countries of the world, i.e. the USSR (today the same refers to the Russian Federation), and the countries of the Eastern bloc. In that direction, the EC affirmed its significant role in effectuating the policies of détente and collaboration, as well as the readiness that this policy be further developed.[13] In that context, the need to intensify collaboration with China, as one of the leading countries in international relations, was also discussed, and at the same time, efforts were to be made to further develop relations and collaboration with other Asian countries, as well as Latin American countries. Besides that, "The Nine also remain determined to engage in close co-operation and to pursue a constructive dialogue with the other industrialized countries, such as Japan and Canada, which have an essential role in maintaining an open and balanced world economic system".[14] According to that, and in favor to the concrete determinations of the EC/EU in this declaration, it decides to think **multilaterally** and act as much as possible in accordance with its limited action and operative capacity.[15]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid. II/13

[12] Ibid.

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