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The need for a renewed rules-based international order

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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Summary

The effectiveness of the rules-based international order is being increasingly challenged by a shift towards multipolarity, with groups of countries coalescing around diverging approaches and visions as regards values, systems of governance and the international order itself. This process is accompanied by the rapid rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, isolationism, unilateralism and pure power politics. The ability to resist the destabilising forces that seek to replace international law with the rule of force, and the capacity to renew and reinvigorate the rules-based international order, will determine the resilience not only of democracies, but of the world as a whole.

The Council of Europe has made an outstanding contribution to strengthening rules-based multilateralism by promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law and contributing to creating a single European legal space.

The Parliamentary Assembly should welcome the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution A/RES/79/1 "The Pact for the Future", and urge all States to implement the 56 actions contained therein. It should also call on Council of Europe member States to support a greater role for the Council of Europe as a partner of the United Nations in strengthening rules-based multilateralism and on issues related to democratic security.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 15332, Reference 4601 of 27 September 2021.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. In 1945, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, world leaders decided to create the United Nations, to ensure respect for international law, to maintain international peace and security and to promote social progress and better standards of life. Since then, the United Nations has been the cornerstone of the multilateral system of global governance, which has been enriched by a number of other international organisations and informal fora with specialised mandates and varying geographical coverage.

2. Founded in 1949 as a peace project, the Council of Europe has made an outstanding contribution to strengthening rules-based multilateralism by promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law and contributing to creating a single European legal space, through the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), whose interpretation by the European Court of Human Rights has made it a "living instrument" and a "constitutional instrument of European public order", and more than 200 other conventions.

3. Almost eight decades later, the international context has profoundly changed. The effectiveness of the rules-based international order is being increasingly challenged by a shift towards multipolarity, with groups of countries coalescing around diverging approaches and visions as regards values, systems of governance and the international order itself. This process is accompanied by the rapid rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, isolationism, unilateralism and pure power politics.

4. The world is currently facing the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War, and the United Nations Security Council is struggling to fulfil its primary responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security due to the irreconcilable positions and interests of its permanent members.

5. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine marked the most brutal violation of the rules-based international order in recent history, with the Russian Federation trying to change the territorial borders of a neighbouring sovereign State, using violence against civilians as an instrument of war and threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

6. Furthermore, the international community has proved incapable of stopping the escalation of violence in the Middle East, which began with an appalling terrorist attack by Hamas and other militia groups against Israel on 7 October 2023 and has escalated into a major regional conflict, resulting in more than 40 000 deaths and a humanitarian crisis of apocalyptic proportions in Gaza.

7. In addition, the result of the 2024 presidential election in the United States raises significant concerns about the direction of the United States foreign policy and the impact it might have on the multilateral system.

8. This context of global instability and insecurity is all the more worrying as, in addition to the maintenance of international peace, the world is facing a number of other distinct and interrelated challenges that can only be addressed through concerted action, ranging from climate change and environmental degradation to mass migration, growing inequalities, global health risks, food and energy crises, terrorism and violent extremism, the rise of artificial intelligence and its impact on all aspects of society, and the exploration of space.

9. In order to counter the threats to the European way of life, protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and preserve Europe's position in the world, Council of Europe member States should strive for an open rules-based international order of realism, rather than an ever-shrinking club of "like-minded" countries.

10. The Parliamentary Assembly firmly believes that a renewed commitment to international law and to the reform of the multilateral system of global governance is necessary to address these challenges effectively. The ability to resist the destabilising forces that seek to replace international law with the rule of force, and the capacity to renew and reinvigorate the rules-based international order, will determine the resilience not only of democracies, but of the world as a whole.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 December 2024.

11. In light of these considerations, the Assembly welcomes the adoption on 22 September 2024 by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution A/RES/79/1 “The Pact for the Future”, which demonstrates the commitment of the international community to reform the rules-based international order in order to meet the grave challenges we face. The Assembly therefore urges all States to implement the 56 actions contained in the Pact for the Future, and in particular to:

11.1. ensure the strictest respect for international law, including the United Nations Charter, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly;

11.2. uphold the mandate of the International Court of Justice and comply with its decisions;

11.3. accede to the International Criminal Court for those countries that have not yet done so, and to co-operate fully with the International Criminal Court and comply with its orders for those countries that have already acceded;

11.4. refrain from the threat or use of force, or acts of aggression; respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity, within internationally recognised borders, of all States;

11.5. commit to reforming the multilateral system and its institutions through an inclusive approach, to ensure:

11.5.1. a reform of the United Nations Security Council, enlarging its membership to increase its representativeness and giving a stronger role to underrepresented and unrepresented regions, such as Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific; revising its working methods; and reconsidering the use and scope of the veto power by permanent members, to avoid any abuse;

11.5.2. revitalising the work of the United Nations General Assembly, which should be entrusted with stronger powers in matters related to the maintenance of international peace and security, especially when the United Nations Security Council fails to reach a common position;

11.5.3. a reform of the international financial and economic institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to grant developing countries with stronger representation and voting powers in their decision-making bodies, as well as easier access to financing and credit, and to identify sustainable ways to restructure their debt;

11.6. significantly strengthen actions aimed at addressing the global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation, as well as the global governance of artificial intelligence.

12. The Assembly recalls that, at their Fourth Summit in Reykjavik in 2023, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe reiterated their commitment to strengthening “the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension, through its liaison offices and through a new engagement based on its core values with democracies in the world and its southern neighbourhood”.

13. In line with the Reykjavik Declaration, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to:

13.1. engage in a dialogue with countries from the Global South and make use of all available institutional and diplomatic channels to ensure the largest participation possible in the enlarged partial agreements of the Council of Europe;

13.2. support a greater role for the Council of Europe as a partner of the United Nations in strengthening rules-based multilateralism and for matters related to democratic security, maintenance of peace, and the protection of democracy, human rights and rule of law, including through the recognition of the Council of Europe as a regional organisation within the meaning of article 52, Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter;

13.3. strengthen the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as the Council of Europe’s co-operation with other multilateral organisations, in Europe and beyond.

14. The Assembly pays tribute to the extraordinary achievements of the European Court of Human Rights through its case law, including its important contribution to international law as one of the foundations of multilateralism. With a view to fostering an harmonious interpretation and development of international law, it invites the Court to strengthen its bilateral and multilateral relations and dialogue with the International Court

of Justice, the different United Nations human rights mechanisms, as well as with regional human rights courts such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights.

15. Furthermore, with a view to strengthening Europe's leadership internationally, the Assembly urges the Council of Europe member States which are also members of the European Union to:

15.1. pursue more vigorously the political and economic integration of the European Union, using the relevant Council of Europe standards and instruments on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;

15.2. adopt concrete measures to follow up the European Union's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence adopted in 2022 and the Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defence adopted in 2024, in order to ensure that the European Union can successfully defend its physical borders, its citizens, its security, and its founding values against both military and hybrid threats, reducing its dependence on non-European allies;

15.3. accelerate the European Union enlargement process while focusing on defusing tensions and disputes, countering interference by malign third actors, strengthening Europe's democratic security, and speaking with one voice internationally.

16. Being convinced of the importance of parliamentary diplomacy and the need for a greater involvement of parliaments in the conduct of international relations and in support of multilateralism, the Assembly welcomes Action 55 of the Pact for the Future, in which world leaders "recognize the importance of the United Nations engagement with national parliaments and relevant stakeholders, while preserving the intergovernmental character of the Organization". Consequently, the Assembly resolves to:

16.1. continue its regular contacts with the United Nations institutions and agencies, promoting the involvement of national parliamentarians in the work of the United Nations and the implementation of its mission;

16.2. enhance its dialogue and co-operation with national parliaments, in particular in areas such as foreign relations, democratic security, confidence building and conflict prevention;

16.3. continue to act as an inclusive and representative platform for parliamentary dialogue, reaching out beyond Council of Europe membership;

16.4. strengthen dialogue with other international parliamentary assemblies, such as the European Parliament, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly, as well as the Inter-Parliamentary Union;

16.5. review and, where necessary, enhance the effectiveness of its co-operation agreements with other international parliamentary assemblies or organisations.

B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly draws the Committee of Ministers' attention to its Resolution ...(2025) "The need for a renewed rules-based international order", in which it takes stock of the current challenges to the rules-based international order as established following the Second World War. The shift towards multipolarity, with groups of countries coalescing around diverging approaches and visions as regards values, systems of governance and the international order itself, is accompanied by the rapid rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, isolationism, unilateralism and pure power politics. The world is currently facing the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War, and the United Nations Security Council is struggling to fulfil its primary responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security due to the irreconcilable positions and interests of its permanent members.

2. This context of global instability and insecurity is all the more worrying as, in addition to the maintenance of international peace, the world faces a number of other distinct and interrelated challenges that can only be addressed through concerted action, ranging from climate change and environmental degradation to mass migration, growing inequalities, global health risks, food and energy crises, terrorism and violent extremism, the rise of artificial intelligence and its impact on all aspects of society, and the exploration of space.

3. The Assembly strongly supports the renewal of the multilateral system of global governance, which should continue to be based on respect for international law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Co-operation among international organisations sharing these universal values and principles will be essential to safeguard multilateralism and to ensure that the momentous challenges ahead can be addressed for the benefit of humanity.

4. Founded in 1949 as a peace project, the Council of Europe has made an outstanding contribution to strengthening rules-based multilateralism by promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law and contributing to creating a single European legal space, through the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and its interpretation by the European Court of Human Rights, and more than 200 other conventions. By strengthening democratic standards, the protection of human rights and respect for the rule of law, the Council of Europe contributes to democratic security and the promotion of international peace within the meaning of the Charter of the United Nations.

5. For these reasons, the Assembly makes a resolute call for strengthening the partnership between the Council of Europe and the United Nations, in line with the position taken by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at their Fourth Summit in Reykjavik in 2023, when they committed to strengthen "the role of the Council of Europe in the evolving European multilateral architecture and in global governance by enhancing its external dimension, through its liaison offices and through a new engagement based on its core values with democracies in the world and its southern neighbourhood".

6. The Assembly refers to its Recommendation 1367 (1998) "Reform of the United Nations", in which it already recommended to the Committee of Ministers to "recognise that the Council of Europe is a regional organisation within the meaning of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, on the basis of its contribution to democratic security in Europe, and the observer status it enjoys in the United Nations General Assembly", and to "examine practical possibilities for the Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly, to be effectively present at the United Nations General Assembly's sessions in New York". In the current international context, these recommendations become even more relevant.

7. In light of the above, the Assembly calls upon the Committee of Ministers to:

7.1. take appropriate steps to seek recognition of the Council of Europe as a regional organisation within the meaning of Article 52, Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, in view of the role played by the Council of Europe in ensuring democratic security;

7.2. strengthen co-operation between the relevant Council of Europe and United Nations bodies, in particular as regards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, their respective work in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as issues such as environmental protection, the benefits and risks of new technologies and artificial intelligence, the role of youth and gender equality;

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 11 December 2024.

7.3. consider updating the 1971 Arrangement on Co-operation and Liaison between the Secretariats of the United Nations and the Council of Europe to better reflect the potential areas of synergy and co-operation between the two organisations in the face of current challenges.

8. Finally, the Assembly reiterates its Recommendations 1659 (2004) “Strengthening of the United Nations” and 2150 (2019) “Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which it invited the Committee of Ministers to find modalities for establishing a Council of Europe representation at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. It therefore strongly supports the proposal of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to establish a liaison office of the Council of Europe at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and urges the Committee of Ministers to take the necessary steps in this direction without delay.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Dora Bakoyannis, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The multilateral system of global governance, which dominated international relations for almost eight decades, is being increasingly tested by the rapid rise of nationalism, protectionism and pure power politics. The US-led open rules-based international order – understood as a set of commitments between States to operate according to principles, rules and institutions providing governance which is not simply dictated by the right of the might – which, despite its inconsistencies and shortcomings, became the global norm in the post-Cold War era, has transitioned towards a multipolar world of competing centres of power.

2. At the same time, now more than ever, the world is faced with an array of distinct yet interconnected challenges: the maintenance of peace and security, climate change and environmental degradation, mass migrations, growing inequalities, global health risks, food and energy crises, misuse of artificial intelligence (AI), and the exploitation of outer space. The ability to resist the destabilising forces and the capacity to design a renewed rules-based international order will determine the resilience both of the planet and European democracies.

3. The need for a renewed rules-based international order arises from the failure of the current multilateral framework to effectively address and advance the broader interests of humanity. The world is currently facing the highest number of conflicts since the end of the Second World War, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is struggling to fulfil its primary responsibility of ensuring the maintenance of international peace and security due to the irreconcilable positions and interests of its permanent members.

4. In addition, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) recently declared that "the current pace of climate action would result in a catastrophic 3.1°C of warming this century […] and even if all existing pledges to cut emissions were enacted as promised, global temperatures would soar 2.6°C above pre-industrial levels – a still devastating scenario for humanity".[4]

5. Finally, extreme poverty, which the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to eradicate by 2030, currently impacts approximately 700 million people. At the current pace of progress, an estimated 600 million individuals will still live in poverty by 2030, falling far short of the original goal.

6. The motion for a resolution which is at the origin of this report dates back to 2021.[5] As a way of introduction, it mentions that, in her 2020 annual report devoted to the issue of multilateralism, the then Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, highlighted how the Covid-19 pandemic had exposed both the escalating challenges facing multilateral institutions and the centrality of these institutions to finding common solutions to common problems.[6]

7. Since then, the situation has further deteriorated. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine marked the most brutal violation of the rules-based international order in recent history, with the Russian Federation trying to change the territorial borders of a neighbouring sovereign State, using violence against civilians as an instrument of war and threatening the use of nuclear weapons.

8. Furthermore, the international community has proved incapable of stopping the escalation of violence in the Middle East, which began with an appalling terrorist attack by Hamas and other militia groups against Israel on 7 October 2023 and has escalated into a major regional conflict, resulting in more than 40 000 deaths and a humanitarian crisis of apocalyptic proportions in Gaza.

9. Finally, the result of the 2024 presidential election in the United States raises significant concerns about the direction of the US foreign policy and the impact it might have on the multilateral system.

10. In order to resist against the threats to the European way of life, protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and preserve Europe's position in the world, Council of Europe member States should aim for an open rules-based international order of realism, instead of an ever-shrinking club of "like-minded" countries.

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4. www.france24.com/en/live-news/20241024-world-already-paying-terrible-price-for-climate-inaction-guterres.
5. Doc. 15332.
6. Report 2020 – Secretary General (coe.int).

2. Previous work of the Parliamentary Assembly

11. The Parliamentary Assembly has adopted in the past several resolutions and recommendations focusing on the importance of multilateralism and on the matter of the reform of the United Nations. This report will build on and be complementary to previous texts of the Assembly, namely:

– Resolution 2444 (2022) and Recommendation 2235 (2022) "Recent challenges to security in Europe: what role for the Council of Europe?";

– Resolution 2473 (2022) "Strengthening the role of the Council of Europe as a cornerstone of the European political architecture";

– Recommendation 2245 (2023) "The Reykjavik Summit of the Council of Europe – United around values in the face of extraordinary challenges";

– Resolution (2515) 2023 and Recommendation (2259) 2023 "The role of the Council of Europe in preventing conflicts, restoring credibility of international institutions and promoting global peace".

12. It should be noted that the matter of reforming the UNSC was also raised in the motion for resolution "Preventing abuse of the right to veto in the Security Council: a perspective by the member States of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe", which was tabled on 11 October 2022.[7]

3. Recent developments on multilateralism

3.1. The United Nations High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism

13. In 2020, the Heads of State and Government commemorating the 75th anniversary of the UN took the following 12 commitments: 1) leave no one behind; 2) protect our planet; 3) promote peace and prevent conflicts; 4) abide by international law and ensure justice; 5) place women and girls at the centre; 6) build trust; 7) improve digital co-operation; 8) upgrade the United Nations; 9) ensure sustainable financing; 10) boost partnerships; 11) listen to and work with youth; 12) be prepared.

14. In 2021, the UN Secretary-General drafted the report "Our Common Agenda", providing key concrete proposals to respond to these commitments, and aiming at reinforcing and relaunching the action related to the Agenda 2030.

15. Subsequently, the UN Secretary-General appointed in 2022 a High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, co-chaired by the former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and former Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven. The Advisory Board was tasked with advising member States on issues of key global concern where better governance could make a difference.[8]

16. In 2023, the Advisory Board launched the report *"*A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future*"*, outlining an ambitious plan to overhaul the global architecture.[9] The report called for six transformational shifts: rebuilding trust in multilateralism through inclusion and accountability; regaining balance with nature and providing clean energy for all; ensuring sustainable finance that delivers for all; supporting a just digital transition that unlocks the value of data and protects against digital harms; empowering equitable, effective collective security arrangements; and strengthening governance for current and emerging transnational risks.

3.2. Reform of the United Nations Security Council

17. The current architecture of the rules-based international order is failing to provide stability and security at global level. In particular, the UNSC reflects the geopolitical outlook resulting from the Second World War. Most UN member States consider the UNSC outdated and inadequate to represent the current geopolitical realities.

7. Doc. 15628.
8. Home – High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (highleveladvisoryboard.org).
9. A Breakthrough for People and Planet (highleveladvisoryboard.org).

18. As an illustration of the above-mentioned paralysis of the top decision-making body, a decade has passed since the last UN peacekeeping mission was authorised by the UNSC (the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic – MINUSCA). On the contrary, during this period, essentially all UN peacekeeping missions have either wound down their operations, been requested to leave or to initiate transition planning.[10]

19. While there is widespread consensus on the need for reform, little has been achieved so far. The debate around the reform of the UNSC revolves around some key issues:

– membership (including the expansion of permanent and non-permanent seats);

– the question of the veto held by the five permanent members;

– regional representation;

– the size of an enlarged UNSC and its working methods, including transparency;

– the relationship between the UNSC and the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

20. The report prepared by the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism presented some suggestions, including the possibility of convening a Charter Review Conference focused on the UNSC reform, and urging member States to commit to the following principles:

– Equity: the UNSC should be expanded to reflect equitably those regions that are chronically under-represented. Options for allocating seats to regions rather than specific countries, and for extending the tenure of non-permanent seats, should also be explored;

– Legitimacy: the UNSC's decisions should not be controlled by a single veto-wielding State; ways must be found to democratise its actions. A key aspect of legitimacy is effective, unified action – reform should aim to build that unity. In particular, focus should be on placing greater limits on the use of the veto and explore other approaches to prevent States from blocking actions favoured by a decisive majority of members. If the UNSC cannot or will not act in the face of threats to international security, then the matter should immediately be placed before the UNGA for action, as is already foreseen by Resolution 377A(V) "Uniting for peace", adopted by the UNGA on 3 November 1950;[11]

– Modernisation: the UNSC must be able to adapt to emerging trends, including by finding creative ways to reflect new geopolitical landscapes, incorporate emerging topics on its agenda, and bring a wide range of voices into its deliberations.

The report of the High-Level Advisory Board also calls for greater efforts to empower the regional level to take a lead role in conflict prevention, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

21. In April 2022, the UNGA adopted Resolution A/76/262 "Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council", which indicates that its President shall convene a formal meeting of the UNGA within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Council and hold a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation.[12]

22. During its 2023 session, the UN General Assembly convened the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council.[13] The Revised Co-Chairs' Elements Paper on Convergences and Divergences, presented in April 2023, showed that progress could probably be already made in some aspects related to the working methods of the UNSC, but an agreement on deeper changes, related to its composition and the use of veto power would obviously be much more difficult to achieve.

23. The UNSC itself is periodically convening meetings focusing on the importance of upholding multilateralism and the UN Charter.[14] The last meeting of this sort was organised by the Russian Federation in July 2024. All in all, the meeting was yet again characterised by cross-accusations among permanent members on the interpretation and the respect of the UN Charter.[15]

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10. Security Council Report, "UN Transitions in a Fractured Multilateral Environment", 8 December 2023.
11. https://ask.un.org/faq/177134.
12. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3969448?v=pdf.
13. Reform of the Security Council | General Assembly of the United Nations.
14. Security Council Report, "Open Debate on 'Multilateral cooperation in the interest of a more just, democratic and sustainable world order'", 15 July 2024.
15. UN Press, "States Must Commit to Multilateralism, Many Speakers Tell Security Council Debate", 16 July 2024.

24. During my fact-finding mission to New York (12-14 March 2024), I had the chance to meet with the Permanent Representative of France, Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière; the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Robert Wood; and the Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil, Ambassador Norberto Moretti.

25. Among the issues discussed was the trust deficit towards the UNSC, which is increasingly perceived as a blocked entity, unable to deliver good outcomes for the global community. All my interlocutors agreed, during the different meetings, that within the UNSC it is increasingly difficult to achieve concrete shared outcomes. On the other hand, there are still examples of topics where an agreement can be found: the consensus around the SDGs, and the management of the crises in Somalia and Haiti were mentioned as examples. Furthermore, as one of them pointed out, the UN Charter has been amended in the past, demonstrating that it can be revised again.

26. The reform of the UNSC, in particular for what concerns its composition and the use of the veto right by permanent members, can indeed only happen through an amendment of the UN Charter, by applying article 108 (through the adoption of amendments by the members of the UNGA and ratification by two thirds of the UN member States, including all permanent members of the UNSC) or article 109 (which envisions the possibility to call for a General Conference of the UN member States for the purpose of reviewing the UN Charter).

27. In the present situation, however, while all the above are still positive signs that discussions and negotiations continue, the prospects of reforming the UNSC to alter the current representation imbalance or to limit the use of the veto power by its permanent members are realistically narrow.

3.3. BRICS Summits

28. In June 2021, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, China and South Africa adopted a joint statement on “Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System”,[16] espousing “their shared values of peace, freedom and rule of law, respect for human rights and democracy as well as a more fair, just, inclusive, equitable and representative multipolar international system, based on international law and the UN Charter, in particular sovereign equality of all States, respect for their territorial integrity and mutual respect for interests and concerns of all”.

29. The Ministers also “reaffirmed the sole authority of the UN Security Council for imposing sanctions and called for further consolidation and strengthening of the working methods of UN Security Council Sanctions Committees to ensure their effectiveness, responsiveness and transparency” and that “multilateralism should promote international law, democracy, equity and justice, mutual respect, right to development and non-interference in internal affairs of any country without double standards”.

30. Similar views were reiterated by the BRICS leaders following the Russian Federation’s large-scale aggression against Ukraine, who failed to condemn the aggression and the serious breach of international law and the UN Charter by the Russian Federation, and supported talks between the Russian Federation and Ukraine over “the situation in Ukraine”.[17] In the 2022 Statement “China and Russia reiterated the importance they attach to the status and role of Brazil, India and South Africa in international affairs and supported their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN”.

31. During the BRICs Summit held in Johannesburg in August 2023,[18] BRICS leaders agreed to admit six new member countries: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates; all of them apart from Argentina officially joined the group in January 2024, and other countries are now considering doing the same, including Türkiye. Addressing the Summit, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed concern “over the risk of a fracturing of the global order” and made an appeal to urgently restore trust and reinvigorate multilateralism.[19]

16. BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System (mea.gov.in).
17. Joint Statement of the BRICS Leaders (mfa.gov.cn).
18. Foreign Ministers’ Joint Statements – BRICS 2023.
19. “Secretary-General's opening remarks at press encounter at BRICS Summit meeting” | United Nations Secretary-General.

32. Finally, in their declaration adopted during the BRICs Summit held in October 2024 in the Russian Federation, BRICS leaders noted "the emergence of new centres of power, policy decision-making and economic growth", and stressed "the need to adapt the current architecture of international relations to better reflect the contemporary realities" while reaffirming their "commitment to multilateralism and upholding the international law".[20]

33. The UN Secretary-General, attending the 2024 Summit, reiterated that the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine violates the UN Charter and international law. The UN justified the meeting of the UN Secretary-General with President Putin, despite an active International Criminal Court warrant against the Russian leader, as based strictly on operational necessity.[21] His presence at the Summit was nevertheless heavily criticised by the Ukrainian Government, saying that it damaged the UN reputation.[22]

34. Going beyond its leaders' formal declarations in favour of multilateralism, the BRICS format is an alternative to the current system of global governance. As an example, BRICS set up in 2015 a multilateral development bank, the New Development Bank, as well as a monetary fund called Contingent Reserve Arrangement, as a first attempt to establish an alternative multilateral financial architecture. While the success of these institutions has been rather modest, they epitomise the effort of BRICS countries to place themselves as an alternative to multilateral institutions perceived as being overly influenced by Western countries.[23]

35. It should be noted that the BRICS do not represent a politically homogeneous group of States. My discussion with the Brazilian Ambassador made clear that there are significant and well-articulated political differences inside the BRICS. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, the focus remains on the deepening of the financial and commercial relations between the members.

3.4. The reform of multilateral financial institutions and multilateral development banks

36. The oldest international financial institution is the Bank for International Settlements, established in 1930 to settle the financial reparations stemming from the Treaty of Versailles at the end of First World War. The current global financial architecture, however, reflects the model designed in 1944 during the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference (the Bretton Woods Conference).

37. The main purpose of the Bretton Woods Conference was to devise a new post-war economic and monetary order, which would support reconstruction and ensure that the economic and financial turmoil experienced during the interwar period would remain a nightmare of the past. The Conference led to the establishment of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the first of the 5 organisations composing the World Bank Group) and of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

38. During the following decades, several other financial bodies were created, either to cover specific funding or regulatory needs, or with a regional focus. The most prominent regional development banks are the Council of Europe Development Bank (1956), the European Investment Bank (1958), the Inter-American Development Bank (1959), the African Development Bank (1964), the Asian Development Bank (1966), and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1991).

39. The reform of the global financial architecture has been periodically discussed since the creation of the Bretton Woods institutions, in particular as a consequence of global macroeconomic and financial crises. The main criticisms focus on the following issues:

– imbalances of power in the governing bodies of the various organisations, which favour industrialised countries through an unfair distribution of voting rights among member States, based on their financial contributions – the reflection of a system envisaged before the end of colonialism. Another sign of this aspect is that the heads of the World Bank and of the IMF are still picked among candidates nominated by the US and by European countries, respectively, with no chance for representation of Global South countries;

– the use of conditionality measures accompanying financial support to countries in distress, often with mixed results in terms of macroeconomic performance and social indicators such as income equality and distribution;[24]

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20. XVI BRICS Summit – Kazan Declaration, 23 October 2024.
21. https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1156161.
22. www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyd4xg70ejo.
23. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order", 9 October 2024.

– unequal access to liquidity and lending among countries, especially affecting developing countries in the Global South which often face higher borrowing costs in volatile financial markets. In combination with the recurrent underinvestment in global public goods, this makes it increasingly difficult for developing countries to sufficiently invest in fundamental sectors such as health, education and social protection.[25] More generally, the increasing public debt in developing countries (and its associated cost represented by higher interest rates) is severely slowing them down in the achievement of the SDGs set in the 2030 Agenda by the UN.

40. The ongoing energy and food crises, a direct consequence of the Russian Federation's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the increasing losses caused by events directly linked to climate change, are adding pressure to the already challenging recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. These multidimensional crises have spread fast internationally due to the level of integration of financial markets, but they are hitting developing countries harder, fuelling resentment and scepticism towards the current multilateral financial organisations.

41. As a consequence, the debates concerning the reform of the international financial architecture and multilateral development banks[26] (including the last Summit on a New Global Financing Pact held in Paris in June 2023) revolve, among others, around the following measures:

– reform the governance system of the IMF and the World Bank, to be more representative of low- and middle-income countries, by envisioning a different and more democratic distribution of quotas and voting rights;

– restructure debt, possibly enlarging the pool of beneficiaries to include middle-income economies, in order to alleviate the burden on developing countries' public finances and unlock resources to fund investments in support of the SDGs;

– improve access to financial liquidity for developing countries, so that they can borrow in a sustainable way and properly plan their longer-term investments. This includes encouraging a larger involvement of private capitals in development projects;

– better protect countries against systemic economic shocks, allowing for financial safety nets to promptly be activated and to quickly channel resources to countries in need;

– restructure the global tax architecture to tackle tax avoidance and evasion as well as illicit financial flows.[27]

42. The need to reform the international financial architecture was equally highlighted during the meetings I held in New York. My interlocutors put the accent on the importance of including the governments of developing economies in the designing process of a renewed multilateral financial framework, which takes into account the particularities of different regions. The latter was perceived as a sine qua non condition for the effective commitment of the Global South to the open rules-based international order.

3.5. The United Nations Summit of the Future

43. On 22 September 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/79/1 "The Pact for the Future", through which Heads of State and Government committed to 56 actions aimed at protecting the needs and interests of present and future generations.

44. The Pact acknowledges the current profound transformation the world is facing, confronted by catastrophic and existential risks, and that these challenges are interconnected and exceed the capacity of any single State alone. This entails, in turn, a recommitment to international co-operation based on respect for international law, including the UN Charter.[28]

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24. IRC Task Force on IMF and Global Financial Governance Issues, "Conditionality and design of IMF-supported programmes", ECB Occasional Paper Series N0 235 / October 2019.
25. United Nations, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 6: Reforms to the International Financial Architecture", May 2023.
26. UN Press, "World Leaders Lay Foundation for Reforming International Financial Architecture, Expediting Socioeconomic Progress, as Financing for Development Forum Concludes".
27. Reuters, "Explainer: What is the 'Bridgetown Initiative' asking for at Paris financial summit?"; European Parliament In-depth Analysis, "Reform of the global financial architecture in response to global challenges. How to restore debt sustainability and achieve SDGs?", June 2024.
28. UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/1 "The Pact for the Future", 22 September 2024.

45. The Pact groups the 56 actions in 5 areas: sustainable development and financing for development; international peace and security; science, technology and innovation and digital co-operation; youth and future generations; transforming global governance.

46. Furthermore, the Pact is complemented by two Annexes: the Global Digital Compact – which outlines the objectives of closing all digital divides, fostering an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promotes human rights, and enhancing international governance of AI; and the Declaration on Future Generations – which contains a set of guiding principles, commitments and actions to promote intergenerational solidarity and intergenerational dialogue.[29]

47. It is worth noting that during the debate, the Russian Federation submitted an amendment proposing the addition of wording relating to the UN's intervention in "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State". This proposal was however disregarded by a vast majority (only Belarus, North Korea, Iran, Nicaragua, the Russian Federation, Sudan, Syria supported it). The Pact was then adopted without a vote.

48. The representatives of France, the United Kingdom and the United States all expressed support to a reformed multilateral system, including the UNSC. The Russian representative, in turn, while emphasising that the UN must play a central role in a multipolar world, also criticised the text of the Pact as non-consensual. The message conveyed by the Chinese representative was more conciliatory, as he stressed that major countries needed to break geopolitical circles and serve as propellers for world solidarity and anchors for international peace.[30]

49. For what concerns sustainable development and financing for development, the Pact reiterates the commitment of member States to achieve the SDGs by 2030, placing the eradication of poverty at the centre of their efforts, by closing the financing gap in developing countries. It also reaffirms that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and stresses the importance to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels. It contains pledges to address the climate change and the environmental degradation.

50. With respect to international peace and security, the Heads of State and Government commit to establishing a just and lasting peace, acting in accordance with international law, fully respecting the sovereign equality of all member States, the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, and settling international disputes by peaceful means.

51. They also reaffirm the obligation of all States to comply with the decisions of the International Court of Justice. Particularly relevant for the Council of Europe, the Pact emphasises the importance of UN partnership with regional and subregional organisations to prevent and resolve conflicts, through confidence-building, early warning and crisis management mechanisms.

52. Furthermore, the Heads of State and Government commit to addressing the root causes of conflicts, but also to protecting civilians in armed conflicts, ensuring humanitarian assistance when needed, to advance the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and to uphold their disarmament obligations and commitments.

53. In terms of science, technology and innovation and digital co-operation, the Pact includes commitments to seize the opportunities for the benefit of people and planet, ensuring that they contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights by all. Concerning youth and the future generations, the pledges focus on investments in the social and economic development of children and youth, and their meaningful participation at all levels.

54. The Heads of State and Government acknowledge through the Pact the need to strengthen and reinvigorate multilateralism and deepen international co-operation. This includes a commitment to reform the UNSC, following these principles: redress the historical injustice against Africa as a priority; enlarge the membership to be more representative of the realities of the contemporary world; continue discussions on the issues of representation of cross-regional groups, of categories of membership, of the total number of members, and of the scope and use of the veto. The Pact also foresees actions to revitalise the work of the UNGA, as well as of the Economic and Social Council and of the Peacebuilding Commission.

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29. https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12627.doc.htm#:~:text=The%20motion%20was%20adopted%20by,Syria)%2C%20with%2015%20abstentions.
30. https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12630.doc.htm.

55. Finally the Pact addresses the need to reform the international financial architecture to address the challenges of today and tomorrow, to strengthen the voice and representation of developing countries in international economic and financial institutions (including the IMF and the World Bank), to mobilise additional financing for the SDGs, and to allow countries to borrow sustainably to invest in their long-term development.

56. The negotiations leading towards the adoption of the Pact showed that the vast majority of the UN member States continues to show support to multilateral co-operation, despite the distrust shown by several countries in the Global South towards the Global West, and the opposite visions of the Global West and the Global East on the fundamental tenets of international order.

57. While the Pact contains a plethora of meaningful and ambitious commitments, the text is not binding on member States, and it can only be considered as the first step in a much longer and complicated reform process.

58. Member States will now need to make concrete efforts in order to follow through the 56 agreed pledges. While the Pact foresees that a review of its overall implementation should be done during the 83rd session of the UNGA (that is to say in 2028), it actually lacks a more concrete timeline and monitoring mechanism on the 56 actions.

59. Nevertheless, the Pact for the Future contains the potential seeds for a thorough reform of multilateralism: the shared commitment of member States to put international law at the centre of the discussion shows the importance they still place in dialogue and co-operation. It remains to be seen how this will be translated into practical action.

60. In particular, several questions arise: will the legitimate requests of the Global South for more representation be responded? Will the rules-based international order be able to survive the disruptive attacks of authoritarian regimes of the Global East? Will the Global West be able to face its own weaknesses, such as the accusations of promoting double standards to its advantage in the application of international law?

61. European countries have the moral obligation of playing their part in helping to find answers to these questions, guided by the shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

4. Ongoing reflections on a renewed rules-based international order

62. The conceptualisation of the rules-based international order is a consequence of the end of the Second World War and the need to establish a global governance system that would ensure the peaceful resolution of disputes among States through co-operation, dialogue, the respect of their sovereignty and the inviolability of their borders. The keystone in this structure was the creation of the United Nations, with the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945. This process was strongly influenced by values such as the centrality of the rule of law and the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which became central to the United Nations Charter and were enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants.

63. The geopolitical system has evolved since then: it was bipolar until the end of the Cold War, it became unipolar until 2008, and has been transitioning ever since towards a complex multi-polarity. In general, three spheres of influence may be identified: a US-led Global West, a China-led Global East and a diverse Global South.[31]

64. The Global West consists of – largely – democratic States mainly in Europe and North America but also Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. In terms of multilateral structure, the Global West would be in favour of preserving the current multilateral global governance. The US role as hegemonic power at global level and as leader of the Global West is however waning. Furthermore, the results of the 2024 presidential elections in the US might have ripple effects, both on the position and coherence of the Global West, with implications for security in Europe that are not easy to foresee at this stage.

65. On the other hand, the Global East, driven by China and followed by Russia, Iran, North Korea and their allies, has a strong authoritarian line, seeking to diminish the Western influence and to undermine the current international order. They reject the concept of liberal democracy as Western hypocrisy and promote

31. G. J. Ikenberry, "Three Worlds: the West, East and South and the competition to shape global order", International Affairs, Volume 100, Issue 1, January 2024.

an illiberal system of governance. Their vision for the world is based on the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of all countries as basic principles of international law, as well as the non-interference in their internal affairs and their right to independently choose their social systems and development paths.[32]

66. The concept of Global South, though flawed due to the diversity of its members, describes a large group of countries across Latin America, Africa and Asia, which have positioned themselves in a role of swing States between the models of global governance proposed by the Global West and the Global East. The growing appeal of Global East fora and initiatives to an increasing portion of the Global South is rooted in two key factors: the desire to break free from the double standards imposed by the Western "unipolar straitjacket"; and the resentment toward Western dominance over international financial institutions and systems, which stifles growth opportunities for much of the developing world.[33]

67. During a recent meeting I had with ten Ambassadors of Arab countries to Greece, the argument of double standards with regards to the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza was used multiple times. They pointed to Western powers' unconditional support for Israel's actions in Gaza and Lebanon, often justified by the refrain "Israel has the right to defend itself," which starkly contrasts with the harsh sanctions imposed on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. In their eyes, while the Russian Federation initiated the war in Ukraine, just as Hamas did in Gaza, Israel's repeated violations of international law have rendered it the aggressor.

68. This perceived double standard has deepened resentment in the Global South, where many see Western democracies' commitment to human rights as limited to their own borders. The hypocrisy is underscored by comparisons, such as the West's insistence on Ukraine's territorial integrity while disregarding this principle during the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. The latter explains why currently only 45 countries have imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation. As India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, put it: "Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems".[34]

69. At the same time, the role, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the traditional international institutions are being further eroded by a new wave of populist nationalism, epitomized by movements such as "America First," "China First," and the broader "my country first and only" ethos that is gaining momentum globally.

70. The global economic paradigm is shifting from neoliberal free-trade principles, which despite the shortcomings created massive growth and lifted 1.1 billion people out of poverty, to a more mercantilist approach, characterised by US "friend-shoring," European "de-risking," and Chinese "self-reliance." Nearly 3 000 trade restrictions were imposed worldwide last year. According to the IMF, the resulting trade fragmentation could inflict long-term losses amounting to 7% of global GDP, while also hindering collaboration on critical global challenges like the green transition and advancements in AI.

71. The aforementioned reality is putting enormous pressure on the economies of low-income countries. Since the end of the Covid-19 crisis, developing countries have become net financiers of wealthier nations and China, sending back more funds than they receive. Burdened by $1.1 trillion in debt, many African governments allocate 45% of their revenues to debt repayment, limiting investment in social programs and climate projects. This financial decoupling underscores the persistent financing gap in the Global South, the most important source of resentment against the status quo of international financial institutions and the Global West.

5. The role of the European multilateral organisations in the new geopolitical context

72. What is the place of Europe in this new evolving context? Despite the efforts to forge political unity and to strengthen the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) at the European Union level, Europe has some specificities which affect its standing as a leader. As Mr Evangelos Venizelos explained during the meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy in Chania (Greece), on 15-16 May 2022, European security is governed by deep historical asymmetries.[35] The Russian military invasion of Ukraine has highlighted them:

– despite Europe's attempts to develop increasing autonomy in this field, the United States is the guarantor of European security, through the North Atlantic Security Treaty Organisation (NATO), which it dominates politically, militarily and financially;

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32. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "The Global Security Initiative – Concept Paper", 21 February 2023.
33. www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/022/0061/003/article-A004-en.xml
34. www.thehindu.com/news/national/jaishankars-europe-remark-echoes-in-german-chancellors-statement-in-munich/article66531087.ece.

– Europe's nuclear arsenal is too small to be a deterrent, especially against the Russian Federation;

– Europe's energy dependence on Russian fossil fuel is a major strategic and political weakness;

– the Russian threat is not perceived in the same way by all European countries.

73. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has not only highlighted the asymmetries of European security but it has also given a fresh impetus to European leaders to overcome them. In March 2022, the European Union adopted the Strategic Compass, an ambitious action plan for strengthening the European Union's defence and security policy by 2030.[36] The Strategic Compass is meant to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy, its ability to work with partners to safeguard its values and interests and to play a more significant role in maintaining international peace and security. It includes a series of ambitious goals, starting with the European defence industry and the establishment of a EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, as a prelude to a EU Army.

74. In May 2024, the EU Council approved its Conclusions on EU Security and Defence, which set out five main priorities that member States are called on to implement as a matter of urgency: ensure political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine; increase defence expenditures and improve their efficiency, to ensure the availability of defence products, and strengthen the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base; increase the EU's ability to act, including through the full operationalisation of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity by 2025; strengthen the EU's resilience and secure access to strategic domains; and strengthen partnerships with other organisations, such as the UN and NATO.[37]

75. The European Union can have a stronger voice as a global player, in line with the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to the European Parliament and the Council on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism[38] and the European Parliament's "Report on the EU and the defence of multilateralism"[39].

76. In the energy field, the European Union is trying to reduce energy overdependence on the Russian Federation, accelerating diversification, with a focus on renewable energy sources.

77. Against the backdrop of the return of a war of aggression in Europe, the EU enlargement has acquired a new momentum, since it is considered the most important medium of enhancing Europe's influence at the international level as well as of promoting the European values and vision of the multilateral global governance. The decision of the EU to grant candidate status and initiate accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, while at the same time reinvigorating the enlargement process in the Western Balkans, manifests the aforementioned objectives.

78. The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine and the new geopolitical context have amplified security risks in Europe because of their impact on the functioning of multilateral mechanisms aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts in the region, including those established under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).[40]

79. Nevertheless, at the end of its 31st Annual Session, held between 29 June and 3 July 2024 in Bucharest, the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Bucharest Declaration, which reaffirmed OSCE's core principles of co-operation and dialogue and called for all OSCE participating States to actively engage in multilateral diplomacy to address current challenges.[41]

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35. "The asymmetries of European security and the need for a renewed multilateralism after the war in Ukraine", (evenizelos.gr).
36. "A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade" – Consilium (europa.eu).
37. Council of the European Union – Press release, EU security and defence: Council sets out five main priorities", 28 May 2024.
38. "Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism", 2021.
39. "REPORT on the EU and the defence of multilateralism" | A9-0172/2022 | European Parliament (europa.eu), 2022.
40. "Multilateralism in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities for the OSCE" – Center for Security Studies | ETH Zurich.
41. OSCE PA News – "Bucharest Declaration adopted with calls by parliamentarians for co-operation, dialogue and adherence to OSCE commitments", July 2024.

6. The role played by the Council of Europe

80. The Council of Europe can be considered as a successful example of multilateral co-operation. Since its establishment, the Organisation has developed 225 treaties and protocols, which have set standards for the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the region and beyond, thus contributing to regional stability and to the improvement of the lives of people living in Europe. In addition, it has established synergic collaborations with the EU and the OSCE, which represent its closer partners in the region.

81. The Organisation also has a strong relationship with the UN, which started formally in 1951 with an Agreement between the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe and the Secretariat of the United Nations – updated in 1971 through an Arrangement on Co-operation and Liaison between the two Secretariats. This relationship now includes agreements and working arrangements with several UN bodies, agencies and specialised agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the World Bank.

82. On 17 October 1989, the UNGA adopted Resolution A/RES/44/6, granting observer status to the Council of Europe. Consequently, the Council of Europe is invited to participate in the sessions and work of the UNGA and its six main committees. Furthermore, since 2000 (every second year since 2004), the UNGA, within its debate on co-operation with regional and other organisations, adopts a Resolution on co-operation between the UN and the Council of Europe. In addition, all activities of the Council of Europe shall contribute to the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development – SDGs. At the request of UN officials, the Organisation also provides a major contribution to the Universal Periodic Review.

83. The Council of Europe Offices in charge of liaison with the UN in Geneva and Vienna[42] have greatly contributed to the enhancement of relations with the UN. The establishment of a Liaison Office of the Council of Europe in New York would significantly further increase the visibility of the Organisation and its outreach. The presence at the Council of Europe of the UNHCR Representation to the European Institutions in Strasbourg should also be stressed.

84. The Reykjavik Summit of Heads of State and Government held in May 2023 renewed the commitment of Council of Europe member States, at the highest political level, for the continued relevance of the Council of Europe as a peace project, and for the protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as guarantors of democratic security. The Declaration also made several references to the UN. In particular, the leaders expressed their determination "to strengthen the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respect for the United Nations Charter, the sovereignty and territorial integrity, within internationally recognised borders, of all States, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms".[43]

85. Furthermore, they called for greater political dialogue with other international organisations, including the UN and the OSCE, to strengthen the partnership between these organisations and the Council of Europe. They expressed the belief that further synergies are possible, in particular for what concerns:

– the implementation of the SDGs;

– the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, especially with respect to the Russian Federation;

– the promotion of the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy;

– the work on the human rights aspects of the environment.

7. Conclusions

86. In the current volatile and unpredictable times, the shifting of global power from the West to the East is putting into question the stability of global governance, by exposing the international community to a new Thucydides' trap. Fragmentation rises, military operations replace diplomatic missions and the rules-based international order loses ground against a state of anarchy that favours confrontation.

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42. The Office in Vienna is in charge of liaison with the OSCE and other international organisations, acting also as Permanent Delegation of the Council of Europe to the UN Office in Vienna, in particular UNODC.
43. Reykjavik Declaration.

87. In a vastly interconnected world, the power rivalry between a rising Global East and a receding Global West is accompanied by a competition of visions for the future state of global governance. The Western vision for an open rules-based international order which promotes democratic values competes with an Eastern interpretation of the sovereign equality of States, freed by the "Western colonial domination" and the "obsession" for promotion of liberal values, and ultimately replaced by the assertion of spheres of influence by the major powers. The object of competition is the diverse pool of democratic and authoritarian States conventionally described as Global South, which will determine the direction of the new world order.

88. In order for the West to effectively enhance the influence of its vision beyond like-minded States, it must take into account essential elements of international resentment: these are normally voiced as, among others, the imbalanced distribution of power in multilateral decision-making bodies, the adoption of double standards in the resolution of geopolitical conflicts, the unequal access to liquidity provided by multilateral financial institutions, and the fact that the Global South often suffers in a stronger way the consequences of global crises, no matter what their nature is – economic, environmental, health-related ones.

89. Whether we like it or not, acknowledging that China and other developing nations will play a larger role in shaping the future of the international order is essential if we aim to sustain it. Multilateralism can only function effectively if it is seen as legitimate; otherwise, States excluded from international decision making will create alternative systems of governance.

90. Europe, North America and the rest of the Global West need to convincingly promote a multilateral global governance, in which the rules, institutions and procedures are not merely approved but also co-designed by the Global South. The promotion of democratic values must be coupled with the realisation that to confront global challenges, such as the climate crisis, the control of AI and the need for a strong economic growth, the seats to the decision-making table must urgently be expanded beyond like-minded States.

91. This shift should not be viewed as a dilution of Western influence on the international order but rather as a reinforcement of multilateral co-operation. With great power comes great responsibility, and granting more rights to major emerging economies would also increase their obligations, compelling them to contribute more actively to climate and development financing, instead of remaining comfortably in the role of recipients.

92. At the same time, especially after the US presidential election, Europe should adopt a more balanced approach between its aspirations for economic security and its global identity as a champion of a rules-based multilateral system. Enhancing our credibility towards essential trade and security partners requires admitting our own inconsistencies at applying international law, while simultaneously underlining the benefits of open liberal democracies in promoting stability, prosperity, and shared global values.

93. The Assembly should take a leading role in reaffirming that only multilateralism can provide solutions to today's global challenges. The outcomes of the UN Summit of the Future represent a starting point in this direction, and the Council of Europe and its member States must support their implementation and promote the values of multilateralism, dialogue and co-operation. Institutional dialogue between the Council of Europe and the United Nations must be strengthened. In addition, the role of the Council of Europe as an organisation contributing to the maintenance of peace and democratic security on the European continent must be acknowledged, possibly also in the context of a future revised global co-operation framework, aimed at better structuring and institutionalising relations with the UN.

94. At the same time, the member States of the Council of Europe should continue to commit to the rules-based international order. The latter entails, among others, the active participation in and adherence to all UN bodies, procedures and institutions, as well as refraining from joining international fora and alliances which promote the fragmentation of multilateral global governance.

95. Furthermore, the member States of the Council of Europe should advocate for the reform of currently ineffective international institutions and organs, especially the UNSC and the Bretton Woods Institutions.

96. Finally, the Assembly should call for a more vigorous continuation of the economic and political integration of the European Union, as well as the acceleration of its enlargement process, as a way to strengthen stability in the face of geopolitical challenges and to enhance the voice of Europe at the international level.