

Tensions Between bilateralism and multilateralism: An analysis of the European Union-Brazil relations

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Introduction:

After the end of World War II, multilateralism became a key element of world politics. Not only did the number of multilateral agreements and institutions increase but also the array of issue-areas. Still, this has not been a linear process. In many cases the rise of multilateralism has been taken over by, or occurred in parallel to, bilateral forms of cooperation (Ruggie, 1992:584, Keohane, 1990:731).

The choice for a strategy of cooperation is grounded on the nature of the issue, as each area has a specific domain, consequently reflecting in different prospects on how to better deal with them in the international arena, as cooperation theorists would argue. Additionally, it is strongly dependent on the configuration of an actor's power and its interests in that specific issue-area (Fearon, 2006: 269)

Since 2003, Brazil and the European Union (EU) have adopted a similar foreign policy strategy based on the assumption that bilateralism has a positive impact on the pursuit of multilateralism. As a result of this convergence of strategies, and also from the recognition of the relevant role played by both Brazil and the EU within the international system, bilateral cooperation between the two has significantly increased. But more than just becoming closer partners, this new approach of the EU-Brazil relationship innovates as it brings a new element: the setting of the promotion of multilateralism as one of the main priorities of their bilateral cooperation.

References: Fearon, J.D. (1998). Bargaining, enforcement and international cooperation. *International Organizations*, 52 (2), pp.269-305. Keohane, R. (1990). *Multilateralism: an agenda for research*. *International Journal*, 45, pp.731-764. Ruggie, J.G. (1992). *Multilateralism: the anatomy of an Institution*. *International Organization*, 46 (3), pp.561-598.

Academic Debate:

International cooperation theories dedicate little attention to the correlation between bilateralism and multilateralism.

Opinions vary and Bilateralism and multilateralism can be considered as: a) Complementary, b) Contradictory, c) alternative or, d) independent strategies of cooperation.

Most analyses are focused on issue-areas and not agents.

Research Question:

Has enhanced cooperation at a bilateral level been reflected into more EU-Brazil cooperation multilateral level?

Sub- questions:

- How global issues (namely trade, climate change and human rights) have been addressed on their bilateral cooperation?

-Have the EU and Brazil agreed on common positions on those issues?

- Have those positions been adopted at the multilateral level?

Hypotheses:

- Cooperation at a bilateral level affects cooperation at a multilateral level, in other words, bilateralism is one of the variables that can shape multilateral cooperation.

- If two partners decide to extend their cooperation from a bilateral level to a multilateral level (like Brazil and the EU) they will be not only legitimating and reinforcing the role of multilateral institutions but also enhancing their potential gains within that arena.

In this case, bilateralism and multilateralism can be complementary strategies.

Methodology:

- Qualitative approach;

- Comparative study on three areas of cooperation based on the concept of issue linkage: Trade (WTO); Environment (UN) and Human Rights (UN)

- Focus on process and outcomes ;

- Analysis of the three stages of cooperation: Bargaining, Agreement and Enforcement.