

COMMITTEE : Youth Assembly (YA)

ISSUE : How can multilateralism be revitalized in the face of rising nationalism and international fragmentation?

CHAIRS : Johanne HENDRICK and Léna QUEGUINER

PRESENTATION OF THE CHAIR



Hello everyone, my name is Lena Queguiner and I'm 17 years old. I'm French and American in the British section of the Lycée International de Ferney Voltaire. When I was 9, my family and I moved to Nigeria where we lived for 3 years. After those 3 years, we moved to Myanmar (Burma) where we stayed for only 1 year due to the military coup. In my spare time, I enjoy doing sports such as soccer, running and surfing.

FerMUN 2026 will be my third FerMUN conference. During FerMUN 2024 I was a delegate in the “Young people in the world of work” committee and during FerMUN 2025 I was one of the chairs for the environment committee. This year I have the honor of being a chair in the youth assembly alongside Johanne HENDRICK. Needless to say that over the past couple years there has been a clear rise of nationalism and international fragmentation. It is for such reasons that this year's youth assembly will be working on how to revitalize multilateralism in this context.

But what exactly is a youth assembly? Well, compared to an ILO tripartite committee, the youth assembly is an informal committee in which two students of each participating country express their view or the view of the youth of their country of origin on the subject at hand. It is a committee that focuses on more concrete solutions and has its very own vocabulary.

I look forward to meeting all of you and hope that this research report will serve as a good basis for your research.

KEY WORDS

Multilateralism: Multilateralism is a term that appeared a couple years after the second world war and refers to many countries collaborating to reach a common objective. It is important to remember that multilateralism indicates the cooperation of three or more countries; if there are only two it is not multilateralism but bilateralism.

Nationalism: Nationalism is when you feel linked and connected to your nation. Numerous elements allow this connection such as the language, the flag, the culture, the music, etc... Nationalism seems very similar to patriotism however one main difference persists, for nationalism they believe that their nation is better than any other nation. Nationalism can have numerous negative impacts such as the creation of conflicts.

National Sovereignty: National sovereignty means that a country can be in complete control of itself without having any exterior pressure. They are therefore free to pass laws and take action in their country with no worry about other treaties or obligations.

International fragmentation: As its name suggests, international fragmentation indicates a decrease of collaboration between countries. Countries therefore tend to work alone which leads to a decrease of multilateral and bilateral agreements.

OVERVIEW

I. Reasons for the decline of multilateralism

a. The rise of national sovereignty

Throughout the last couple years there has been a clear rise of national sovereignty due to countries' impressions that they are losing too much power and authority over their territory. More and more feel like they can't make decisions over their economies, borders, and laws since they are constantly bound by others, as states the IOM (International Organization for Migrants) in their border security, migration, governance and sovereignty report, "Walls and fences have gone up where only a few years ago, people freely crossed into other countries. (...) At a time when

borders are becoming less restrictive in terms of movement of goods, services and communication, they are becoming more important politically”. The rise of national sovereignty is also a clear reaction against globalization that increased interdependence between countries.

A concrete example is Britain's exit from the EU (Brexit) that took place in 2016. Indeed, Britain argues this decision was taken to have more control on its borders and laws without being blocked by the decisions adopted by the EU, as stated in the OpenEdition Journal, “One of the most compelling arguments used during the Brexit campaign that might explain the Leavers’ political success focused on EU economic migration, which the Leave campaign regularly framed as a drain on British public budgets”.

Another example is the US ‘America First’ policy. This policy, as its name clearly indicates, is centered around the US putting its own needs and interests first which caused the withdrawal of the US in some important international agreements such as the Paris climate agreement (2015).

All of this clearly illustrates that the rise of national sovereignty has negatively impacted multilateralism. However it is not the only factor; geopolitical tensions also play a crucial role.

b. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts

Geopolitical tensions and conflicts are also a key factor to the fall of multilateralism for numerous reasons. To start with, when there are clear tensions between two or more states some tend to act on their rivalry by using veto power, or even breaking international law which does not allow agreements and discussion to move forward and be put in place. In addition, tensions evidently create distrust. This pushes countries to not sign off on a common agreement even if they share the same point of view on the subject at hand. Last but not least, geopolitical tensions often make countries uneasy about their security which encourages them to invest and pay attention to their protection and military over other important issues. One of the most famous tensions is the United States - China rivalry which implicitly pushed the US to temporarily back out from the WHO.

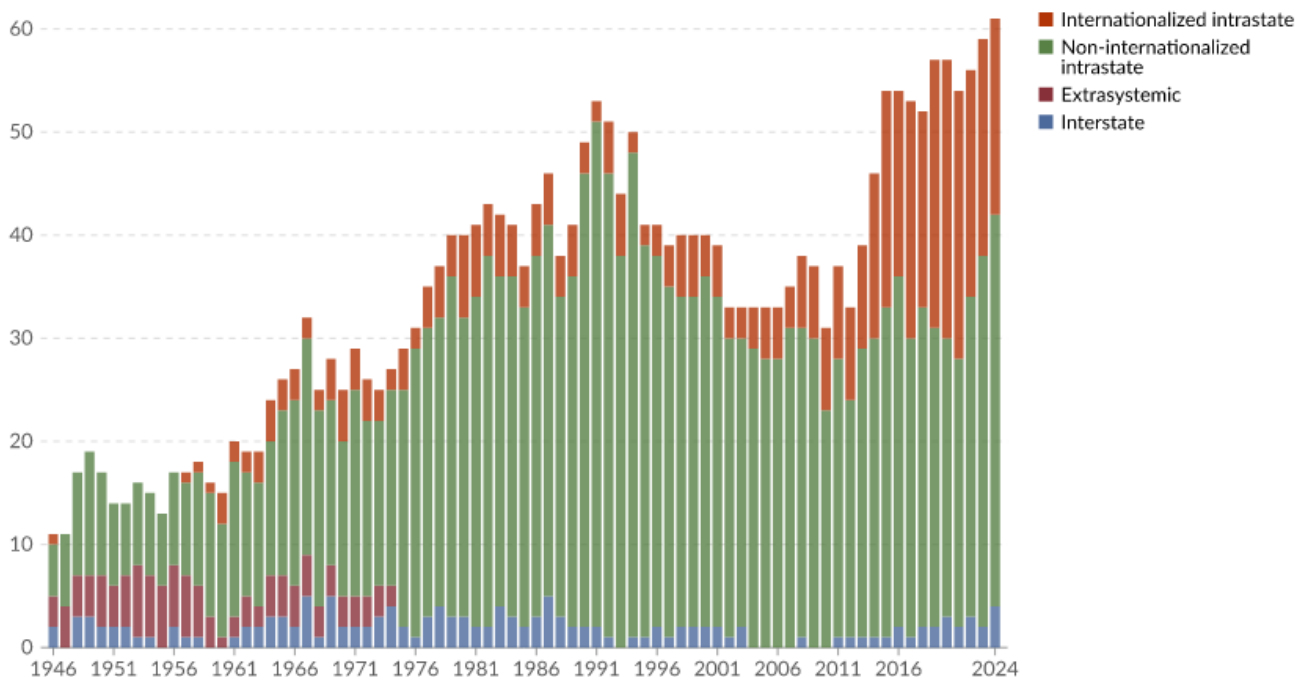
This graph offers significant insight on the rise of geopolitical tensions and conflicts between. We can firstly observe a rise in the number of conflicts. After a decline in the 1990, the number rose exponentially starting in the 2000s. This suggests an increase in geopolitical instability,

significantly in internationalized intrastate conflicts (a civil war in which exterior states intervene in). The increasing rise in conflicts mark the growing geopolitical fragmentation, and weakened multilateral conflict resolution mechanisms.

c. Multilateralism's weaknesses

Number of state-based conflicts, World

Included are interstate, intrastate, and extrasystemic conflicts that were ongoing that year.



Data source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program and Peace Research Institute Oslo (2025); geoBoundaries (2023)

Note: Some conflicts affect several regions. The sum across all regions can therefore be higher than the global number.

OurWorldinData.org/war-and-peace | CC BY

Even if multilateralism seems extremely positive and constructive, it's important to note that it contains numerous weaknesses that put its growth at a disadvantage. Multilateral agreements are highly complex, and are designed to be suitable to all members, making negotiations extremely time-consuming. As Science Direct (leading online platform for accessing scientific and academic research, run by the publisher Elsevier) states, “Those interests are often in conflict with each other, which makes efforts to reach agreements on rules extremely complicated and tedious”, when talking about the WTA (World Trade agreements that englobe 164 states and several observer states). Furthermore, powerful countries often have more weight and authority over these agreements, which tends to frustrate less powerful countries.

II - How to reinforce multilateralism to revitalise it

a) Associate multilateralism to global issues

Many issues don't have borders, such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics. Pushing countries to tackle these current issues together will unite states under a cause. Shared interests and benefits are essential to rebuilding bonds and peace between nations.

b) Draw in civil society and youth

Lastly, involving civil society and youth could be a good solution to revitalize multilateralism. It could bring numerous positive outcomes such as the immersion of new ideas. In addition, it would put global tensions aside and focus on the issue at hand. Last but not least it would allow civil society and youth to feel represented and heard.

RELEVANT TREATIES AND EVENTS

24/10/1945

The United Nations Charter is a treaty that established the creation of the United Nation - an organization put in place to promote global cooperation and multilateralism.

27/01/1989

The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, signed in 1969 and effective since 1989 (also known as the "treaty of treaties") sets out global rules on the way treaties are written and put in place.

01/11/1993

The treaty of Maastricht, effective from 01/11/1993, is a treaty that enabled the creation of the European Union. The European Union is one of the best examples of multilateralism as it demonstrates a clear cooperation between numerous countries.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As explored in the overview, some interesting solutions are: associating multilateralism to global issues and drawing in civil society and youth (look above for more details).

Other interesting solutions include:

- A better management of geographical tensions to avoid them interfering with agreements,
- Finding ways to make multilateral agreements less time-consuming,
- A way to make countries feel like they can be part of multilateral agreements and still have control over their territory,
- Last but not least ensuring all countries feel included and not washed out by the most powerful ones.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER :

- 1) Is your country part of many multilateral agreements?
- 2) What is your country doing to ensure they respect these agreements?
- 3) Is your country involved in any geopolitical tensions and conflict?
- 4) Is your country prioritizing the growth of their army over other fundamental issues such as climate change?
- 5) Is your country recognized as being very influential during multilateral agreements or on the contrary washed out by powerful countries?
- 6) Does your country's government feel like they are losing control over their own territory due to multilateral agreements?
- 7) Does your country prefer multilateral or bilateral agreements? Why?

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