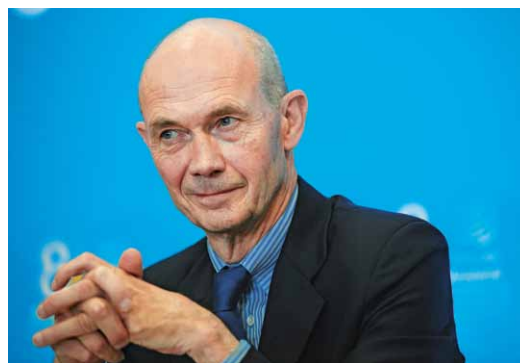


# Out with the Old, in with the New

If the multilateral order is to survive, it must change

**T**he corona virus has given a new sense of urgency to debates on the future of multilateralism and international cooperation. The multilateral order we have come to know was shaped at the respective ends of both world wars – two defining moments of the 20th century. However, given the growing gap between the architecture of that order and the changing geopolitical order of the 21st century, its capacity to deliver has come under growing pressure.

The pandemic is causing a massive economic and social crisis, and is bound to make a bad situation worse. Simultaneously, the heated debates regarding the origin of SARS-CoV-2, the quality of the World Health Organization's response, and its alleged vulnerability to Chinese influence indicate that relations between Washington and Beijing are further deteriorating. Consequently, the world's capacity for multilateral action is regressing at a time when we need more multilateral action, not less, for two basic reasons: First, the aforementioned intensifying geopolitical rivalry between China and the US. If Europeans are to preserve their autonomy, they will need to take serious steps towards coordinating their foreign and security policy, as well as their trade and industrial policy. Second, the pandemic may weaken some governments, but it will strengthen others. Stronger states



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in turn require stronger multilateral mechanisms.

So how can we, how should we, foster more multilateralism?

First, engage: We must build coalitions of states that care about multilateralism. Such an effort may or may not include the United States or China. While paying lip service to the cause of international cooperation, in reality both have been selectively employing multilateralism for their own, narrow purposes, thus undermining the spirit of genuine multilateral cooperation. The Alliance for Multilateralism, launched by Germany and France in

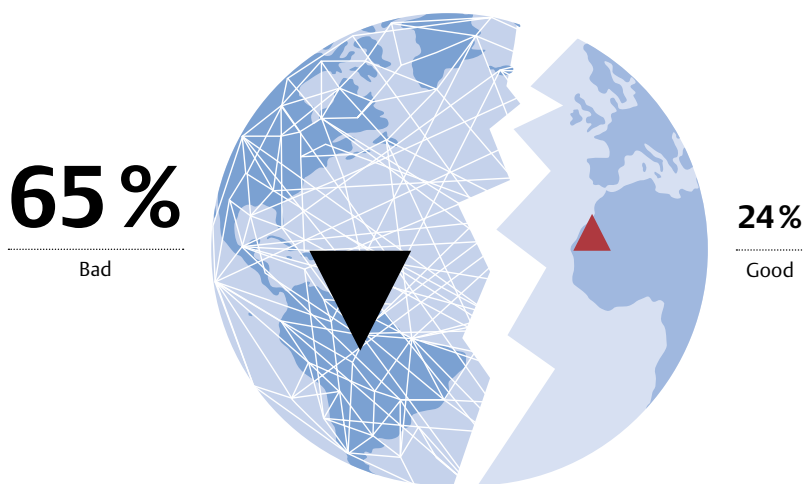
September 2019, was a step in the right direction, but so far has produced little concrete results. An international initiative to cover the gap in the WHO’s budget caused by President Trump’s decision to temporarily suspend US payments, be it by the EU or an ad hoc coalition of the willing, would have provided a much-needed victory for the ideal of multilateralism. The initiative by major WTO members in April to set up a coalition to avoid food trade restrictions was a rare instance of international coordination during this crisis. For once, the EU, the US, China, and Brazil stood together – unlike India or Indonesia (at the time of writing).

Second, reshape: The international community must finally tend to the task of reforming our system of international treaties and institutions. Take the WTO: Even prior to the crisis, it had become clear that existing regulations governing international trade were too weak to level the playing field in areas such as subsidization. Personnel is a further case in point: In selecting

those who lead international organizations, we need to be more open, more transparent, and more professional. And we need to continue developing formats such as the Sustainable Development Goals or the G20: The mechanisms underpinning multilateralism in the 21st century will be less like cathedrals built in stone, but rather flexible as a tent.

Finally: diversify. To do so, we must abandon our state-centric understanding of multilateralism. Instead, we should replace it with a concept that is open to different forms of non-state actors – what I have called “poly-lateralism”. This is why, on the occasion of the centenary of the first world war, the Paris Peace Forum was created in 2018: To complement states’ actions by mobilizing non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, academic institutions, and large cities, to name but a few. Or, put differently, to establish a bottom-up, stakeholder-focused and project-based approach to tackling major global challenges.

Would it be good or bad if the corona crisis caused a decrease in the degree of globalization and interconnectedness?



2020: don't know 8%, no answer 3%

And make no mistake: With the rivalry between China and the US dominating international relations for the foreseeable future, the EU will need to take the driving seat and lead this movement. This implies a serious increase in Europe's geopolitical clout, which in turn will require the EU to accelerate its own economic and political integration. Seen from this angle, the present catastrophe may well prove a decisive test.

I am convinced that the EU will emerge from this crisis either stronger or weaker. The answer, in no small part, lies in the hands of my German friends. We will need a colossal amount of borrow-

ing to fix our economies. And the key to do borrowing at the lowest possible price lies in mutualizing our balance sheets. The leap from the status quo to collective debt would be similar to the "whatever it takes" of the European Central Bank under Mario Draghi during the 2008 financial crisis.

Europeans have proven that when united, they are capable of tackling great challenges. But a divided Europe simply will not be able to advance the cause of multilateralism. So yes, we need an antidote to SARS-CoV-2. But, as Jacques Delors said in April, now more than ever we also need an antidote to the virus of division. ✖

### Should the member states of the Eurozone issue "corona bonds"?

