EU–UN Relations. How much of a Partnership?

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The number, scale and variety of threats to the safety of the contemporary world are forcing multilateral cooperation to tighten. The United Nations is the main forum of such cooperation and has a vast spectrum of powers. In addition the European Union tries to act in a similar way, although on a much smaller scale. Both organizations, then, seem to have much in common and appear to be mutual partners. Is this cooperation really going as well as one would expect? Do they treat each other as equal partners? This article tries to answer these questions and more.

Introduction

The modern world is full of contradictions and paradoxes. On one hand, a number of very complex global problems are being experienced, such as failed states, asymmetric conflicts, climate change, nuclear weapons, interference in the internal affairs of certain sovereign states, and so on. On the other hand, we currently have at our disposal a broader than ever set of tools that may be used to fight or reduce the negative aspects of these threats and problems. Examples of these include the whole system of the United Nations, more resilient regional organizations (the European Union), and the information and scientific revolutions. It should be noted that, first, counteracting the problems and threats arising currently requires international efforts much bigger than before. Second, the traditional participants in international relations (the states) have not disappeared and do not shrink from emphasizing their sovereign right to independent action toward suitable corrective measures. Third, although a number of frameworks exist that may be used to counteract threats, and which have proven to be individually effective, they lack coordination and coherence in terms of their functioning (Ref. 1, p. 4).

In the eyes of many the main entity with the aim of reacting to global challenges is the United Nations (UN). This organization, with its specialist agencies, funds and support programmes, is viewed, also by the European Union, as the international politics entity with the broadest legitimization to act upon the threats and problems

mentioned. All EU countries are members of the UN, contributing to the financing and the realization of the operational targets of the organization. The EU itself, currently enjoying international subject status thanks to the Treaty of Lisbon, also aims to influence the decision-making processes in the UN, thus increasing its own importance on the international arena. These organizations are therefore important to each other and there is every reason to investigate their relations.

The European Union in International Organizations

The Treaty of Lisbon did not introduce significant qualitative changes in previous regulations concerning the signing of international contracts by the authorities in Brussels. The aim was only to put the process in order and slightly supplement it – art. 216-219 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The key consequence of according the EU international legitimization, according to art. 47 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), is that since the introduction of the Treaty of Lisbon it is the European Union that is an agent in international agreements, and not the European Community, as in the past. One ought to add that the Treaty of Lisbon broadened the catalogue of matters that require the consent of the European Parliament in terms of the Council of the EU signing international contracts. Therefore, the catalogue indicated in the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC) was repeated in art. 218 sec. 6a of TFEU with the addition of a potential agreement of the EU joining the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In terms of agreements concerning matters of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the entity responsible for initiating and performing the negotiations, on the basis of an authorization previously acquired by the EU Council, is the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Ref. 2, art. 18 sec. 2).

However, according to art. 220 sec. 1 of the TFEU the EU is responsible for establishing all proper forms of cooperation with organs of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Moreover, the European Union is supposed to maintain proper relations with other international organizations not directly indicated in the Treaty. For example, the EU is neither a member of nor an observer with the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, as internal regulations between those entities forbid this; at the same time, all the EU member countries are part of these organizations (Ref. 3, pp. 35–36). Bearing in mind art. 217 of the TFEU, the Union can conclude agreements with one or more other countries or international organizations, concerning the establishment of an association, characterized by mutuality of rights and responsibilities, common actions and particular procedures. Art. 220 sec. 2 TFEU, however, details that the responsibility for realizing the aforementioned tasks rests with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and with the European Commission. Due to this situation, questions arose regarding the relation between the High Representative and

the Commission. The practice so far leads to the conclusion that the EC takes the lead in organizations of an economic nature, and the High Representative in political organizations. EC representations were transformed into EU delegations, subordinate to the High Representative and an internal part of the European External Action Service. Their duties include tight cooperation with membership countries and, according to art. 221 of the TFEU, providing permanent representation of the European Union.

A straightforward definition of the relations between the EU and the UN is not an easy task. In the light of current legal regulations, the EU cannot be a member of the UN, as the United Nations Charter stipulates that only states can enjoy full membership rights (Ref. 4, art. 3-4). Nonetheless, in acknowledgement of its increasing potential, in 1974 the then European Community was granted the status of permanent observer at the United Nations General Assembly (Ref. 5, p. 5). All current EU member countries are members of the UN and two of them are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (France and the UK). From art. 34 sec. 2 par. 2 of the TEU in the Lisbon version it follows that EU countries being members of the United Nations Security Council (permanent or temporary, only temporary before the Treaty of Lisbon) have to act unanimously, and at the same time exhaustively inform other EU member countries and the High Representative about the course of actions. In addition, they are to defend the Union's standpoints and interests, however without detriment to their own commitments resulting from the terms of the United Nations Charter (Ref. 6, p. 14). Such a stance was also strengthened by Declarations 13 and 14, added to the Treaty of Lisbon (Ref. 7). It is clear, then, that even though EU member countries ought to undertake coordinated actions in the arena of the UN with reference to the common EU standpoint, in the event of a conflict of interest individual countries put priority on the obligations resulting directly from the terms of the United Nations Charter over the interest of the EU.

The political aspect of the cooperation between European Union member countries within the UN also causes ambiguities. First, the countries lead their own foreign policy, fulfil their own obligations resulting from the United Nations Charter, and thus are guided by the best realization of their own national interests. They are therefore not obliged to observe common arrangements concerning the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The United Kingdom in the UN Security Council supported the USA position on Saddam Hussein. France threatened to veto a resolution against Iraq. There were also discrepancies within the EU Council itself and in the relations between the EU Council and the European Commission. *Summa summarum*, the intervention in Iraq did happen in spite of the lack of a resolution from the UN Security Council. Some EU countries supported the USA intervention politically and militarily, some definitely objected; nonetheless the EU helped with Iraq rebuilding from war damage.

Second, EU institutions undertake initiatives aiming to assure more coordination and coherence of actions of member countries within the UN. 'What serves this purpose is the cooperation between states and the European Commission, thanks to which the country holding presidency can present a common standpoint on behalf of 27 countries to the General Assembly, as well as the right of the EC representative to appear [...] as a permanent observer at the UN' (Ref. 8, p. 408).

The Basis for Cooperation of the Two Organizations

From the point of view of the European Union, the UN is extremely important as an international organization, because it helps to face crucial challenges in the modern world and promotes the idea of multilateralism, which is very much valued in Brussels. This appreciation is not however as one-sided as might seem at first glance. The reason is that without the financial support of the EU member countries and the Union itself, the UN would find it difficult to perform its functions properly (the key document here is the Financial Agreement from April 2003). After all it is the integrated Europe that provides the largest financial support to the United Nations, averaging around 40% of the UN's total budget. The USA contributes around 22%, Japan around 17%, and then there is the 'rest of the world'. In certain areas of the UN's functioning (e.g. development aid, peacekeeping operations), the European financial support is even greater – funds coming from EU countries and the Union itself, that contributed to the UN, its specialist agencies and financial programmes, rose from €144 million in 2001 to €935 million in 2009 (Ref. 9, p. 6).

Still, cooperation between the EU and the UN does not go along seamlessly. Certain frictions appear quite frequently, especially in terms of financial negotiations. More often, however, divergent opinions appear in the context of possible reforms of the United Nations system. The first problem arises with changes in the composition of the UN Security Council, where a place could be granted to the European Union instead of France and the United Kingdom (which refuse to agree to such a solution due to their own national interests and prestige). Brazil, South Africa, India and Japan, for instance, do not agree, as they would gladly occupy a seat in this organization themselves. A similar standpoint is presented by countries enjoying membership in other international organizations, as they perceive this solution as discrimination. They argue that Europe is overrepresented in the Security Council, as it fills two slots for permanent members and two to three slots for temporary members (out of a total of 15). Finally, in the past, the EU has 'proven' many a time that it often has problems with establishing a common standpoint in the Security Council (e.g. Iraq 2003, Kosovo 2008):

> In terms of power, the EU as an institution often does not appear to have much leverage, particularly regarding issues of international peace and security. While the EU is effective in coordinating, for example, post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Iraq, it was, significantly, unable to present a unified position in the lead-up to the war. It would be correct to say, therefore, that the power of the EU at the UN depends largely on its ability to present a unified position. […] Even then, this may not always be enough to assure a satisfactory outcome. (Ref. 1, p. 12)

Therefore, reform would require the United Nations Charter to be changed so as to make possible full membership of international organizations, which is unlikely (Ref. 10, p. 68).

In the spring of 2001, the European Commission (EC) adopted a document evaluating the cooperation between the EU and the UN so far, indicating means for facilitating mutual communication, and analysing the influence of Brussels' development policy to the whole of the United Nations system.[11] The Statement

underlined that, over the years, mutual contacts and relations had become increasingly complex, rich and diverse, while covering the entirety of areas of interest in terms of EU external relations. The European Commission pointed to development and humanitarian aid as the first steps towards increasing the effectiveness of cooperation between the two organizations. It was assumed that the presence of Union structures (financial, personal) in agencies, programmes and funds supervised by the United Nations would increase. The Commission also indicated four critical Union weaknesses in terms of the effectiveness of its operations within the UN: (a) low status of the Community in most of the United Nation's agencies, which reduced to a large degree the ability to influence the shape of adopted (legal, financial) solutions; (b) little coordination of EU member countries' actions in terms of development and humanitarian aid in a broad sense; (c) little indirect influence of the Community on organizational structures and planning in the UN system; and (d) lack of appropriate human resources within the European Community itself, which would take care of the interests and the image of the EU (Ref. 12, pp. 54–55). At the time of writing, in 2016, not much had changed in this regard.

On 8 May 2001 the European Commission adopted another Statement, this time on the issues of human rights and democratization in other countries.[13] It emphasized that the EU is not aiming to recreate its own policy in terms of preserving world rights and democracy, but rather is looking to reinforce its actions in these matters, among other things through a more strategic (comprehensive) approach, putting more emphasis on those actions in dealings with other international-relations entities and in its cooperation with the UN itself. However, it seems pointless to search for serious actions towards implementing the above (Ref. 14, pp. 5–27).

Then, on 10 September 2003 the European Commission published another statement concerning multilateralism, which outlined a new vision of the EU's relations with other international organizations, including the UN in particular.[15] First, it indicated that the importance of multilateralism is currently much greater than before and thus it needs to become the centre of the EU's external activities, and second, that the United Nations is the 'backbone' of the world's multipolar order. It also said that the EU is no longer willing to be only a payer, but also wants to be a partner of the UN, whose opinion has to be taken into account by other international-relations entities. In addition, the document included detailed targets of reforms being prepared, aiming at an increase of effectiveness in implementing international obligations and strengthening cooperation between the EU and the UN. Moreover, in terms of improving the effectiveness of collaboration between both organizations and aiming at utilizing the EU's full potential within the UN (Ref. 16, p. 106), the European Commission proposed two solutions – first, giving the future partnership solid foundations, i.e.:

- more efficient political dialogue;
- increasing the presence of Commission representatives in various bodies of the United Nation's system;
- closer financial cooperation on the basis of the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement from 2003;

- establishment by the EC of a strategic partnership with the UN's agencies, funds and programmes on development and humanitarian aid;
- exchange of information and experiences between the organizations (Ref. 17, p. 8).

Second, the EC suggested supporting international order, stability, safety and peace through information exchange, the implementation of common operational standards, the improvement of mutual trust, preventing conflicts, managing crises and cooperation with regional organizations. Unfortunately, even though 'the Commission's Statement was met with a vivid reaction of Union's member countries, mainly on government level, the initial opinions were mostly not followed by decisions about starting national debates on the future of relations between the Union and the UN' (Ref. 18, p. 311). However, official documents issued by the two sides seem to contradict the status quo, which proves that the dialogue, on all levels, between the organizations improved by a significant degree (Ref. 19, p. 8).

Over the last few years, the collaboration between the EU and the UN became much more dynamic thanks to an expansion of the area of possible partnership activities, especially in terms of the increase of importance of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Thanks to a simplification of the institutional-decision making system, the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and a clear differentiation of competence between member countries and the EU, cooperation between the EU and the UN became possible not only with regard to the environment, humanitarian or development aid, but also with an eye to avoiding conflicts, fighting terrorism, peacekeeping operations, and so on. In this regard, the Union even adopted a new credo of 'effective multilateralism', thus expressing its belief in the *European Security Strategy* adopted in 2003 and emphasizing that 'one of the priorities of the European Union is strengthening the United Nations by providing tools, which allow it to perform its duties and act effectively' (Ref. 20, p. 9). It was a decisive reaction to opinions that the United Nations is struggling to survive, as it had not yet experienced a similar crisis before, and its role was being questioned to a large degree (Ref. 21, pp. 1–2). It is, however, unfortunate that this was still more of an announcement than a fact.

More emphasis on the Union's part on strengthening multilateralism, and thus the position and role of the United Nations, was however a result not only of noble motives, i.e. contributing to realizing the UN's goals, but, maybe above all, of an ambition to make the European Union a 'global player' in international relations. The following opinions seem interesting in this aspect:

> as an organization regarding itself as a crisis manager, the U.N. regards the EU not so much as a supporter but as a possible competitor, drawing attention and resources away from the U.N. In addition, there is reason to conclude that the EU's interest is not to strengthen the U.N. directly, but rather indirectly, by first developing its own operational capacity. […] In many ways, the success of this relationship, especially with regard to Africa as the main continent of U.N. activities, is a litmus test for the EU's strategic ambitions […]. (Ref. 22, p. 7)

Whatever the truth, both motives would require coordination of actions undertaken by member countries – speaking in one voice. Although certain steps were taken to achieve this, one ought not underestimate challenges awaiting the EU and its member countries in this regard, resulting from the structure of the very organization, as well as reasons on the part of other countries (Ref. 23, pp. 5–6).

Areas of Cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations

Both the European Union and the United Nations perform their functions on many levels and include many aspects. Both share, at least in theory, common values and goals. From the point of view of Europe, the United Nations are a very important forum, which governments and citizen society representatives use to negotiate and agree on common standpoints and actions aiming to resolve key problems and threats to the modern world. Eight basic areas of cooperation between the EU and the UN can be distinguished (Ref. 24, pp. 270–271):

- development aid – the cooperation is facilitated mainly through the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Food Programme, as well as many conferences and summits organized by the UN;
- peacekeeping and stabilization – the European Union participates in UN missions and operations (e.g. in the Balkans);
- environment protection – both organizations collaborate with each other within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and in conferences concerning, for example, climate change;
- humanitarian aid – the EU is a world leader in contributions for humanitarian aid. It is implemented by the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). Moreover, the EU participates in the work of the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as cooperating with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- protection of human rights – generally, the collaboration happens within the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly – Third Committee;
- trade – both sides cooperate within the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as through the work of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD);
- care for culture and civilization – the EU cooperates with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- health services – both sides cooperate within the World Health Organization (WHO).

It seems correct to state that care for keeping peace in the world and stabilizing the global situation are the most important areas of cooperation linking the European

Union and the United Nations. Without fulfilling this condition, all other actions would lose a lot of their relevance, and here the range of threats is very broad – from drugs, weapons trade, managing and accessing natural resources, and degradation of environment to contagious diseases or migration traffic. No wonder that the EU considers the UN a key entity responsible for undertaking actions in order to prevent international conflicts (Ref. 25, p. 26). A vital document in this regard is the *Joint Declaration on UN–EU Cooperation in Crisis Management*, dated 19 September 2003. It emphasized the benefits for both sides from the cooperation so far, indicated a will to intensify common actions and established a special mechanism of bilateral consultations, aiming to facilitate planning, training and communication. These solutions were further developed in the document *EU-UN Cooperation in Military Crisis Management Operations: Elements of Implementation of the EU–UN Joint Declaration*, adopted by the EU Council on 17 June 2004. Among other things this document listed two possible models for performing EU operations according to the UN mandate (the so-called bridge model – quick and short EU interventions allowing the UN to gather more forces and resources, and the so-called readiness model – support for operations led directly by the UN) (Ref. 17, p. 8).

In the *Declaration on UN–EU Cooperation in Crisis Management*, dated 7 June 2007, the role of EU Battle Groups, including their permanent operational readiness and mobility, was appreciated and emphasized. The document also postulated increasing the importance of high level political dialogue between the UN Secretariat and the Union for creating special mechanisms of cooperation in emergency situations, in solving which both sides would engage. The European Union also strongly engaged in the process of creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission. This commission is not funded directly by the UN and its role is solely advisory within the UN system (Ref. 8, pp. 409–410).

The EU member countries, and the EU itself, attach a lot of importance to obtaining a UN mandate, bringing with it public and political legitimization, before undertaking any actions (e.g. sanctions, interventions). However, as is often the case in international politics, some countries believe it is a necessary condition, whereas others do not. This fact is vital proof for the existence of contradictory opinions in terms of legalizing the use of force in international relations. Some countries are willing to get a 'green light signal' from the UN before initiating a mission or an intervention, whereas others prefer creating a so-called 'coalition of will' or 'coalition of the willing' in order to more consistently realize their own strategies and actions. There are also opinions such as the following:

> It would be true to argue that the EU would prefer to go through the UN whenever possible in order to enjoy international legitimacy. However, […] 'effective multilateralism' means that EU has to necessarily try to secure UN approval, but must not remain paralysed if it does not receive it. (Ref. 1, p. 22)

Considering the ineffective UN structures, with a high level of bureaucracy, and sporadic difficulties in effective performance between the EU and the UN, problems with achieving effective multilateralism become very apparent (Ref. 26, p. 12).

The Status of the European Union within the UN System

Even at first glance, the whole system of UN organizations, funds and programmes allows for huge diversity in the status of the EU. In 1964, the Commission of the then European Communities established an information office in New York. Ten years later this gained a higher diplomatic status, as it was transformed into a delegation of the European Community with the United Nations, preceded by obtaining the status of observer in the General Assembly by the Commission. Currently six such EU delegations exist:

- in New York (with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, UNDP and UNICEF);
- in Geneva (with OCHCHR, UNHCR, ILO, WHO);
- in Vienna (with IAEA and UNODC);
- in Paris (with UNESCO);
- in Rome (with FAO, WFP and IFAD);
- in Nairobi (with UNEP) (Ref. 27, pp. 8–15).

Moreover, the EU Council established liaison offices in New York and Geneva, the responsibility of which, even though they do not possess political autonomy, is to serve the EU member countries, and the presidency in particular, in everyday actions within the UN, including providing necessary information, document flow and coordination of particular countries' standpoints. The EU Council Liaison Office and the EU delegation (both located in New York) were joined in one body under the supervision of a Council representative, who acts as Head of Delegation. Establishment of the European External Action Service allowed for supplementing the delegation with several dozens of office workers and diplomats.

From the standpoint of the EU's formal position, the matter of utmost importance is the annual meeting of EU representatives, at ministerial level, with the UN Secretary General in New York. It is one of the elements of maintaining permanent good relations between the organizations. In addition, high ranking representatives of United Nations bodies meet EU representatives in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg. Currently, we are also witnessing the initialization of a sector dialogue (e.g. meetings of UN representatives with EU diplomats from the Political and Security Committee). The European Parliament also attempts to emphasize its usability for these bilateral relations by maintaining contacts with the UN Secretary General or through visits of deputies at significant events taking place in New York (Ref. 27, p. 10). It is interesting that according to art. 34 sec. 2 par. 3 of the TEU, EU member countries that are part of the United Nations Security Council appeal for inviting the High Representative to represent the EU view when the Security Council's agenda lists an item upon which the EU as a whole has specified its standpoint. The first such speech took place on 4 May 2010 and concerned the cooperation between the EU and the UN with regard to peace and safety (Ref. 10, pp. 7 and 69).

Within individual bodies of the United Nations the formal status of the EU also increased, from observer, through active participant, to full membership. Apart from

the status of observer with the General Assembly, which the Community obtained in 1974 (currently there are 67 such observers), it also acquired membership in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 1991. Since 2002 the EU has been a member in the World Food Summit, and in 2003, after arduous negotiations, became a member of the *Codex Alimentarius* Commission, functioning under the supervision of FAO. Similar actions raising the formal status of the EC/EU are undertaken in other sectors of UN activity, especially during conferences, where the EU is usually treated as a full member. The Community also gained, and the EU 'inherited', the status of a full member of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD, 1993), or an observer with the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999) and UNESCO (2005) (Ref. 23, pp. 6–7).

Even if the changes just discussed are vital, changes in the EU status in the Security Council or the General Assembly would be far more important. There have been attempts to raise the status of the Union in the UN General Assembly. After the Treaty of Lisbon, the Union has acquired international subjectivity and a certain political force. It also acts intensively within specialist agencies, funds and programmes under the supervision of the United Nations. Taking all this into account, no other organization in the world can be considered equal to the European Union. Noticing the increasing status and importance of 'Regional Economic Integration Organizations' between sovereign states, however, a number of international organizations have used this concept to grant such international-relations entities full membership. This very procedure was used during the attempts of the Union to be accepted to the FAO and a few other multilateral organizations. Currently, we are also witnessing a precedent matter of a 'Regional Integration Organization' clause by one of the United Nations conventions. The word 'economic' is no longer included, thus increasing openness to other international organizations (Ref. 10, pp. 66 and 117–119).

Over the last few years, EU standpoints, due to the EU's low status in the General Assembly, have generally been restricted to supporting the standpoint of one of the member countries. Initially, such standpoints were presented by the EU country exercising the presidency. Since the Treaty of Lisbon, this task has been exercised mostly by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and, to a smaller degree, by the President of the European Council and the EU delegation. A Union representative can only take the floor when the representatives of all the countries belonging to the UN (and there are 192 of these) have already done so, which significantly reduces any influence of the EU. For this very reason, on 13 September 2010 the EU applied to the General Assembly with a project of a resolution revoking the concept of 'organization of regional integration' and increasing the EU's status to the role of a reinforced observer. This status would guarantee the EU the ability to present own projects of resolutions or the right to appear in front of state representatives, which would cause greater visibility of EU's initiatives and increase its influence. To the amazement of the EU representatives, most of UN member countries, mainly from Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Area and the Middle East, including six EU strategic partners(!), voted against

such a solution, officially from fear of 'opening Pandora's Box' of similar demands from other international organizations. Most of the countries voting against the resolution gladly use the development aid offered by the EU. The idea was not abandoned however; there are still lobbyist activities in progress regarding this matter (Ref. 28, p. 1).

Coordination of the EU's Standpoints for the Purpose of UN Operation

In art. 32 of the Treaty on European Union as adopted after the Lisbon changes, it is clearly stated that member countries within the European Council and EU Council, for the purpose of defining a common standpoint, agree on all matters of foreign and safety policy that are of general interest. Before undertaking any action in the international arena or incurring any obligations that might influence EU interests, each member country, in the spirit of solidarity, consults with the others in the European Council or EU Council.

Where the European Council or the EU Council has come to a common attitude (standpoint) of the EU, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the foreign policy ministers of individual member countries coordinate their activities. Diplomatic missions of EU countries and delegations in other countries and with international organizations cooperate and help to form and implement a common attitude (standpoint) (Ref. 2, art. 32, art. 34 sec. 1 and art. 35). Such is the theory, but how does it look in practice?

After the Treaty of Lisbon, the coordination of EU member countries' standpoints for the purpose of work within the United Nations gained in importance and intensity. For instance, the EU delegation in New York itself annually conducts around 1300 coordination meetings concerning the work of the General Assembly and its subordinate executive bodies, as well as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Meetings of the Security Council are held each week and, even though they do not constitute a coordinative forum *sensu stricto*, thanks to them EU member countries absent from the current composition of the Security Council gain access to important information. Other coordination meetings, around 1000 a year, take place in Geneva. Although formulating a policy and positioning decisions for the purpose of the UN usually occur in the capitals of member countries of the EU and its institutions localized in Brussels, 'those coordination meetings play an important supplementary and corrective role' (Ref. 23, p. 7).

However, European Union member countries still show difficulties in speaking with one voice within the General Assembly, for example. Unanimity of the European states, manifested by consistency of standpoints during voting, is generally and slowly increasing. Yet it still only runs at around 65–70%, very occasionally lower. In many cases, only a few countries break rank (because of their history, strategic interests, socio-economic status, alliances, etc), but even this is enough to disturb the voting or downgrade the position and image of the EU as a whole. What is more, these data do undermine the substantial quality of coordination processes within the EU itself. And the division in the Union is a key challenge to the

global strategic legitimization of the EU, particularly in the eyes of the so-called strategic partners.

Here, just for curiosity's sake, it seems a good idea to mention the data concerning the consistency of voting of the EU and its strategic allies in terms of work in the UN General Assembly. Data gathered since 2004 allow us to conclude that Canada, Japan and South Korea have upheld their status of EU natural partners, as – in a vast majority of cases investigated by the UN General Assembly – their standpoints were identical to that of the EU. What might be considered at least baffling is the data concerning the consistency in voting of the EU and the USA, seemingly the closest of partners. Statistics cause one to doubt the 'key' character of this relation and the consistency here seems far from desired (Ref. 29, pp. 4–26). Depending on the range of issues, the remaining EU strategic partners vote more or less similar to the standpoint of the EU, although some believe that China and India are definitely the least consistent with the EU in terms of voting (Ref. 30, p. 2).

Final notes

The European Union and the United Nations seem to be natural and obvious partners. They are united not only by general values indicated in the United Nations Charter from 1945 or in the Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. There also exist a number of areas of cooperation, where both of these international-relations entities set similar ambitious goals, e.g. protection of human rights, development and humanitarian aid, environment protection, care for global safety and peace, etc. This requires cooperation of both partners for the effective realization of assumed priorities and not wasting financial resources (Ref. 31, p. 11). Nonetheless, in order to strengthen the position of the European Union in the whole system of the United Nations, much more political courage and vision of forthcoming actions will be needed, both currently and in the future. It would be best to move away from declarations, statements and communications, and towards agreements and settlements that actually are important for reaching the designated goals of cooperation. This might enable the possibility of finding leadership, which is currently missing in the UN, and so significantly downgrades the position of both the UN and the EU in the world. The new opportunities that the Union gained from the Treaty of Lisbon ought to be finally appreciated and utilized to the full extent. New tools and structures, a clear division of competence and the decision-making process, and the recently formed diplomatic service, are at the disposal of Union leaders. Now what needs to be done is only to realize the common voice in the international arena and keep the promise of acting in the spirit of effective multilateralism (Ref. 17, p. 16). Yet the word 'only' might be truly misleading in this case.

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