

## **No World Order: Mapping the New Multipolarity**

**Article by Raluca Besliu**

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Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has brought to the forefront the potential rise of a new world order based on multipolarity. The calls to impose sanctions on Russia and support Ukrainian war efforts from European countries and the United States have mostly been left unanswered not just by other major international players, such as China and India, but also by developing countries across Latin America and the Middle East.

If a decade ago, Western countries could have persuaded their counterparts to comply through trade and diplomatic strings, such an approach is no longer effective. Developing countries worldwide have started forming alliances to bypass Western powers, fostering alternative trading partnerships and thus boosting their growth.

One such alliance is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Coming into force in 2022, RCEP is a free trade agreement among 15 Asia-Pacific countries, including China, Japan and Australia. With a combined population and GDP accounting for approximately 30 per cent of the world's total, RCEP could represent the largest trade bloc in history. It aims to eliminate over 90 per cent of tariffs on traded goods and promote supply chain integration, potentially reshaping global production and trade flows.

Similar partnerships are likely to be forged across the world in the coming years, with unexpected countries rising as actors as well. What potential alliances are on the horizon? What implications do they hold for the EU? Could they bring back bloc-like politics, or herald a new global patchwork, where countries participate in multiple alliances for varied purposes?

While this new multipolarity takes shape, complex crises like the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change have made the world's interconnectedness even more undeniable, as the only way to tackle them is to work together.

With more calamities taking place on a yearly basis, climate change is one of the most pressing global problems, whose impacts inescapably transcend borders. The smoke produced by the Australian bushfires of 2019-2020 not only crossed the Tasman Sea and diminished air quality in New Zealand, but had global consequences as well.

The aerosols produced by the fires brightened cloud decks – particularly off the coast of Peru – which then played a role in the formation of La Niña, influencing weather patterns for years. The smoke released during the wildfires possibly also exacerbated the ozone layer's depletion. The intensity of this year's Canadian wildfires suggests that they could have equally worrying global consequences.

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The EU is starting to understand that it cannot achieve a better climate without the rest of the world on board. By introducing climate diplomacy in its foreign policy strategy, the bloc is gradually recognising the interdependence between domestic and foreign policy.

However, the EU continues to prioritise implementing progressive policies domestically, often at the cost of polluting other regions. The energy transition is an example of this. Promoting electric vehicles within the EU to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, while exporting used fossil-fueled cars to West Africa and elsewhere transforms these regions into the Union's junkyards.

This approach risks turning the EU into a green fortress, associated with hypocrisy, double standards, and neocolonialism. To maintain credibility and coherence, Brussels must bridge the gap between ambitious domestic policies, such as the European Green Deal, and its foreign policy objectives. This requires the EU to consider the global impact of its actions, promote sustainability worldwide, and engage with international partners to foster a collective response to climate change.

The Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine raised the prospect of deglobalisation. Disturbances in global supply chains, including production disruptions and transportation challenges, made it harder for the Western world to secure key goods and components, including strategically valuable semiconductors. Governments and companies are increasingly looking to bring production closer to home.

The world is experiencing a new model of globalisation, more localised and shaped on the terms of many actors. Jerome Powell, the US Federal Reserve chair, stressed that while we might be heading towards a world of higher inflation and lower productivity, it will also have "more resilient, more robust supply chains," capable of better resisting global challenges like pandemics and wars. So there will be more players, along a more intricate chain.

The global slowdown led the US to push for bringing back on its territory some key supply chains, by increasing investments in core green technologies, including batteries and semiconductors. This move was designed to liberate the US from China's geopolitical leverage, especially as the trade wars between the two countries – started under the Trump administration – deepened under Biden.

Shifting alliances, rearranging trade flows, and a changing climate: these are the dynamics shaping our world and Europe's potential role in it. As the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world, the US and China, increasingly face off against one another, how can the EU contribute to bridging gaps and ensure their collaboration on climate, even while competing in other fields? What role will other nations play, from Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America? How will events intrude?

More on these crucial questions in our new monthly column "No World Order".

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