

»» Brazil - European Union: a distant bond

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Brazil is currently one of the European Union's most important global partners. Relations between the European Union and Brazil have always been defined by ups and downs resulting from the different focuses that the South American giant gave to its strategic partnerships. However, this relationship deserves an asterisk because relations between both parties can be defined never having been so close, yet at the same time so far.

Official relations between the European Union and the South American nation were established in 1960. Since then, Brazil has slowly gained importance in the EU's foreign and commercial policies, and in 2007 it became one of its strategic partners.

Since the start of this relationship, Brazil has gone from being a country focused on defending its sovereignty, to become a regional leader, and finally to emerge as a new geopolitical player on the global arena. In this new form, Brazil has focused on South-South relations and it has primarily attempted to establish strategic partnerships with countries that share its aspirations of playing an important role in a multi-polar world.



A RELATIONSHIP OF CONVENIENCE

Brazil and the European Union have excellent commercial relations, which are the basis and the driving force of this transatlantic bond. The European Union is Brazil's leading commercial partner and Brazil is one of the Union's top ten commercial partners. Aside from being the largest economy in South America, Brazil represents 34.4% of European commerce with the region and 2.1% of all the European commerce throughout the world.

The European Union is, by far, the nation's top investor since 50% of the foreign direct investment in Brazil originates from its European partners. It is worth highlighting that, on an independent level, Spain is one of the largest investors in Brazil, only second to the United States.

EU-Brazil commercial relations are clearly marked by a North-South divide. However, the economic bonds that connect South America's largest economy to Europe are increasingly diverse. Brazilian exports, which are based on agricultural products or raw materials (Brazil is the leading supplier of agricultural products imported by the European Union), are evolving towards a higher percentage of manufactured goods, such as machinery or transportation materials.

This relationship of convenience is mutually beneficial, so Brazil and the European Union must focus on once again finding the formula that at one point established a stronger understanding between the two. Instead, it seems that with the passing of time, this old couple has opted for finding different dancing partners.

SOUTH-SOUTH FOCUS

Throughout the second half of the 20th century and during the first years of the 21st, Brazil's global situation experienced an important change. It shifted from being a country that looked inward and whose main foreign concern was to defend its sovereignty, to become an economic and regional leader, to then emerge as a global player.

In its new position as an emerging power in a multi-polar world, Brazil, with a pragmatic approach, has proven to be an intelligent player in the geopolitical board. This adaptability has allowed it to establish new partnerships that have marked the new focus of Brazil's international strategy. Alongside countries such as South Africa, India, China or Russia, Brazil has positioned itself as a major power, and it has even been able to modify the voting shares in one of the most significant international organisations the IMF.

This new reality is reflected in the aspirations of several of these countries in attaining a permanent position in the United Nations Security Council. Brazil, South Africa and India are determined to reform this organisation, which they see as an anachronism of

the Western colonial past, or in the best of cases as a relic of last century's Cold War.

Above all else, China's role in this new situation deserves to be given a closer look. Chinese commerce with the South American giant has grown significantly in the last decade, making China the top commercial partner of Brazil in terms of individual nations. This relationship must be nuanced because although statistics are important, the China-Brazil relationship follows a North-South model in which the Asian country receives raw materials and the South American nation obtains manufactured goods.

THE FUTURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

To a certain degree, Brazil's focus towards strategic partnerships based on the South-South model jeopardises its European Union relations. Although the economic exchanges between the two have never been better, their political relationship seems to have lost its warmth.

For now, Brazil's position with respect to the Union is somewhat ambiguous. The inevitably conflicting interests between new and old powers seem to destine them to a clash that could result in a radical change in international system.

In a multi-polar world in which multiple economic powers compete to defend their own interests, Brazil seems to have chosen new dance partners whilst forgetting the mutual benefits that a closer relationship with the European Union would entail.

There is no need for the rivalry between new emerging powers and established powers to continue cooling relations between the two old partners. Europe has to give priority to the relationship that began in 2007 when the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership was signed, making Brazil its main partner in the region. A closer bond based on a common history, culture and language, but particularly on shared values, could allow Brazil and Europe to once again find a way to dance to the same tune.



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