
EU-UN Cooperation

A CONVERSATION WITH JOÃO VALE DE ALMEIDA

FLETCHER FORUM: *How do you represent the interests of the European Union at the United Nations, given that the various states of the European Union with membership status at the United Nations have such diverse views?*

JOÃO VALE DE ALMEIDA: Our motto in the European Union is “united in diversity.” All twenty-eight member states, constituting half a billion people in total, understand that it is in their best interest to be united.

But at the same time, we all respect each other’s diversity. These are states that have their own history, culture, and identity. They are all different, yet they should all be respected. This is the cement with which we have built the European Union of today. That is what we need to have in mind when we try to agree on common positions. It is in the ultimate interest of all these coun-

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tries to be united, because their influence, their strength and their power will be increased by that unity. If they are divided, they will have less influence on events that will affect them. This is what makes the process of representation easier than it could otherwise be perceived.

João Vale de Almeida is a senior European Union diplomat and the current EU Ambassador to the United Nations from October 16, 2015. Ambassador Vale de Almeida previously served as the first EU Ambassador to the United States from 2010 to 2014; in this role, he actively engaged in strengthening EU-U.S. relations and was critical to the launching of negotiations of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP). He has also served as the Director General of External Relations of the European Commission and Head of Cabinet for European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, as well as in several other senior positions in the European Commission.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Could you describe that process of uniting states into a common position in the international forum of the UN?*

VALE DE ALMEIDA: It involves a lot of coordination and discussion, which is done on a daily basis in New York. I chair meetings with all 28 ambassadors to reach agreement on common positions. My colleagues have hundreds of meetings every year—more than 1,000 meetings on coordination—on all the different aspects and areas that the UN deals with, in order to agree on common positions. It's hard work, but at the end of the day, we basically vote in the same way, which is a source of strength and influence.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Now that the European Union and the United Nations are both themselves international forums, how might they complement and compete with each other in addressing policy issues?*

VALE DE ALMEIDA: We don't compete with each other; we cooperate wherever we can. We see this as mutually beneficial. There's a lot to be done around the world that we cannot do entirely alone. Take Africa, for instance, which is the continent in which the European Union and UN cooperate the most. Many crisis areas and humanitarian challenges have arisen in Africa in the past decades: conflict prevention, natural disasters, genocide. Some of these continue to happen, and will happen again in the future. But Africa also represents enormous opportunities for future development and prosperity, and there as well the European Union and the UN have wide scope for cooperation.

So, we cooperate extremely well with the UN, on the ground, in the field, and in very difficult situations, and we see how important, relevant, and positive it is that the two organizations work together. We—the European Union and its Member States—are one of the biggest, if not in some areas the biggest, source of funding for the United Nations, and that gives us a particular responsibility. As the Representative of the European Union at the UN in New York, I'm very proud to claim that position.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Your work was essential to the launching of trade negotiations with the United States on T-TIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), but we now have a lot of domestic opposition to the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) in the United States, a very similar trade agreement with the Asia-Pacific region. What implications does this ongoing opposition to the TPP have for the negotiation and implementation of T-TIP?*

JOÃO VALE DE ALMEIDA: I was happy to see TPP negotiations concluded. I know that they still need ratification by Congress and I follow the debate in the United States, although I no longer have bilateral responsibilities. I see T-TIP as a very important tool. T-TIP is more than a free trade area; it is a partnership that covers trade, investment and regulatory aspects.

Our two economies—the United States and Europe—are so far the two most important economies in the world, although they may not remain so in the long run. T-TIP is a way to maximize our present relevance and continue to shape the future of globalization in a way that is compatible with our values. Rule of law, protection of intellectual property, environmental and labor standards, and consumer rights protection are all at the heart of T-TIP. A debate is happening both in Europe and in the United States, and until T-TIP is concluded and ratified, it will continue. That's only normal—that's democracy. I believe that T-TIP is a necessary tool if we want Americans and Europeans to have a stronger influence in the way the global economy is organized, and in doing so, also benefit business, workers, and consumers in other regions of the world.

FLETCHER FORUM: *How do you incorporate those values you've mentioned into T-TIP, and how does the values perspective inform your approach to trade negotiations?*

JOÃO VALE DE ALMEIDA: I think that trade policy should not be immune to the values dimension. On the contrary. Some actors around the world would like the rule of law to be put
aside or at least given less weight than it should have, but we have a different approach.

We believe that intellectual property rights are very important: for example, when an inventor or a creator or a researcher invests in a particular final product, they should be rewarded for that, and there should be mechanisms to protect them. Similarly, if you take environmental and labor standards, we believe that economic

exchanges, investment, and trade should promote economic development, but not at any price. The UN has just agreed on sustainable development goals for 2030, so trade policy has to incorporate sustainable practices.

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T-TIP certainly does, and so does TPP, and I think these are powerful instruments to promote a values-based trade policy.

FLETCHER FORUM: *In conclusion, to circle back to issues within the European Union, could you comment on the UK's efforts to renegotiate its position in the European Union and the discussion around potential British exit (Brexit)? What implications has that had for the future unity of the European Union?*

VALE DE ALMEIDA: The UK has decided to engage in a discussion with the rest of its European partners about some of the conditions of their participation in the European Union. The result of these discussions will be the basis for a consultation with the British people. This is a normal democratic process, which we, of course, respect. We believe, and we hope, that the UK will remain in the European Union—and we believe this is good for the UK. We certainly also believe it's good for the European Union, and we hope that this will all come to a conclusion that is just as positive and favorable to the British people as it is for the European Union as a whole, and, if I may say, also for the global community. *f*