

## META UNITED NATIONS Summer School

**Title:** THE RESILIENCE OF MULTILATERALISM IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

**When:** 2-5 September 2026

**Where:** In person at the University of Warsaw

**Organised by:** The Steering group of the META United Nations project (<https://4euplus.eu/4EU-1016.html>). Organizing Team:

1. Professor Morten Rasmussen, University of Copenhagen;
2. Professor Giovanna Adinolfi, University of Milan
3. Professor Anton Stefan Zimmermann, University of Heidelberg
4. Professor Dorota Heidrich, University of Warsaw

**Context and objectives:** Multilateralism as it has developed during the Twentieth Century, and particularly since 1945, is under serious threat. The emergence of great power competition in international politics, combined with the abdication of the United States to be the anchor of the current international order, not only threaten the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation, but also the very existence of core international organizations such as the United Nations. This crisis of multilateralism comes in a situation where international cooperation and coordination seem more urgent than ever before for humanity to be able to confront major challenges with security, economic inequality and migration as well as potentially existential questions related to artificial intelligence and the climate crisis. However, crises are sometimes moments of opportunity where for example the lack of representation of the Global South in multilateralism can be addressed, or where new approaches to international cooperation can be developed.

The Summer School will offer PhD students an interdisciplinary crash course in the history and contemporary developments of multilateralism. It will include four sessions, which delve into: 1) a historically grounded understanding of the nature of the current crisis of multilateralism in comparison to earlier crises; 2) an in depth analysis of how multilateralism works today focusing on the United Nations and the role played by states; 3) an analysis of societal dimension of multilateralism by exploring the role of non-state actors ranging from transnational cooperations to NGOs, 4) a presentation of a interdisciplinary approaches to studying multilateralism combining history, social science and legal expertise. The PhD-students attending will be introduced to a unique and creative research environment where the instructors together with the course participants will work hand in hand to understand the current crisis of multilateralism and try to develop solutions to contemporary challenges.

## Programme:

### ***2 September 2026 : Welcome, Introduction and Keynote***

12:00-13:00 Registration/Coffee and networking

13:00-13:30 Welcome and introduction by the organizers

13:30-14:30 Lunch

14:30 - 16:00 Keynote lecture followed by Q&A: professor B.S. Chimni

18:00 - Welcome dinner

### ***3 September 2026: The History of Multilateralism in the Twentieth Century***

The sessions offer a historical overview of the development of multilateralism since 1919. Multilateralism was launched in the wake of the First World War as an attempt to ‘make the world safe for democracy’ as President Woodrow Wilson phrased it. However, the League of Nations did not manage to secure peace after the world depression of the 1930s and the rise of authoritarian regimes both in Europe and Asia. Nevertheless, the many experiments in multilateralism by the League of Nations that covered a broad range of important technical fields would inspire the United Nations that was formed in 1945. The United Nations was endowed with a similar aim as the League and has functioned over the last eighty years. After 1945 the UN was part of a strong movement towards multilateralism with a remarkable increase in the number of international organizations. The UN has also undergone several phases shaped by the Cold War, decolonization, unipolarity after 1989 and finally the contemporary return to multipolarity and the increase of great power competition since 2014.

#### FIRST SESSION 9:30-13:00

Lecture 1: The Breakthrough of Multilateralism: The History of the League of Nations, 1919 to 1945 (Olga Hidalgo-Weber, University of Geneva)

The League of Nations, established in 1919, was in many ways the starting point for the development of multilateralism both in institutional and legal terms. It was here that the first experiments in multilateralism were launched and many practices developed that would shape international organizations after 1945.

#### COFFEE BREAK 11:00-11:15

Lecture 2: The Heyday of Multilateralism: The United Nations, 1945 to 2026, (Alanna O’Malley, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

... history is rich and varied and offers numerous insights not only of multilateralism in action but also of the many serious crises that have threatened its function

### LUNCH 13:00-14:00

### SECOND SESSION 14:00-16:00

Presentation (part 1) of the projects of the doctoral students. Each PhD student will present her/his project and receive comments from the scholars organizing the Summer School.

### COFFEE BREAK 16:00-16:30

### THIRD SESSION 16:30-18:00

Topic: Interdisciplinarity and multilateralism (Morten Rasmussen, University of Copenhagen)

This session will discuss different methodologies that can be used to analyze multilateralism from historical, legal and social science methodologies. Multilateralism is best explored based on interdisciplinary approaches. This section will introduce three different disciplinary approaches to multilateralism and discuss how these can be combined.

## ***4 September 2026: Multilateral Institutions***

Since 1945, States have persistently adopted practices that have jeopardised the United Nations' capacity to exercise the functions entrusted to it by its founding fathers. However, in recent years, States' disengagement has reached such a scale that it is effectively preventing the implementation by the UN of an effective role in the serious internal and international crises that characterise the contemporary era.

The objective of the sessions is to facilitate the acquisition by participants of a legal framework, with a view to situating the disengagement of states and its institutional effects from an international law perspective, in particular in the context of the Gaza crisis. The Board of Peace proposed by the United States will also be analysed from a critical perspective, in order to assess its limits and whether it represents an alternative to the current multilateral system.

### FIRST SESSION 9:30-13:00

Lecture 1: *The diverse manifestations of States' disengagement from the United Nations* (Giovanna Adinolfi, University of Milan; Dorota Heidrich, University of Warsaw)

The phenomenon of States' disengagement from international organizations can be understood along a broad spectrum of practices, including non-payments of contributions, blocking decision-making (veto), failure to implement decisions, violations of agreed rules, disengagement from dispute settlement, withdrawal. The topic is explored focusing mainly on

...ount when relevant to illustrate the current varied manifestations of disengagement.

COFFEE BREAK 11:00-11:15

Lecture 2: *The impact of disengagement in the situation of Gaza - ICJ verdicts, IL breaches*  
(Marco Pedrazzi, University of Milan)

The focus of this lecture: firstly, to direct attention to the role of UN organs, namely the General Assembly, the Security Council, the International Court of Justice and UNRWA; and secondly, to explore how the effectiveness of these organs has been diminished by the attitudes of UN members. The lecture will also address issues related to breaches of human rights law and international humanitarian law in the situation of Gaza.

LUNCH 13:00-14:00

SECOND SESSION 14:00-16:00

Presentation (part 2) of the projects of the doctoral students. Each PhD student will present her/his project and receive comments from the scholars organizing the Summer School.

COFFEE BREAK 16:00-16:30

THIRD SESSION 16:30-18:00

Topic: *Is the US-led Board of Peace a viable alternative to the United Nations?*

The topic is examined through an Oxford-style debate involving the participants. The overall aim is to give them the chance to evaluate and discuss whether the US proposal for establishing the Board of Peace would help address the challenges faced by the United Nations. The analysis will be based on a comprehensive review of the Board's constitutive instrument and the disciplines outlined therein on financing, decision-making, dispute resolution, and the consequences of breaches of agreed rules.

Participants will be divided into two groups. Group 1 has to find arguments for why the Board of Peace is a good institution that can contribute to solving major crises without risking disengagement among its members. Group 2 has to find arguments for why the Board is not a good institution and cannot contribute to solving major crises, also due to the risk of disengagement among its members.

After a discussion within each group, participants will exchange and defend their arguments, also anticipating counterarguments and developing corresponding replies.

Materials for the debate will be provided before the Summer School begins, enabling students to prepare themselves with either argument.

## 5 September 2020: THE ROLE OF NGOs and **Private Actors**

The crisis of multilateralism is also a crisis of who produces, mediates, and contests normativity beyond the state. In this part of the Summer School, we examine the role of private actors in this process, with particular attention to transnational corporations, civil society, and NGOs. Their significance lies not only in their growing practical influence, but also in the way they

unsettle established distinctions between public and private power, governance and contestation, cooperation and unilateralism. This section invites interdisciplinary reflection on how private actors transform the political and legal conditions of legitimacy, responsibility, and resilience in international order.

### FIRST SESSION 9:30-13:00

Lecture 1: *Transnational Corporations and the Transformation of Global Governance* (Anton Zimmermann, University of Heidelberg)

Transnational corporations are central to this development. As organizers of cross-border production and investment, they shape how multilateral norms are implemented, bypassed, or transformed. From a political science perspective, they can be understood as actors within shifting global governance constellations, sometimes reinforcing intergovernmental fragmentation, sometimes filling regulatory gaps, and sometimes generating new forms of authority that compete with or exceed those of states and international organizations. From a historical perspective, their present prominence also invites questions about longer trajectories: how has the relationship between private economic power and international order developed over time, and to what extent does the current moment mark rupture, continuity, or return?

### COFFEE BREAK 11:00-11:15

Lecture 2: *Civil Society and NGOs – Stabilizers or Challengers of the Multilateral Order?* (Dorota Heidrich, University of Warsaw)

Civil society actors and NGOs occupy an equally ambivalent position in the crisis of multilateralism. They may stabilize the multilateral order by monitoring implementation, producing expertise, mobilizing transnational networks, and linking local struggles to global frameworks – for example in climate or migration contexts. Yet they may also expose the limits of existing institutions, relocate political conflict into new arenas, or become entangled in the very governance structures they seek to challenge. This lecture examines the conditions under which private actors contribute to resilience or fragmentation in the multilateral system, drawing on comparative case studies from across issue areas.

### LUNCH 13:00-14:00

### SECOND SESSION 14:00-16:00

Presentation of the projects of the doctoral students. Each PhD student will present her/his project and receive comments from the scholars organizing the Summer School.

### THIRD SESSION 16:30-18:00

Topic: *Who Governs? Private Authority, Public Legitimacy, and the Future of Multilateralism*

The afternoon session invites participants to engage directly with the central tensions explored in the morning lectures through a structured group exercise. Participants will examine a set of real-world cases in which private actors – transnational corporations, NGOs, or hybrid public-private bodies – have assumed governance functions traditionally associated with states or

international organizations.

Participants will be divided into two groups. Group 1 will argue that the increasing role of private actors represents an opportunity for more effective, flexible, and inclusive forms of multilateral governance, capable of addressing gaps left by intergovernmental institutions. Group 2 will argue that the growing influence of private actors undermines the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the international order, exacerbating inequalities and eroding the authority of public institutions.

After deliberating within each group, participants will present and defend their positions in a plenary exchange, addressing counterarguments and exploring what a more resilient multilateral framework – one that adequately integrates and regulates private actors – might look like.

Materials for the session, including selected case studies and readings on corporate governance, NGO accountability, and international regulatory frameworks, will be circulated before the Summer School begins.

### FAREWELL DINNER 19:00