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**Flavio Celio Goldman & Gabriel Fernandes Pimenta**

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**Abstract:** Cooperation between Brazil and the European Union has expanded across various areas despite structural constraints and divergent approaches. This article examines the interplay between institutional trajectories, Europe's evolving strategic posture and the intensification of political and sectoral cooperation with Brazil. Shared values and converging interests sustain a predominantly optimistic outlook, notably as the Mercosur-EU Agreement offers instruments to advance a more resilient and comprehensive bilateral agenda.

**Keywords:** Brazil-European Union relations; Mercosur-EU Agreement; trade; multilateralism; geopolitics.

## **Brasil e União Europeia: Situação Atual das Relações e Perspectivas**

**Resumo:** A cooperação entre o Brasil e a União Europeia expandiu-se para diversos eixos apesar de restrições estruturais e abordagens divergentes. Este artigo examina a interação entre as trajetórias institucionais, a postura estratégica em evolução da Europa e a intensificação da cooperação política e setorial com o Brasil. Valores compartilhados e interesses convergentes sustentam uma perspectiva predominantemente otimista, principalmente porque o Acordo Mercosul-UE oferece instrumentos para promover uma agenda bilateral mais resiliente e abrangente.

**Palavras-chave:** relações Brasil-União Europeia; Acordo Mercosul-UE; comércio; multilateralismo; geopolítica.

The ties between Brazil and Europe rank among the most traditional in the country's foreign policy, as evidenced by the celebrations of bicentennial diplomatic relations with European countries between 2025 and 2026<sup>1</sup>. Alongside this historical trajectory, contemporary elements of rapprochement have emerged, such as dense diplomatic engagement<sup>2</sup>, significant economic exchange—the European Union is Brazil's second-largest trading partner<sup>3</sup>—and a positive perception of European countries among the Brazilian public (AtlasIntel 2024). Bilateral issues, such as exchanges of visits by heads of government and State, and regional matters, such as negotiations between Mercosur and the European Union, occupy media space and are the subject of public debate.

While important for underscoring the significance of the link between the two sides of the Atlantic, these elements constitute only the starting point for a more sophisticated approach to relations between Brazil and the European Union, which is the focus of this paper. To achieve this objective, we will establish the conceptual foundations for the analysis, with particular attention to the political framework and social trajectories of the parties involved. We will then present the contemporary strategic context of Europe, taking into account elements of interaction between the region, the institutions of regional integration, and other relevant global actors. Finally, we will address the current status of relations between Brazil and the European Union, considering both bilateral and regional-scale elements in order to develop perspectives on the subject<sup>4</sup>.

## CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The characterization of a region as an object of analysis combines geographic, institutional, and intersubjective elements (Fawn 2009). In this sense, the European space can be characterized along three dimensions: the countries of the region,

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1. During this period, Portugal, the United Kingdom, the Holy See, Sweden, Austria, and the Netherlands celebrated 200 years of diplomatic relations with Brazil.

2. Brazil maintains resident embassies in 36 European capitals, while Brasília hosts 37 diplomatic missions from the region.

3. According to data from the Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services (MDIC), trade flows between Brazil and Europe reached US\$ 132.9 billion in 2025, accounting for 18% of Brazil's total exports and 25% of its total imports.

4. This text was written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect official positions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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with which relations are maintained on a bilateral basis; the set of countries framed by shared characteristics, such as spatial contiguity, high average income, and, to a large extent, adherence to liberal values; and the institutions that bind the European continent together, such as the European Union and NATO. Europe thus constitutes a relevant center of the international system, both because of the capabilities of the countries in the region—acting on a bilateral basis or in a coordinated manner—and because of the normative and strategic reach of its institutions (Bargués et al. 2023; Wunderlich 2025). The analytical focus on the European Union fits within the third dimension and supports the approach by providing elements such as State membership and the existence of formal regional integration arrangements, which simplify the discussion of what constitutes the region.

The analysis of the relationship between Brazil and the European Union—which might appear inconsistent insofar as it involves a State and a regional integration arrangement—is grounded not only in formal aspects but also in features of the historical development of the parties. The formation of the Brazilian State occurred in a context of the predominance of the European nation-State model, with centralized formal institutions as the dominant political form (Acharya & Buzan 2019). In this respect, Brazil’s institutional framework and the local perspective on international institutions, such as international law and diplomacy, favored relations with European States, given the convergence of values and practices since the outset of Brazil’s independent trajectory (Lopes 2025). Beyond this initial socialization within the system of States, the centrality of European States as global powers established the relationship on economic and strategic foundations. Accordingly, “Europeanism” can be identified as the preferred orientation of Brazilian foreign policy until the 1910s (Santos 2004;

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Ricupero 2017). Even after the mid-twentieth century, with the consolidation of American and Asian powers as central actors in the international system, already established ties—understood through the lens of path dependence—help explain the persistence of Europe as a mandatory arena of Brazilian foreign policy (Pierson 2004; Fonseca Júnior 2011). In formal terms, the analysis is sustained by the fact that the European Union is not only a formal regional integration arrangement but also a subject of international law, capable of maintaining diplomatic relations (Forteau et al. 2022; Mangiameli 2012).

## THE EUROPEAN STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Over the past thirty years, the European strategic landscape has consolidated around the European Union as the continent's principal political reference. This institutional center of gravity has functioned simultaneously as a forum for solving internal crises—such as the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration crisis—and as a pole of attraction for countries in the immediate neighborhood, encompassing a belt stretching from the Western Balkans to the Caucasus.

More recently, the European strategic environment has been affected by a set of interrelated external factors. Notable among these are China's rise across multiple domains, in direct competition with the United States; the outbreak of the war in Ukraine; the strengthening of populist and extremist trends within internal political systems; risks of instability in global supply chains, as it happened during the coronavirus pandemic; and the erosion of confidence in the security umbrella provided by the United States. In response, the European Union has been reassessing its approach to strategic positioning in light of an unstable global and regional environment, as reflected in the program for the first half of 2026 prepared by the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Council of the European Union 2026).

This strategic reassessment has prompted the pursuit of initiatives aimed at raising the region's degree of autonomy. Among these, particular emphasis has been placed on addressing energy dependence on Russia, dependence on supply chains linked to China, and security dependence on the United States despite the continued role of NATO, through programs such as RESourceEU, REPowerEU, and Horizon Europe (European Commission 2022; 2025a; 2025b).

In the field of security, the conflict in Ukraine led historically neutral countries, such as Sweden and Finland, to opt for NATO membership, reshaping the continent's security landscape. The protracted duration of the conflict has prompted adjustments in the positions of European countries, which, without abandoning

support for Ukraine, have shown growing interest in proposals for a political solution of the matter, such as those put forward by the “Friends of Peace” Group, co-chaired by Brazil and China, or in serving as co-guarantors of the potential outcome of negotiations among the United States, Russia, and Ukraine.

In parallel to China’s expanding engagement beyond its immediate neighborhood, associated with the Belt and Road Initiative, the European Union has shown interest in broadening its extraregional presence, with focus on energy, environmental issues, critical minerals, and digitalization. The European response to Beijing’s initiative has materialized in the Global Gateway program, which foresees the mobilization of up to €300 billion by 2027 for sustainable projects, with the aim of positioning the EU as a reliable partner for the Global South (European Commission 2023).

Meanwhile, a perception has taken hold among European actors that the intensification of strategic competition between the United States and China poses a growing risk to the region’s political, security and economic interests. The view that a multipolar world would better serve these interests is widely shared and is reflected, for example, in the support expressed by France and the United Kingdom for reform of the UN Security Council and for Brazil’s admission as a permanent member (République Française 2024; Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2014). The debate on the need for European strategic autonomy emerged during the first Trump administration in 2017 and has gained significant momentum since then. In this context, the European Union adopted the Strategic Compass in March 2022, the first document to articulate a common vision among the Member States on defense, setting out objectives for the medium term (European Union 2022).

On the domestic political front, the most evident risks to the stability of the European Union seem to stem from the rise of extremist, populist and sovereigntist parties, often associated with growing opposition to migration and to the very foundations of European integration. Rising identity- and migration-related tensions tend to fuel these forces, posing risks to democratic stability and to mechanisms of interstate cooperation. In this regard, international cooperation in fields such as defense of democracy and information integrity has been identified as a priority for a number of European countries.

## **INITIATIVES AND PROSPECTS**

Brazil shares with the European Union convergent perspectives regarding the need to defend democratic institutions, the centrality of sustainable development and the role of international law as the foundation of a stable international system capable of promoting security and prosperity for its members. This shared set of values has served as the cornerstone for deepening interregional relations. Added to

this normative convergence, at the level of opportunities generated by the current strategic environment, lies the common search by Brazil and the European Union for new partnerships and for strengthening capabilities in areas such as trade, energy, sustainable development, digitalization, science, technology and innovation.

Europe's renewed interest in Latin America—and in Brazil in particular, seen as an essential partner in addressing global challenges—as well as Brazil's reconnection with its traditional partners after 2023 are reflected in the intensification of political dialogue. At the regional level, two CELAC–EU summits have been held within a two-year period<sup>5</sup>, after an eight year hiatus. At the bilateral level, the framework of the Brazil-European Union Strategic Partnership structures political dialogue and sectoral cooperation (Council of the European Union 2007). The visit of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to Brasília in June 2023 resumed frequent high-level contact between Brazilian and EU leaders, which continued at events such as the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro and COP 30 in Belém do Pará. Brazil and the EU keep regular institutional dialogues in key areas of cooperation such as human rights, science and technology, digital economy and energy.

Brazilian diplomatic discourse has been adamant about the interest in strengthening cooperation with the EU. President Lula has stated this clearly in different occasions, notably during his inauguration speech in January 2023 and during his speech at the opening of the 80<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly, in September 2025, in which he formulated his view on a multipolar order founded in multilateralism (Lula da Silva 2023).

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The association agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, signed in January 2026, represents the culmination of convergences between Brazil and Europe. Beyond the agreement's trade significance, President Lula highlighted its political and strategic outreach by framing it as a response of multilateralism against isolationist trends (Lula da Silva 2026). Taken as a whole, the 32 countries of the Mercosur-European Union Agreement encompass approximately 720 million citizens, with a combined GDP of more than US\$ 22 trillion. The agreement will

5. In July 2023, in Brussels, and in November 2025, in Santa Marta.

broaden access to strategic markets to Brazilian companies and provide common rules, allowing for the expansion of value chains across the Atlantic.

Notwithstanding advances in rapprochement, some challenges persist in the relationship between Brazil and the European Union, made evident during the approval process of the agreement between the integration blocs. Among them are reluctance by certain sectors to deepen economic ties and different technical standards that might retard the fulfillment of commercial commitments. An example is provided by mechanisms perceived by the Brazilian side as protectionist, such as the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The EUDR imposes verification requirements on products exported to the EU to ensure deforestation-free supply chains, while the CBAM consists of a tariff on certain products based on the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their manufacturing. Both instruments are based on assumptions, criteria, and processes unilaterally defined by the EU and subject to criticism. They are viewed by the Brazilian government and business stakeholders as examples of unilateral regulation that restrict regulatory autonomy and create trade barriers for Brazilian products, while disregarding local standards of environmental governance.

*The relationship between Brazil and the European Union rests on solid foundations, giving rise to cautious optimism regarding its evolution. Historically dense ties, normative convergence around democracy, sustainable development, and multilateralism, as well as the growing institutionalization of political and economic dialogue, provide favorable conditions for long-term interaction. The association agreement between Mercosur and the European Union represents a relevant milestone in this process.*

Geopolitical sensitivities also highlight different perspectives between both sides. The reactions of the Brazilian government and most EU countries to the events in Venezuela on January 3, 2026 show how Brazil and the European Union framed their responses accordingly to their respective strategic contexts, while still revealing a shared commitment to multilateral principles.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The relationship between Brazil and the European Union rests on solid foundations, giving rise to cautious optimism regarding its evolution. Historically dense ties, normative convergence around democracy, sustainable development, and multilateralism, as well as the growing institutionalization of political and economic dialogue, provide favorable conditions for long-term interaction. The association agreement between Mercosur and the European Union represents a relevant milestone in this process. In a context marked by geopolitical instability and economic fragmentation, the partnership between actors that share—albeit not uniformly—common references across several fields of international governance constitutes a valuable foreign policy asset.

The maintenance of this relationship will depend on the ability to manage the challenges that arise from closer ties. They indicate that the partnership is not free from friction, requiring continuous political engagement and structured dialogue in order to accommodate the priorities of both parties. Differences, however, do not negate the potential of the relationship. On the contrary, if addressed with the necessary diplomatic investment, they may foster more mature forms of cooperation between Brazil and the European Union in an increasingly complex international environment. ■

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