

## **How should the transatlantic community respond to Brazil's rising economic and political presence on the international stage?**

**More specifically: How can Brazil and the transatlantic community work together to address global concerns?**

**Response to the Atlantic Community's "Call for articles: Engaging Brazil", February 22, 2013**

The transatlantic community is often referred to as "the West", in contrast to the still existing remnants of the "East" (e.g. Russia and Belarus) and the equally quasi-vanishing "South". This specific "Western" heritage is still alive, not only in countries of the South such as Brazil, but also in the mindset of West Europeans and North Americans. That is why reflections on the relationship between Brazil and the transatlantic community in general, and NATO in particular, have to start with some history.

Viewed from the Brazilian side, Western not quite vanished empires are still around: France has one of its longest borders with Brazil's Northern state of Amapa, Great Britain's humiliating victory in the Falkland/Malvinas war has recently been recalled, George W. Bush re-installed the 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet of the US Navy to defend the South Atlantic and the Caribbean Sea against whatever enemies, and white supremacy prejudice has subcutaneously somewhat survived the civil rights movement in the USA, South Africa's efforts to overcome apartheid and the Carnation Revolution of 1974 in Portugal, even though it hopefully died with Adolf Hitler in Germany and in the German descendants' circles in Brazil. Finally, "Internationalization of the Amazon" has been a slogan, and a fear, for centuries, which makes international efforts to preserve the Brazilian rain forests so difficult. But Brazil is overcoming its "dependency" past having embarked on a course to "des-nortear", metaphorically meaning that "the North" is no longer attracting the compass needle for its behavior. That was resolutely propagated and vividly performed by one of the Brazilian speakers at last year's UN Rio+20 Conference, when he triumphantly turned the map of the globe upside down showing the South Pole on top.

On the other side, not only "God's own country", but also Western Europe tends to usurp all that is good and beautiful for themselves, namely peace, human rights, democracy, freedom, pursuit of happiness, good governance, social security, prosperity ... you name it. Sunday speeches are full of those flattering utterances, because the public in general and also the political class adore to belong to the "better half" of the world while ignoring that with this type of discourse, the "rest of the world" is implicitly stigmatized as barbarian, pagan, authoritarian, wild, savage, terrorist, dangerous, backward, underdeveloped ... you name it. Coloni-

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al/imperialist stereotypes such as the “white man’s burden” or the “mission civilisatrice” thus tend to survive in a rather “longue durée” on both sides of the North/West-South divide.

But the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its globalization processes present new challenges and open new avenues. There are basically two strategies when it comes to “working together” with Brazil and to “responding to its rising presence”, namely the OECD and the UN option:

OECD has opened its door for Mexico, South Korea and Chile, and there is a certain cue of countries trying to enter the “rich <and the decent> men’s club”.

On the other side, the UN and its subdivisions try to establish “universal club” principles, norms and procedures, which all of its members are to respect and to act accordingly.

Brazil is in a unique position: In spite of its undeniable deficits with regard to inequality, corruption, and internal security and violence problems, its soft power and its recent internal economic and social developments, as well as its sheer weight, and also its outstanding diplomatic history, make that country presently the world’s leading candidate for a firm UN strategy. The Human Rights Declaration of 1948 and all the following UN initiatives which have tried to establish a truly universal regime of norms have suffered from the handicap that they could rather convincingly be denounced as expressions of “Western values” which would neither fit the East nor the South. Since Brazil has nowadays adopted those UN norms, and its government as well as its intellectuals and its people stand rather firmly behind them, it would be a pity when the transatlantic community would opt for the OECD strategy trying to adopt Brazil as a member of the Western club with its imperial reminiscences instead of grasping the opportunity to recognize and appreciate Brazil as an equal partner on the global level playing field of the UN with its universally valid norms.

“Deus é brasileiro” is an old Brazilian saying. It turns out to be quite telling, when you translate “Deus” not with a strictly religious “God”, but with Sigmund Freud’s “super-ego”. The universal, cosmopolitan “commandments” emanating from the UN are presently being taken very seriously in Brazil, - more so than in any other country, or at least in most of the other countries of the world, and the transatlantic community should grasp that opportunity to join efforts with that country, and some others, in order to promote and propagate the basic principles of the United Nations as a universal code of conduct, and not only as a Western narrative.