The Political Language of Multilateralism in the United Nations

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First published 2026

ISBN: 978-1-032-76284-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-87402-9 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-53251-4 (ebk)

2 Concepts and Language in Studying Multilateralism

DOI: 10.4324/9781003532514-2

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Kone Foundation for funding the research project on United Nations Legitimacy and Transnational Challenges, 1990–2019 (Grant No. 201904988).

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

2 Concepts and Language in Studying Multilateralism

2.1 Multilateralism as a Discursive Action

In this book, we define the politics of multilateralism as a discursive action in which language and concepts are used by politicians and representatives that shape the institutional reality of the UN. Our aim is to approach the UN as a political entity consisting of several forums where the use of language for political purposes takes place. We understand politics as a discourse-oriented activity in which the use of language and particular concepts shape policies, processes, and outcomes of political decision-making. From this perspective, the UN and its different organs provide institutions and forums where politics take place, regulated by the rules and practices of the organization. International cooperation and diplomacy, based on deliberation and negotiation, would be impossible without language. As James Farr (1989, 27) has pointed out, political acts are carried out both in and through language. To understand both political and social relations in the past and present, we should pay attention to the use and definitions of concepts. Concepts can be understood as constitutive of political positions; thus, the use of one concept instead of another is always inherently political. Studying concepts can take us directly to the language in which politics takes place (Jordheim and Neumann 2011, 154). The diplomatic ideal is connected to the compromise between parties that all consider beneficial. Diplomatic treaties are meant to advance common interests (Palonen 2019, 38) and thus often rely on negotiations.

It is also useful to remember that the Charter of the United Nations underlines the role of language in defining international cooperation. As Article 10 states,

> The General Assembly may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the present Charter, and, except as provided in Article 12, may make recommendations to the Members of the United Nations or the Security Council or to both on any such questions or matters.
>
> (UN n.d. Charter)

The right to discuss is pivotal for an organization such as the United Nations, especially if based on universal representation and thus on the political idea of seeking

DOI: 10.4324/9781003532514-2

common ground on issues that relate to the functions and tasks of the organization. Article 11 of the Charter follows a similar path and grants the General Assembly the right to discuss the maintenance of international peace and security (UN n.d. Charter). Within the United Nations, the General Assembly is the only body whose work is directly linked to discussion in the context of the Charter, but the Charter in general does promote the idea of negotiation to find solutions to inter-state problems and emphasizes the role of the Security Council to initiate such negotiations (Article 43, UN n.d. Charter). Besides the language of the Charter, the UN is linked to the state of modern diplomacy. The Charter reflects the officially accepted functions of the United Nations, but as is well understood, diplomacy, in general, is often a discursive activity in which representatives of states meet, communicate the positions of their states, and can resort to negotiation and other forms of interaction (Barston 1988; Leguey-Feilleux 2009).

Furthermore, diplomacy, whether it is taking place in the context of the United Nations or other venues, can lead to the creation of pacts or treaties that crystallize the discursive positions taken by the representatives of states who have participated in the negotiations behind a treaty, pact, or some other form of formal decision or even a communique. From the point of view of analysis, the role of language in diplomacy does become more nuanced if an exploration of diplomacy tries to show links between discourses and practices, as Iver B. Neumann (2009) has suggested. Multilateralism has the potential to have consequences in both fields. Following Jess Gifkins (2016, 150), we consider that language in UN institutions is not static but rather illustrates a negotiated balance that is acceptable among the member states at a given time. Through conceptual innovation or reinterpretations, including the enlargement of understanding of "international threat" or (human) "security," the mandate of the UNSC has also changed.

Further, similar to Kari Palonen's (2017) thinking, we understand concepts and debates as inherently linked. Debates provide opportunities to look at concepts and related rhetorical interpretations of conceptual change (Palonen 2017). Newman et al. (2006, 1) have also considered multilateralism as a social construction. However, their approach focused on the values and institutions of multilateralism, whereas we are interested in the use of the concept of multilateralism itself.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this volume has been inspired by two ways of thinking. First, what has been defined as "conceptual history" or "conceptual approach to study of political thought," following the ideas of Koselleck (1985), Skinner (2002), and Rosanvallon (2006). The approach, however, differs from only analyzing specifically the history of a concept, instead looking at how concepts and their changes are connected to specific events. Second, our approach is indebted to parliamentary studies, focusing on concepts, debates, and rhetoric in both domestic and international or transnational contexts. These two research traditions and how they benefit our research will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Studying rhetoric in IR is not completely unheard of (see, e.g., Krebs and Thaddeus Jackson 2007; Thaddeus Jackson 2004), but it has been mainly related to constructivism and interpreting rhetoric, especially in terms of persuasion. Evgeny Roshchin (2017b, 177) has considered conceptual changes in interstate language,

which "should be understood as products of rhetorical power struggles, in which some arguments lose the battle while others prevail, some concepts are discarded while others are modified." This idea illustrates our thinking as well: there are rhetorical power struggles in interstate language, which can be used to examine multilateralism in the UN context.

While the concept of multilateralism may not be directly used, there are other expressions, conceptualizations, or ways of thinking that could be seen as either supporting or diminishing multilateralism. One example is the overall mention to the UN's role or authority, indicating that issues should be considered multilaterally or through multilateral fora. Other often used references are commitment to international cooperation or appreciation of the international community. Other viewpoints would include rules and principles of international governance and the tension between unilateralism, bilateralism, and multilateralism. Such tensions show the potential limitations of multilateralism. We could also think that concepts such as sovereignty can be used to emphasize more unilateral measures, as all the member states of the UN are sovereign states that have considerable interests in preserving state sovereignty in balance with other states belonging to the same system. At the same time, sovereign states can also be seen as supporting the UN and its policies.

2.2 Conceptual Politics of Multilateralism: Norm, Process, and Outcome

Commonly, multilateralism is used in very practical terms to describe a phenomenon of international cooperation, but it has a normative element as well. As Robert W. Murray (2016, xii) has written, there are several theoretical approaches discussing multilateralism and institutions, but there seems to be a lack of consensus concerning the basic elements of multilateralism's role in IR among the practitioners of these schools of thought. Realism, constructivism, and liberalism have different emphases and ideas of how multilateralism should play a role and what kind of global governance we should aim for. Global governance is not, however, identical to multilateralism. Vincent Pouliot and Jean-Philippe Thérien (2023) have studied the politics of global governance and, in particular, global policymaking, especially in the UN framework. While we acknowledge the usefulness of literature on global governance and certain overlaps between the themes, our focus in this book is specifically on multilateralism, which we view as a concept that remains understudied in the UN context.

The often-cited Ruggie's (1992) definition of multilateralism emphasizes not only international cooperation involving three states (or more) taking part in international cooperation that can take place through ad hoc arrangements or institutionalized settings (see Keohane 1990) but also the principles of guiding the cooperation among the states. It involves both theoretical and practical parts. In other words, there is both "content" and "process" as defined by Ruggie (Murray 2016, xiv). This line of thinking often connects multilateralism to constructivism in terms of norm construction (Murray 2016, xiv). While the noun

"multilateralism" can be seen as referring to "diplomatic strategy" employed by the states, the adjective "multilateral" can be seen as an "ad hoc tactic" by states or other actors to reach an objective, as a first part of cooperation (Zartman and Touval 2012, 2). It is not purposeful to address all the previous studies on multilateralism in this chapter but rather to draw on some specific questions to address how multilateralism is understood in this book and the methodological and theoretical choices we have made.

While multilateralism tends to attract attention, there have been only a few conceptual analyses so far, in addition to some seminal works cited earlier. For James P. Muldoon et al. (2010, 3), the concept of multilateralism and its role in international affairs are "poorly understood" in academic circles. Fen Osler Hampson and Paul Heinbecker (2011, 300) have argued that the concept of multilateralism "centers on the collectively agreed norms, rules and principles that guide and govern the interstate action." It can thus refer to specific orders like the Concert of Europe, international treaties including the UNCLOS, international organizations, most notably the UN, different types of negotiations or forums, or specific outcomes including the ICC (Hampson and Heinbecker 2011, 300).

There have also been many attributions related to multilateralism trying to explicate what multilateralism is or related problems, including principled or diminished multilateralism (Rüland 2018), competitive multilateralism (Moreland 2019), contested multilateralism (Morse and Keohane 2014), or democracy-enhancing multilateralism (Keohane et al. 2009), to mention a few. Multilateralism is expected to be effective, as mentioned by the EU's global strategy in 2016, and inclusive, as brought forward by the high-level advisory group on effective multilateralism (HLAB 2023). In addition to what multilateralism is, the historical origins of multilateralism (Lavelle 2020), alternatives to multilateralism (Partzsch 2020), or whether multilateralism is fit for the twenty-first century (Hampson and Heinbecker 2011) have been studied. Multilateralism can be connected to the concept of international order when multilateralism is understood as cooperation that is going or expected to go somewhere (see Jokela et al. 2023). Multilateralism can be examined as a type of diplomacy or as an organization. While this volume focuses on the UN, we are interested in the discursive language of multilateralism rather than the multilateralism of the UN.

According to Katja Creutz (2022, 49), the concept of multilateralism is difficult to grasp because it is eclectic and is used by different actors for different purposes. It can be selective, nominal, effective, instrumental, or actional (Creutz 2022, 49). The main constructions of multilateralism are commonly divided into two lines of thinking: multilateralism to achieve something or multilateralism as a value itself (see Murray 2016; Creutz 2022). Similarly, for Alynna J. Lyon (2016, 202), multilateralism refers both to the method of interaction between the states and as a value itself. Flonk and Debre (2025) speak about substantive and procedural multilateralism. In this book, relying on the previous definitions, we consider multilateralism as a three-part typology – as a norm, as a process, and as an outcome – as explained later to better indicate the nuances of multilateralism. These three typologies show different tenets of what multilateralism means in the context of the United Nations,

which, by the spirit of its Charter, is an organization that should be a center for actions of nations, guided by both common purposes and common ends in an institutional context. By following this typology, we examine the language of multilateralism in the following empirical chapters.

2.2.1 Multilateralism as a Norm

We consider that multilateralism is seen as a *norm* that should guide international cooperation, with the UN as the main forum for multilateralism and where the idea of multilateralism is developed. We associate multilateralism with both and see them interconnected when it comes to ideas of guiding principles. In international relations, norms are a result of states agreeing on how to handle issues, but norms emerge in connection to domestic politics, making international norms dynamic (see Panke and Petersohn 2012).

Samuel Barkin and Bruce Cronin (1994, 108) argue that when international norms legitimize state rather than national sovereignty, the

> international community and its institutions will tend to defend the rights of established states against nationalist claims of domestic ethnic groups. On the other hand, when the norms of the international order favor national over state sovereignty, the international community will be more sympathetic to pleas for national self-determination, often at the expense of established states.

Furthermore, they (1994, 114) claim that a nation-state needs legitimization based on norms and principles of a particular era, and that state of understanding is reflected in how sovereignty is seen and how that affects international behavior. We treat multilateralism as a norm that reflects the state of domestic contemporary thinking: what makes a norm, what maintains it, and what norm should not be. There emerges multilateralism as a value: it is a result of the commonly accepted principle being treated as a norm dynamically but is also associated with the acceptance that behind the norm there lies something bigger, and in the case of multilateralism in the UN context, an idea commonly accepted in the spirit of the UN Charter, thus constituting a political value for the participants in the UN context. The UN Charter does not specifically mention the concept of multilateralism, but the spirit of international cooperation that it establishes is multilateral in nature.

2.2.2 Multilateralism as a Process

How multilateralism is seen as a way to solve global problems and ways for states to cooperate in international affairs refers to multilateralism as a *process*. Multilateralism is interpreted as a mechanism; it can also refer to the system or the forums of international cooperation. We also understand the process as a set of phases in which topics are discussed and politically handled. It may lead to a decision or other form of official outcome. The UN Charter, with its 111 articles, is a

constitutive document for the UN defining the obligations of the member states but also the structure, procedure, and aims of the UN. Seeing multilateralism as a means to an end, the outcome is the only thing that matters. When speaking about effective multilateralism, it can refer to both the process and the outcome. The idea is that it is functional. Joachim Krause (2004, 44), for instance, has stressed that "[m]ultilateralism has been a reality of international relations for six decades and has served many purposes. In most cases, it has been functionally oriented and either global or regional in scope." According to his view (Krause 2004, 43–44), Europeans have tended to support multilateralism because of the experienced utility in the process, whereas the US view has stressed the efficiency aspect in solving problems.

2.2.3 Multilateralism as an Outcome

The UN Charter defines the need for international cooperation to maintain peace and security, achieve social progress and better standards of living, and promote human rights. In Article 56 of the Charter, it is stated that member states "pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization for the achievement of the purposes set forth in the previous article" (UN n.d. Charter). Generally, multilateralism is understood as a collective action that can result in decisions taking the form of international agreements or other non-binding resolutions involving a common understanding of norms and policies, thus indicating the *outcome* aspect of multilateralism. One of the very concrete examples of multilateralism in practice is the accepted human rights treaties in addition to the foundational Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Vincent Pouliot (2011), multilateralism is indeed not only a means to an end but "an end itself." Therefore, the outcome of multilateralism can also refer to having multilateralism as a foundational principle.

2.3 Conceptual History and International Politics

Constructivist international politics, like other politics, is constitutionally a social activity (Reus-Smit 2004, 3). It has been considered that IR has been "relative[ly] insensitive" to both language and concepts that are used and that the role of language in international relations is overlooked (Korvela 2018, 25). However, ideas, language, and concepts have been the subjects of many lines of discursive approaches and constructivist theories in IR (Roshchin 2017a, 180). In Oliver Kessler's (2021, 552) view, conceptual history in IR mainly refers to *Begriffsgeschichte* following Koselleck's work, focusing on examining specific concepts and their histories. Similarly, Felix Berenskoetter (2017) has noticed how the first generation of IR scholars were interested in certain key concepts, but it has been mainly in the last two decades that the focus on concepts in IR studies has returned. This can be seen in a twofold way: first, following the linguistic turn, somewhat critical attitudes towards terms and categories used and the ideas behind them appeared in some parts of the field. This has been followed by focusing on concepts including

sovereignty, hierarchy, security, democracy, and power. Second, language is changing, because of the experience of transforming geopolitical and social realities, accompanied by features of the late modern and the challenges to the structures of Western dominance, which have, according to Berenskoetter (2017, 153), formed the essence of IR since its establishment. For him, these changes have been experienced differently, but they have caused dissatisfaction with the existing concepts and their meanings. This has been followed by the invention of relatively new terms such as globalization or climate change, or the recovery of long-neglected ones, including capitalism or empire. Focusing on concepts in IR studies has not been completely unheard of. Ian Hurd (2007) has dealt with legitimacy as a "common" concept in IR, but with little attention to what it means or how it works. In a recent article, Andrew Ehrhardt (2025) has studied the concept of civilization in foreign policy and how it could be better thought as a mode of thinking about international affairs and foreign policy than as a value of judgment, including hierarchy and progress or superiority, to give a few examples.

As stated at the beginning of the volume, our research question *is what kind of political language of multilateralism takes place in the selected UN bodies and what this tells us about multilateralism and its nuances to better understand the current state of multilateralism.* In this volume, conceptual history is adopted as a method to grasp the political language of multilateralism. This means using conceptual history as a strategy of textual analysis inspired by Koselleck (see, e.g., Palonen 1997). This approach considers the role of certain concepts as particularly important and meaningful concepts but also recognizes the use of the concepts in a specific context, in this case, the UN. In other words, we are both interested in the concept of multilateralism and how it is used in debates. So far, multilateralism as a concept has become a keyword in international affairs, but no shared understanding or universally accepted language exists among different actors or policy areas.

The use of concepts can be examined in two different levels: (1) in academic research, concepts are treated as analytical categories that can be adopted in empirical research, but they do not necessarily have correspondence in the social-political discourse; and (2) the daily-life use of concepts, in which concepts guide thought and action both by individuals and collectives (Berenskoetter 2017, 155). The research approach of this book understands concepts not only as static definitions but rather as struggles of meanings. Similarly, Farr (1989, 24–25) has written that "to understand conceptual change is in large part to understand political change and vice versa." Conceptual change can thus be seen as "one imaginative consequence of political actors criticizing and attempting to resolve the contradictions, which they generate in the complex web of their beliefs, actions, and practices as they try to understand and change the world around them" (Farr 1989, 25).

According to Willibald Steinmetz and Michael Freeden, concepts should be seen as "focal points of understanding and interpretation." Through concepts, we can recognize both regularities and discontinuities in human discourse and how "comprehensions of the world" are arranged and accompany action (Steinmetz and Freeden 2017, 1). The UN and its foundation have also been examined from a conceptual history viewpoint. For Risto Wallin (2004, 34), the use of "organization"

as a key concept in the preparation stage of the UN in 1943–1945 was meaningful because, in addition to the specific approach towards the new world organization, a specific conceptual history was also selected. Wallin (2004, 34) argues that the specific conception of organization is preceded by a history that can be traced back to Immanuel Kant's conceptions of world politics and especially federation. In comparison to the previous League of Nations, the UN vocabulary is characterized by conceptual history that describes the world as a separate and own community with other related concepts (Wallin 2004). In Wallin's view (2004), the UN Charter, similarly to other charters, is the product of its own time and context but at the same time can be seen as a vision for the future. While the charters can be seen as reflections of past experiences, they also demonstrate the expectations for the future, reflecting the temporalization of political narratives (Wallin 2004, 31).

As Jens Bartelson (2011, 2) has argued, there is a difference between the term, conception, and reality using sovereignty as an example. Sovereignty as a concept can help us understand the whole idea of multilateralism. Following Vincent Pouliot's (2016, 28) idea, we think that multilateralism is a social construction built upon historical and discursive patterns rather than only being a form of institutional cooperation. Pouliot (2016, 28) defines multilateralism "as global governance practice characterized by an inclusive, institutionalized, and principled form of political dialogue." Thus, for him, it is different from more "exclusive" forms, including minilateral or bilateral international cooperation. By abandoning the predominant view in IR that sees a functional view of multilateralism to solve different political problems, he provides an alternative view of seeing multilateralism as a socially construed form that has eventually replaced other practices (Pouliout 2016, 29).

While we aim to examine a concept, the idea is not to examine multilateralism only but rather consider multilateralism and its different aspects (multilateralism as norm, process, or outcome of international cooperation) and to trace the practices, debates, and related, associated concepts such as sovereignty, legitimacy, international cooperation, international community, and authority to provide a more sophisticated view on multilateralism. This is because concepts can hardly be isolated, and they are often interrelated. While concepts lack boundaries, they often share some components or meanings (Steinmetz and Freeden 2017). The attention given to associated concepts helps to understand the broader semantic field alongside the usage of the concept "multilateralism" or its different wordings.

In the field of conceptual history, Michael Freeden (2006) has studied political ideologues with the help of discourses. There, he employed a research strategy in which he was flexible towards the presence of different conceptualizations in the action of a particular ideology and thus pursued a semantic approach in which different concepts formed different layers of significance for a particular ideology. He found that certain concepts were more significant for discourses related to particular ideologies, and simultaneously, some concepts were treated as part of the same ideology but had a more minor position in the use of discourse. Therefore, Freeden (2006) pointed out that within an ideology, there were groups of concepts that were more central to the ideology and groups of concepts that were less central but still part of the typical discourses. Together, these concepts formed the semantics

behind a particular ideology. For Freeden (2006), the use of language in the context of social constructivism provided a useful starting point for analysis of political ideologies. If an ideology represents a set of ideas and ideals associated with a common theme, it is not far from what multilateralism might constitute in international relations. In fact, what Freeden illustrates is the importance of perspectives on some concepts as more central to explain reality than others, while supported by the use of other concepts that help to define the concept in the center.

When we use the term "multilateralism," we immediately open a field in which the theme can be discussed from various perspectives. Rather than focusing on one concept, we are dealing with a cluster of concepts or through the semantic field. "Sovereignty" is often used in contrast to multilateralism, although in practice the relations of these two concepts may require the use of other, more associative concepts (see Raustiala 2000). But the political reality is that when international norms, rules, and institutions are in question and the rules-based international order is being discussed, one can hardly escape the notion of how norms, rules, or institutions may influence the sovereignty of a state. Furthermore, "legitimacy" and "authority" point attention to the same theme the "sovereignty" does: who or what can have an impact on international relations, who or what might influence or even control the agenda that the international community discusses, and how the relations between an individual state and the international institution-based community are perceived. Multilateralism, sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority are interconnected and complex. The sovereignty of individual states needs to be respected if multilateral cooperation is to succeed. Legitimacy is essential for the acceptance of any effort related to multilateral cooperation, requiring that actions carried out under multilateralism should be aligned to respect the sovereignty of states and be widely accepted. Furthermore, authority underlines the role of participants in debates on multilateralism: who has the authority to discuss and even lead the future of multilateralism? Ruggie (1986) defined sovereignty as the institutionalization of public authority, and it is this role of authority behind sovereignty that continuously shapes the state of multilateral cooperation. However, as noted by Bartelson (2006), the whole conceptualization of sovereignty has become contested in IR theory and international law. Instead of speaking about one universal concept of sovereignty or relying on the traditional idea of Westphalian sovereignty, sovereignty is now understood more as context-specific, attracting different meanings and interpretations. In addition to these associative concepts, we will have a versatile approach to other concepts and the broader semantic field related to multilateralism.

By looking at these concepts and how they are adopted in the discussions, we can trace how multilateralism is defined and understood in the specific case studies on peace and security, human rights, and development. As mentioned, previous studies have examined rhetorical and conceptual change in the UN context (for instance Boilard 2019; Wallin 2005) and processes (see Schipper 2006) or used conceptual history concerning international relations (see Kessler 2021; Roshchin 2017a; Jordheim and Neumann 2011) or to study specific key concepts in IR (such as sovereignty or empire), but so far most of the studies on multilateralism and the UN have mostly neglected the conceptual and rhetorical approach.

The research approach of the book is connected, however, to the broader IR theory of social constructivism. Following the idea of Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (2001, 393), we understand constructivism as focusing "on the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture and argument in politics." The role of multilateralism in the IR theory has grown since 1992, when James A. Caporaso (1992, 601) argued that multilateralism was not present in the theoretical categorizations of IR to the extent that it might have been, but multilateralism continues to provide a topic for analytical focus applied in an institutional context and the framework that follows. For this volume, the United Nations does constitute the institutional context but is treated as being intertwined with multilateralism as its topic.

To sum up, the idea of the book is to illustrate the conceptualization of the politics of multilateralism and related political language. We acknowledge that there is no single concept of multilateralism that we aim to analyze (or provide) in this book, but by recognizing the context and attributes describing international cooperation, we can identify different understandings and meanings of multilateralism. While the main focus is on multilateralism, the associated concepts – authority, sovereignty, legitimacy, and related discourses – help to track down the idea of multilateralism in the UN context and how the UN member states see multilateral cooperation, its value, and its outcome.

From our point of view, having a versatile approach to concepts enables a research design in which the idea of multilateralism can be discussed and potentially manifested in different ways in different policies, resolutions, and recommendations of the various bodies within the United Nations. Therefore, "multilateralism" offers us an analytical concept that can be employed in the discourses of contemporaries, but simultaneously it offers us a descriptive idea of activities performed in the context of cooperation between more than two states (see Ruggie 1992). While we acknowledge the role of states as contributors to the UN debates, the analysis is not done on the state level but rather at the institutional level (UNGA, UNSC, HRC).

2.4 Parliamentary Studies Focusing on Concepts, Rhetoric, and Debates

Since the linguistic turn decades ago, language has become central to studying politics. In recent years, the digitalization of parliamentary sources has enabled studies on concepts and the changes and continuities of their use in these debates (see, e.g., Ihalainen and Palonen 2009), thus underlining the significance of studying political debates as reflections of the contemporary world and its current issues (see Wiesner et al. 2017). As Marie Christine Boilard (2019, 47–50) took as the premise in her work about human rights policies in the UN context, politics is a contingent and controversial activity. Boilard employed a research approach in which the rules and procedures of the UN create the framework in which politics as activity took place. As a whole, Boilard considered that a debate and a series of debates were taking place in a specific forum, but that the rules and procedures of the forum were open for potential change. The result was to consider the debates of the particular body

within the UN, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, as an illustration of politics, and above all as a form of parliamentary politics.

By using the UN meeting records, Boilard emphasized the UN as a forum of "negotiation rather than deliberation," neglecting "the importance of UN debates for the conduct of world politics" (Boilard 2019, 50). The different bodies of the UN are not parliamentary institutions in the sense that national legislatures, such as the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, as they lack the power vested in the national legislature regarding, for example, the drafting of laws. However, parliaments do provide cases of politics in an institutional framework that can be analyzed by acknowledging the privileges and constraints of the institutional framework (Häkkinen 2019; Ihalainen et al. 2016; Ilie 2010). The United Nations is an organization that, in its different bodies, has an institutional framework in place that helps to facilitate but also define the discussion that takes place, thus leading to a view that the United Nations can have parliamentary characteristics, especially in the General Assembly, as a deliberative forum where "all member states are represented with equal votes" (Peterson 2018, 119).

What is important is that parliaments have also established their concepts related to the procedures, often convened to standing orders; one could also speak of a specific parliamentary language (Palonen 2020). Similarly, to parliamentary debates, the UN documentation (meeting records, resolutions, reports, and other forms of documentation included in the UN digital library) provides a coherent corpus of materials to study concepts and related struggles. While examining concepts in the UN context, one has to consider the nature of the international organization as a form of diplomacy and negotiation rather than debates per se. There are some specifics regarding bodies, including the UNGA, where every UN member country has an equal right to voice and vote. Many times, the UNGA decision-making is also about finding a consensus, and resolutions are enacted without voting. In the UNSC, the membership is limited to P5 members with their right to veto and ten elected members, thus reflecting very different procedural and agenda-setting manners, not to mention the role of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security. However, discussions and negotiations taking place at the UN reflect the member countries' views and the use of language and specific discourses, thus providing opportunities for conceptual and discourse-related analysis of multilateralism.

The United Nations has long been associated with the idea of having a representative parliamentary organ that could create binding decisions and thus prove representative democracy on a global scale (see Kennedy 2006; Deplano 2020). The "parliamentary dimension" of the UN has been discussed, increasing parliamentarians' and parliaments' input in the UN's work to strengthen the representative and democratic elements of the UN. Parliaments are seen to be in a crucial position of implementing international cooperation in domestic terms by legislating but also by providing representation and legitimation. While the UN's cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union has been strengthened over the years and is now a regular part of the UNGA's agenda in every two-year cycle (see Kronlund 2023), there seem to be practical limitations to parliaments' input in international cooperation. The parliamentary dimension needs to be kept in mind when exploring the

UN and the debates in the UNGA and the UNSC. Despite the constraints of the UN institutional framework and the role of negotiation over debate, the parliamentary dimension enables us to see the UN, and the UNGA in particular, as a representative institution among states to reflect the political thought towards a variety of political themes, multilateralism included.

Conceptual history, international politics, and the perspective of the parliamentary dimension – and its connection to use of language to shape policies – create premises for the empirical analysis of selected cases. From here we will continue to the empirical sections of the volume and start with the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security.

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Materials

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