



Round table discussion with the Members of the Diplomatic Club of Geneva

29 September 2020 | TATIANA VALOVAYA SPEECH

Dear President of the Diplomatic Club of Geneva,
Dear Mr. Colin [Associate researcher at GCSP],
Dear colleagues,
Dear friends,

Let me first of all thank the Diplomatic Club of Geneva for organizing this important debate on the future of multilateralism.

This topic is highly relevant as the multilateral system is currently facing its deepest crisis.

Last week, in his opening address to the General Assembly, the United Nations Secretary-General expressed his concern over the **unprecedented deregulation of the global governance system**. He also stressed that to face current challenges, we need more effective multilateralism with vision, ambition and impact.

Indeed, we must not only manage a crisis, but also need to face a real transformation. The world has changed a lot since 1945, and multilateralism itself is changing in nature.

Nowadays, States remain, of course, **the major players** in international relations. As before, they play a fundamental role within any international institution, including the United Nations. However, they are no longer the sole actors in international relations.

A multilateralism that can take on the challenges that we face today, must be networked and inclusive, drawing on different international institutions and organizations, civil society, cities, businesses, local authorities and young people. This might sound like a theoretical concept at first. But let me give you some examples of what is already happening right now and how we can further bring this vision to life.

Take the example of the city of Geneva: in addition to the permanent missions of 180 Member States and the headquarters of many international organizations, Geneva is home to around 750 non-governmental organizations that ensure that the voice of civil society is heard in intergovernmental bodies.

We see, for instance, local actors playing an increasing role in advancing and revitalizing international cooperation. Geneva plays an active role **to enable partnerships with and between cities**. On 25 August, with the support of the Swiss Confederation, the canton and the city of Geneva launched a new cooperation platform - **the Geneva Cities Hub** - in order to promote discussion and cooperation between cities on urban issues and forge closer links between cities, urban networks and Geneva stakeholders.

The Geneva Cities Hub works in close cooperation with the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Office at Geneva to **increase the role of cities in multilateral diplomacy**. In June, together with UN-Habitat, it hosted a platform to discuss cities-related challenges, such as inclusion of persons with disabilities and gender perspectives in urban development planning. In October, the UNECE Forum of Mayors will organize a discussion on sustainable urban development. This year, the Forum will focus on city action for a resilient future: the mayors from across the UNECE region will share concrete actions and innovative solutions on urban resilience, including the local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and city actions to mitigate and respond to the effects of climate change.

As for the **private sector**, it is encouraging to see the readiness of business to become more than a partner for financial resources. Companies of all sizes are becoming increasingly committed to the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development and supportive of broader international cooperation efforts.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Global Compact, an initiative launched in 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide **to adopt and implement sustainable and socially responsible policies**.

Twenty years ago, then Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated: "if we cannot make globalization work for all, in the end it will work for no one." Many business leaders have since realized how relevant Mr. Annan's words were.

As tragic as the pandemic is, it has also created a momentum for change. Last week, during a special session of the General Assembly in New York, business leaders from over 100 countries decided to go even further. They signed onto a powerful document entitled "**Statement from Business Leaders for Renewed Global Cooperation**". The statement recognizes that the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals are beneficial to the long-term viability of private companies. But much more needs to be done.

In order to turn this strong commitment into tangible actions, businesses need to assess the long-term costs and benefits of their activities. We need to see **more public-private partnerships**, especially at local but also regional levels, including civil society and young people.

Last year, the city and the canton of Geneva organized, with the support of many other stakeholders and partners, an unprecedented event - the Building Bridges Week - which brought together thousands of people working in the financial industry, the United Nations, international organizations, governments, universities and civil society representatives. I am particularly pleased that the second edition of the Building Bridges Week will be held in Geneva next spring.

In a world more interconnected than ever, building bridges between the public and private sectors, academia and civil society is the sine qua non condition for moving our common Agenda for Sustainable Development forward. It is absolutely necessary to continue in this direction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our vision for a reinvigorated multilateralism and building back better after COVID-19 has just gained further traction: In the context of the UN75 initiative, the United Nations launched this year the first-ever global consultation on the role and future of multilateral cooperation. To date, over 1 million people have taken the survey in all UN Member and Observer States.

I want to share with you some of the results of the initiative. They are an important confirmation that the work we are doing is relevant and impactful. The majority of respondents believe that global cooperation is vital to deal with today's challenges. They believe in multilateralism. And they note that the pandemic has created an urgent need for change.

It is rewarding that the participation of young people in this worldwide consultation was defined as **the priority number one**. Here in Geneva, despite the exceptional circumstances due to the pandemic, we were able to organize two virtual dialogues with students from various Swiss universities: the first dialogue was held on 24 April and the second one took place on 25 June. Organizations, such as the European Organization for Nuclear Research and the International Olympic Committee were our external partners in this important conversation with the youth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Many agree that **the 21st century multilateralism must be networked** – linking global institutions across sectors and geographies, from development banks to regional organizations and trade alliances.

There is also a broad consensus that **the 21st century multilateralism must be more inclusive** than it is now. We share the understanding of a multilateral system that constantly **innovates, delivers for the people, and protects our planet**.

All the actors of international Geneva, traditional and emerging alike, are making a major contribution to turning this new multilateralism into reality. Therefore, a

strengthened and inclusive multilateralism, divided into thematic networks but connected to each other, is not at all a chimera but **a nascent reality, especially in Geneva.**

The examples that I shared today are taking place right before our eyes – many of you play already an active part in those initiatives. But there is more work to be done. I look forward to using this event as another occasion to create and share ideas for the multilateral diplomacy of the future.

Thank you.

<https://www.ungeneva.org/en/director-general/tatiana-valovaya/activities/2020/09/round-table-discussion-members-diplomatic-club>