

## **The Future of the UN – Event Report**

Screening of *The Veto* and High-Level Panel Discussion

Casa do Brasil, Athens, 19 January 2026

On 19 January 2026, the Embassy of Brazil in Greece and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) co-hosted the event “*The Future of the UN*” at Casa do Brasil in Athens. Marking 80 years since the first meeting of the UN Security Council, the event featured the screening of the documentary *The Veto*, followed by remarks from its director and producer, Tim Slade, and a high-level panel discussion moderated by Georgios Kostakos, Research Associate at ELIAMEP and Co-founder of FOGGS.

The panel brought together H.E. Harriet Berg, Ambassador of Norway to Greece and Cyprus; Maria Gavouneli, Professor of International Law and Member of the Board of ELIAMEP; Cleopatra Kitti, Senior Policy Advisor at ELIAMEP; Paulina Lampsa, Board Member of the Global Progress Foundation; and Iason Kasselakis, Counsellor (First Class) at the Diplomatic Office of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece.

### **Reflections by Tim Slade: A Call for Urgent Reform**

Following the screening, Tim Slade offered a brief reflection on the film’s message and the broader state of multilateralism. He argued that 2026 represents a critical juncture for the United Nations: without meaningful reform, the organization risks becoming “out of service” in fulfilling its primary mandate of maintaining international peace and security.

While acknowledging the role of veto misuse, he emphasized that the broader challenge lies in the lack of political will among states beyond the major powers to assert themselves collectively. In his view, tools for reform already exist within the UN Charter, including mechanisms for procedural innovation and potential Charter reform. Expansion of permanent membership, potentially without extending veto power, could rebalance representation, but only if the structural power asymmetries between the dominant powers and the wider membership are addressed.

Slade stressed that decisive action on Ukraine and Palestine is essential to preserve the credibility of the multilateral system. He warned that failure to do so risks accelerating the erosion of the UN’s authority, as alternative initiatives and informal groupings emerge to fill perceived vacuum.

A central theme of his remarks was the need for smaller and medium-sized states to unite, both regionally (e.g., within the EU, Nordic-Baltic, Arab, or African frameworks) and across regions. He argued that collective economic leverage and strategic repositioning are necessary to counterbalance dominant powers. In particular, he suggested that states must reassess long-standing alliances and prioritize the will and interests of their citizens over deference to major powers.

## **Responding to *The Veto*: Reforming the Security Council**

In the first round of interventions, panelists reflected on the film and the challenges surrounding the veto power and UN Security Council reform.

Ambassador Berg underlined that the rules-based international order and the UN peace and security architecture are currently under severe pressure. For Norway, she stressed, the UN system is essential for safeguarding sovereignty, predictability, and international law. While acknowledging that the veto was historically necessary to secure great power participation in 1945, she noted that its repeated use, particularly in crises such as Ukraine and Gaza, has undermined the Council's effectiveness. Norway supports a more representative and transparent Security Council, including expansion of both permanent and non-permanent seats, with stronger representation from underrepresented regions, especially Africa. She also emphasized initiatives aimed at increasing political costs for veto use, including General Assembly debates triggered after a veto is cast, and efforts to clarify Article 27(3) of the UN Charter regarding abstention by parties to a conflict.

Professor Gavouneli highlighted the legal tensions embedded in the current functioning of the Security Council and stressed that reform must remain anchored in the principles of the UN Charter. She referred to the multiple attempts –of variable seriousness– to amend the current arrangements with the possible addition of another third circle of membership, including for instance India or Brazil or South Africa, that would reflect better the new balance of power in the world. She reminded the audience that, in addition to the formal structures within the UN, global governance today relies also on a number of informal arrangements such as the G7 and the G20, which operate in close cooperation with the UN family or other international institutions, such as the OECD which serves as secretariat to such arrangements.

Paulina Lampsas described the documentary as both timely and cautionary, noting that public perception increasingly views the Security Council as paralyzed by veto politics. She observed that more than 300 vetoes have been used since 1945, primarily by major powers defending geopolitical interests. Lampsas argued for a more inclusive Security Council that reflects contemporary global realities, including stronger representation of the Global South. She also suggested exploring reforms to veto practice, such as limiting its use in cases of mass atrocities or requiring more than one permanent member to exercise a veto to make it effective.

Cleopatra Kitti framed the discussion within a broader geopolitical landscape marked by 60 active conflicts and what she described as “multipolarity without multilateralism.” She warned that sidelining multilateral institutions risks normalizing war as an instrument of policy. Using Cyprus as an example, she stressed how UN resolutions and peacekeeping mandates remain essential for stability and rule of law. She further argued that UN reform cannot be isolated from reforms of other multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, particularly regarding access to capital, governance, and global financial stability.

Iason Kasselakis presented Greece's longstanding support for initiatives aimed at constraining veto use, including the "Uniting for Peace" mechanism, the Franco-Mexican initiative, the ACT Code of Conduct, and the Liechtenstein initiative. On Security Council reform, he recalled Greece's position, as articulated at the 79<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, supporting expansion of both permanent and non-permanent seats, including meaningful participation from underrepresented regions. He also proposed procedural improvements, such as enhanced interaction between the Council and the General Assembly, stronger reporting practices, and greater inclusion of civil society briefers. As an elected member of the Security Council for 2025-2026, Greece's priorities include peaceful dispute settlement, respect for international law, Women, Peace and Security, Climate and Security, Children in Armed Conflict, and maritime security.

### **The Future of the UN**

In the second round, speakers addressed the broader theme of the UN's future.

Ambassador Berg stressed that binding international cooperation remains indispensable in an increasingly interconnected world facing shared threats such as climate change and biological risks. She highlighted the importance of ongoing reform processes initiated by the UN Secretary-General and emphasized that credibility depends on tangible results on the ground. Reforms must maintain balance across the UN's three pillars, peace and security, development, and human rights, while ensuring inclusion, cross-regional compromise, and meaningful civil society participation.

Professor Gavouneli argued that while criticism of the UN is widespread, the Charter's core principles remain relevant and necessary. She stressed that, under the animadversion created by the current US administration, the international community continues to operate and produce results – the essential contribution of the WHO during the pandemic being an excellent example. In addition, she reiterated that the challenges we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are common and global by definition: climate change, ocean pollution, global commons, all these cannot be addressed by unilateral action by individual States. The main structure of the international community will adjust and adapt to the needs of the present but the fundamentals are solid enough and will remain the same.

Paulina Lampsca cautioned against excessive "UN bashing," noting that the organization's positive contributions often receive insufficient public attention. While acknowledging bureaucratic inefficiencies, she argued that the UN Charter remains a foundational global compact. She called for bold and comprehensive reform, including stronger arms control regimes, updated nuclear agreements, governance frameworks for AI and autonomous weapons, and enhanced empowerment of the General Assembly. She concluded by stressing that reform requires political will and visionary leadership.

Cleopatra Kitti emphasized that reform must strengthen multilateral politics rather than dismantle institutions. She highlighted how capital, trade, and governance are increasingly intertwined, arguing that multilateral institutions must adapt to mediate not only conflict but

also post-conflict stability and sustainable growth. In her view, the future of the UN depends on its capacity to remain relevant as a guarantor of international law and coordinated global action.

Iason Kasselakis reaffirmed Greece's commitment to dialogue, diplomacy, and democracy as guiding principles during its Security Council term. He underscored the importance of peaceful dispute settlement, adherence to international law, and strengthening cooperation between UN organs. Greece's engagement reflects a belief that the UN system, despite its imperfections, remains the central framework for global peace and stability.

The discussion highlighted both the structural weaknesses and the enduring relevance of the United Nations system. While panelists differed in emphasis, ranging from institutional reform and procedural improvements to broader geopolitical realignments, there was broad agreement that the UN remains indispensable. The veto mechanism, representation deficits within the Security Council, and the growing gap between global power realities and institutional structures were identified as central challenges. At the same time, speakers stressed that many reform tools already exist within the Charter framework and that incremental as well as structural changes are possible, provided there is sufficient political will.

Looking ahead, the future of the UN appears closely tied to three interrelated factors: the capacity of member states (particularly small and medium-sized countries) to act collectively; the ability of reform processes to maintain balance across the UN's three pillars (peace and security, development, and human rights); and the restoration of institutional credibility through tangible results on the ground. While geopolitical fragmentation and competing power centers complicate reform efforts, the discussion reaffirmed that multilateralism grounded in international law remains the only viable framework for managing global challenges. The event ultimately underscored both the urgency and the complexity of shaping a United Nations that is more representative, effective, and resilient in an evolving global order.