

The G20, Mexico and Italy's Presidency in 2021: Diplomacy and International Recovery

El G20, México y la presidencia de Italia en 2021: diplomacia y recuperación internacional

Victoria Romero

Mexican Ambassador to Azerbaijan
vromero@sre.gob.mx

Diego Domínguez

Head of Economic, Commercial and Cooperation Affairs, Embassy of Mexico in Korea
ddominguezc@sre.gob.mx

Enrique Barrera

Head of Department for G20 and MUKTA, Deputy Ministry of Foreign Affairs
sbarrerag@sre.gob.mx

■

Abstract

In this article, the authors analyse the work of the Italian G20 presidency in 2021. They explain the configuration, evolution and dynamics of the Group until 2021 and assess Italy's priorities and the outcomes of the Rome Summit in October 2021. They also present Mexico's objectives and outcomes in the Rome Declaration, as well as a general analysis of the results of the Italian presidency and their implications for the overall performance of the G20 and multilateral diplomacy.

■

Resumen

En este artículo, los autores analizan los trabajos de la presidencia italiana del G20 en 2021. Explican la configuración, la evolución y la dinámica del Grupo hasta el año de 2021 y evalúan las prioridades de Italia y los resultados de la Cumbre de Roma de octubre de ese mismo año. También presentan los objetivos de México y sus resultados en la Declaración de Roma, además de un análisis general sobre los resultados de la presidencia italiana y sus implicaciones para el desempeño general del G20 y la diplomacia multilateral.

■

Keywords

Mexico, G20, Rome Summit, Rome Declaration

■

Palabras clave

México, G20, Cumbre de Roma, Declaración de Roma

The G20, Mexico and Italy's Presidency in 2021: Diplomacy and International Recovery

*Victoria Romero, Diego Domínguez
and Enrique Barrera*

The Group of Twenty (G20) is a strategic forum created in 1999 among finance ministers and elevated to the level of heads of state and government in 2008 to respond to the global challenges posed in the 21st century.¹ Since its inception, it has been called upon to coordinate joint responses to challenges as diverse as financial crises, social inequalities, the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainable development, climate change, polarisation, geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts.

Since its establishment, the G20 has increased its influence on the accelerating geopolitical and economic transformation, in which multilateral diplomacy is reasserting itself as one of the main instruments of global governance. Its nature as an informal and flexible forum has allowed it to act swiftly in the face of the institutional and bureaucratic constraints faced by other international organisations and fora.

¹ The members of the G20 are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. Spain is a permanent guest. The annual presidency invites other countries to accompany the process. Italy invited Brunei, the United Arab Emirates, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Netherlands, Rwanda, Singapore and Switzerland. International organisations of the U.N. System such as FAO, UNESCO, WHO, ILO, WTO and U.N., and financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and other agencies such as the OECD also participate.

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, a number of political events defined the Group's agenda, such as the resignation of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the outcome of the U.S. presidential election in favour of the Democratic Party. In addition, China and the United States reached an agreement to end the trade war; Russia held a referendum to allow its president to govern until 2036; the European Union and the United Kingdom signed trade instruments after Brexit; and, in the last year of Donald Trump's administration, negotiations were initiated with the Taliban to end the occupation of Afghanistan after 18 years of U.S. troops in that country.²

In this scenario, it was thought that Saudi Arabia's presidency of the G20 in 2020 would mark a new stage in strengthening the global economy and would register significant advances in sustainable development, especially with the return of the United States to the climate agenda following its re-engagement in the Paris Agreement. The accelerating advance of the fourth industrial revolution also meant that the importance of the digitalisation agenda would elevate international debates, both on innovation and on bridging social divides.

Nevertheless, the international community was confronted with one of the most devastating and multidimensional global crises in history. The rapid and lethal spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which caused COVID-19, had far-reaching economic, social and, of course, global health consequences. This health threat left millions sick and deceased, forced border closures, cancelled international travel and brought economic activity to a virtual standstill. World Bank estimates indicated that global extreme poverty increased for the first time in more than 20 years, closing at 9.2%; the United Nations estimated that, in developing countries, the percentage of people in extreme poverty rose from 32.5% to 35.7%.³ The G20 therefore faced the enormous challenge of finding real, immediate and effective solutions to the multiple effects of this crisis.

² Abril Herrera and Enrique Barrera, "Anuario 2020", in *Anuario Mexicano de Relaciones Internacionales*, no. 2, 2022, pp. 437-456.

³ Centro Gilberto Bosques, "Retos del multilateralismo más allá de la vacunación, pobreza, inequidad y cambio climático", February 12, 2021, p. 2, at <https://centrogilbertobosques.senado.gob.mx/analisisinvestigacion/contexto/prospectiva-multilateral-2021/viewdocument> (date of access: September 4, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the fragility of the multilateral system. A large number of countries implemented measures contrary to International Health Regulations, such as unnecessary interference in international traffic and trade, or the hoarding of tests and protective equipment and, later, vaccines. Faced with this scenario, international organisations with universal membership, including those specialised such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), showed their inability to articulate consensual actions or even to summon the necessary political will to act jointly.

Saudi Arabia assumed the G20 presidency with the theme “Realizing Opportunities of the 21st Century for All”, at a time when COVID-19 was not yet seen as a global threat. The declaration of the pandemic as a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 by the WHO forced the Saudi presidency to rethink its priorities and push for a rapid response. On March 26, it convened the first extraordinary virtual G20 summit to find solutions to the threat. Leaders adopted a joint statement in which they reiterated their commitment to use all necessary measures to address this global crisis.

For Mexico, it was clear from the outset that the pandemic and its consequences could only be effectively addressed through international collaboration and collective action. Ambassador Julián Ventura, then deputy foreign minister and Mexico’s G20 Sherpa, stressed that this was a challenge that could only be resolved through multilateral dialogue, as none of the countries could tackle it on their own:

Global challenges demand global responses [...]. We need to respond with congruence and order to the COVID-19 pandemic, whose human, social, economic and financial impacts are without recent parallel [...]. The G20 made individual and collective commitments. At the core is the recognition that to protect people, and especially the most vulnerable, we must all do our part [...]. The national interest is indistinguishable from that of the international community as a whole.⁴

⁴ Julián Ventura, “Cooperación en tiempos de crisis: México en el G20”, *Milenio*, March 30, 2020, at <https://www.milenio.com/opinion/julian-ventura/columna-julian-ventura/cooperacion-en-tiempos-de-crisis-mexico-en-el-g20> (date of access: July 16, 2022).

The 15th G20 Leaders' Summit was held by videoconference from Riyadh on November 21-22, 2020. With a clearer picture of the pandemic and its multidimensional scope, members made collective commitments on key issues. For example, they agreed to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, which were considered a global public good. They also committed to underpin an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery, with measures such as extending the suspension of debt service payments to the least developed countries until the end of 2021⁵ and identifying measures to support middle-income countries.⁶

Mexico defended multilateral action to confront the pandemic, with a clear call to reinforce the role of the United Nations and the WHO, with proposals such as the effective implementation of mechanisms like COVAX to ensure broad global immunisation.⁷ The country's priorities were reflected in the commitments made by leaders on universal health coverage, support for middle-income countries, the promotion of gender equity through the EMPOWER initiative, the fight against corruption⁸ and the reduction of remittance transfer costs.⁹

⁵ A. Herrera y E. Barrera, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

⁶ "All-virtual G20 Summit Opens with Saudi Arabia as Host", in CBS News, November 21, 2020, at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/all-virtual-g20-summit-opens-with-saudi-arabia-as-host/> (date of access: July 24, 2022).

⁷ The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) is one of the pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. It aims to accelerate vaccine development and manufacturing, and to ensure fair and equitable distribution among countries, especially for vulnerable populations in complex humanitarian situations. In 28 countries, COVAX is the leading provider of COVID-19 vaccines. As of November 2022, COVAX has delivered 1830 million doses to 146 countries. While these efforts have been successful in protecting vulnerable people, the operation has been complicated in highly politicised and conflict-affected environments, and adaptation to an evolving pandemic situation has been uncertain.

⁸ J. Ventura, "México en el G20: solidaridad global para una recuperación inclusiva", *El Universal*, November 24, 2020, at <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/opinion/julian-ventura/mexico-en-el-g20-solidaridad-global-para-una-recuperacion-inclusiva?s=09> (date of access: August 25, 2022).

⁹ The World Bank estimates that, in 2022, money sent to low – and middle-income countries increased by 5%, or USD 626 billion, over the previous year; see World Bank, "Remittances Grow 5% in 2022, Despite Global Headwinds", press release, November 30, 2022, at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/30/remittances-grow-5-percent-2022> (date of access: November 30, 2022). Three major G20 economies took the lead in remittances,

With a constantly mutating pandemic due to the emergence of new strains and a slow and uneven recovery, the G20 started a new cycle on December 1, 2020 under the leadership of Italy. The challenges were perhaps greater and global conditions were clearly more uncertain. The Italian presidency had the triple task of building on the outcomes of the Riyadh Summit, pushing for agreement on new global challenges and anchoring a weakened multilateral system. The arrival of Joe Biden as U.S. president and the sudden change of government in Italy that brought Mario Draghi to power painted a more positive picture for the G20. However, reaching consensus on the final declaration of the Rome Summit was even more complex than the Riyadh Summit.

This article analyses the work of the Italian presidency of the G20 in 2021. The first section explains the configuration, evolution and dynamics of the Group until 2021. The second section reviews Italy's priorities and the outcomes of the Rome Summit in October 2021. The third section presents Mexico's objectives and their outcomes in the Rome Declaration. This article concludes with a general analysis of the results of the Italian presidency and their implications for the overall performance of the G20 and multilateral diplomacy.

Current configuration, evolution and dynamics of the G20

The G20 is the main forum for global economic and financial policy coordination, which by its very characteristics can be classified as the highest expression of the new multilateralism or club diplomacy. It is a space for open, informal and flexible dialogue with equal participation of devel-

with India leading for the first time with USD 100 billion, Mexico with USD 60 billion and China in third place with USD 51 billion; see World Bank, "Remittances in the G20", in *Remittances Brave Global Headwinds: Special Focus: Climate Migration*, Washington, D.C., World Bank (Migration and Development Brief, 37), 2022, pp. 2-3. April 11, 2022, the SRE announced the signing of a collaboration agreement between the Institute for Mexicans Abroad and Telecomunicaciones de México to reduce commissions on remittances sent to Mexico by Mexican nationals in other countries.

oped and emerging countries. It provides guidance and creates international rules that are agreed by political will and consensus among its members.

It is defined as a mechanism with considerable legitimacy thanks to the representativeness and diversity of its membership, which includes countries from all continents as well as from both the developed and developing world, *i.e.* world powers and middle powers. Unlike “traditional” bodies, this forum lacks a constitutive act, a permanent secretariat or its own budget. Its low degree of institutionalisation allows for adaptation of its agenda and working methods to the challenges it faces, and thus enables a more agile and concrete response. It is therefore considered an alternative or “safety valve” to formal organisations, as decisions are taken at the highest level.

It is a forum for political orientation and direction. Its main function is to unite political will, unblock negotiations and generate positive inertia to promote discussions in other spaces. The agreements reached are not binding and are rarely implemented, as this task is left to institutionalised bodies and individual members. For this reason, the G20 has no monitoring or evaluation mechanism to measure the progress or results of its agreements. However, some measures have been put in place to follow up on its commitments. For example, since 2013, the Working Group on Development has produced a document on individual and joint G20 progress on the development commitments set out in ministerial and leaders' declarations.

It is regarded as an agenda setter, as it identifies new issues on the international agenda, and a rule maker, as it creates formal or informal rules that govern international action. Its legitimacy derives from the general perception of its members as global and regional leaders, with the capacity and resources to influence the actions of other countries. Their influence on multilateral dynamics has generated criticism for their possible competition or duplication of efforts with institutionalised international organisations. For this reason, the participation of these bodies in discussions seeks to coordinate and promote the complementarity of international action between forums.

The G20 was elevated to leaders' level in 2008, with the Washington Summit, to respond to the global financial crisis of that year. The second summit took place in April 2009, in London, to agree on actions to halt the recession

and underpin economic recovery with measures such as providing USD 1.1 trillion to the global economy through the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹⁰ At the Pittsburgh Summit, also in 2009, the decision was taken to institutionalise the Group with annual summits, the division of its work into Finance and Sherpa channels and the creation of thematic working groups with technical and ministerial meetings. It also agreed on the format of an annual rotating presidency among the members and the figure of the troika in addition to the pre- and post-presidencies, with the aim of guaranteeing continuity of the agenda.

Each year, the rotating presidency invites a small number of countries. Recent cycles have included Spain (permanent guest), the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Singapore and the countries holding the chairmanships of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This trend has given way to a debate on the relevance of broadening the membership in favour of greater representativeness. One of the main arguments is the growing influence of emerging countries in global decision-making.

The discussion is accentuated by the over-representation of Europe due to the high number of European countries and, in addition, the permanent space for the European Union. Opponents of this position argue that a larger number of members would undermine the effectiveness of the G20 by broadening the number of positions and, consequently, complicate consensus-building. This discussion is likely to intensify in the coming years.

State participation is complemented by that of international organisations such as the World Bank; the IMF; the United Nations and some of its specialised agencies such as the WHO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO); the World Trade Organisation (WTO); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and the Financial Stability Board (FSB). These bodies, along with others invited by the presidencies in office, provide technical analysis and policy recommendations

¹⁰ Sergio Enrique Barrera Gutiérrez, *La intervención política y económica de Alemania sobre la crisis griega en 2015* [thesis], Mexico, UNAM, 2018, p. 84, at <http://132.248.9.195/ptd2018/septiembre/0780183/0780183.pdf> (date of access: August 8, 2022).

that contribute to outlining G20 commitments. Their involvement is restricted to some technical guidance processes that contribute to members' decision-making. While their concurrence is not necessary to reach consensus, they are expected to bring agreements to discussions in their own fora to contribute to their implementation.

The work of the G20 presidencies officially begins on December 1 each year, although the formal handover takes place at the end of the annual leaders' summit. The process always begins with the first Sherpa meeting, at which the current presidency presents its priorities. Throughout the year, working groups develop the thematic priorities, draft deliverables and negotiate declarations and documents to be adopted at the ministerial level. The Sherpas meet several times during the year to guide the overall work, review progress in each area, generate synergies between agenda items and prepare for the leaders' summit, including the negotiation of the final declaration.

The summit is the culmination of the annual work of the G20. It lasts two days, during which the heads of state and government discuss the issues on the agenda and the international situation and adopt the final declaration with the agreements reached through the Finance and Sherpa channels. The summits also serve to hold bilateral and multilateral meetings between different countries and groups, such as the G7 and MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia). The latter group, formed at Mexico's initiative in 2013, has served to promote agreements with developed countries and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Its objectives include building bridges in an increasingly multipolar international system and presenting innovative solutions to global challenges.

The G20 has achieved a great number of successes, such as the adoption of one of the largest fiscal and monetary stimulus packages, which consisted of spending 2% of GDP in 2009 and 1.6% in 2010 to mitigate the financial crisis. It also created the FSB to identify risks in the international financial system and propose measures to meet regulatory standards. At the 2014 Brisbane Summit, the G20 committed to reducing the gender gap in labour market participation rates by 25% as of 2025. At the 2015 Antalya Summit, the G20 agreed to reduce the proportion of young people at greatest risk of being permanently out of the labour market by 15% as of 2025.

However, it has also seen failures. The clearest example was its inability to reach consensus language on commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement following the announcement of the U.S. exit from the treaty in 2017. The G20 also failed to adopt concrete measures to support middle-income countries in their post-pandemic recovery process, as it did for the least developed countries through the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI).

Italian presidency and the Rome Summit 2021

Italy assumed the presidency of the G20 in 2021, in a scenario marked by the multidimensional impact of the pandemic and a deep economic crisis negatively affecting all countries, especially those in the developing world. Despite the major challenges for the Italian leadership, analysts, including John Kirton, saw a positive outlook that represented a return to normality with a long list of lessons learned and the beginning of a new phase based on digital transformation.¹¹ It was also thought that Italy's leadership would help to abate the negative effects of the pandemic and return to the path of global economic recovery.

The G20 had not seen a European leadership since 2017. This rapidly crystallised from the start of the Italian presidency, whose priorities were based on the interests of the G7, the European Union and the national plan of the government of Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who took office in February 2021.¹² In other words, the G20 faced an agenda heavily weighted towards the priorities of developed countries, at a time when interstate and intrastate inequalities represented perhaps the greatest challenge for the international community.

¹¹ John Kirton, "A Significant Performance for People, Planet and Prosperity: Prospects for the G20's Rome Summit", in Global Governance Project, at <https://www.globalgovernanceproject.org/a-significant-performance-for-people-planet-and-prosperity-prospects-for-the-g20s-rome-summit/john-kirton/> (date of access: August 28, 2022).

¹² Mario Draghi, "In Pursuit of Global Good", en John Kirton y Madeline Koch (eds.), *G20 Italy: The Rome Summit*, London, GT Media, 2021, p .8-9.

Italy's priorities revolved around three axes: people, the planet and prosperity. In the first, the aim was to respond to the pandemic, through universal access to vaccines, inclusive economic recovery, the addressing of inequalities, and policies focused on education, employment and agriculture. The second axis focused on tackling climate change and boosting energy transition, the circular economy, environmental protection and the preservation of biodiversity. The third axis was to achieve greater prosperity through digitalisation and innovation, and significant progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹³ Cross-cutting themes included social inclusion and the protection of the most vulnerable groups, with a focus on gender equality and sustainability.

At the centre of the agenda stood the response to the pandemic and sustained recovery. One of the first steps in this direction was the World Health Summit, organised by the G20 and the European Commission and held on May 21, 2021 via videoconference from Rome. Participants committed to transfer vaccines to countries with the least access, through more equitable distribution and access. They also agreed to promote actions to improve the world's preparedness for future pandemics by strengthening the international health architecture, among other measures. Support for less developed countries, the revitalisation of international trade, the integration of SMEs into the global economy, job creation, quality education and the fight against corruption were promoted. The G20 recognised that the pandemic remained an unprecedented global health and socio-economic crisis.¹⁴ The 20 economies expressed their support for the WHO's coordinating role in addressing COVID-19.¹⁵ This decision sought to support the mandate and role of specialised institutionalised bodies for implementing their commitments on a universal basis. It also enabled the WHO to report on the number of COVID-19 cases in each country,

¹³ Diego Domínguez Cardona, "El camino hacia la recuperación: el G20 en 2021", *El Heraldo de México*, February 12, 2021, at <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/opinion/2021/2/12/el-camino-hacia-la-recuperacion-el-g20-en-2021-256629.html> (date of access: October 18, 2022).

¹⁴ Global Health Summit, "The Rome Declaration", May 21, 2021, at https://global-health-summit.europa.eu/system/files/2021-05/GHS_The%20Rome%20Declaration.pdf (date of access: October 10, 2022).

¹⁵ The WHO has established 2021 as the Year of Health and Care Workers.

coordinate the work of COVAX, and push for action to ensure equitable access to vaccines. During Indonesia's presidency in 2022, this support translated into countries endorsing WHO to be part of the governance of the World Bank-administered Pandemic Fund.

Overall, the Global Health Summit had positive results and its final declaration sent a political message of commitment towards multilateral action to contain the pandemic. It laid the foundations on which consensus could be reached towards the Rome Summit and allowed Mexico to identify the parliamentary environment in the group. It served to draw a "map of positions" among members, which showed a clear division between developed and developing countries, based on the unequal conditions in which they found themselves at the time. Most advanced countries had achieved full vaccination of their populations, while a significant part of the developing economies had not received a single dose. The Italian and E.U. co-presidency pushed for agreements that reflected this reality and that of the other developed countries, downplaying the crucial importance of equitable distribution of vaccines as one of the keys to overcoming the pandemic. Developing countries undertook additional individual and joint efforts to ensure that their needs and interests were reflected in the final text, at times without the open support of the presidency.

In addition, Italy prioritised the work on climate change at COP26 co-chairing it with the United Kingdom (November 1-12), as well as COP15 on the protection of biodiversity (initially to be held in Kunming, October 11-15, but eventually in Montreal in December 2022). On July 22-23, an extraordinary meeting of energy and environment ministers was held in Naples, due to the fires and floods that affected cities in G20 member countries; a declaration on the environment was agreed, covering food security, sustainable water use, marine pollution, sustainable finance and youth climate education. This was the precursor to leaders in Rome committing not to publicly finance coal-fired power generation abroad,¹⁶ and demanding that developed countries meet the Paris Agreement's commitment

¹⁶ G20, "G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration", paragraph 28, October 31, 2022, at <https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/G20ROMELEADERSDECLARATION.pdf> (date of access: October 18, 2022).

to allocate USD 100 billion per year to climate change mitigation in developing countries by 2025.¹⁷

During the Italian presidency of the G20, two financial measures were adopted in support of the countries that suffered most from the effects of the economic crisis. On the one hand, the DSSI, which benefited almost 50 countries for a total of USD 12.7 billion deferred between May 2020 and December 2021.¹⁸ A common framework for the treatment of long-term debt, beyond the COVID-19 crisis, was also adopted. In addition, the IMF was called to transfer special drawing rights (SDRs) for USD 650 billion in additional reserves of vulnerable countries, allocated on August 23, 2021.

Rome backed an international tax reform proposed by the OECD, which envisages the creation of a global minimum tax of 15% for multinational companies with a turnover of at least EUR 750 million per year, in order to eradicate tax havens. This regime should generate USD 150 billion a year in revenue for governments.¹⁹ The initiative agreed by 136 countries obliges multinationals to be taxed in the countries where they make profits and not only where they are domiciled for tax purposes. The OECD is currently seeking to have these provisions in place by the beginning of 2024.²⁰

The Rome Summit was held on October 30-31, 2021, under high expectations. First, because it was the first face-to-face meeting since the start of the pandemic. Second, because although important steps had been taken in global immunisation, the economic crisis had worsened throughout

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 25. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has reported each year that climate finance flows from developed to developing countries have been below target in 2015. Working Group III contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022 Mitigation of Climate Change*, Geneva, IPCC, 2022, at https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FullReport.pdf (date of access: March 3, 2023).

¹⁸ G20, *op. cit.*, paragraph 11.

¹⁹ France 24, "Los líderes del G20 aprobaron en Roma una histórica reforma fiscal que apunta a las multinacionales", in France24, October 31, 2021, at <https://www.france24.com/es/europa/20211031-los-l%C3%ADderes-del-g20-aprueban-en-roma-una-hist%C3%B3rica-reforma-fiscal-internacional> (date of access: October 18, 2022).

²⁰ OECD, "International Tax Reform: OECD Releases Technical Guidance for Implementation of the Global Minimum Tax", in OECD, February 2, 2023, at <https://www.oecd.org/tax/beps/international-tax-reform-oecd-releases-technical-guidance-for-implementation-of-the-global-minimum-tax.htm> (date of access: March 3, 2023).

the world, affecting social inequalities. Thirdly, because it represented the prelude to COP26, so that the agreements reached in this area would guide the discussions and the results of this conference.

The negotiation of the Rome Declaration was particularly complex, marked by the accentuated polarisation of positions between developed countries and emerging economies and a clear inclination of the Italian presidency towards the former, a phenomenon that had not occurred in previous years, at least not to the extent of hindering the negotiations. It was clear to the Sherpas from the outset that Italy would seek to use its leadership position to impose its national interests and commitments, as well as those of the G7 and the European Union, regarding climate change, energy transition and development. On the first of these issues, Italy pushed for measurable commitments, more ambitious than those set out in the Paris Agreement, but in line with those adopted within the European Union. On energy, the goals proposed by Italy were also very similar to those previously agreed by the G7. On development, the presidency emphasised developed countries' support for lower-income nations, leaving out the needs of middle-income economies.

This division was joined by other more complex divisions on issues such as gender equality and digitalisation. Regarding the former, a large majority defended the use of the term "gender equality" in the Final Declaration against a small group that insisted on the narrower concept of "equality between men and women", as a way to avoid referring to the rights of LGBTI+ people. In the second, vast differences in national laws on the protection of personal data and the cross-border flow of information prevented specific agreements towards advancing digitisation goals.

An important aspect of the Rome Summit was the meetings and agreements that were reached in the margins between the participating leaders. The United States and the European Union agreed to reverse the Trump administration's aluminium and steel tariffs, ending trade tensions between the two allies. President Biden resolved disagreements with France over the cancellation of Australia's purchase of French submarines and sent positive signals that negotiations with Iran would be revived.²¹ On a less

²¹ J. Ventura, "Los 20 en el 21", *Reforma*, November 3, 2022.

positive note, Biden called for a subsequent summit to discuss supply chain resilience, to which countries such as China and Russia were not invited.

Mexico during the Italian presidency

Mexico played a prominent role during the Italian presidency. From the outset, the Mexican G20 team, composed of Deputy Minister Carmen Moreno Toscano (Sherpa), Minister Jennifer Feller (Sous-sherpa) and Third Minister Diego Domínguez (director for G20), outlined the priorities that it promoted throughout the year, based on the international situation, the Group's agenda and its national interests. The first of these priorities was the defence of multilateral diplomacy as the best way to address the challenges that the G20 had on the table: “[The G20] is a privileged space to strengthen political dialogue and deepen our collaboration with some of our main strategic partners on priority issues. [...] We want an effective multilateral system, based on international cooperation, with objectives that are always and primarily for the direct benefit of those most vulnerable”.²²

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador appointed Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon as his representative to the Rome Summit. Foreign Minister Ebrard brought to the leaders' dialogue Mexico's position on the importance of strengthening cooperation and collective action to accelerate the response to the health, economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,²³ as well as to provide concrete responses to the multiple other challenges.

From the beginning of the process, Mexico outlined five priorities: health, climate change, cultural heritage, migration and support for middle-income

²² Carmen Moreno Toscano, “Hacia un multilateralismo más eficaz e incluyente: México en el G20”, *El Universal*, July 4, 2021, at <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/opinion/carmen-moreno-toscano/hacia-un-multilateralismo-mas-eficaz-e-incluyente-mexico-en-el-g20> (date of access: November 3, 2022).

²³ Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “México participa en la Cumbre de Líderes del G20 en Roma”, press release no. 485, October 25, 2021, at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-participa-en-la-cumbre-de-lideres-del-g20-en-roma?idiom=es> (date of access: November 3, 2022).

countries. The Mexican delegation arrived in Rome with these objectives in mind, with the support of most of the emerging G20 countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Türkiye.

On health, Mexico submitted a proposal to ensure universal recognition of all WHO-licensed vaccines. After intense negotiations, and with the support of the majority of emerging countries, the commitment was inserted in paragraph 5 of the Final Declaration. The proposal pursued two central objectives: first, the promotion of a multilateral vision of global vaccination based on the recognition of the WHO as the highest international health authority and, second, the elimination of discrimination between people and countries based on the vaccine that each individual had received. In turn, the benefits would be the facilitation of equitable and non-discriminatory resumption of international travel, the diversification of vaccine production capacity between countries, and the acceleration of economic recovery through the revitalisation of key sectors such as tourism.

It is important to recall that on April 20, 2020, with the support of 179 countries, Mexico presented an initiative at the U.N. General Assembly to guarantee equal access to medicines, vaccines and medical supplies against COVID-19 (resolution 74/274). The first space in which the Mexican President advocated for this proposal was at the G20 Extraordinary Summit the previous month.

On the priority related to climate action, Mexico called on developed countries to meet their climate finance commitments and facilitate access to funds for projects on adaptation. Advanced economies were asked to reaffirm their commitment to mobilise USD 100 billion per year between 2020 and 2025, as set out in the Paris Agreement. In addition, with the support of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Mexico pushed for more ambitious financial targets for COP26.

Regarding the third priority, and in keeping with the bilateral cooperation mechanisms established with different countries, including Italy, Mexico promoted clear language on the importance of the G20 working together on the preservation of damaged, illicitly trafficked or endangered cultural heritage. This has been an essential part of Mexico's foreign policy in the G20 over the last few presidencies.

Mexico also promoted migration as a central aspect of the response to the pandemic. With the support of Germany, Spain and Türkiye,

the Mexican delegation achieved, for the first time since 2017, the inclusion of a substantive paragraph on migration. The G20 adopted, by consensus, the commitment on the socio-economic development of migrants' communities of origin and respect for their human rights, regardless of their migratory status. The inclusion of migrants in national and regional economic recovery efforts was also agreed.

Finally, Mexico promoted the view that an inclusive recovery must consider the needs of all countries, especially middle-income economies. Together with Argentina, a G20 commitment was made to explore and implement concrete measures to support these countries in the face of the effects of the pandemic.

Conclusions

In the face of the accentuation of the multipolar international system, the growing questioning of the liberal order²⁴ and trends towards unilateralism, fragmentation, protectionism and even ideological extremism, the G20 has a unique responsibility to defend multilateral dialogue and the promotion of global governance. Its institutional set-up, flexible nature and representativeness position it as a strategic forum for giving political direction, creating norms and guiding international action in an agile and effective manner.

Italy assumed the presidency of the G20 in the midst of the pandemic crisis and its escalating health, economic and social consequences, reflected in the growing inequalities between developed, emerging and lower-income countries. The arrival of Joe Biden as U.S. President and the new Italian leadership of Mario Draghi were seen as encouraging signs for strengthening leadership within the group, building solid consensus around concrete collective actions to overcome the crisis and, as a consequence, revitalising the multilateral system as a whole.

²⁴ Claude Heller, *Historia mínima de las relaciones multilaterales de México*, 2021, Mexico, El Colegio de Mexico, 2021, pp. 272-273.

However, the results were limited and inconsistent. Italy, with the backing of its G7 allies and the European Union, pushed an agenda strongly aligned with the priorities and strategic interests of developed countries. The emerging G20 economies, including Mexico, had to undertake extraordinary diplomatic efforts to maintain a balance with the needs of developing countries. Geopolitical tensions and rivalries also crystallised in the execution of Italian leadership. For example, Italy showed strong and continued reluctance to Mexico's initiative on universal recognition of *all* WHO-licensed vaccines because it included two produced by China. Since its presentation by Mexico in August 2021, Italy obstructed its discussion and refused to include it in the draft final declaration that the Sherpas negotiated between September and October, prior to the leaders' summit. The Mexican negotiating team successfully managed to build a critical mass of support around its proposal, mainly from emerging countries, to get it negotiated in the G20 plenary, despite Italy's refusal. As a result of extensive diplomatic efforts, compromise language acceptable to all members was reached and enshrined in the Final Declaration.

Another example of domestic bias in the G20 was in the consideration of the needs of middle-income countries. Italy and its European allies pushed for a recovery and growth approach focused solely on development assistance to lower-income countries, as this was where their interests lay. Once again, Mexican diplomacy used its persuasion, negotiation and support-building skills in emerging economies such as Argentina, Brazil and India to shape a commitment to include "middle-income" countries in recovery efforts.

At a key moment for the reinvigoration of the multilateral system and international collaboration, Italy was successful in pushing for a more pragmatic G20 activism by increasing the G20's responsiveness and scope to the multidimensional crisis the world was facing at the time. However, it also generated unnecessary fragmentation within the Group that put consensus-building at risk. Paradoxically, this division was strategically exploited by the emerging countries to put aside their differences in favour of their shared interests and priorities, and to create a common front against the impositions of the great powers.

In the coming years, Mexico should continue to ensure the strengthening of the multilateral system through the G20. This is one of the best

instruments for projecting foreign policy priorities and increasing our international influence. We must anticipate the Group's responses to future economic, political and military crises. Within the Group, Mexico has key allies, such as emerging countries, Latin American countries and MIKTA members, with whom it can increase its negotiating capacity depending on the issues on the current agenda. Mexico will continue to seek to ensure that the agreements reached at the G20 favour the most vulnerable countries and strengthen sustainable and inclusive development for all countries, without discrimination.

Multilateral diplomacy must be one of the main mechanisms to prevent shifts in the balance of power from becoming threats to the global economy. The G20 must not allow geopolitical shifts and the constant transformations in international relations to limit its ability to coordinate unified policies in the face of global challenges. This international forum has succeeded because of the political will of its members to accept consensual compromises after extensive negotiations. The main challenge the G20 faces in crisis scenarios is to maintain its members' commitment to dialogue and to achieving collective action. Consensus-building sends positive political signals that can prevent or mitigate polarisation and confrontation.

At the end of 2021, Indonesia assumed the G20 presidency with a number of unresolved issues. Chief among them is achieving a balance in the agenda's objectives in light of the prevalence of developed country interests during previous presidencies. President Joko Widodo's government decided to set three priorities for 2022: strengthening the global health architecture, digital transformation and energy transition. Faced with an inconclusive pandemic, the Asian country initially decided to initially on a stronger and more inclusive recovery under the leadership of the G20. However, the war against Ukraine was soon to begin and transform into one of the most profound internal challenges the Group has faced to date. Russia's invasion of Ukraine created an extreme divide that provoked developed countries to attempt to expel Russia from the forum, in the face of differing positions from emerging economies. It also dictated the level of ambition, focus and conduct of negotiations, which represented an additional and significant obstacle to diplomacy in the pursuit of the Group's objectives under a scenario of international recovery.