

STAYING ON COURSE IN TROUBLED WATERS

EU FOREIGN POLICY IN 2021

JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES





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INTRODUCTION

STAYING ON COURSE IN TROUBLED WATERS

This book is a selection of my writings in 2021. They focus on how the European Union dealt with the challenges of a more competitive world during the second year of the pandemic. They are not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide an account of the European 'footprint' on this year's events. I hope it will give the reader an idea of how the EU has tried to stay on course in troubled waters through its foreign and security policy.

Certainly, 2021 was a difficult year. The COVID-19 pandemic lasted longer than expected, increasing inequalities and exacerbating geopolitical challenges.

The pandemic also continued to shape our personal lives and affect the very nature of diplomacy, partly due to the stilted distance of endless videoconferences. Diplomacy is about meeting foreigners, preferably in person. It makes a big difference if you can look someone in the eye, assess their body language and 'step outside' during negotiations, in order to better understand their reasoning and see if you can find common ground. In a videoconference, people state their positions, but they do not invest in compromises. And without compromises, we stand still, or even go backwards.

Of course, the fact that the pandemic has reduced direct contacts is not the main reason that the world is drowning in unsolved problems. That has to do with the underlying political and economic drivers. But it has made a bad situation worse.

The conflicts, tensions and struggles for influence from before the pandemic are still here, along with various global issues. The most important of these are the environmental crisis – which is not only about climate change – and the multidimensional impact of digitalisation.

We may say that during the past 2 years, the pandemic has been acting like 'contrast fluid', exposing the seriousness of geopolitical tensions and the weaknesses of the existing multilateral system: democracy, human rights and peace are all struggling or retreating.

This is having severe consequences: conflicts and civil wars are more numerous, they last longer, are often internationalised through proxy forces and are harder to resolve. Power politics are back on the agenda all over the world. New (and often authoritarian) empires are widening their influence and challenging European values and interests.

This also leads to more human suffering around the globe: at the end of 2021, the International Rescue Committee estimated that 274 million people would need humanitarian assistance in 2022 – a 63 % rise over the past 2 years. According to the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, more than 1 % of the world's population – 1 in 95 people – has been forcibly displaced, compared with 'only' 1 in 159 in 2010. In 2021, we saw more and more countries fail to fulfil their 'responsibility to protect' citizens and some, such as Myanmar, openly attack them.

There were of course also positive developments in 2021, including in areas where the EU has been a constructive influence, for example on fighting climate change with the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow. In addition, the Strategic Compass, which will be adopted in March 2022, is a structural response to the security challenges we are facing.

Overall, we faced four kinds of issues. First, we faced issues related to global commons such as the pandemic and climate change. Second, we relaunched EU-US relations, in a context marked by the worsening of the Ukrainian crisis and the intensification of strategic competition with China. Third, we dealt with the challenges related to the stabilisation of our periphery, as well as the deepening of our engagement with Africa and the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, we tackled the growing conflicts linked to the weaponisation of interdependence.

Coping with global commons

The first set of challenges is in the field of global public goods. It is constantly expanding and touches on the climate, epidemics and the oceans, but also on space, biodiversity, migration and human rights.

During 2021, all of these issues were very important to us. However, two of them dominated the European agenda: the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

In 2021, the pandemic entered its second year, with a rebound linked to new variants. However, we had access to vaccines, thanks in particular to the mRNA vaccines developed in Europe and the United States.

At the end of 2021, more than 50 % of the world's population had received at least one dose and 80 % of adults in the EU had received at least two doses (to which boosters are being added at a rapid pace). But there is also a big counterpoint: a wide vaccination gap among countries and continents with, for instance, less than 8 % of sub-Saharan African people being vaccinated by the end of 2021.

In Europe, the joint procurement of vaccines at the EU level proved to be a big success, despite the criticism at the beginning of the year. This enabled us not only to reduce the costs but also to increase the availability of vaccines.

The EU, the world's largest vaccines exporter

The EU has been by far the world's largest exporter of the vaccine, with more than 1.4 billion doses delivered, even if these exports have mainly gone to other developed countries. We are also the largest contributor to COVAX and one of the biggest global vaccine donors, reaching our target of 300 million donated doses at the end of the year.

But being one of the biggest donors does not mean that we have done enough. Europe alone has not been able to close the vaccine gap between Europe and Africa. We rightly claim that vaccines are a public good and that nobody will be safe until everybody is safe, but reality has proven that this is easier said than done.

For example, the 8 % African vaccination rate masks considerable national differences: Rwanda has managed to vaccinate over 53 % of its population. The capacity of the health system has proven to be crucial. In fact, for some countries the availability of vaccines is not the main problem: there are also logistical constraints or the reluctance of populations to be vaccinated, generally due to a lack of information or confidence in their authorities. On a positive note, these difficulties are mitigated by an important demographic factor: the extreme youth of the African population makes it much less vulnerable to the ravages of the virus than the older population of the Western world.

Nevertheless, in 2022 we should do more on donations and increasing the vaccine production capacity in Africa and elsewhere.

Climate change and climate diplomacy

Climate change is the biggest systemic threat facing the world: it is a kind of permanent pandemic but without vaccines. The COP26 summit in Glasgow was a key moment to put the world on the necessary track of climate neutrality, i.e. to ensure that global climate action is happening at the necessary speed and scale. However, as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said: 'The outcome of COP26 reflects the interests and contradictions of the world today.' Negotiating among 197 countries means compromise. The outcome needs to be strengthened next year but it is a step forward, sending the message that fossil fuel subsidies and the unabated use of coal are on the way out. The outcome also foresees a doubling of funding for climate adaptation.

The Global Methane Pledge was a concrete step forward at COP26 that was due to EU climate diplomacy. It aims to reduce global methane emissions by at least 30 % from 2020 levels by 2030. The EU started it, the United States joined and finally 100 countries signed it. This is a good example of how the EU should operate internationally: take the initiative, build a coalition and rally the rest of the world.

It is clear that a lot of work lies ahead. The EU represents only 8 % of global emissions and this share is declining, while China's share stands at 26 % and is still rising. To keep global warming under the 1.5 degree limit, we need to cut global emissions in half by 2030. For this to happen, we need to bring the world with us. We must not only intensify our efforts at home, but also increase our efforts to enable developing and emerging countries to finance their energy transitions. Fighting climate change is not a luxury of the developed world. With more than 600 million Africans without access to electricity, significant efforts on climate and energy diplomacy are needed. The climate transition needs to be both global and just – or it will simply not happen.

Relaunching EU–US relations

Another important improvement this year was due to the arrival of a new American President. Under Joe Biden, both the tone and the substance in EU–US relations have improved dramatically. And we have seen what this means in concrete decisions where the EU and the United States are now on the same page: climate change, the Iran/JCPOA negotiations, global corporate taxation, etc. The Biden administration has understood that the alliance with Europe is a way for the United States to remain among the leading countries in the world. Europe is not a burden for the United States, but an asset.

The specificity of transatlantic solidarity is that it unites partners who share a fundamental attachment to the principles of freedom, democracy and human rights. These principles are increasingly under threat throughout the world, including in our own societies. It is precisely the awareness of this fragility that gives its full meaning to the transatlantic relationship.

This does not mean that we are, or will be, in perfect agreement on everything. However, it means that we can speak openly and honestly, as friends do. And, if necessary, we can overcome differences of opinion or approach, as was the case with the AUKUS deal or the conditions for the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Last year, we engaged in a particularly serious dialogue with the United States on China and the Indo-Pacific region. China's rise to power is an inescapable reality. The question that remains is how it can be accommodated in a multilateral order. This in turn depends on how China complies with the principles of a rules-based order and reciprocity in economic matters.

China, a partner, a competitor and a strategic rival

Europe sees China as a major global player with the characteristic of being a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival all rolled into one. In many ways, the Biden administration shares our view. There are areas where cooperation with China is desirable, like climate; others where competition is inevitable as the logical consequence of China's rise; and yet others where rivalry between two very different politico-economic systems is unavoidable. Of course, the balance between these three components needs to be fine-tuned and there may be differences between the two sides of the Atlantic: we need to adjust our views together.

There is no benefit in pitting the United States against Europe: those who value its strategic autonomy only in terms of its ability to distance itself from the United States are miscalculating. Yet the strength of any alliance lies in the strength of all of its partners. The events of 2021 that are described in this book showed that the United States wants a strong European partner. The strengthening of the Atlantic alliance requires a strengthening of the European pillar. A strong Europe will make the transatlantic relationship stronger: this is the message that I am trying to get across in this book.

Of course, there are many forums, including NATO, in which our discussions with the United States take place. However, this is not enough, especially since not all of the EU Member States are members of NATO. We need to build a dialogue

between the United States and the EU on all strategic issues. We advanced with this process during 2021 and now we must give it maximum substance. The multiplication of crises that we are experiencing is a good indicator of that need and urgency.

We should also work in lockstep in the Balkans, where the trend is worrying – especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina – and we must try to get the Iran nuclear deal back on track.

We also cannot forget Afghanistan: after the Taliban takeover, we still have a responsibility towards the Afghan people and must try to avoid a total collapse. In 2022, we have to find the narrow path of delivering ‘humanitarian aid +’ (i.e. also supporting the health and education services) without legitimising the Taliban regime.

We must also use the EU–US Trade and Technology Council to work together on the standards and taxation of ‘Big Tech’. It is in our common interest that the standards of the new economy are not shaped by authoritarian regimes: along with our American allies, we must ensure that our democracies contain the advance of ‘Big Brother’. Given the influence of new technologies on our lives, Europe must use its normative power in fields such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing or biotechnology.

However, Europe will only be able to extend its normative influence in these fields and assert its values if, in parallel to its regulatory power, it acquires real technological power. In other words, to be a regulatory champion it is necessary to be a technological leader, in order to ensure that our standards are dominant.

Of course, here too there may be differences in approach between the United States and Europe. However, the European vision of data regulation can have an influence on the American public debate.

Insecurity and power play in the East

This year we have seen in the East many vivid examples of what we mean when we speak of ‘hybrid conflicts’: cyber operations and intimidation (against Ukraine), state hijacking of airplanes and the blatant manipulation of migrants (by Belarus), energy blackmail (by Russia against Moldova) and the aggressive use of disinformation and propaganda (everywhere). It is getting worse and we must respond.

We must continue our support for Ukraine and Moldova and remain firm on Belarus. At stake are the fates of individual countries and societies, but also the wider principles underpinning the European security order: the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states; the inviolability of internationally recognised borders; and the freedom of countries to decide their foreign policy and security policies. In addition, we must enhance our support to civil society, fight corruption and encourage the building of resilient countries and governments that deliver for their citizens and are able to resist Russian pressure. At the same time, we need a functioning relationship with Russia, which remains an important EU neighbour and plays a key role in all of these crises.

At the start of 2022, when we were reviewing this book, I read repeatedly that the Ukrainian crisis has once again revealed Europe's weakness. However, despite appearances, Europe is not absent from the Russian–American 'discussion table'. Far from it.

It is true that last December, Russia addressed its two draft treaties to the United States and NATO and ignored the EU. This is not really a new attitude from the Russian authorities and there are several reasons for it.

Moscow deliberately seeks to bypass the EU on security

The first is political. Moscow deliberately seeks to bypass the EU in security discussions, because Vladimir Putin profoundly disagrees with the values that the EU defends. They are antithetical to those that the Russian government seeks to promote. We have seen this clearly in Belarus or with the Navalny case. In addition, let us not forget that the Ukrainian crisis was born from the free trade agreement between the EU and Ukraine. Therefore, the EU is a form of political nuisance for the Russian regime, which it seeks to circumvent through bilateral dialogues with Member States.

There is also a strategic aspect: Russia considers that discussions on the security of Europe should be the exclusive responsibility of the United States and NATO. Of course, no one can ignore the essential role of the American guarantee in the security of Europe. However, the EU Member States, within both NATO and the OSCE, all have their own say as well.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the EU has expressed its principled positions about the main legal instruments that have defined the European security architecture for 30 years. These principles are well known; they involve the respect

of the territorial integrity of all states as well as the right to choose their alliances. These issues have occupied the bulk of European diplomatic activity during the last quarter of 2021.

Moreover, beyond the reaffirmation of these principles, the EU has been closely associated with the consultations undertaken by the United States, including in the formulation of their response to Russian demands.

I am one of those who believe that Russia is a power that cannot be ignored and a neighbour that will not disappear. I also believe that Russia has legitimate security interests, like any other country on the planet. We have to engage with Russia on issues of common interest. However, the Russian government should still ask itself why so many countries want to join NATO, not at the behest of the United States but simply because they are scared of Russia's aggressive stance.

Africa and the Southern Neighbourhood

In the Southern Neighbourhood, the gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea widened further in 2021 in terms of all key indicators (economy, demography, fundamental freedoms). The situation in Libya has improved under the unity government and the country has a chance again, with elections to be held in 2022. But we have seen a clear regression in Lebanon and Tunisia. Further south, the situation in the Sahel is even worse: a coup in Mali, persistent violence in Burkina Faso and Niger, etc.

All these cases prove that having functioning political systems on the ground is everything: it is the *conditio sine qua non* for progress. No amount of external advice or assistance can make up for political settlements between local players. It is also the obvious conclusion after the Afghanistan debacle. The sooner we are able to internalise this lesson, the better.

In the South, we have to reverse the trend of growing divergence between the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, support Libya and help break the logjam in Lebanon. There is a particular opportunity to upgrade our relations with the Persian Gulf countries.

At the start of the Commission's mandate, we made a big commitment to Africa, setting out our ambition for a revamped, modern EU–Africa partnership. The tag line was 'Not on, not for, but with Africa'. We laid out ambitious plans that included all of the elements of the economy, security and governance. Then COVID-19 took

over. In addition, we saw a worsening of the crises in the Sahel, Ethiopia and Sudan, which consumed much of the remaining policy bandwidth. Sadly, in many parts of Africa there has been a negative trend in 2021, above all in terms of security and governance.

It is imperative to return to the positive agenda of reimagining our partnership with Africa. We must move beyond individual crises and forge a modern, forward-looking agenda. We have to highlight our connectivity offer, using the Global Gateway. We also need to deliver on vaccines – building on our ‘1 billion’ plan to help develop a vaccine industry on the continent – and on climate finance. There are many reasons to reimagine this relationship and shape the agenda together – and 2022 is the right year to do it.

The strategic theatre of the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region is probably where the future global order will be decided. The main thrust of the strategy we unveiled this year is political diversification. We have set out our intention to expand the EU’s engagement, going beyond the traditional areas of trade and investment, to deepen cooperation on global issues and work more on security, including maritime, cyber etc.

Going forward, we must substantiate our partnerships in the region, for example by working on digital standards and climate action. The fact that China and India were watering down the COP26 outcome on coal shows that there is more work to do. We also have to deliver on the security dimension, for example by implementing the ‘coordinated maritime presence’ proposal in the region.

In 2021, we also stuck together on China. As I said, there has been a convergence of strategic perspectives in Europe around the triptych of seeing China as partner, competitor and rival – all at the same time. This has helped to cement unity among the member states, even when faced with unacceptable sanctions against Members of the European Parliament and other forms of pressure and coercion from Beijing on member states like Lithuania. The Chinese activities towards Taiwan and in Hong Kong and Xinyang are also against the very foundations of what we believe should be international norms.

Time to get serious on security and defence

This year, the debate on security and defence switched gears, driven by a significant worsening of our strategic environment. There is a consensus in the EU that we cannot afford to be a bystander in a world shaped by and for others. We must strengthen our capacity to think and act in strategic terms, with partners wherever possible and on our own if needed.

The Strategic Compass that I presented in November 2021 is a political proposal to prevent the major risk that the EU is facing: 'strategic shrinkage', or the risk of always being principled but seldom relevant. That is why it defines a high ambition for the European security and common defence and presents concrete means to make this ambition a reality.

The Strategic Compass takes into consideration that in recent years, the classic distinction between war and peace has been diminishing. The world is full of hybrid situations where we face intermediate dynamics of competition, intimidation and coercion. The tools of power are not only soldiers, tanks and airplanes – but also disinformation, cyberattacks, attempts to instrumentalise migrants, the privatisation of armies and the political control of sensitive technologies or rare earth metals. We have to be aware that defending Europe will require a new, comprehensive concept of security and that emerging technologies will have a profound impact on future warfare and European defence.

To prevent the risk of strategic shrinkage, the Strategic Compass proposes ways and means for the EU to handle the challenges it faces. This will require political will, without which nothing is possible and operational efficiency, without which everything is pointless. Taken together, these two ingredients will enhance our credibility, without which our ambitions will come up hard against reality.

The Strategic Compass is neither a crystal ball for predicting the future, nor a silver bullet that will magically enable Europe to develop a common defence policy overnight. It is a guide for preparation, decision and action that proposes concrete steps: to act more quickly and decisively when facing crises; to secure our citizens against fast-changing threats; to invest in the capabilities and technologies we need; and to partner with others to achieve common goals.

There should be no misunderstanding: I am fully aware of the limits of purely military approaches. We must learn the sobering lessons of Afghanistan and other interventions. The EU will never be a classic military power; this is neither our

ambition nor what the world needs. However, if you want to play a political role and shape global events, you need a toolkit that also enables presence on the ground. If you take that option off the table, others will fill the void – as we have seen in Libya and elsewhere.

‘Global issues’ and the weaponisation of interdependence

The nature of the modern political and media agenda is such that we often run from crisis to crisis. The list of 2021 crises is long and familiar: Belarus, Ukraine, Mali, Sudan, Ethiopia, Venezuela and Afghanistan. We tend to go from the crisis of the day to the coup d'état of the week. But we also need to take care of the longer-term ‘transversal’ issues that will literally shape the 21st century, such as the geopolitics of migration, energy and climate, along with digital and technology standards.

Interdependence has long been seen as a way to bring people together, to reduce development gaps and to promote cooperative rather than confrontational solutions. The benefits of interdependence have also been widely verified, but there is also a downside: interdependence is now instrumentalised on a political and strategic level. For example, this includes technology, rare earth metals and migration. In a context where interdependence becomes increasingly conflictual, Europe must reduce its vulnerability in all of the areas where some countries can manipulate our dependencies and restrict our options and choices.

There are many examples of how we can make a difference, if we overcome our silo thinking and link up our rule-making capacities with our financial instruments or regulatory power. One of these is the Global Gateway that we launched in November 2021. The central idea underpinning it all is that connectivity is also a geopolitical issue.

We know that our work on technology standards matters, because the values on which these standards are based are very much contested by today's authoritarian powers. We, as the EU, need to forge new alliances with like-minded partners to ensure that democratic principles continue to guide the development and use of new and disruptive technologies. A closed ‘EU-only’ mindset to technology regulation will not work.

The same dynamic applies to migration: we must work with and invest in partnerships with the countries of origin and transit. On energy, we have to work with others on the diversification of routes and sources, and help our partners to develop renewable forms of energy – such as solar and hydrogen – especially in the oil and gas producing countries.

We have to treat these transversal issues as core foreign policy. And while energy and climate diplomacy are already quite common terms, cyber diplomacy or migration diplomacy are not, at least not yet.

One often hears that ‘Europe is powerless’, an economic giant but a political dwarf. Actually, the problem in Europe is not a shortage of power, but the fragmentation of power. We need better coordination in our work in sectoral fields, along with the use of all available instruments in support of a single political strategy. This is hard work and not always very glamorous, but this is what the Treaty on the European Union requires of us.

Of course, in 2021 we were also engaged in many other regions: Latin America, the Persian Gulf, central Asia, the Arctic, etc. In all of these cases, we hear from our partners that they want us to do more, better, faster. You can read about these and other topics in the book. However, I want to end with some general reflections on EU foreign policy and on how to make it more effective.

Having been in the job for 2 years and having analysed how we make EU foreign policy, I see three key ingredients for success.

The need to ‘think political’ and learn the language of power

We are still too often Eurocentric and inclined to think that our ‘postmodern’ approach applies to the entire world. The EU has succeeded by turning political problems into technocratic ones and by supplanting power calculations with legal procedures. In the history of international relations and of the continent, this was a Copernican revolution. It has been a spectacular success, cementing peace among previously warring parties. It has also created institutions, mental maps, reflexes and a certain vocabulary that are unique. Europeans are, rightly, proud of this ‘escape from history’.

But this triumph has come at a cost: a reluctance to acknowledge that, outside our postmodern European garden, the jungle is growing back. I do not believe that history has ended, but rather that a new chapter has begun. With Europe surrounded by crises and the world increasingly marked by great power competition, I have repeatedly argued that we must be realistic and approach the world as it is – not just as we want it to be. This is why I have been saying for some time that we have to learn, or maybe relearn, to think and act in terms of power.

In a world dominated by political, economic and demographic giants, we have no choice but to unite, form a solid bloc and constitute a force that is capable of defending our values and interests – without being ashamed of proclaiming them loudly and clearly. In this respect, there is no contradiction in wanting to become a true powerhouse on the one hand, while continuing to defend the essential principles of multilateralism on the other. In fact, if we look closely, the two go hand in hand.

Building ourselves up as a power by abandoning multilateralism would make absolutely no sense. This would only destroy the rules of the international system to which we are attached – and which certain authoritarian powers hope to call into question. There is a real battle of narratives being played out at the global level and we must be at the forefront of this battle. However, hoping to save multilateralism without being strong and powerful enough to do so is an illusion.

I am proud that Europeans continue to favour dialogue over confrontation, diplomacy over force and multilateralism over unilateralism. However, if we want dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism to succeed, we need to put power and resources behind it. Whenever we have done so – in Belarus or with our climate diplomacy – we have been successful. Whenever we opted for stating principled positions but without specifying the means to give them effect, the results have been less impressive.

Take the initiative and build diverse coalitions

Overall, we are often in a reactive mode, responding to other people's plans and decisions. I spend a lot of time commenting on the ideas of others and attending their conferences. I believe that we have to move away from the bureaucratic 'what did we do last time?' routine and regain a sense of initiative.

We must also be ready to experiment more. It is often the safest option to stick to what we know and what we have always done. But this is not always the best way to get results.

We also need to be more goal-oriented and think about how we can mobilise partners around our priorities, issue by issue. We should acknowledge that, alongside coalitions of like-minded partners, we also have countries working with us on some issues, while opposing us on others. And if the central governments are unhelpful, we should work more with local authorities or civil society groups.

In the EU, we are very busy with our own affairs and we often take a long time to establish common positions. As a result, we run the risk of prioritising the search for internal unity over maximising our external effectiveness. Meanwhile, the rest of the world has already moved on. In politics like in physics, time is relative: if the speed of your change is less than the speed of change in the world around you, you are effectively going backwards. This we cannot afford.

Build the narrative

After spending several decades in politics, I am convinced that shaping the narrative is probably the most important element of defining success. This is the real currency of global power. This is why I started to talk about the ‘battle of narratives’ and the ‘politics of generosity’ right at the beginning of the pandemic – and why I write books like this one and spend considerable time on my blog and on other communication activities.

In terms of narrative, we need to up our game. Just because we think that we are doing the right thing does not mean that the rest of the world automatically agrees. We speak a language that no one understands: technocratic and process-heavy, giving dry facts but not telling a wider story. We have to ensure that EU policy is at least understood, if not supported. This requires us to be more active and professional and to devote more time and other resources to this task. We must also be more alert to state-backed disinformation campaigns – and be ready to fight them.

The year 2022 should be the year where the pandemic becomes endemic and where we manage to deliver clear results in EU foreign policy.

Europeans do not care much about who does what in Brussels, nor about abstract discussions or even about how much we spend on a particular cause or country. They are not bothered with the number of statements that we make or the sanctions we adopt. They judge us on outputs, not inputs. In other words, they look for results: are they safer or more prosperous as a result of EU action? Is the EU more or less influential, also in terms of defending our values, than a year ago? Are we more or less trusted by others? Have we done more or less to support our partners? These are the metrics that matter. In 2022, we must act as if our reputation is on the line – because it is.

Brussel, 30 January 2022

1.

EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD



EUROPE'S WATERSHED YEAR

07/01/2021 – *Op Ed* – After struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU ended 2020 with a series of historic policy achievements and hopes of renewed cooperation with the United States. At the start of 2021, I underlined in that *Op Ed* for Project Syndicate that we will pursue both multilateralism abroad and strategic autonomy at home.

In 2020, people around the world experienced life in slow motion, even as political developments accelerated. For the European Union, navigating the COVID-19 crisis has been challenging; yet, despite much naysaying, Europeans not only stuck together, but *grew* together, forging a more cohesive bloc. In 2021, global cooperation ought to make a strong comeback, and the EU should continue to pursue 'strategic autonomy' so that it can safeguard its citizens and interests in the years and decades ahead.

2020 marked a watershed

It is a truism that 2020 marked a watershed. In fact, the world has been undergoing several tectonic shifts for years now, including but not limited to growing public distrust, polarisation and identity politics, tepid economic growth, rising debts, and deepening inequality. We have witnessed the weaponisation of interdependence. Trade, technology, investment, tourism, and other former venues of deepening cooperation have become instruments of power and domains of intense competition.

This was the big picture that we in the EU leadership saw when we took office in December 2019, just before conditions became even more challenging. For Europeans, it looked as though everything we held dear was being contested, be it multilateral cooperation; solidarity between countries, generations, and individuals; or even basic respect for facts and science. In addition to several crises brewing in the EU's neighbourhood and the escalation of Sino-American tensions, we were hit suddenly by COVID-19, which has compounded all the other longer-term challenges Europe faces.

The pandemic stress test

There is no denying that the EU struggled during the early days of the pandemic. We were ill-prepared, and many member states were initially inclined to let everyone fend for themselves. But genuine acts of solidarity soon followed, with many countries taking patients from, and sending emergency equipment to, those most in need. Then the EU-level measures kicked in. The European Central Bank provided massive liquidity, and the European Commission authorised member states to incur large deficits to support their economies.

The discussion quickly turned to how the EU could provide fiscal support to the hardest-hit countries, and these debates culminated in a historic 'recovery fund.' An unprecedented €1.8 trillion was allocated for a new 'Next Generation EU' instrument and the bloc's next seven-year budget. Moreover, two longstanding economic-policy shibboleths were shattered. For the first time, EU leaders agreed to issue large-scale common debt and allow for fiscal transfers, provided that spending is aligned with the twin priorities of funding a green transition and securing Europe's digital future.

“Two longstanding economic-policy shibboleths were shattered. For the first time, EU leaders agreed to issue large-scale common debt and allow for fiscal transfers.”

On the international front, the EU's position has been clear: a 'pandemic world' needs multilateral solutions. We have lived by this motto even when others were going it alone. Our May 2020 (virtual) pledging conference to raise funds for vaccine research was a perfect demonstration of the EU's unique strengths. While the United States and China were proverbially at each other's throats, Europe stepped up to lead on this critical issue. Moreover, we did so in a quintessentially European way (call it 'Multilateralism 2.0'), working with not only governments, but also foundations and the private sector.

Since the summer, Europe has suffered a second wave of infections and struggled with renewed lockdowns. Although we have far more knowledge about COVID-19 and how to treat it, 'pandemic fatigue' is widespread. Worse, the initial economic rebound appears to be fading, indicating that the crisis will continue to dominate our lives for months – and perhaps years – to come. As such, we must keep mobilising across all of the relevant domains, from public health and the economy to security and global governance.



A new moment for multilateralism

Revitalising multilateralism thus will be a top priority for the EU in 2021. Obviously, we cannot achieve this alone. But we anticipate that we will have more partners in the year ahead than we did in 2020. With Joe Biden succeeding Donald Trump as president, the US is expected to rejoin to the Paris Agreement, restore its support for the World Health Organisation, return to the Iran nuclear deal, and adopt a more constructive stance within the World Trade Organisation.

America's return to the global stage will serve as a much-needed shot in the arm for multilateralism. We hope that others, including China and Russia, will follow suit in reversing their selective and self-serving approach to multilateral cooperation in the UN and elsewhere.

“To be sure, pleas for ‘rules-based cooperation’ often sound less inspiring than bombastic appeals to ‘take back control.’ We must ensure that multilateralism delivers tangible results for citizens.”

To be sure, pleas for ‘rules-based cooperation’ often sound less inspiring than bombastic appeals to ‘take back control.’ We must ensure that multilateralism

delivers tangible results for citizens. No one will be safe until we have a reliable vaccine, so the paramount questions on vaccination are who will get what, when, and how. There is a serious risk of ‘vaccine nationalism’ or ‘vaccine diplomacy,’ with rich and powerful countries forcing themselves to the front of the line. In early 2020, some countries used ‘mask diplomacy’ to extract political concessions in exchange for critically needed personal protective equipment. The EU will insist on the opposite approach: vaccines must be treated as a global public good and distributed based on medical needs.

The second big multilateral priority for 2021 is climate change, another area where the EU has shown leadership. Having already set a 2050 carbon-neutrality target, we are close to an agreement on a binding commitment to reduce greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions by 55 % by 2030. Moreover, these efforts seem to have inspired others: China has signaled its intention to become carbon neutral by 2060, and Japan and South Korea have said they will do so by 2050. We now need the US, India, Russia, Brazil, and other big emitters to get on board. Climate change is the existential challenge of our time. As with COVID-19, the warning signs are visible for all to see, and there is a solid scientific consensus about what to do. The difference, of course, is that there will never be a vaccine for climate change. So, we must bend the curve of GHG emissions as fast as possible.

European strategic autonomy

Finally, at the same time that we pursue multilateralism, we must build a capacity to act autonomously when necessary. As I [argued](#) a year ago, Europeans must confront the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. The EU must ‘learn to speak the language of power.’ The pandemic has underscored the need for European strategic autonomy, a concept that originated in defence circles, but that now extends to public health and many other domains. We have learned the hard way that there are costs to depending on just a few suppliers of critical goods – especially when the supplier is a country whose value system is fundamentally at odds with our own.

“*Strategic autonomy is about how Europe can address vulnerabilities across a wide range of areas – from critical technologies and infrastructure to rare earths and the raw materials needed for the green transition.*”

The solution to this problem is diversification and, when necessary, shorter supply chains. This is not just about market failures in medical supplies. Strategic

autonomy is about how Europe can address vulnerabilities across a wide range of areas – from critical technologies and infrastructure (such as digital networks and cloud computing) to rare earths and the raw materials needed for the green transition. We must avoid excessive dependence on external suppliers in these strategic sectors. The point is not to embrace autarky or protectionism, but to safeguard our political independence so that we remain masters of our own choices and future.

Some elements of this strategy were put in place in 2020. Europe now has a mechanism to screen foreign investments, and we have begun to address the distorting effects of foreign subsidies. We are also boosting the international role of the euro, and preparing additional measures on issues such as government procurement. As matters stand, the EU procurement market is almost totally open, while that of some others remains almost completely closed. We must either ensure reciprocity or take steps to restore balance.

How can Europe manage data?

Strategic autonomy also applies to cyber issues. How can Europe manage data? We must avoid the dichotomy whereby data belongs either to Big Tech platforms (with little government oversight) or to the state (including its link to the security apparatus). The EU's last major tech legislation was the General Data Protection Regulation in 2018, and much has already changed since then. These are just some of the many challenges the EU will have to navigate in 2021. It will be rough sailing, but we will emerge stronger if we stay focused on two complementary priorities: revitalising multilateralism and building up strategic autonomy.

MAKING THE EU A GLOBAL PLAYER

04/02/2021 – Blog – *At the beginning of 2021, I spoke to the Robert Schuman Foundation about our priorities for the year: easing tensions in our neighbourhood, opening a new chapter in our relationship with the United States, rebalancing our relations with China, putting European strategic autonomy into practice and reviving multilateralism.*

At the invitation of the Robert Schuman Foundation, I spoke on Monday on the topic *The European Union as a global player*. This was an opportunity for me to pay tribute to the Foundation's namesake, the renowned French foreign affairs minister whose [declaration of 9 May 1950](#) ⁽¹⁾ played a vital role in launching the process of European integration.

Five priorities for making the EU a global player

Seven decades on, our work is far from complete, especially in terms of foreign and defence policy, the area for which I am responsible. My talk, given from the perspective of early 2021, took stock of the five priorities that we will focus on to achieve our goal of making the EU a global player.

First of all, considering the growing number of significant challenges and threats on our doorstep – from the Balkans to Africa, and from the eastern Mediterranean to Russia – we must continue to devote much of our energy to our immediate neighbourhood.

“ Since December 2020 Ankara has made some encouraging statements and taken a number of positive steps, but we are still awaiting concrete proposals and tangible measures.”

As far as our relations with Turkey are concerned, since December 2020 Ankara has made some encouraging statements and taken a number of positive steps, such as resuming talks with Greece on the delimitation of maritime zones. Be that as it may, we need concrete proposals and tangible measures if progress is to be

⁽¹⁾ See https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en

made. Our goal remains clear: we wish to leave behind the negativity that characterised 2020 and begin cooperating again. This will enable us to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey, which is both a neighbour and a key partner for the EU.

Our relationship with Africa, a key concern

Our relationship with Africa will also be a key concern in the coming months. Given the current situation, our African partners will be paying close attention to the assistance we give them with overcoming the COVID-19 crisis, especially our debt relief efforts. The EU is also strongly committed to working with our African partners to ensure the stability and development of the Sahel region in the face of Islamist terrorism. This is a huge challenge.

Russia is another priority of ours. I am travelling to Moscow today, at a difficult time. The European Union swiftly condemned both the arrest of Alexei Navalny upon his return to Russia on 17 January and his sentencing on 2 February. We are calling for his release and continue to push the Russian authorities to urgently investigate his attempted assassination. We also condemned the largescale violent repression of protests in recent weeks. This crackdown has highlighted the dwindling tolerance for dissenting voices in Russia.

Russia remains a key neighbour

Nevertheless, Russia remains a neighbour and key partner with whom we must maintain a firm dialogue if we truly wish become a global player and be able to influence issues that have a major impact on our security, like the situations in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Belarus and Ukraine. This dialogue is the purpose of my visit.

The opening of a new chapter in our relationship with the United States is also high on our agenda. Since taking office on 20 January, Joe Biden has shown us another, reassuringly familiar, face of the US. [Our initial interactions with the new US administration](#) ⁽²⁾ have been very encouraging, laying the foundations for a principled, demanding partnership.

(2) See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/92260/node/92260_en

“ Our initial interactions with the new US administration have been very encouraging, laying the foundations for a principled, demanding partnership.”

Of course, even though the EU and the US clearly still share common values, this reinvigoration of our relationship does not mean that we will always agree on everything going forward. Europe has gradually come to realise that it must undergo a transformation if it is to respond to the challenges of our age. A more strategically autonomous Europe will be a more effective partner for the US too. The EU's priorities for its cooperation with the US include climate crisis response, trade and investment, and the regulation of new technologies.

As for foreign policy in the more traditional sense of the term, the EU and the US share interests in a great many areas. The crises in the EU's eastern neighbourhood concern us both: we must work together to defend sovereignty and reforms in Ukraine and develop a robust, coherent approach to Russia. We also need to better coordinate our commitments in the southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.



Bringing the US back into the Iran nuclear deal

As the coordinator of the Iran nuclear deal, I endeavoured to keep it alive all throughout 2020. We must now work with the Biden administration to find a way of bringing the United States back on board while ensuring that Iran returns to full compliance.

Furthermore, we need to rebalance our relations with China. The EU's unity is a core prerequisite here: no single EU country can defend its interests alone against this superpower. Cooperation with China is necessary in areas ranging from climate change and COVID-19 response to debt relief for poor countries.

Against this backdrop, the EU and China reached a comprehensive agreement on investment in late 2020. As a result, European companies will have better access to the Chinese market. We must nevertheless be realistic and make sure that China fully honours its commitments on issues like state aid and labour law.

At the same time, the Chinese government has plainly behaved unacceptably in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. We condemned its actions in no uncertain terms and will continue to do so. So depending on the area, we must continue to view China as a partner, a competitor and a rival.

“ We have talked and talked about strategic autonomy, but the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to put it into practice.”

The time has also come for us to implement European strategic autonomy. We have talked and talked about strategic autonomy as a concept, but the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to put it into practice. Strategic autonomy is not about 'going it alone' or adopting a protectionist stance, but rather about remaining in control of our own choices and setting our own course for the future.

This will require Europe to address its weaknesses in many areas, ranging from digital technologies and critical infrastructure to rare-earth elements, health and defence. Our next move here will be to adopt a [Strategic Compass](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/node/89047_en) ⁽¹⁾ to serve as the basis for a European strategic culture and a common language on security and defence.

(1) See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/node/89047_en

Reviving multilateralism

Last but not least, we urgently need to revive multilateralism. While the US's return to the world stage is an important step in this direction, we hope that other countries – especially China and Russia – will agree to alter their overly selective approach to cooperation within the UN and elsewhere.

Even so, 'a rules-based international order' is never going to be as inspiring a slogan as 'take back control' or 'America first'. For multilateralism to be credible again, we must ensure that it delivers tangible results for the world's people.

“ *If multilateralism is to regain its credibility, we must ensure that it delivers tangible results for the world's people.*”

This year, this is especially relevant for our approach to COVID-19 vaccines. With new variants emerging, no one will really be safe until everyone in the world has been vaccinated. This year, both in Europe and worldwide, one of the main questions on everyone's lips is this: how many vaccines will we be getting, and when?

Given the situation, there is a very serious risk that 'vaccine nationalism' or 'vaccine diplomacy' may win out and richer, more powerful countries may put their own interests first. That is not what we want. While we vaccinate Europe's people, we are also wholly committed to helping our partners vaccinate their people through such efforts as the COVAX global vaccination initiative, of which the EU is the largest donor.

Looking ahead to the COP 26 climate conference in Glasgow in November, our second major multilateral priority for 2021 is, of course, the fight against climate change. There will never be a vaccine for climate change: we must reverse emission trends without delay.

“ *There will never be a vaccine for climate change: we must reverse emission trends without delay.*”

The EU has given itself the ambitious goal of being carbon-neutral by 2050, while China has announced that it is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2060. The United States has just decided to rejoin the Paris Agreement and must now set demanding targets for itself⁽⁴⁾. We urgently need India, Russia, Brazil and other

⁽⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/91865/european-union-welcomes-decision-president-biden-united-states-re-join-paris-agreement_en

major emitters to come on board too, and will do everything in our power to convince them to do so.

A lot of work ahead of us

In short, we have a lot of work ahead of us this year if we want to make Europe a true global player, even without the unexpected crises that are bound to arise, like the COVID-19 pandemic so devastatingly did in 2020.

A WEEK WITH HIGH DIPLOMATIC TENSIONS

29/03/2021 – Blog – *At the end of March 2021, international developments accelerated. Many events seemed then to indicate a confrontation between democracies and authoritarian regimes. However, even if Russia and China seem to join forces to face the ‘Western world’, the future landscape of a multipolar world is not simple.*

This past week, the pieces of today’s strategic ‘Rubik’s cube’ have been moving. Let me try to capture the geopolitical movements of a week that in fact started on 18 March with the first US–China meeting under the Biden administration in Alaska and ended on 25 March with a European Summit in which US President Biden also participated, via video link.

During this week we also had the usual EU Foreign Affairs Council; I met with Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu; I also took part in the discussion at the NATO Ministerial Meeting on Russia and had an important first meeting in person with the US Secretary of State, Tony Blinken.

EU taking action on human rights and China escalates

On Monday 22 March, we met with [EU Foreign Ministers](#) ⁽⁵⁾. The preparation of the European Council debate on Turkey was the main point on the agenda, but we took also some operational decisions. Among those was the adoption of ‘restrictive measures’ under the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions regime, which we [introduced at the end of last year](#) ⁽⁶⁾. Concretely, we agreed on a [package targeting persons and entities from Russia, China, North Korea, Libya, Sudan and Eritrea](#) ⁽⁷⁾. We also expanded our existing sanctions regime on Myanmar.

(5) See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95458/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-press_en

(6) See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90395/stronger-eu-action-against-human-rights-violations_en

(7) See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/>

These decisions were proof of our willingness to take action to tackle gross human rights violations, wherever these occur. Each individual or entity listed has been carefully selected for their direct involvement in human rights abuses. Importantly, we took the decision to sanction Chinese officials for their actions in Xinjiang in coordination with our most important like-minded partners: the US, Canada and the UK.

During our Foreign Affairs Council meeting, we learned that China was responding to our targeted decision listing of four people and one entity, with broader sanctions against ten people (eight members of national and the European Parliament plus two think tanks) and four entities including the Political and Security Committee in the Council and the Sub-Committee on Human Rights in the European Parliament and two think tanks, along with all their families. The inclusion of democratically elected officials and independent researchers, for the criticism that they have been expressing about China, underlined our differences when it comes to democratic principles and fundamental freedoms.

“ *There has been a firm, principled and unanimous rejection of these Chinese sanctions, which indeed are both disproportionate and unjustified.*”

Regarding China, we may not always agree on everything in the EU, but there has been a firm, principled and unanimous rejection of these Chinese sanctions, which indeed are both disproportionate and unjustified. Clearly, this move makes our relations and cooperation more difficult. The Directors of 35 prominent European think tanks have rejected these moves and expressed solidarity with their sanctioned colleagues. I fully agree that academic freedom must be upheld and that we actually need more not less dialogue between European and Chinese researchers.

Tectonic shifts among China, Russia, the US and the EU

Meanwhile, China and Russia have been moving closer to each other: their Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Wang Yi met this week in China. Both said they wanted to strengthen their technological independence from the West and called on ‘countries to stop interfering in other countries’ sovereign internal affairs’. In addition, Minister Lavrov repeated once again during the joint press conference that ‘there are no relations with the European Union as an organisation’, adding that ‘the entire infrastructure of these relations has been destroyed by unilateral decisions made by Brussels.’ As EU High Representative, I can only regret this move and state my clear disagreement with this baseless claim.

Moscow and Beijing use very similar language when speaking of the West or the US. However, we should analyse carefully what drives them. For example, economically, the two countries want to increase their independence from the West but they do not play in the same league, with China clearly having the upper hand between them.

One key aspect in their bilateral discussions is energy. China is in need of oil and gas which it is importing from Russia among others. Meanwhile Moscow is seeking to diversify its energy exports away from the EU, given our energy transition commitments and the overall tensions in our relationship. But doing so will not be easy or quick, given that the investments in infrastructure needed to diversify are enormous. Beijing is also developing agreements with the energy powers of Central Asia, which is a traditional Russian back yard.

However, we would be wrong to analyse this relationship only from an economic point of view. The Chinese-Russian rapprochement is above all based on a rejection of democratic values and an opposition to what they see as 'interference' in their internal affairs.

“ *The rivalry between Washington and Beijing is unfolding on many fronts, but it doesn't mean this will replicate the bipolar world of the Cold War.*”

The rivalry between Washington and Beijing is unfolding on many fronts, but it doesn't mean this will replicate the bipolar world of the Cold War. For one, Russia was never an economic rival nor a major trade partner for the West while today China is the world's second economic power and indeed a crucial trade partner for both the US and EU. Besides, also in political terms, the world today is not binary but multipolar.

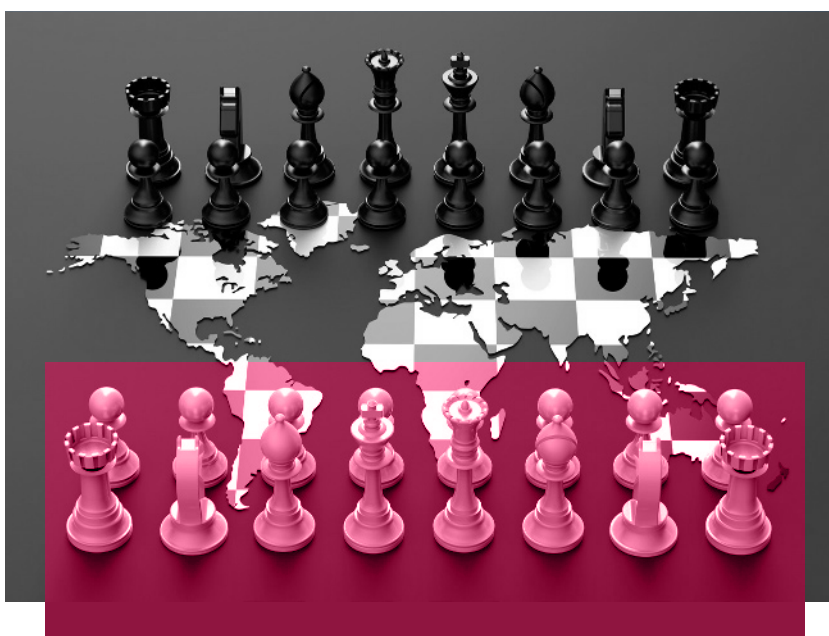
How the EU should navigate the emerging strategic landscape

From the point of view of EU-China relations, the developments this week showed our divergence over values that form the basis of our respective worldviews and political systems. But this does not mean we cannot cooperate in some areas and even less that we have an interest in pushing Russia and China closer together. Indeed, as I have said many times, with China we should stick to the 'partner, competitor, rival' framework. It is, moreover, interesting to note that the US now

uses a similar trilogy when referring to their approach to China. With Russia, we should ‘[push back, constrain and engage](#)’ ⁽⁸⁾.

“As EU, our preference is always for cooperative relationships, based on agreed rules. But we should also be clear about the often adversarial nature of the relationships and the strategic intent that China and Russia have.”

There are clearly significant policy areas that require effective cooperation with both China and Russia (from climate change, to COVID-19 to various security challenges). And as EU, our preference is always for cooperative relationships, based on agreed rules. But we should also be clear about the often adversarial nature of the relationships and the strategic intent that China and Russia have. All this is part of us ‘[learning to speak the language of power](#)’ ⁽⁹⁾ and developing our strategic autonomy.



⁽⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/92876/russia-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-debate-his-visit-moscow_en

⁽⁹⁾ See <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/nl/press-room/20190926IPR62260/hearing-with-high-representative-vice-president-designate-josep-borrell>

A new chapter in EU–Turkey relations?

The news has been somewhat better on another front where we had many tensions before, namely EU–Turkey relations. With EU Ministers, we agreed that there has been an improvement when it comes to the overall rhetoric used and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, we have seen very worrying decisions domestically, notably the crackdown on the democratic opposition party HDP and the [announced withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention](#) ⁽¹⁰⁾ – nomen est omen – protecting women's rights. I had a long conversation with the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu after the FAC where we discussed these issues and the Cyprus question, following [my recent visit](#) ⁽¹¹⁾ there.

“ *We need to continue engaging actively with Turkey to ensure we get and sustain a more constructive attitude.*

I am convinced that we need to continue engaging actively with Turkey to ensure we get and sustain a more constructive attitude. At the European Council, leaders welcomed the report that I presented as High Representative together with the Commission as the right basis for their conclusions and they [agreed that given Turkey's more constructive attitude recently we should aim for engagement in areas of common interests](#) ⁽¹²⁾, from the functioning of the customs union to migration plus other areas of mutual interests. We do so through a phased, proportionate, but also reversible approach, should Turkey return to a path of confrontation. On this clear basis, I will now work actively on all relevant tracks, including the work on the Eastern Mediterranean Conference and the wider regional aspects.

One key case where we need Turkey to act in a more constructive way is Libya. After ten years of conflict, the people of Libya have a new chance with the establishment of a unity government and the political transition underway. We all need to do our utmost to use this [window of opportunity](#) ⁽¹³⁾ as I [discussed with Prime Minister Al Debaiba](#) ⁽¹⁴⁾ who heads the new government of national unity. Turkey has been a major actor in Libya including through military intervention.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95380/turkey-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-turkey%E2%80%99s-withdrawal-istanbul_en

⁽¹¹⁾ See P. 307.

⁽¹²⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf>

⁽¹³⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95383/operation-irini-and-search-peace-libya_en

⁽¹⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95621/libya-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-spoke-prime-minister-abdulhamid-al_en

Now we need to see what we as EU can do additionally including, if asked by the UN, to help monitor the ceasefire.

EU–US relations are back on track

The other major plank of last week's heightened diplomatic activities was EU–US cooperation, with Secretary of State Tony Blinken in town. We were both at the NATO Ministerial Meeting discussing Russia. And we had our first face-to-face meeting (or mask-to-mask, as we say these days), covering the full spectrum of issues on which we need to cooperate. Regarding China, it was striking that US policy has essentially converged on the EU 'triad' with both sides agreeing that 'relations with China are multifaceted, comprising elements of cooperation, competition, and systemic rivalry.'⁽¹⁵⁾ We decided to restart our dedicated dialogue on China and the challenges and opportunities it presents.

We also discussed Iran and how to get the nuclear deal back on track as well the various crises in our Eastern neighbourhood (Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus), Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean plus Venezuela, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Ethiopia as set out in our joint press statement.

The meeting with Secretary Blinken was very encouraging and also operational. It confirmed that transatlantic relations are back on track. I was especially pleased by the extent to which this US administration wants to revitalise our partnership, by listening to our views and seeking convergence. The US has always been our most strategic relationship and therefore it matters that there is now a clear desire to invest in working together. It is quite fitting to hear Blinken describe the EU 'as partner of first resort.'

This positive mood was also confirmed in the discussion between EU leaders and President Biden. He reconfirmed, as he has done before, the interest and commitment of his administration to strengthen EU–US cooperation, based on our shared democratic values and our common interests. That positive message and commitment was echoed by the EU side. The task ahead now is to flesh out this shared desire for transatlantic action.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95609/united-states-joint-press-release-meeting-between-high-representativevice-president-josep-en>

Conclusion

It is important and re-assuring to know that EU–US cooperation is solid, precisely when we see a world in flux with authoritarian powers seeking to assert themselves more and more. Everything that happened this week reinforces the need for Europe to build partnerships and strengthen its capacities to confront a challenging world.

EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

29/04/2021 – Speech – In a debate hosted by the Groupe d'Etudes Géopolitiques, I have analysed in depth the reasons for Europe's geopolitical awakening and set out how the EU can best address problems of dysfunctional politics, problems of power politics and problems of collective action.

Thank you for this invitation to speak to the Groupe d'Etudes Géopolitiques. I welcome your research on geopolitical questions and I am an active reader of le Grand Continent. This debate provides me with the opportunity to talk about the lessons to draw after a year and half of pandemic. My book, *European Foreign Policy in times of Covid-19*, is actually a collection of my writings from this past year, some of which I have published on my blog, in op-eds, in the press, newspapers, and interviews.

I write so much because I enjoy it but above all because I believe in the importance of narratives. To me, a politician must be a storyteller because political battles are won or lost depending on how the issues are framed. In international politics, the same process applies. Hence, I always try to write from the standpoint of a protagonist, of an actor taking an active role. In my opinion, there is today a lack of common understanding of the world among Europeans, which is unfortunate because in order to make a change, you need to understand the world. As Marx once said: 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point however is to change it'...

As you may have noticed, there is a considerable debate on the 'how' to build EU foreign policy and on 'who' frames it. The most important thing is how to avoid paralysis, because in most cases, member states are very much divided. This inevitably leads us to the debate on how to make decisions. Should the decisions be taken at unanimity or according to the rule of qualified majority?

The urgent need for a common understanding of the world

The consequences of not having a shared strategic culture must also be taken into consideration. Without a common understanding of the world, it will be very

difficult to adopt a common foreign policy. In the end, European foreign policy is how Europe projects itself to the rest of the world and therefore the way to exert its influence (through sanctions, norms and standard setting).

I will not go around the world and say what we are doing or should be doing in this or that region, or conflict or issue. I have already had plenty of debates like that. Let us reflect more deeply on how we can improve our impact. After eighteen months into this job, it is clear to me that overall trends are not favourable to us. The wind is not blowing in our favour. There is less European influence than there ought to be. Yes, there is a geopolitical awakening across the EU, but translating this awakening into action remains a work in progress.

“ While time is relative in physics it is also the case in politics. My friend Javier Solana once said, ‘if you are changing at a slower speed than the world around you, you are going backwards in relative terms.’ ”

While time is relative in physics it is also the case in politics. My friend Javier Solana once said, ‘if you are changing at a slower speed than the world around you, you are going backwards in relative terms.’ The important thing for the EU is to compare our speed with the rest of the world’s speed. From this point of view, we are going backwards in several issues in relative terms. The challenge for Europe is to ensure that as world history is accelerating, our response does as well, in terms of speed and scale. But that is not the case.

Foreign policy is a highly complex business, especially in the EU

Foreign policy is a highly complex business, especially in the EU because it is not a state. In the EU, there are many actors and also many veto points. That is why the European success rate is often low. But that is also true for the foreign policy of superpowers. We must remember that foreign policy is about changing the domestic politics of other countries. What is foreign policy for us, means domestic politics for others.

It is worth distinguishing between three different types of problems: first, the problems of dysfunctional politics, second the problems of power politics and finally the problems of collective action. In many places around the world, the core of many problems is dysfunctional politics: a disagreement on the nature of the state and society. A lack of a political settlement and a lack of governance. From Afghanistan to Libya, the Sahel, to Lebanon, or Venezuela, the list goes on:

the state is *weak* and *contested*. We call this '*poor governance*'. The key insight here is that the problem doesn't lie in the lack of resources such as the lack of financial, natural or military resources.

“*In Afghanistan as elsewhere, what has happened is that local forces have not reached an agreement on a viable and legitimate political settlement and we, as outsiders, cannot do it for them.*”

When you take a look at Afghanistan over the past 20 years, hundreds of thousands of troops have passed through, hundreds of billions dollars have been spent in this conflict, and yet, in Afghanistan as elsewhere, what has happened is that local forces have not reached an agreement on a viable and legitimate political settlement and we, as outsiders, cannot do it for them. They are the only one able to do so, even if we know that this failure to produce functioning politics will inevitably have collateral damages for us, with increased insecurity, migration flows, etc. This is where our security starts. To get progress, we have to understand the local forces at play, be it Venezuela or Chad. So, one lesson I learned is the need to invest to truly understand local forces at play. What forces are driving the conflict? How can outsiders work along the local protagonists to build functioning politics?



The second category of problems has to do with power politics. Every day we witness Putin, Erdogan, Xi Jinping and their behaviours: ready to use force, economic coercion and openly linking everything with everything. It is almost a *cliché* now to say that Europe needs to wake up and look at the world as it is, not as we want it to be. We must get rid of a certain *naïveté* and recognise that we live in a world where we do have many partners but also some strong adversaries – people out to harm us and our type of political system and society. Europe must be able to take care of itself. We cannot solely rely on the US, no matter how pleased Europe is to have America back with Biden, or on the approach which assumes that open markets and global rules will solve everything.

“ We must get rid of a certain naïveté and recognise that we live in a world where we do have many partners but also some strong adversaries – people out to harm us. Europe must be able to take care of itself.”

Open markets and global rules will not solve everything, especially after the pandemic. On the issue of masks at the beginning of the pandemic, and now regarding vaccines for instance it is clear that access depends in part on political considerations. The same applies to strategic investment: 5G, AI, rare earths minerals, etc. We must remain the masters of our own future and cannot outsource the protection of our interests.

Put strategic autonomy in action

Hence this concept of strategic autonomy, much debated in 2020. In 2021 we ought to put it in action. This awakening to a world of power politics will require new mental maps and a new vocabulary. For more than eighteen months now, I have been fighting for Europeans to learn *‘the language of power’*. We have more work to do in defining more clearly what our political priorities are, i.e. to prioritise we must better prioritise *where* we can make the difference.

The truth is that Europeans have more power or levers of influence than they realise. When we put together our normative power (rules setting called the *‘Brussels effect’*) – our financial assistance, our trade and investment policies, our CSDP operations, our delegations: it adds up to a lot. But where the US is able to make *‘grand strategy’*, where China does issue linkage under the Belt and Road Initiative, we, Europeans are masters of silo thinking and disjointed efforts. Each policy tends to develop according to its own logic and rhythm. The way to go is to use these instruments as part of one political strategy.

“We, Europeans are masters of silo thinking and disjointed efforts. Each policy tends to develop according to its own logic and rhythm. The way to go is to use these instruments as part of one political strategy.’

In short, in Europe we have a problem of *mentality* (reluctance to think in terms of power, priorities, trade-offs) and of organisation (linking goals and means) remains. But step by step, Europe is becoming better at this even if it remains a work in progress. The framing of China as a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival is probably the most striking example. These concepts are now leading to concrete and comprehensive decisions on investment, foreign subsidies, procurement, due diligence, AI etc.

Global public goods and collective action

The third category of problems falls under the heading of public goods and collective action like health (access to vaccines for instance) or action on climate change and biodiversity, but also the fight against extreme poverty and rising inequalities. The big issue here is that the multilateral system that has been created to handle these problems is being challenged like never before, precisely by power politics. Therefore, the WHO and WTO are struggling, the G20 and UNSC are often paralysed, and there is a growing number of problems without multilateral ‘regimes’, like cyber, AI, and other emerging technologies.

The EU should do much more to revitalise multilateralism and make it fit for purpose. Europe must be ready to invest in multilateralism, building consensus among great powers if possible, and be more creative with the ‘emerging types of multilateralism, beyond the state-to-state’s framework. Experiment more with multilateralism and work more with regional organisations like AU, ASEAN, etc.

We must change our mentality

While this might be a sobering analysis, the good news relies on the fact that making a change is mainly down to us, and to the collective choices of Europeans. Above all we must change our mentality. As Luuk van Middelaar wrote in *Le Grand Continent*: ‘Where Europe fights to minimise losses, others fight to win.’ We ought to change this situation. And I, as the HR/VP, will do everything in my power to push this agenda.

BUILDING THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD AT THE GROUP OF SEVEN MEETING

06/05/2021 – *Blog* – Last May, I spent two days in London, meeting the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) countries and of the Indo-Pacific region. We had thorough discussions on the main geopolitical issues and agreed to act more closely together in order to build an open, democratic and sustainable post-COVID-19 world.

Together with my EU colleagues Heiko Maas, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Luigi di Maio, we met Marc Garneau from Canada, Toshimitsu Motegi from Japan, and Antony Blinken from the United States, with Dominic Raab from United Kingdom hosting us at the magnificent Lancaster House. The foreign ministers of India, Korea, Australia, South Africa and Brunei (which currently chairs ASEAN) were also invited to participate to our discussions on the Indo-Pacific region and the sustainable recovery. This was the first time since 2019 that we could meet physically in this format. It was a reminder of how essential face-to-face exchange and informal and more personal discussions are for diplomacy.

Preparing the G7 summit of heads of state and government, which will be held from 11 to 13 June in Cornwall at the United Kingdom, we discussed a wide array of pressing geopolitical challenges, such as relations with China, Iran and the JCPOA, the coup d'état in Myanmar, the Indo-Pacific, the situation in Libya and Syria, the crisis in Ethiopia, the tensions in Somalia, the difficulties encountered in the Sahel, the situation in the Western Balkans, relations with Russia and the crises in Ukraine and Belarus, as well as the situation in Afghanistan.

In addition to this intense 'world tour', we also tackled several cross-cutting issues, essential to maintain open societies in the post-COVID-19 world, such as freedom of the media, religion and belief, the fight against arbitrary detentions, cyber governance and internet shutdowns, sanctions and the fight against disinformation and foreign interference.

Discussions on vaccines, education and hunger

We also addressed some of the main issues that can slow down recovery: the issue of vaccines and how to accelerate their global roll-out; education, which in many places came to a standstill during the crisis; and the fight against hunger with the COVID-19 pandemic having significantly increased food insecurity on the planet.

“ *The global pace of vaccination today is far too slow to deal effectively with the pandemic worldwide.*”

Regarding vaccines, I initiated the discussion by expressing my concerns on the need to accelerate the vaccine roll-out globally. I recalled that, [as stated recently for instance by Ricardo Hausmann](#) ⁽¹⁶⁾ from the Kennedy School at Harvard, the global pace of vaccination today is far too slow to deal effectively with the pandemic worldwide. At the current pace, the whole world will not be vaccinated before 2023. There is a growing risk that the new variants will undermine the efficiency of the vaccines that we are currently using. COVID-19 could become chronic, weakening the economic recovery.

The COVAX facility is playing a fundamental role in helping poor countries to vaccinate their populations, and the European Union has strongly supported it from the very start. However, COVAX does not manufacture vaccines or create additional production capacity. As Prof. Hausmann says, COVAX is acting as a fair organiser of a long queue of people waiting to get vaccinated and therefore manages scarcity.

In Europe, we have been exporting so far as many vaccines as we have been using for our own population. However, this is not the case everywhere. We discussed on how some countries producing vaccines are now banning exports or taking measures that disrupt supply chains. This lack of production capacities raises the question of a possible waiver on Intellectual Property Rights on COVID-19 vaccines.

There are different views on this measure, depending on the assessment about its effect on the capacity to produce more rapidly more vaccines. We have taken note of the recent US position on this issue expressed by President Biden. As EC [President von der Leyen said today](#) ⁽¹⁷⁾, ‘*The European Union is ready to discuss any*

⁽¹⁶⁾ See <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/covid19-vaccine-shortages-pharmaceutical-companies-by-ricardo-hausmann-2021-04>

⁽¹⁷⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_2284

proposal that addresses the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner. That is why we are ready to discuss how the U.S. proposal for a waiver on intellectual property protection for COVID-19 vaccines could help achieve that objective’.

Several bilateral meetings

I also had the opportunity to meet bilaterally with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and my Japanese and Canadian colleagues. In addition to that, I exchanged views with the Ministers from South Korea, India, South Africa and Brunei (which currently chairs ASEAN). I finally met bilaterally with Dominic Raab, the UK Foreign Secretary and G7 host. It was indeed our first face-to-face exchange since the UK officially left the EU, and we agreed on an Establishment Agreement for the EU Delegation to the UK [that includes giving the European Union Ambassador in London full ambassadorial status](#) ⁽¹⁸⁾.

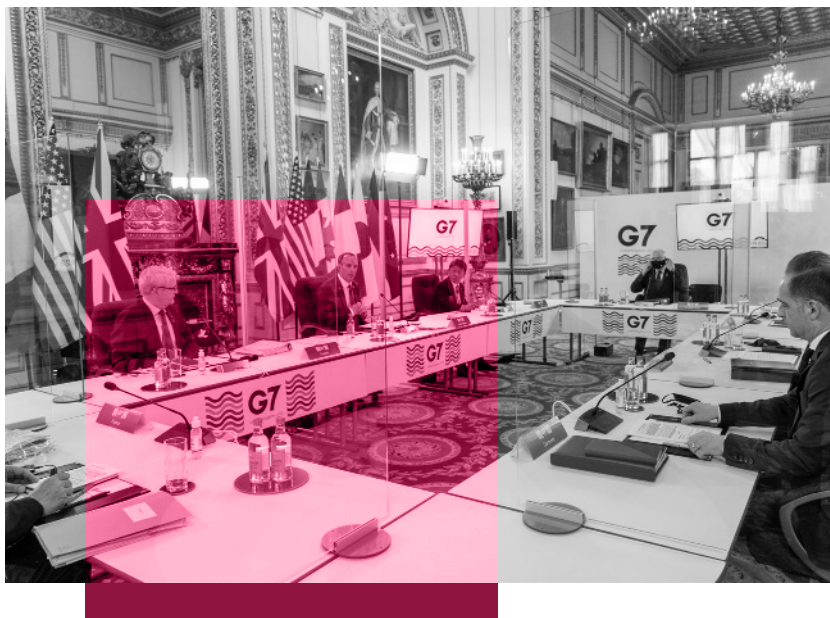
“*The main lesson I personally have drawn from this G7 meeting, is that there is a real determination among these democratic, like-minded countries, to face challenges together.*”

We have discussed a great number of complex issues over these two and a half days. The result of our discussions is reflected in the [comprehensive communique](#) ⁽¹⁹⁾ that we have issued. The main lesson I personally have drawn from this G7 meeting, and I would like to share it with you, is that there is a real determination among these democratic, like-minded countries to further step up their cooperation, to face challenges together.

In recent years, partly because of the difficult relations with the previous US administration, it was sometimes difficult to find common ground among the G7 countries and to use it to its full potential. G7 meetings themselves had tended to become places of confrontation rather than cooperation. Those days are fortunately over.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/97837/united-kingdom-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-and-foreign-secretary-dominic-en>

⁽¹⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/97842/G7_%20Foreign_%20and_%20Development_%20Ministers_%E2%80%99%20Meeting:%20Communiqu%C3%A9



A positive boost to EU–US relations

Joe Biden's presidency has already given a positive boost to relations [between the EU and the United States](#) ⁽²⁰⁾ – and this G7 meeting shows that this trend goes well beyond EU and US: the represented democracies largely share the same analysis of the global situation and of the risks to peace and stability in various regions of the world posed by the rise of authoritarian regimes. This requires democratic countries to pull together.

“ For our democratic model to prevail globally, we still have a lot of work to do together to convince our partners in emerging and developing countries that this is the right way forward for their future.”

This said, for our democratic model to prevail globally, we still have a lot of work to do together to convince our partners in emerging and developing countries that this is the right way forward for their future and for the well-being of their citizens. In this respect, our capacity to act together to help the entire world recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic effects is of crucial importance.

⁽²⁰⁾ See p. 243.

We do not want a world permanently divided into rivalling blocs.

We do not want a world permanently divided into rivalling blocs. A global community is needed to solve global problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (and other potential future pandemics), climate change, biodiversity loss or nuclear proliferation. Our goal is to build a post COVID-19 global multilateral framework based on democratic values and fundamental rights already recognised by the United Nations in 1948.

“ *Our goal is to build a post COVID-19 global multilateral framework based on democratic values and fundamental rights.*”

In recent years, this goal has seemed increasingly out of reach. This G7 meeting has now provided renewed confidence in our ability to change the global balance in favour of democracy and freedom.

THE EU SUPPORTS THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS

10/06/2021 – Speech – *In my briefing to the UN Security Council in June 2021, I set out the EU's support to the work of the UN. I underlined also the cost of the absence of multilateral action: reduced access to vaccines, insufficient climate action, peace and security crises that fester.*

I am pleased to speak to you today about the role of the EU on the maintenance of international peace and security. We live in a world where the demand for multilateral solutions is greater than the supply. We see more divisions, more free-riding and more distrust than the world can afford.

Rules-based multilateralism is a term that's perhaps well understood at the UN and in Brussels. Maybe it is not a simple, nor an appealing phrase; but our job is to bring it alive.

We need global cooperation based on agreed rules

We need global cooperation based on agreed rules. The alternative is the law of the jungle, where problems don't get solved. Every day we see the cost of the absence of multilateral action: reduced access to vaccines, insufficient climate action, peace and security crises that fester.

The root cause is the rise in power politics and ideological contests, leading to the erosion of trust. We have to address this deficit of multilateralism and push back against selective and self-serving approaches to multilateralism.

The EU remains committed to the UN and rules-based multilateralism. The core of our strategy is to protect, reform and build multilateralism that is fit for purpose.

The world's biggest changes stem from new technologies. They can be both disruptive and empowering. Think of Artificial Intelligence, big data and cloud computing or genetic engineering, autonomous weapons and surveillance.

One of the biggest questions we face is how to ensure that the rules we so need for these emerging technologies reflect the values of the universal declaration of human rights. If not, technology will be used against individuals and communities in a nightmarish scenario.

We all know that conflict prevention and peace building are key. We must work with countries at risk before conflict erupts; and build sustainable peace after the signing ceremony. Sustainable peace compels us to be inclusive, with a particular focus on women and youth.

The second year of the pandemic

We are in the second year of the pandemic. It has underscored the fragility of a hyper-globalised and interdependent world.

We need to learn wider lessons about how human health and security and planetary health and security are linked.

Where politics gave us stalemates and divisions, science and cooperation gave us the exit strategy: vaccines. The EU is a staunch promoter of vaccine multilateralism, with COVAX at the centre.

‘Team Europe’ has contributed more than €2.8 billion. We have exported more than 240 million doses of vaccines to 90 countries, more than any other region.

We are planning to donate at least 100 million doses to low and middle-income countries before the end of the year. But even this is not enough. So we call on all players to lift export restrictions on vaccines and their components.

Africa imports 99 % of its vaccines. This has to change. The EU is partnering with Africa and industry, backed by an initial €1 billion in funding, to boost manufacturing capacity in Africa for vaccines, medicines and health technologies.

Beyond the pandemic, we know that climate change and biodiversity loss have reached existential levels. Two major UN Summits later this year, in Kunming and Glasgow, must deliver decisive action.

This is a real test of the multilateral system. We need these Summits to produce real outcomes, in line with the scale and urgency of the problem.

The Security Council has an important role to play on climate, health and their links to peace and security. To give impetus to the success of the two Summits, I hope you will pass a resolution on the link between climate change and security, which is increasingly evident.

The responsibility of the Security Council

Last year I said: 'At a time of global crisis, we need a Security Council able to take the necessary decisions and not one that is paralysed by vetoes and political infighting.'

Unhappily, the situation has not improved. In the past year, we have seen new conflicts erupt (in Tigray); older ones re-start (Myanmar, Nagorno-Karabach, Israel-Palestine); and chronic violence continue (in DRC, Yemen).

In all these cases, we need this Council to provide the necessary decisions. This is about real people's lives. The price of inaction is paid in conflicts not solved, humanitarian aid not delivered and in lives lost.

Sitting on the Security Council is a serious responsibility, politically, even morally. The UN Charter gave this Council the supreme say on matters of peace and security. For the EU there is no acceptable alternative. No other organisation we can turn to.

So the Security Council must provide the support and protection that people in conflict zones depend upon.

We look to the UN Security Council to match its belated but unanimous support for the UN Secretary-General's call for a global cease-fire with a full commitment to its implementation.

The EU's contribution to peace and security

The EU has been and remains a staunch supporter of the UN, in all three pillars. We have said it many times before and we mean it.

Our support is not just in what we say, although that matters, but in financial terms, human terms and political terms.

We work with UN missions in many theatres. We have 17 operations and missions, contributing to UN goals with UN mandates; 13 of them operating alongside UN missions. We are currently defining our next set of joint EU–UN priorities on peace operations and crisis management, to strengthen our cooperation and maximise impact.



We are fully committed to the Sustainable Development Goals. And we base ourselves on the conviction that real security depends on people enjoying their rights and freedoms.

The EU will always be on the side of those calling for their universal rights to be respected, sometimes at grave personal risks: in Hong Kong, Venezuela, Myanmar and elsewhere.

In many cases, given the refusal by those in power to respect people's fundamental rights, we have imposed sanctions. They are never an end in themselves but a tool to push for the respect of universal rights. Our sanctions are targeted and do not hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Concrete cases

Now I want to highlight a few concrete areas where the EU is deeply engaged and where we need urgent results.

Israel-Palestine: Last month we saw a dramatic escalation with enormous human costs. We now need to build on the ceasefire to resume negotiations towards a two-state solution.

Let us remember that security is not the same as peace. And an untenable status quo may turn yet again into another cycle of violence. Therefore, a negotiated settlement is urgent and indeed the only way to give rights and security to both Israelis and Palestinians. To accompany the parties, we must revive the Quartet.

Syria: This year we mark the 10th anniversary of the war in Syria. The Syrian regime and its backers, have left the country in ruins. Given the dramatic humanitarian situation, it is essential that the cross-border mechanism remains open and I appeal to the Security Council members to renew it in July.

Libya: There has been important progress with the national unity government. But the ceasefire is still fragile and needs to be supported by a robust monitoring mechanism, so that elections are able to take place in optimal conditions in December.

The EU has offered support. We welcome the unanimous renewal of the arms embargo and the authorisation of inspections and the seizure of illegal cargo on the high seas. Operation Irini will continue its work on the implementation of the embargo. We need greater focus on the issue of withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya, to avoid the destabilisation of the whole region.

The Sahel and the Horn of Africa: Both regions hold the key to African security. The revised EU strategy is built around the need for more results and greater governmental accountability. We must continue our engagement but also to take firm action against those who stand in the way of a peaceful and inclusive transition process.

Iran: We are working non-stop to revive the JCPOA in all its aspects, i.e. the nuclear activities and the sanctions lifting. I am actively engaged with all the main players, as is my team leading the negotiations in Vienna. We are making progress but the

negotiations are intense on a number of issues including on the precise sequencing of steps.

Let me end with some cases closer to the EU:

Belarus: For months, we have seen massive repression of peaceful protestors that took to the streets demanding to elect their President. Recently, the regime resorted to the scandalous forced landing of a civilian plane, travelling between two EU capitals, to arrest a leading journalist and his companion.

This is a major attack on air safety and the EU response has been firm and principled. We have closed our airspace to planes from Belarus airlines and are in the process of adopting a new package of sanctions. We have also devised a €3 billion economic support package that would be available to a democratic Belarus.

Ukraine: I regret that the situation in the country tends to be instrumentalised for political purposes here at the Security Council.

To be clear: six years after all member of this Security Council unanimously supported the Minsk Agreements, little has been done to implement them. Russia is a party to the conflict and we count on it to take a constructive stance. I welcome President Zelinsky's initiative to convene the Crimea Platform Summit; I intend to take part with President Michel and I hope there will be the widest possible participation from UN members.

Western Balkans: the EU will not rest until all the countries of the region are inside the EU. To this end, we are fully mobilised to support reconciliation and reforms as the best antidote to nationalist rhetoric. We will host the next edition of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in the coming days.

More broadly in Europe we do not want geostrategic competition. We want a peaceful, prosperous and stable neighbourhood, free from so-called protracted conflicts and zones of influence.

(POST)-PANDEMIC GEOPOLITICS: TOGETHER IN A WORLD APART

10/07/2021 – *Speech – At the fourteenth international Dubrovnik Forum, I presented an analysis of the current ‘pandemic world, and an outlook for the post-pandemic world around three challenges that will determine our future : a more contested neighbourhood, the EU–US–China triangle and how to tackle global challenges in that context .*

I would like to situate our discussion today on Europe, the Western Balkans and the region into a wider context of ‘the geopolitics of post-pandemic world’, as the title of this Forum states. While the EU is leaving the pandemic behind, the rest of the world still struggles.

The pandemic is still raging

After 18 months and several waves, the EU is getting out of the tunnel – even if we need to remain vigilant, because of the delta variant. But the pandemic is still raging in the rest of the world, notably in South America and Africa. In South America, mortality stands at 3 500 deaths per day, half of which in Brazil: this is more than ten times what it is in the EU today. In Africa, the total number of deaths is rising at 23 % per week. And Africa’s vaccination rate is still only under 3 %, whereas in the EU it’s over 50 % (one vaccine). Also in large parts of Asia (outside China), cases are rising fast and the situation is worsening.

So, for the world, the pandemic will not be over until 2023. And by then, our world will look very different: less ‘Western’, more digital and much more unequal – within and between countries. The determining factor for getting the pandemic under control is the availability of vaccines. It is impossible to overstate their importance. Where politics has often given divisions and competition, science and collaboration have given us vaccines.

“ *The EU is still the only region to vaccinate our own population, to export half of our production and being a leading donor to COVAX.*”

While we need to do more, it is worth pointing out that EU is still the only region to vaccinate our own population, to export half of our production and being a leading donor to COVAX. But, unhappily, COVAX is not yet delivering in large enough volumes – in part because India is not exporting. So we need to do much more. Access to vaccines is the great fault line in the world today. Vaccine inequality will drive a very unequal recovery. That means a more unequal and hence unstable world.

The vaccine diplomacy card

We all know that China, Russia and others are playing the vaccine diplomacy card, around the world and in this region. We need to be aware of this and take action accordingly. For instance, until today the EU has delivered 3.2 million doses in total to the Western Balkans (exports, COVAX and donations). The total figure for sub-Saharan Africa is 9.5 million. This is nowhere near enough. So we need to donate more in larger volumes, where we have a minimum target of 100 million donations for this year. And building up global production capacity, especially in Africa.

The IMF calculates that, if we vaccinate the world to 40 percent this year and 60 percent by the middle of next year, we will gain \$9 trillion in output between now and 2025. And 40 percent of this gain will be for advanced economies. Plus, if we don't vaccinate people globally, we leave fertile ground for new mutations that could come back to the developed world. So solidarity and self-interest point in the same direction.

Navigating the geopolitics of the post-pandemic world

It is hard to summarise the outlook for our post-pandemic world but I will try. Essentially, I see five trends: none fully new, but all accelerated by the crisis.

1. Unprecedented competition between states. This is a world of competitive nationalism, power politics and zero sum games.
2. Our world is more multi-polar than multilateral. The strategic competition between US and China is often paralysing the UN Security Council, WTO, WHO.
3. We have stopped travelling as individuals but globalisation is continuing. However, interdependence is more and more conflictual and soft power weaponised. Vaccines, data, technology standards are all instruments of political competition.

4. Some countries follow 'a logic of empires'. They argue in terms of historical rights and zones of influence, not agreed rules and local consent.
5. The world is becoming less free and democracy is under attack, at home and abroad. We face a real battle of narratives.

Let's face it: none of these trends is favourable to EU. We like a predictable world of rules-based multilateralism, open markets, positive sum games, solidarity, with people and countries free to shape their own lives. We have to treat the world as it is. Not to accept it. But to base our policy choices on a realistic assessment. So I see these five trends as a call to action.

Now I want to mention three mega challenges that will determine our future role in this post pandemic world:

- A. How do we deal with a more 'crowded' neighbourhood?
- B. Where do we position us in strategic triangle of US, China and EU?
- C. How do we ensure we get effective action on global challenges, especially the climate crisis, but also regulating technologies?

The contested neighbourhood

This group knows very well that our neighbourhood has become 'crowded' and competitive – with Russia, Turkey and others using hybrid tactics. At the same time, we know that the people in the neighbourhood want more from Europe, delivered faster and better. The European model of democracy, solidarity, freedoms and fundamental rights remains extremely powerful and attractive. So we must continue to work with anyone that shares our vision.

That means keeping our commitments with the Western Balkans and keeping the whole region on a European path. Including by reviving the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue. That means supporting Ukraine when it faces Russian aggression and as its reform agenda brings it closer to the EU. That means continuing to put pressure on the regime in Belarus for the oppression of citizens. That means supporting Libya and its new national unity government. That means doing all we can to prevent a catastrophe in Lebanon due to the political stalemate. The list goes on.

My main message on the neighbourhood is that as EU, we need to step up, both by demanding and by offering more. The agenda is vast and I hope this Forum can come up with new ideas.

The US–China–EU strategic triangle

This month, China marks the 100th anniversary of its Communist Party. A chance to underline the historic achievements. But we also got a defiant message from President Xi Jinping warning that foreign powers will ‘get their heads bashed’ if they attempt to ‘bully or influence’ the country.

We see growing Chinese influence everywhere, built on centralisation at home and assertiveness abroad. Cooperation with China is getting more difficult, also because of ‘issue linkage’: market access is linked to our stance on human rights. But we must cooperate on many issues and the economic potential remains: 25 % of all global growth in 2021 will come from China.

Meanwhile in the US, the talk is about seeing China as partner, competitor and rival, like we do. But there is a bipartisan consensus that the dominant part is strategic competition. For Biden this is about democracies versus authoritarian powers. This was the main framing for the G7 and NATO Summits. US–China strategic competition will shape the world for decades to come. As EU, we need to steer a clear course. Not equidistant but using own glasses. With the US we share history and a political system. The product of Enlightenment.

We have re-launched our EU–US dialogue on China. And with the Biden team, the dialogue is real. But we must keep in mind that EU and US interests are not always the same. A lot of EU–China work is about doing our homework: investment screening, foreign subsidies, 5G, our procurement and anti-coercion instruments. All happening. And it’s about developing our own Indo Pacific strategy.

So, the second mega challenge is how to steer our own course in US–China–EU strategic triangle – and how to mix elements of cooperation and competition into a coherent strategy.

How to revive multilateralism and make it deliver?

No need to tell this group that there is a crisis of multilateralism. Even after the 'return' of the US under Biden, the supply of multilateral action is still less than the demand. Take the climate crisis. Last week it was 49.6 degrees – in Canada, not Baghdad! Freak weather is not something that will happen in the future, it's already happening today.

Global warming is happening twice as fast in the Arctic. We are moving past all sorts of 'tipping points'. A world of 3 degree warming by 2100 – which is the current trajectory – is radically different from one of 2 degrees warming. This is a test for the multilateral system. And COP26 in Glasgow is the probably the last moment that we can still halt runaway climate change. But this will require a radical acceleration of global efforts.

Climate change is also a geopolitical issue. It will create new security threats and shifts in global power. So also for us foreign ministers to discuss.

The second example is technology. Here too we need multilateralism to deliver: on standard setting for Artificial Intelligence, data (the oil of the 21st century), autonomous weapons, cloud services, surveillance. Who will set the rules? On what bases and values?

Throughout history, control over technology has determined who runs the world. So Europeans need to work hard to help set the rules for the future. And can we continue to rely on the 'Brussels effect' if none of the Big Tech companies are European?

Conclusion

Let me stop here. I hope these reflections on the geopolitics of the post pandemic world have helped to set the stage.

THE VENTOTENE MANIFESTO IS STILL FULLY RELEVANT

29/08/2021 – *Speech – At the 80th anniversary of the Ventotene Manifesto, I underlined the contemporary relevance of this European Manifesto. We should draw inspiration from that visionary document, to build a strong EU foreign policy, as our citizen demand.*

I am glad to be back in Ventotene. I was here before, in 2014 to speak at the closing session of this annual international seminar on federalism. This place carries a special, symbolic meaning for me and for everything I stand for politically: European integration, federalism, anti-fascism, democracy and international solidarity.

These days, a lot of politics is based on tribal dynamics. Maybe this is not always good or helpful to forge compromises. But if there is a political tribe to which I belong, then this is it: the one that fights for a strong Europe as an anti-dote to nationalism and as the only way for Europeans to achieve our common goals and defend our European model of solidarity, prosperity and freedom.

So it feels good to be back here and to debate the next steps for Europe's global role with all of you.

Lessons from the Ventotene Manifesto

In foreign policy it has been yet another 'Summer of crises' (Afghanistan, Belarus, Lebanon etc.). They have kept me busy as we are trying to handle all the consequences for Europeans and local populations alike. If we zoom out from individual countries and look at the whole board, it is clear that strengthening Europe's foreign policy, is both the most urgent task the EU faces. But it is perhaps also the area where the obstacles are greatest.

The idea that Europeans can only make a difference in the world by acting together has an intrinsic plausibility. Indeed the famous Ventotene Manifesto of 1941 already called for a single EU foreign and defence policy! Indeed, 80 years ago, Altiero Spinelli was already right about this (as about much else).

And by the way, European citizens have also, for decades now, called for a stronger EU foreign policy. For many years there have been large and stable majorities asking for this – and in recent years the figures have gone up (to over 70 % in the latest Eurobarometer).

“ EU Citizens understand very well that in a world of super-powers throwing their weight around, a world of big trends and big threats, there is no hope in making an impact if each country acts alone.”

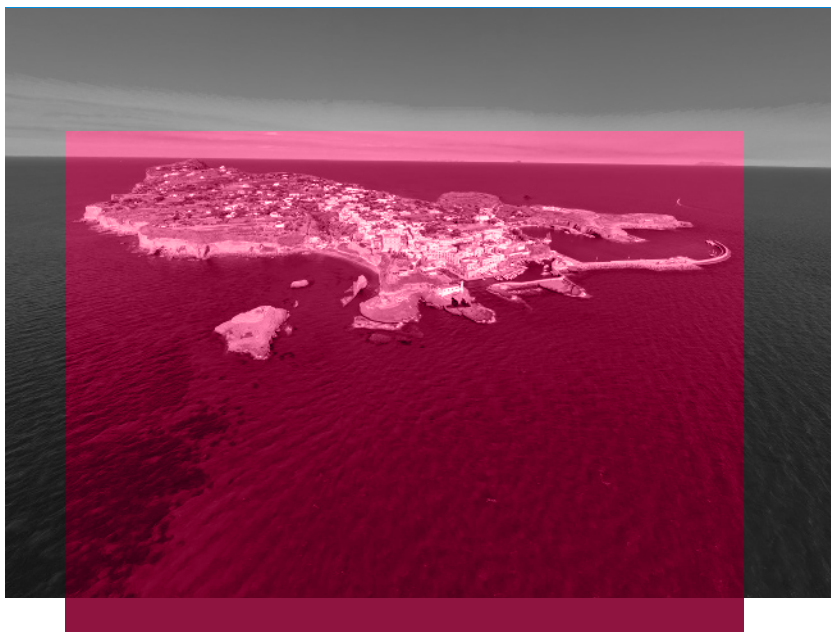
Because citizens understand very well that in a world of super-powers throwing their weight around, a world of big trends and big threats, there is no hope in making an impact if each country acts alone. This is obvious and yet, and yet, making EU foreign policy effective remains, shall we say, work in progress.

The reason is that European citizens ever are ahead of national governments. Governments are the main decision makers – and in foreign policy that means the rule of unanimity. In other areas, as is well known, we have transferred competences to the Community-level and agreed to take decisions by qualified majority vote. And make no mistake: there are also major national interests at stake in these areas, for example the single market, or energy and climate targets. Contrary to what you hear sometimes, these are no less ‘sensitive’ policy areas than foreign policy.

But we have collectively decided that the best was to avoid paralysis and delays that come with unanimity. That we would empower common institutions with clear mandates and resources. In foreign and security policy we don’t have, nor do we even work for, a single EU foreign policy as Spinelli called for, but a common one. A bit like the Balladur plan when we were preparing the monetary union.

It is worth noting that we decided to go for a single currency with a single monetary policy managed by the ECB. Or that we have a single trade policy managed by the Commission, based on mandates and approvals adopted by Qualified Majority Voting.

Typically, these policies work reasonably well: we are able to take decisions fast to defend common European values and interests.



A great diversity of views on international issues

We have a great diversity of views inside the EU of 27 on international issues. We don't have a common strategic culture. So it is no surprise that we often take ages to decide anything. Or that we excel in issuing statements where we 'monitor' or 'express our concerns' but don't specify what actions we will take if our concerns are not listened to (as is too often the case).

I know very well that it is difficult to change things in the EU especially on how we organise ourselves. But I believe that in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, we should have an open debate, without taboos, and ask how we can give ourselves the institutional means to build the credible foreign policy that our citizens are asking for.

“*In the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, we should have an open debate, without taboos, and ask how we can give ourselves the means to build the credible foreign policy that our citizens are asking for.*”

In the mid-1980s there was the Chechini Report on the cost of non-Europe, which paved the way to the Single Market which was established through Qualified

Majority Voting. We now need to calculate the cost of non-Europe in foreign policy and draw the consequences.

Time for a new Ventotene Manifesto

Let me end on one final, important and symbolic point: 80 years on it may be time for a new Ventotene Manifesto. One that focuses not just on the critique of nation-states as the source of wars and international anarchy. But to highlight their limitations to address the big transnational challenges of our time: pandemics, climate change, migration, digital, etc.

All these challenges are global in nature. There are no real national answers. In addition to equipping our European Union with the powers it needs, we also need to forge a reformed global governance. With clear rules of road, and above all, with effective means to enforce them.

Too often, we see internationally agreed rules being flouted with impunity. Too often countries are pushing self-serving approaches and getting away with it. Too often we hear the siren songs of nationalism where strong men (they are mostly men) offering simple solutions. In too many cases, the existing system is unable to deliver effective action.

This we cannot afford. So my appeal to you is this: let's discuss a new Ventotene Manifesto, offering concrete solutions to the pressing problems of an unstable world. One that's ambitious and bold in character, with a sharp sense of urgency behind it but one that's also deeply practical and modern: to solve the problems that define our age and that of our (grand) children.

RENTRÉE 2021: AFGHANISTAN AND BEYOND

06/09/2021 – Blog – *In September 2021, we had two informal meetings in Slovenia, one with EU Defence Ministers and another with Foreign Ministers. Naturally, Afghanistan was at the top of our agenda, but we also discussed EU relations with China and the Indo-Pacific.*

The Afghan crisis isn't over. We must determine how to deal with the Taliban and draw the consequences of this crisis for our action in the rest of the world and for our defence policy.

During our meeting with foreign affairs ministers, the Head of the United Nations Agency for Refugees in Afghanistan, explained the dire humanitarian situation in the country. To face this dramatic ongoing humanitarian crisis and help people who still want to leave the country, we have to engage with the Taliban. However, engagement does not mean recognition.

The level and nature of this engagement will depend on the actions of the new government. With EU Foreign Ministers, we agreed on the following five benchmarks:

1. The commitment that Afghanistan will not serve as a base for the export of terrorism to other countries.
2. Respect for human rights, in particular women's rights, the rule of law and freedom of the media.
3. The establishment of an inclusive and representative transitional government through negotiations.
4. Free access for humanitarian aid, respecting our procedures and conditions for its delivery.
5. Allowing the departure of foreign nationals and Afghans at-risk who wish to leave the country in line with what was already decided by United Nations Security Resolution 2593.

In order to assess the implementation of the above benchmarks and to be able to have an efficient operational engagement on the ground, we have decided to coordinate our contacts with the Taliban, including through a joint EU's presence in Kabul, coordinated by the European External Action Service – if the security

conditions are met. From there, we could support the departure of European nationals that are still in Afghanistan and Afghans at risk that could be received in European Union member states as decided by any of them. Many EU member state nationals are still in Afghanistan as well as Afghans that have been cooperating with them or that have been identified as people at risk.

The need to engage more with Afghanistan's neighbours

We also need to engage more with Afghanistan's neighbours, and regional actors. We decided that, under the auspices of the European External Action Service, the EU will initiate a regional political platform of cooperation with Afghanistan's neighbours. This political platform will consider the management of population flows from Afghanistan; the prevention of the spread of terrorism; the fight against organised crime, including drug trafficking and human being smuggling. A much needed move to stabilise the whole region. We will of course coordinate strongly with the United States, the United Nations as well as with other partners and regional organisations in the framework of the G7 and the G20.

Beyond that, we have more long-term lessons to learn from this situation. I listed some of them [in an Op-ed published last Wednesday in the New York Times](#) ⁽²¹⁾. And we have begun to discuss them during both meetings, also with the Deputy Secretary Generals of NATO, Mircea Geona, and the Under Secretary General of the United Nations, Jean Pierre Lacroix.

“*Afghanistan has shown in a striking way that deficiencies in EU capacity to act autonomously comes with a price.*”

Afghanistan has shown in a striking way that deficiencies in EU capacity to act autonomously comes with a price. The only way forward is to combine our forces and strengthen not only our capabilities, but also our will to act. This means enhancing our capacity to respond to hybrid challenges, covering key capability gaps, including logistic transport, raising the level of readiness through joint military training and developing new tools like the 5 000 people Initial Entry Force that we are discussing actually. Such an Entry Force would have helped us to provide a security perimeter for the evacuation of European Union citizens in Kabul.

⁽²¹⁾ See p. 141.

We have discussed these kinds of proposals for many years and, so far, divisions among member states have led to insufficient implementation and action. I have the hope – I do not have assurances yet- that the discussions that we have been having during the last couple of years on the Strategic Compass, will have created enough common understanding of the challenges and threats that we are facing, to mobilise the common will of the member states.

“ Regarding European defence, I have the hope that the discussions that we have had during the last couple of years have created enough common understanding, to mobilise the common will of the member states.”

What has happened in Afghanistan will for sure be exploited elsewhere by anti-Western actors. However, it is up to us to learn the right lessons: We need to be aware of the pitfalls of carrying out state-building efforts in war-torn societies, which are not structured along the lines of a modern state. No amount of external support can be a substitute for a viable local political settlement, what we often call ‘local ownership’. We have to step-up our integrated approach, combining military, civilian, development and diplomatic efforts. This is particularly relevant for the efforts that we are deploying in other parts of the world, like in the Sahel.

China, we need to show solidarity, unity and coordination

Beyond Afghanistan, our FAC also discussed EU relations with China. They are becoming increasingly challenging in the last months, driven by ever-growing Chinese assertiveness, including on occasions the negative targeting of some member states. We need to show solidarity, unity and coordination to meaningfully engage with China.

Looking ahead, the EU will work with China on Afghanistan, Myanmar or climate change in the run-up to the COP-26. At the same time, competition in trade and economic matters will continue to drive EU–China relations in the coming year. We remain also concerned regarding the situation in Hong Kong, in Xinjiang, in Tibet and the South China Sea, among other. This calls for a balanced and calibrated strategy and a shared sense of responsibility and unity. To engage China from a position of strength, we all – EU institutions and member states – need to apply the EU’s multifaceted approach treating China as a partner, competitor, and systemic rival.

India, a central player in the Indo-Pacific region

We also met with the Foreign Minister of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. India is a central player in the Indo-Pacific region, where [the world's centre of gravity is shifting](#) ⁽²²⁾. Later in September, we will release a Joint Communication on our Strategy for this region. The last EU–India Leaders' Meeting in May showed how much our relations have expanded in the past years. Besides the breakthroughs on trade, we also underlined the foreign and security agenda. For example, a complex joint naval exercise was held in the Gulf of Aden in mid-June. Together with India, we can do a lot to ensure that the international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), are upheld in the region.

Connectivity is another natural candidate for increased cooperation. Last May, we have entered into a Connectivity Partnership, we need now to implement it through concrete projects. Other pressing priorities include the fight against climate change where we count on India to play its full part. Our discussion demonstrated the resolve of EU Foreign Ministers to strengthen our approach to the Indo-Pacific.

“*Lukashenko's regime, cynically, has been using, migrants and refugees to artificially create pressure on our Eastern borders. We are ready to take all measures needed to support Lithuania, Latvia and Poland.*”

Finally we discussed also the deterioration of the situation in Belarus. Lukashenko's regime, cynically, has been using during this summer, migrants and refugees to artificially create pressure on our Eastern borders. The Ministers stand in solidarity with Lithuania, Latvia and Poland and we are ready to take all measures needed to support them.

The informal meetings of Defence and Foreign Ministers in Slovenia showed that shaping our European foreign and security policy remains 'work in progress'. We are going forward but we need to match the speed of change in the world around us. When it comes to our response to the Afghanistan crisis, but also on the other big geopolitical challenges we face.

⁽²²⁾ See p. 379.

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY: ONE WEEK IN NEW YORK

25/09/2021 – Blog – In September 2021, I have had an intensive week of diplomatic engagement in New York centred on the annual General Assembly of the United Nations. In my many bilateral meetings, my main priorities have been EU–US relations, the Iran nuclear deal and Afghanistan. In each case, we need to speak with a clear EU voice.

UN General Assembly week is the highlight of the diplomatic calendar. For one week, the political and diplomatic world is coming to New York for a frantic schedule of summits, ministerial and bilateral meetings, media interviews and more. A week of ‘diplomatic speed-dating’.

For the EU, this was a chance to reiterate our support to the UN and to multilateralism, and to address the most concerning current global issues: Afghanistan, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the JCPOA Iran nuclear deal), and of course the fall-out after the announcement of the AUKUS partnership and the cancellation of the Australia–France submarine contract. The week provided an opportunity to meet many counterparts and partners from around the world in a very short space of time to address these issues.

“ *The UN General Assembly week is the highlight of the diplomatic calendar. For one week, the political and diplomatic world is coming to New York for a frantic schedule.* ”

World leaders addressed the General Assembly to paint their vision of how to move our world forward and reminded us that we stand at the crossroads in many ways. UN Secretary-General Guterres, for instance, stressed that ‘we face a moment of truth’ and that it is time ‘to deliver, to restore trust and to inspire hope’. He reminded us that the very *raison d’être* of the UN and multilateral cooperation is the belief that we are capable of great things when we work together.

Equally, US President Biden underlined that we stand ahead of a ‘decisive decade for our world’ and that the planet stands at an ‘inflection point in history’. He promised, the US is committed to work with its partners to collectively face this point, and stressed the importance of doing so within the framework of multilateral institutions and of using ‘relentless diplomacy’ instead of military might.

Speaking for the European Union, [President Michel also stressed](#) ⁽²³⁾ that ‘we face another focal point in human history’ and that the EU will continue to be the leading sponsor of peace and sustainable development. Also by developing our strategic autonomy and being less dependent, with the aim to strengthen our positive influence.

AUKUS and transatlantic relations

At the start of the week, all focus was on the Australia, UK, and US pact and the potential impact this could have on transatlantic relations. This announcement had taken the world by surprise. The following reactions were not just about a deal on sub-marines that did not go through, but about the wider ramifications for EU–US relations and the EU’s role in the Indo-Pacific. The lack of consultations and communication between the close partners that we are, created real difficulties. It provided a negative image of an uncoordinated or even divided West, where we should show common resolve and coordination, not least as regards geostrategic challenges.

“*The lack of consultations and communication between the close partners that the EU and US are, created real difficulties and provided a negative image of an uncoordinated or even divided West.*”

We [discussed the AUKUS issue with EU Foreign Ministers on Monday](#) ⁽²⁴⁾ and Ministers expressed clear solidarity with France. We decided to ask the US, Australia and the UK to explain how and why they arrived at their decision. There was also agreement that the challenges of the Indo-Pacific require more cooperation instead of more fragmentation. The [EU’s Strategy on the Indo-Pacific](#) ⁽²⁵⁾ – that we unveiled on the same day as the announcement of the AUKUS alliance – is precisely about how the EU will step up its engagement in and with the region, including on security. A clear priority of the strategy is to work with willing and like-minded partners.

Also on Monday, I met Marise Payne, the Australian Foreign Minister and underlined our expectation that close partners inform and consult one another.

⁽²³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/09/24/discours-du-president-charles-michel-a-l-assemblee-generale-des-nations-unies/>

⁽²⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104404/informal-eu-foreign-ministers-meeting-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press_en

⁽²⁵⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4704

The Foreign Minister and I agreed that the EU and Australia have many common interests in the Indo Pacific, supporting regional stability and cooperation and keeping the regional order open and rules-based.

During a phone call between Presidents Biden and Macron on Thursday, the US side recognised that the process had not been well handled and that prior consultation would have been beneficial. The US also stressed the importance of working with the EU and its member states, including France, in the Indo-Pacific. Also crucial was the clear expression of support by President Biden for a stronger EU role on defence, in complementarity with NATO. This was an important message for the future of EU–US relationship.

A strong alliance between the United States and the EU

This positive message was reiterated when [I met US Secretary of State Blinken](#) ⁽²⁶⁾. We reaffirmed the strong alliance between the United States and the EU and agreed to continue working on practical steps to deepen our dialogue and cooperation. The problem could have been avoided by ensuring to reach out to partners before. We need to put in place a system to avoid such issues as around AUKUS in the future. A structured dialogue with the United States on security and defence, as we had agreed to set up during our EU – US Summit earlier this year, could provide the ideal platform for this.

A lot of work lies ahead: to repair trust, to implement vigorously our own Indo-Pacific Strategy working with US and others. And to ensure real progress in acquiring the defence capabilities we need to shoulder a greater part of our responsibilities.

“ *A militarily capable and strategically aware EU is in the interest of the US and NATO.*”

I have long believed that a militarily capable and strategically aware EU is in the interest of the US and NATO. Especially in the EU neighbourhood, there are and will be occasions where US and NATO do not want to engage and Europe must be able to act on its own. This is one of the reasons why we work on the [Strategic](#)

⁽²⁶⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104510/united-states-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-met-secretary-state-antony-en>

[Compass](#) ⁽²⁷⁾, to set out our common ambitions. What we need are concrete actions on capabilities and, strengthening our will to use them, when required.

Iran and the nuclear deal

Recently, there were also various important developments on Iran and the nuclear deal: the Iranian elections and a deal between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran on the verification measures including the use of cameras at Iran's nuclear facilities. This deal had narrowly averted a formal censure by the IAEA Board, after we have seen growing concerns over expanding Iranian enrichment activities and negotiations in Vienna have stalled in recent weeks.

In this context, my hope was that, as coordinator of the Iran nuclear deal (also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), I would be able to convene a Ministerial meeting, as in previous UNGA weeks. A full ministerial meeting proved impossible, but I had a long [bilateral meeting with the new Iranian Foreign Minister Amirabdollahian](#) ⁽²⁸⁾, who also met many other counterparts to explore how we can move forward.

The most important outcome was that he confirmed that Iran would return to the negotiating table in Vienna. The new Foreign Minister has been in office for less than a month, but we must return to negotiations soon and revive the Iran nuclear deal in all its aspects, meaning a US return and a lifting of sanctions in exchange for full Iranian compliance. The sequencing of these steps is the crux. Iran is struggling, US impatience is clearly growing, and the wider regional context including the Taliban take over in Afghanistan is creating turbulences. Therefore, we will have to work hard in the coming weeks to narrow the gaps and achieve results.

The way forward on Afghanistan

Afghanistan was for me the third priority for this week. With the Taliban now in control and the economy in freefall, a serious humanitarian crisis looms. There is a broad international consensus on the need to judge the Taliban by their actions and not to allow the country to collapse completely, which would be dangerous for the entire region and overall international security.

⁽²⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en

⁽²⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104485/iran-high-representativevice-president-borrell-meets-foreign-minister-amir-abdollahian_en



I had the opportunity to meet and discuss the way forward with several regional actors and international partners, such as Secretary of State Blinken, and the Pakistani, Turkish and Russian Foreign Ministers. In all these talks, it emerged very clearly that we need to work closely together as international community to address the situation on the ground. We need to address collectively the economic situation in the country, as well as the human rights and humanitarian situation and to work on common interests such as counter-terrorism, organised crime, the trafficking of drugs and people, and a balanced approach on migration.

“ *With the Taliban now in control and the economy in freefall, a serious humanitarian crisis looms.*”

For all these issues, we need indeed a regional approach and we will work on a regional format, ensuring full ownership of neighbours. We will strive to develop the benchmarks discussed with EU Foreign Ministers during the [informal Gymnich meeting](#) ⁽²⁹⁾, including as to women's rights and girls education, into an international support program. In all of this, it is important to avoid a proliferation of initiatives that could also lead to greater confusion and I will continue working towards this goal.

⁽²⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/103712/afghanistan-press-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-informal-meeting-foreign_en

Mali and the so-called Wagner group

Finally, an issue I had to raise with the Russian Foreign Minister and discuss with my Malian counterpart was the situation in Mali and the potential deployment of the private security company Wagner group. This would affect negatively the country's stability and would therefore have consequences on the cooperation between the European Union and the Government of Transition in Mali.

It was my first meeting with Foreign Minister Lavrov since we had [seen each other in Moscow in February](#) ⁽³⁰⁾. I repeated a clear message to him this week: yes, there are fundamental differences between Russia and the European Union. But there are also issues where we need to work together, in the interest of global security and stability, starting with Afghanistan.

Finally, I had many other meetings during this hectic week: a [dinner with the Western Balkan leaders](#) ⁽³¹⁾, plus [meetings with the Gulf Cooperation Council](#) ⁽³²⁾ (next week I will also travel to the region), and meetings with the Foreign Ministers of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Peru, Chile, the President of Ecuador and African leaders, to name a few. We also [signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Colombia](#) ⁽³³⁾, which will take our cooperation to the next level and had several other meetings on Latin America.

“ I leave New York with a sense that we managed to make Europe's voice heard in international affairs and in developing global structures.”

Overall, I leave New York with a sense that, together with both EU Presidents, we managed to make Europe's voice heard in international affairs and in developing global structures for building a better world, a staunch defender of multilateralism and working with our allies and partners. On Iran, Afghanistan, Libya and many other issues, there is still a wide demand and compelling need for Europe to speak up and back up its positions with the instruments and forms of leverage we have. In this regard, it is important that we overcame the AUKUS rift between the EU and our allies. Hard work lies ahead now to translate the pledges of consultations into concrete deliverables, in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere, and to address global challenges and contribute to shape the world in line with our interests and values.

⁽³⁰⁾ See p. 274.

⁽³¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104458/western-balkans-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-meets-regional-leaders_en

⁽³²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104476/gcc-high-representativevice-president-borrell-meets-gulf-cooperation-council_en

⁽³³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4831

EUROPE CANNOT AFFORD TO BE A BYSTANDER IN THE WORLD

10/10/2021 – Blog – Major geopolitical shifts are taking place, which put into question Europe's ability to defend its vision and interests. European leaders discussed in October 2021 how to respond. To move forward, we must focus on action and not get stuck in abstract and divisive debates. The Strategic Compass will set out concrete steps in the area of security.

In less than a month, we have gone through the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the announcement of the AUKUS defence deal. These events have sharpened and accelerated the debate on Europe's global role and it was therefore right that we had a discussion at the level of leaders about the implications – and the choices we now need to make.

I stressed at the informal European Council that in principle two attitudes are possible. The first is to bury our heads in the sand, finding reasons to downplay the significance of geostrategic developments, or argue that they only concern certain member states. The second is to realise that important shifts are happening and that we must act if we do not want to live in a world order that we cannot help shape.

Two major trends affect us more and more

In fact, there are two major trends affecting us more and more. First, we are witnessing a strengthened reaction to China's rise and assertiveness, of which the AUKUS case is a good illustration. Second, we are seeing a multipolar dynamic where actors like Russia and others are seeking to increase their margin of action and sphere of influence, either regionally or globally. Quite often, they act to the detriment of EU values and interests, as we see in Syria, Libya, Mali and elsewhere.

“Europeans are at risk of becoming more and more an object and not a player in international affairs, reacting to other people's decisions, instead of driving and shaping events ourselves.”

The result is that today Europeans are at risk of becoming more and more an object and not a player in international affairs, reacting to other people's decisions, instead of driving and shaping events ourselves. The question is: what do we want to do about this? Are we as European Union content to remain a sort of regional actor, focusing mainly on economic and normative power, for whom the world's affairs and hard power are too complicated? Or do we consider that there is no free lunch, i.e. that passivity also has a high cost?

We have of course discussed these issues for years already. That is why we should avoid our usual tendency to have an abstract, and frankly divisive, debate on whether we should *either* strengthen Europe's own security capacities *or* do so in NATO. We clearly need to do *both*. The stronger we become as EU, the stronger NATO will be.

“We should avoid our usual tendency to have an abstract, and frankly divisive, debate on whether we should either strengthen Europe's own security capacities or do so in NATO. We clearly need to do both.”

At the informal European Council, leaders agreed on the need to achieve concrete progress in strengthening Europe's global role. Their guidance relates to our work on security and defence, relations with the US, and our strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific. Concretely, I see four main lines of action:

The priority of all priorities is to develop both our capacities and our will to act. For this, we must focus on what unites us and continue building the necessary trust among us. It cannot be the agenda of one, or a handful of countries. And the basis to achieve this is to nurture a common strategic culture, a shared sense of the threats we face.

What the Strategic Compass is about

This is precisely what the so-called [Strategic Compass](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en) ⁽³⁴⁾ is all about: it will lay out a strategic approach for our security and defence that will guide our actions to 2030. It will give a sense of direction: how we should develop the necessary defence capabilities and overcome strategic gaps and how we should bring greater focus and results to combating hybrid threats and protecting EU interests in cyber, maritime and outer space. It will also propose more ambitious partnerships in

⁽³⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en

these domains. Leaders tasked me to present a first draft of the Compass in November and I pleaded for a strong level of ambition.

Many leaders rightly stressed that the transatlantic partnership is and remains irreplaceable. Based on an ambitious Strategic Compass and a new joint EU–NATO statement that should come out in the coming months, we must strengthen the transatlantic relationship and place it on a stronger footing. However, as repeatedly stated over the last years and demonstrated by recent developments, including the Afghanistan withdrawal and AUKUS, our American friends expect us Europeans to carry a greater share of responsibility – for our own and the world's security. I will travel to Washington next week to continue my discussions on this with Secretary of State Blinken and other interlocutors. Importantly, with the new US administration, our discussions are on a different and very constructive path.

A coherent strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific

In addition to the need to develop our capacities and willingness to act, recent developments have also reinforced the imperative of having a coherent strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific, including how we deal with China and develop our relations with the rest of a region that will mark world events in the 21st century.

On China, leaders agreed that we must remain strong in our approach, based on the 'partner, competitive, rival' trypic. In terms of practical policies, the challenge is often how to blend these three elements into a coherent whole. For me it is clear that the best way to engage China is from a position of unity and strength. We must encourage dialogue and cooperation in certain areas like climate policy. But we should also be ready to push back when Chinese decisions run counter to our views, notably on human rights and geopolitical choices. That was the line I took last week when I spoke with Foreign Minister Wang Yi during [the EU–China Strategic Dialogue](#) ⁽³⁵⁾.

At the same time, we have to deepen our engagement in and with the Indo-Pacific region, based on our [recently adopted strategy](#) ⁽³⁶⁾. To recall: 40 % of EU trade passes through the South China Sea and the region produces 60 % of global

⁽³⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tchad/104809/china-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-holds-11th-eu-china-strategic-dialogue_en

⁽³⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/96740/EU%20Strategy%20for%20Cooperation%20in%20the%20Indo-Pacific

growth. The EU is also still biggest investor in the region (not China, as many believe) so we have a big stake and contribution to make.

The challenge of Indo-Pacific and a rising China require more coordination and less fragmentation. The point of our Indo-Pacific Strategy was to signal readiness to cooperate with China where this makes sense, to diversify relations (deepening cooperation with Japan, India, South Korea, ASEAN and others) and to modernise our stance (going beyond trade – to security cooperation, including the proposed maritime presence). The Indo-Pacific is a prime geostrategic theatre and we need to be present.

The debate on Europe's global role has reached a critical stage. It is what Germans call a *Chefsache*: a question for EU leaders i.e. presidents and prime ministers. Big trends and decisions are compelling us to act. In the months ahead, we have a chance to turn the realisation that Europe cannot afford to be a bystander into concrete actions. The world is not waiting for us.

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: WHAT DO CITIZENS WANT EUROPE'S GLOBAL ROLE TO BE?

15/10/2021 – Blog – *The ‘Conference on the Future of Europe’ was launched in spring 2021 to address Europe’s challenges and priorities. Listening to citizens and giving them a say is also highly relevant when it comes to foreign and security policy. Citizens are expecting more from us, so we should heed their call for action and results.*

The [Eurobarometer](#) ⁽³⁷⁾ and other surveys regularly report that EU citizens attach great importance to foreign policy and security issues – and that a majority wants increased EU involvement in these policy fields. We need to listen to our citizens, including how they want to shape the EU’s role as global actor. The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) ⁽³⁸⁾, has exactly as objective to listen to our citizens and prepare reforms, as needed.

Citizens will discuss the topic the [EU in the World](#) ⁽³⁹⁾ starting on 15-17 October in Strasbourg with a first Citizens’ Panel focusing on this issue. Several more panels on Europe’s global role of Europe will take place throughout the rest of the year. This will then be followed by a Plenary session on 21-22 January in which I will be associated and the purpose there is to discuss the recommendations of the Citizens’ Panels.

Interesting inputs expected from EU citizens

We can certainly expect some interesting inputs from our citizens on both the *what* and the *how* of EU foreign policy. We need an open debate on what our substantive policy priorities should be, in terms of geographic and thematic terms. But also on whether there are new priorities we have to focus on more? How can we become more effective in our decision-making, to take faster decisions? Can we do better in terms of handling the linkages between the internal and the external dimensions of European policies? And how can we defend our core

⁽³⁷⁾ See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>

⁽³⁸⁾ See <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>

⁽³⁹⁾ See <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/EUInTheWorld>

interests and values when some big powers openly undermine democracy and freedoms? These are some of the big questions that we policy-makers grapple with every day and they are certainly also on the mind of our citizens.

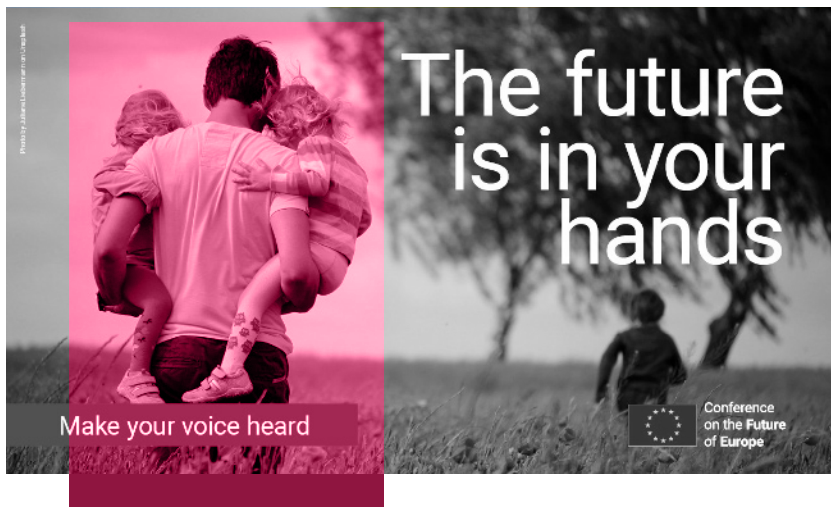
“*The task could not be more urgent. We need to prepare and position ourselves for the post-pandemic world.*”

The task could not be more urgent. We need to prepare and position ourselves for the post-pandemic world. Even if we are not yet out of the pandemic, some overall trends are clear. None are fully new, but all have been accelerated by the crisis. The first is that our world is becoming more multi-polar than multilateral, with the strategic competition between the United States and China often paralysing multilateralism. Second, interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft power is often weaponised: vaccines, data and technology standards are all instruments of political competition. Third, some countries follow ‘a logic of empires’, arguing in terms of historical rights and zone of influence, rather than adhering to agreed rules and local consent. And fourth, the world is becoming less free and democracy is under attack – both at home and abroad. We face a real battle of narratives.

A call to action

All these trends are a call to action. We Europeans need to respond to these developments, and decide how to new seize opportunities and face new threats. This discussion cannot wait. We need to find ways to become more united and to build real solidarity among ourselves. This is essential to better defend our interests and values and enhance our leverage in dealing with powers who don't share our values, and who are prepared to weaponise their assets, from natural resources to supply routes. We should also become more flexible and creative in our partnerships, strengthening coalitions with like-minded partners, while cooperating also with others to pursue common global goals, such as climate action. Finally, we should do better in taking decisions faster and be more coherent in implementation.

“*We need to find ways to become more united. This is essential to enhance our leverage in dealing with powers who don't share our values and are prepared to weaponise their assets.*”



In many respects, our citizens are ahead of governments in seeing the need for a stronger EU foreign and security policy. Many Europeans want more results and are ready to invest in achieving that goal, financially and politically. They see that the way we organise ourselves now can lead to delays or lowest common denominator decision-making. We are constantly striving to improve our effectiveness but the rate and speed of change around us is often greater, meaning that in relative terms we are going backwards.

Ready to embrace any good idea

So we should be ready to embrace any good idea on how to do things better. In this context, we are also open to listen to citizens from around the world, particularly our closest partners such as those with whom we share common values as well as those who aspire to become members of the European Union such as for example the countries from the Western Balkans whose future lies in the EU.

By listening and engaging citizens, we can receive valuable inspiration and recommendations. And in a next phase, it will be up to the political leadership, at EU and national levels, to take up these ideas and recommendations – and act upon them.

THE EU'S GLOBAL GATEWAY: CREATING LINKS, NOT DEPENDENCIES

07/12/2021 – Op Ed – Since the start of the von der Leyen Commission, the twin transitions of green and digital in Europe have been at the forefront. With the new Global Gateway strategy, the EU continues to promote these transitions at the global level. With my colleague Jutta Urpilainen, we explained this new strategy in this Op Ed.

Earlier this year, the EU and Brazil inaugurated a new fibre-optic cable to carry terabytes of data faster and more securely between our two continents. This helps scientists in Europe and Latin America to work together, on issues from climate modelling to disaster mitigation. The cable starts in the EU, where the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) became the gold standard of data protection, and ends in Brazil, which recently introduced a similar law. The cable links two continents together building a data economy that respects the privacy of its citizens' data. This is how Europe approaches connectivity – bringing partners together without creating unwanted dependencies.

Bringing closer all those who work with our partners

Last week, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the cooperation agencies of France, Spain and Germany joined the European Commission in Togo to identify projects to finance in the energy, transport and digital sectors. During the mission, the EIB signed a €100 million credit line to support African small and medium businesses to recover from the pandemic and to seize growth opportunities from the African Continental Free Trade Area. These are examples of what we call Team Europe, bringing together all those who work with our partners to support the green and digital transition.

Since the start of the von der Leyen Commission, the twin transitions of green and digital in Europe have been at the forefront. With the new Global Gateway strategy, the EU continues to promote the green and digital transition at the global level.

“*In a world of interdependence, where supply chains are showing their fragility and can be weaponised, we need to ensure that global connectivity is based on rules and international standards.*”

In a world of interdependence, where supply chains are showing their fragility, we know how important connectivity is. We have also seen how the links that connect us can also be weaponised. Data flows, energy supplies, rare earths, vaccines and semi-conductors are all instruments of power in today's world. That is we need to ensure that global connectivity and access to these flows is based on rules and international standards.

The standard of the future must reflect our core values

While flows in goods may be ideologically neutral, the rules which govern them are intertwined with political values. Particularly in the digital domain, Europe and other democracies must ensure that the standards of the future reflect our core values.

Europe wants to reduce excessive dependencies and be more autonomous in areas like the production of computer chips. Our autonomy is reinforced if all our partners have alternatives when making their investment decisions. Europe's calling card and offer to our partner countries to address infrastructure investment needs is financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable connectivity. No 'white elephants' and no 'debt traps', but projects that are sustainable and serve the needs of local populations.

“*Europe's offer is financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable connectivity. No 'white elephants' and no 'debt traps', but infrastructure projects that are sustainable and serve the needs of local populations.*”

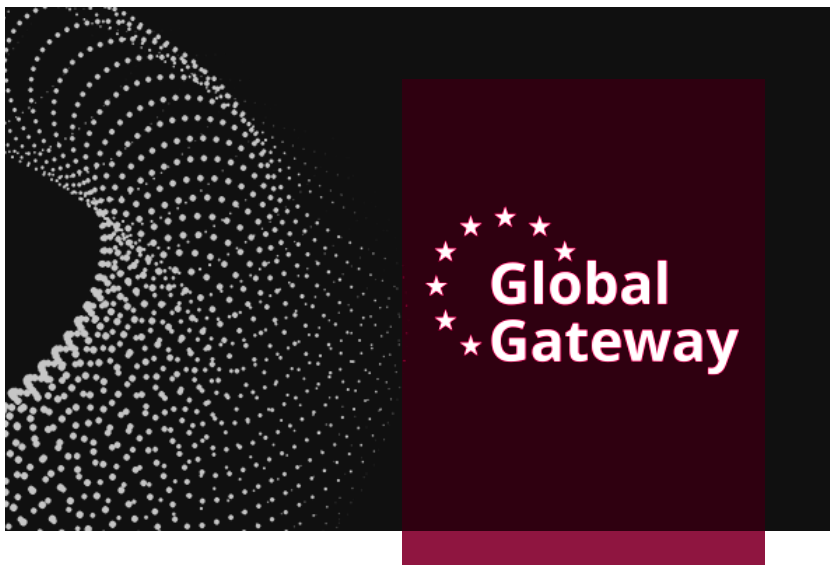
For Europe to master the connectivity challenge, it needs not only principles and frameworks, but also adequate resources and clear priorities.

Firstly, we will use the resources of Team Europe, EU and its member states in a smarter, more efficient way. Global Gateway will mobilise investments of more than €300 billion in public and private funds for global infrastructure development between 2021 and 2027, financing the climate and digital transition, -- as well as health, education and research. We will mobilise half of the investments with the help of the EU budget and the other half indicates the planned investments from European financial institutions and member states' development finance institutions.

Remodelled financial tools

We have remodelled our financial tools to provide the firepower that can blend loans and grants and provide the guarantees needed today. We put in place mechanisms to filter out abnormally low tenders and protect against offers that benefit from distortive foreign subsidies, which undermine the level playing field. We will also ensure that EU internal programmes – InvestEU, our research programme, Horizon Europe and the Connecting Europe Facility – will support Global Gateway, alongside member states' development banks, national promotional banks and export credit agencies.

Of course, capital from the private sector will remain the biggest source of investment in infrastructure. That is why we are exploring the possibility of establishing a European Export Credit Facility to complement the existing export credit arrangements at Member State level. This would help ensure a more level-playing field for EU businesses in third country markets, where they increasingly have to compete with foreign competitors that receive large support from their governments.



Secondly, on the priorities, Global Gateway has identified a number of flagship projects. These include the extension to the BELLA cable to the rest of the Latin America, as part of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance; the expansion of the Trans-European Network to improve transport links with the Eastern Partnership and

Western Balkan countries and scaled-up funding for the Erasmus+ student exchange programme worldwide. In Africa, along with support for new strategic transport corridors, the EU will mobilise €2.4 billion grants for Sub-Saharan Africa and over €1 billion for North Africa to support renewable energy and the production of renewable hydrogen, which can help meet the EU's projected demand for clean energy and help partners to do the same.

At heart, Global Gateway is about demonstrating how democratic values offer certainty and fairness for investors, sustainability for partners and long-term benefits for people around the world.

2021 IN REVIEW: A YEAR OF TRANSITIONS

27/12/2021 – Blog – Looking back, I would define 2021 as a year of transitions. Geopolitical changes have intensified with power politics repeatedly challenging the EU and its values. We must respond with all the determination we can muster.

The pandemic has carried on longer than we imagined a year ago and the omicron variant is yet again requiring the introduction of major restrictions and threatening the recovery. Still, we know that vaccines are making a major difference. Thanks to the common purchase mechanism, a majority of Europeans have received at least two doses.

The EU has also exported COVID-19 vaccines since December 2020 without interruption. Out of a total of 2 billion doses produced, the EU has exported over 1.1 billion doses to 61 countries and [Team Europe](#) ⁽⁴⁰⁾ has shared more than 385 million doses. The EU has therefore surpassed its target for 2021, which was to share 250 million doses by the end of the year, and the aim of Team Europe is to have donated a total of 700 million doses by mid-2022.

“ We need to do more to reverse vaccination disparities and tackle growing imbalances and inequalities.”

Still, unequal vaccination rates across continents underline the need to accelerate donations and develop local vaccine production capacities, especially in Africa. Indeed, while in Europe 60 % of the population is fully vaccinated (EU: 68 %), full vaccination rates stand at 61 % in South America, 56 % in North/Central America and the Caribbean, 57 % in Oceania, 53 % in Asia and only 8 % in Africa.

A stop to the developing world catching up

On top of these disparities, the pandemic has put a stop to the developing world catching up, leading to an increase in world hunger and poverty, with the number

⁽⁴⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76341/coronavirus-news-eu-action-team-europe-support-disinformation-repatriation-and-solidarity_lt

of people falling below poverty line due to COVID estimated at around 150 million by the World Bank. We need to do more to reverse this trend and tackle growing imbalances and inequalities.

In addition to handling the pandemic, we have tended to run from one crisis to the next, with Belarus ⁽⁴¹⁾, Ukraine ⁽⁴²⁾, [Mali](#) ⁽⁴³⁾, Sudan, [Afghanistan](#) ⁽⁴⁴⁾, [Ethiopia](#) ⁽⁴⁵⁾ and [Venezuela](#) ⁽⁴⁶⁾ dominating the international and EU agenda. Being in permanent crisis management mode has sometimes weakened our capacity to address transversal, longer-term issues that should be at the centre of our foreign policy, such as revitalising multilateralism, or handling migration in a balanced way, or the energy and climate crises or the rules for the digital transition.

“*Being in permanent crisis management mode has sometimes weakened our capacity to address transversal, longer-term issues.*”

While in 2021 there were many setbacks and challenges, we also had some positive developments. For example, we were able to present the [Strategic Compass](#) ⁽⁴⁷⁾ to the EU member states. Its purpose is to strengthen the EU's role as a security provider. Until now, Europeans have too often lived in a 'security bubble', despite a fast-worsening security environment. The EU does not aim to be a military power in traditional terms, but we do need to be better able to defend ourselves. The Compass should be adopted next March and allow us to take our own security and defence more seriously.

Another positive example is how EU climate diplomacy played a leading role in the fight against climate change at [COP26 in Glasgow](#) ⁽⁴⁸⁾. Negotiating with 197 parties implies compromises and the EU played its part, for instance, with the Methane Pledge which it initiated and 100 countries eventually signed.

⁽⁴¹⁾ See p. 290.

⁽⁴²⁾ See p. 278.

⁽⁴³⁾ See p. 354.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See p. 416.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See p. 351.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ See p. 443.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/106337/towards-strategic-compass_en

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/climate-action-and-green-deal/eu-cop26-climate-change-conference_en

2021 also saw the relaunch of [EU-US relations](#) ⁽⁴⁹⁾ under President Biden. The new direction of the US administration enabled us to make progress, for example on climate change, on the Iran nuclear negotiations and on corporate taxation. While the way in which the departure from Afghanistan and AUKUS decision unfolded was unfortunate, at the end of the year we held close [EU-US consultations on China](#) ⁽⁵⁰⁾ and the Indo-Pacific and also agreed to launch a dedicated [EU-US dialogue on security and defence](#).

Increased engagement with Latin America

This year we increased [our engagement with Latin America](#) ⁽⁵¹⁾, including inter alia the first [high-level EU visit to Brazil](#) ⁽⁵²⁾ in nine years and the inauguration of the *EllaLink* fibre optic submarine cable between the EU and Brazil. The EU-Latin American and Caribbean Leaders' meeting of early December should also trigger new developments in the coming months.

On China we maintained EU unity, recognising that the EU sees the country as a partner, competitor and systemic rival, all at the same time. In 2021, the worsening of the human rights situation inside China, its regional behaviour, as well as the decision to sanction MEPs and other EU official bodies and most recently its coercion of Lithuania have all taken their toll.

Diversifying our partnerships across the Indo-Pacific

Overall, we have put the emphasis on diversifying our partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. Our new [Indo-Pacific strategy](#) ⁽⁵³⁾ promotes EU's engagement in the region to not only boost trade and investment, but also to cooperate more on security issues, for example maritime or cyber security. My [visit to Jakarta in June](#) ⁽⁵⁴⁾ consolidated our engagement with ASEAN. We have also [engaged more closely with Central Asia](#) ⁽⁵⁵⁾ and started to improve our [cooperation with the Gulf countries](#) ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ See p. 243.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/108298/eu-us-joint-press-release-eeas-and-department-state-second-high-level-meeting-eu-us-dialogue_en

⁽⁵¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/regions/latin-america-caribbean_en

⁽⁵²⁾ See p. 438.

⁽⁵³⁾ See p. 379.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ See p. 399.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See p. 404.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ See p. 412.



[In Africa](#) ⁽⁵⁷⁾, the year was unfortunately marked by many conflicts and the overall deterioration of the situation in the Sahel. The civil war in Ethiopia in particular took on a dramatic dimension. We are now preparing the AU–EU summit to be held in February where, as the EU, we will have to deliver on our rhetoric, notably on vaccines and climate finance.

The situation in Libya seems to have stabilised, with elections having been postponed again, and tensions with Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean have tended to ease this year. The recently held [Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean and the EU–Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial Meeting in Barcelona](#) ⁽⁵⁸⁾ at the end of November were also reminders of the urgent need to close the growing gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean and seize new opportunities for example around the green transition.

“ In 2021, we have worked to defend EU interests and values and strengthen a rules-based global order in this year of transitions.”

In our eastern neighbourhood, [2021 featured clear examples of power politics](#) ⁽⁵⁹⁾, as we saw in the cases of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. To face these threats, the

⁽⁵⁷⁾ See p. 346.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ See p. 342.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ See p. 273.

EU has provided political as well as operational support to its partners in a firm and unified manner, for example with the [5th package of sanctions](#) ⁽⁶⁰⁾ against the Lukashenko regime in Belarus. As hybrid conflicts proliferate, we must continue to back Ukraine or Moldavia in resisting the pressure from Russia, and maintain an unyielding approach to Belarus. On that regard, The [Eastern Partnership](#) ⁽⁶¹⁾ Summit reaffirmed EU's strategic, ambitious and forward-looking approach with our Eastern European partners. The rise in divisive rhetoric and actions across the Western Balkans [especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) ⁽⁶²⁾ have also hampered efforts to bring the six countries closer to their European future.

This brief overview of the past year is by no means exhaustive, but I wanted to recall some of the most salient issues. In 2021, we have worked to defend EU interests and values and strengthen a rules-based global order in this year of transitions. That work must continue in 2022 with all the determination we can muster.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/02/belarus-eu-adopts-5th-package-of-sanctions-over-continued-human-rights-abuses-and-the-instrumentalisation-of-migrants/>

⁽⁶¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/eastern-partnership_en

⁽⁶²⁾ See p. 259.

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VACCINES AND THE FIGHT AGAINST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



VACCINATING THE WORLD: THE EU IS DOING MORE THAN IT GETS CREDIT FOR

26/03/2021 – Blog – *Despite initial setbacks, the EU has been working hard during the first months of 2021 to accelerate the internal roll out of COVID-19 vaccines. At the same time, the EU was already contributing in a very significant way to the global vaccination drive via exports and the international COVAX facility.*

In recent weeks, the EU encountered significant difficulties in its response to the COVID 19 pandemic due to vaccine production delays. Nevertheless, the EU has done, and is still doing, more than what is known in the public sphere to help vaccinate the world, and more than what it gets credit for.

The EU is one of the first producers and exporters of vaccines and our efforts to further ramp up production capacity will soon be delivering results. Between 1 December 2020 and 15 March 2021, the EU has already exported 46 million doses to 33 countries – including those countries that have not exported any doses to anyone.

Through the [COVAX facility](#) (63), the EU is also already playing a key role in helping low and middle income countries to vaccinate their population. So far, COVAX has delivered 31 million doses to 54 countries.

“Through the [COVAX facility](#), the EU is already playing a key role in helping low and middle income countries to vaccinate their population.”

We have also made a major contribution to the development of vaccines. Last year, the EU spent a lot, more than €1 billion, [to support the research and development of vaccines and new therapies](#) (64) to cure COVID-19. The new mRNA technology, which has been vital for the rapid development of several vaccines, has been developed in Europe. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in particular has been strongly supported by the EU.

(63) See <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility>

(64) See https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/health-research-and-innovation/coronavirus-research-and-innovation/financing-innovation_en

Through the advance purchase agreements (APAs), the EU has ordered 1.3 billion vaccine doses from BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. That is significantly more than what we need to vaccinate our 447 million people. And as [confirmed by the European Council on 25 March](#) ⁽⁶⁵⁾, we intend to share part of these vaccines with our partner countries in parallel to accelerating the EU's own vaccination plans.

We will extend our assistance to the rest of the world

As things stand, 360 million doses should be delivered to the EU in Q2 (compared to 100 million in Q1). Should this target be fulfilled, we can have 70 % of EU adult population vaccinated by the end of the summer. This in turn will help us expand our assistance to the rest of the world.

We are currently putting a lot of pressure on our suppliers, in particular AstraZeneca, to meet their commitments and deliver the contracted volumes to the EU. On 30 January, the Commission introduced a transparency mechanism for exports of COVID-19 vaccines to the rest of the world to help check that companies respect their commitments with the EU.

The revised mechanism adopted on 24 March follows the same rationale, while adding reciprocity and proportionality criteria to it and ensuring higher levels of transparency in the exports beyond the EU, while not affecting the execution of the Advance Purchase Agreements. With this pressure and by having more vaccines authorised in the EU, we also aim to reach the point faster at which we can share more vaccines with our partners.

“*With the pressure put on our suppliers, we also aim to reach the point faster at which we can share more vaccines with our partners.*”

It is indeed important to stress that the whole world needs to be vaccinated rapidly. Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, no one is safe until everyone is safe. This is more than a catchphrase: it is a basic truth. As the virus continues to spread, other variants are emerging. It is a race against time, as we must be faster with vaccinations worldwide than the virus with its mutations. We must do so for reasons of basic solidarity, but also out of self-interest.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/25/statement-of-the-members-of-the-european-council-25-march-2021/>



No one is safe until everyone is safe

This conviction has been at the heart of our actions since the beginning of the crisis. Last year, we joined forces with the World Health Organisation and other international health actors [to create COVAX](#) ⁽⁶⁶⁾, as mentioned before. Through COVAX, high-income countries and other donors are paying for vaccines that will be delivered for free to 92 low-income countries ([COVAX Advance Market Commitment](#) ⁽⁶⁷⁾ (AMC), countries in green on the map).

The European Union, with its member states, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (what we call [Team Europe](#) ⁽⁶⁸⁾, have so far provided €2.2 billion to this initiative, including €1 billion from the EU budget. This means that the EU has been the largest donor to COVAX until very recently – and without us it would not be able to do its remarkable and necessary work.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ See <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>

⁽⁶⁷⁾ See <https://www.gavi.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Gavi-COVAX-AMC-IO.pdf>

⁽⁶⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77470/%E2%80%99Team-europe%E2%80%99D-global-eu-response-covid-19-supporting-partner-countries-and-fragile-populations_en

The choice of multilateralism

This choice is fully in line with our general commitment to multilateralism. However, in terms of vaccine diplomacy, this is a weakness for Europe, compared to other vaccine donors: it is not the European flag that is present on vaccine deliveries but that of COVAX. The EU is the major driver behind the work of COVAX, but we do not get the diplomatic recognition that the countries using bilateral vaccine diplomacy do get. This is not the first time in global affairs and the EU needs to sharpen its communication efforts.

“*It is not the European flag that is present on COVAX vaccine deliveries. The EU is the major driver behind COVAX, but we do not get the recognition that the countries using bilateral vaccine diplomacy do get.*”

The initial objective of COVAX is to ensure at least 20 % vaccine coverage across the world, beginning with health workers. Depending on further donations from participating countries, COVAX can and will be expanded in scope and ambition. 31 million doses have already been delivered by COVAX until 22 March ⁽⁶⁹⁾ to 54 countries like [Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Mozambique, Mali, Malawi, Nepal, Uganda, Fiji, Cambodia, Nigeria, Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Yemen, Albania, Colombia](#) ⁽⁷⁰⁾...

COVAX needs significant additional funding

However, to fulfil its mission, COVAX needs significant additional funding. Last February, the EU doubled its own contribution with €500 million additional support and Germany pledged €970 million. Against this background, we warmly welcome the US' announcement to join COVAX and give a contribution in 2021 and 2022 of up to 4 billion USD. This will be a welcome boost for ensuring global vaccination.

In addition, we should not only deliver vaccines to low and middle-income countries, but also support effective vaccination campaigns. With the donors' help, including from the EU, COVAX will provide financing to support the planning, technical assistance and cold chain equipment to help prepare for the delivery of

⁽⁶⁹⁾ See <https://www.gavi.org/covax-vaccine-roll-out>

⁽⁷⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/76341/Coronavirus:%20news%20on%20EU%20action,%20vaccines,%20Team%20Europe%20support,%20disinformation,%20repatriation%20and%20solidarity%20stories

vaccines around the world, beyond the 92 low and middle-income countries supported by COVAX.

High expectations on the EU

In conclusion, we are aware that on vaccines, the world has very high expectations on the EU. Our production capacity is in continuous development and we expect to further strengthen our deliveries and technical support to our partners in the coming weeks. Assistance will be geared, especially to low and middle income countries. I am fully confident we will soon get there.

THE GEOECONOMICS AND GEOPOLITICS OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

18/04/2021 – Blog – *The Covid-19 crisis has changed the global balance of power. In the spring of 2021, the IMF economic forecast showed that the recovery was underway, however, the gap between emerging and developing countries and the advanced economies plus China was deepening. A worrying trend that has been confirmed since.*

The pandemic has triggered the most serious and global crisis since the Second World War. It will significantly shift the geopolitical balance of the world. There are still many uncertainties, however, after one year, clear trends are beginning to emerge. They are important to understand to adapt European foreign policy to this new context.

The recovery seems to be solid

Last week, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank held their traditional Spring meeting. On this occasion, the IMF released its [World Economic Outlook](#) ⁽⁷⁾. In spite of our actual concerns, the news that the IMF brought was rather good: the economic recovery seems to be solid even if there are still many uncertainties linked in particular to the new COVID-19 variants (see following figure).

According to the IMF, the recovery should be faster than expected in previous forecasts. This is due in particular to a marked upturn in industrial activity and international trade in goods as the IMF report describes. Last January, manufacturing output was back to its January 2020 level and international trade was significantly higher than one year before.

⁽⁷⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/03/23/world-economic-outlook-april-2021>

“ *The recovery remains quite uneven. China returned to pre-crisis activity levels in 2020. The US and Japan are expected to do so in 2021, Japan in the second half and the EU in 2022. However, many low-income countries will only return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.*”

However, this recovery, even if stronger than expected, remains quite uneven. According to the IMF, China returned to end-of-2019 economic activity levels in 2020. The US is expected to do so in the first half of 2021; Japan in the second half of 2021; and the EU in 2022, already quite late. However for many emerging and low-income countries the situation is even worse and they will only return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

The poorest countries will be lagging behind: according to IMF estimates they will have lost in 2022 6.4 % of their GDP per capita compared to what was projected in January 2020, while the emerging countries (excluding China) will have lost almost 6 %. At the same time, the advanced economies will have lost ‘only’ a little less than one percentage point.

According to the IMF, the US will become richer than expected

In the medium term, the IMF considers that the United States will have become richer in 2024 than expected in January 2020, while emerging Asia (excluding China), Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa will have lost the most from the COVID-19 crisis. China itself will also remain slightly handicapped.

These differences are due to how effective countries have been in tackling the health aspects of the crisis, especially the speed of the vaccination roll-out, combined with the size of their economic policy support.

“ *Europeans have often complained recently about the delays in the vaccination roll-out in the EU. However, the situation is much worse in most emerging and developing countries.*”

Europeans have often complained recently about the delays in the vaccination roll-out in the EU, and, indeed, we have encountered significant difficulties. However, the situation is much worse in most emerging and developing countries as the IMF report figure shows. The people in most low income countries will not be vaccinated before 2022.

Hence, the importance of the EU's work to enhance world vaccines production capacity and to help the poorest countries gain rapid access to vaccines including through the international COVAX initiative. We have been until recently the first contributor to COVAX with €2.2 billion. The recent decision by the United States to join COVAX should help accelerate the global roll-out of vaccines.

Help vaccinate the whole world remains a central issue

[Our ability to help vaccinate the whole world](#) ⁽⁷²⁾ remains a central issue for our external policy. First because demonstrating our solidarity will influence the future attitudes of many emerging and developing countries toward the EU, but also because our own health depends on it due to the risk of new variants emerging in the unvaccinated parts of the world – and then coming to Europe. Once again, it is not just a matter of solidarity; it is also in our own interest.

Investing in the production and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines worldwide is therefore the most important immediate public spending priority. According to Vitor Gaspar, the IMF's head of fiscal affairs: *'Vaccination is likely to be the global investment project with the highest return ever considered'*. Vaccinating the world will cost tens of billion dollars but it should boost growth prospects sufficiently to raise tax revenues in richer countries alone by \$1 trillion by 2025. In other words, what governments spend on vaccinations will pay for itself many times over.

The ability to mobilise public finance

The other reason for the gap between advanced and emerging and developing countries in the speed of recovery is the ability to mobilise public finances. All countries have seen their governments' revenues fall significantly in 2020. However, this has not prevented the richest countries from significantly increasing their public spending at the same time (by 6 % in average according to the IMF). Emerging countries have also done so, but to a much lesser extent (less than 1 %). While low-income countries have had on the contrary to lower slightly their public spending.

⁽⁷²⁾ See p. 106.

This is why we have developed the [Team Europe initiative](#) ⁽⁷³⁾ over the past year in cooperation with our member states and financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, to help our partners worldwide to deal with the pandemic. We have mobilised until now €38.5 billion for this purpose.

“*Despite already high levels of public debt before the crisis, the richest countries have been able to significantly increase their debt level last year. That was not the case for the rest of the world.*”

This difference in capacity to mobilise public expenditures is linked in particular to differences in the financing conditions. Despite already high levels of public debt before the crisis, the richest countries have been able to significantly increase their debt level last year while debt servicing continues to decrease as a share of GDP thanks to diminishing interest rates, as a result of the very expansionary monetary policies implemented by their central banks. That was not the case for the rest of the world.

Different debt dynamics

Following IMF figure shows what is at stake: all type of countries spend actually around 2 % of their GDP for public debt interests. However, the debt level and dynamics are very different. The debt of the richest countries has grown around 20 GDP percentage points since 2019 and they have accumulated a stock of debt equivalent to 120 % of their GDP. For emerging countries the debt level has grown only by 10 GDP percentage points to 65 % of GDP and for the poorest countries debt growth has been from 5 GDP percentage points to less than 50 % of GDP..

Therefore, it is essential to ensure in coming months adequate access to international liquidity for all. Low-income countries in need will benefit from recently decided, with full EU support, further extension of the pause on international debt repayments under the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) ⁽⁷⁴⁾ until December 2021.

Although several countries ‘have very high levels of debt vulnerability’, IMF Chief Economist Gita Gopinath does not see signs of a ‘systemic debt crisis’ looming.

⁽⁷³⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76341/coronavirus-news-eu-action-vaccines-team-europe-support-disinformation-repatriation-and-en>

⁽⁷⁴⁾ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>

However, the EU is pushing for an effective use of the new [G20 Common Framework](#) ⁽⁷⁵⁾ for orderly debt restructuring that was adopted last year. All creditor countries, including China, should actively participate in this effort in coming months. The recently decided new allocation of \$ 650 billion of the IMF's [Special Drawing Right](#) ⁽⁷⁶⁾ will also provide needed liquidity protection in highly uncertain times, as the EU have been asking for, since many months.

“ We see a significant gap in the speed of recovery between China plus advanced economies and other emerging and developing countries. This role reversal bears geopolitical risks.”

One year after the start of the pandemic, we see a significant gap in the speed of recovery between China plus advanced economies on the one hand and other emerging and developing countries on the other. This is the most relevant geopolitical issue at this stage. It was not the case during the great recession of 2008-2009: the richest countries suffered then more than emerging and developing ones. This role reversal bears geopolitical risks, if it were to continue. For the future, it is essential that this divergence is not allowed to persist and grow.

A significant gap between US and the EU

However, there is also a significant gap within the advanced economies between the United States and the others, particularly the European Union. This is because the US federal government has much more accelerated its public spending than others. Both in 2020 (as shown in the following figure) and this year with the new \$1 900 billion stimulus plan announced by Joe Biden, pending his \$2 000 billion dollar multi-year investment plan. As a consequence, GDP per capita in the US is expected to grow by 1.8 % between 2019 and 2021 according to IMF, while it should decline by 0.9 % in Japan and 2.6 % in the euro area.

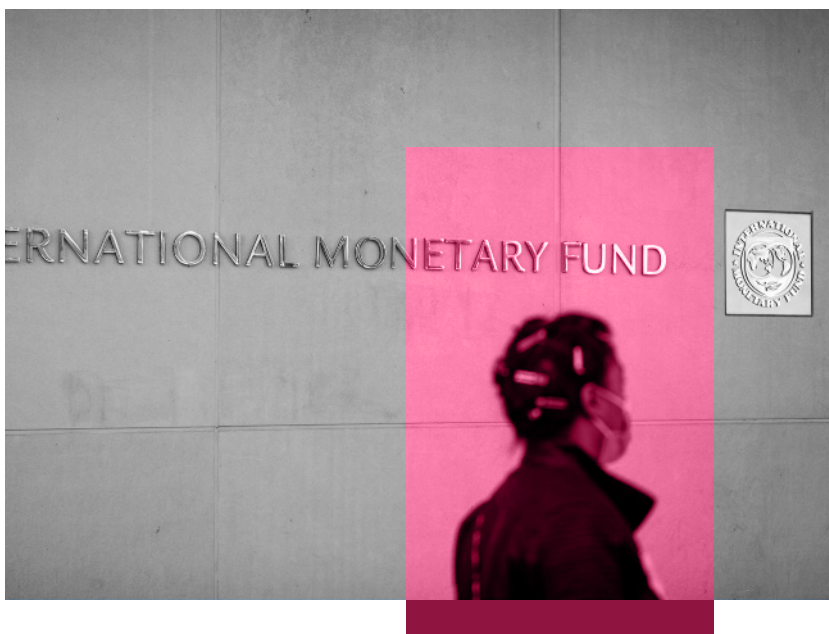
The big amount of money mobilised by Joe Biden's stimulus plan has raised concerns. It has been criticised by some observers, [including Larry Summers, former Treasury Secretary](#) ⁽⁷⁷⁾ and [Olivier Blanchard, former IMF chief](#)

⁽⁷⁵⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/About/FAQ/sovereign-debt#Section%205>

⁽⁷⁶⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/14/51/Special-Drawing-Right-SDR>

⁽⁷⁷⁾ See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/02/04/larry-summers-biden-covid-stimulus/>

[economist](#) (78), because it risks creating higher inflation. Although oil, metal and food world prices are indeed already rising (see following figure), the IMF does not seem to fear a significant rise in inflation in the coming months.



Rather, some observers see a [new Washington consensus](#) (79) emerging between the world financial institutions and the American government around economic policy, including the need to use extensively expansionary monetary policy and fiscal spending in the face of the current crisis. Maybe it is too early to characterise it as a 'new Washington consensus', but certainly things have changed compared to previous times, when the fight against inflation and the level of public expenditure were the main concerns of the world financial institutions ...

The post pandemic world is being built now

In this context, if we want to avoid Europe stalling in comparison to the US and China, it is necessary that EU member states do not relax too early their fiscal support to the economy, as they did in 2010 during the last crisis, while we accelerate

(78) See <https://www.piiie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/defense-concerns-over-19-trillion-relief-plan>

(79) See <https://www.ft.com/content/3d8d2270-1533-4c88-a6e3-cf14456b353b>

the vaccination roll-out. At the same time, we must succeed now in getting the Next Generation EU plan off the ground without additional delay. This is essential not only for the wellbeing and future of Europeans themselves, but also for the EU to have a say in tomorrow's world affairs. The post pandemic world is being built now.

WE NEED TO CLOSE THE VACCINATION GAP

28/05/2021 – Op Ed – *In this Op Ed published in the spring of 2021, I stressed the urgency of accelerating the actions undertaken, notably via COVAX, to vaccinate the whole world and Africa in particular. This was not only morally indispensable but also necessary in the interest of all.*

By the end of May 2021, only 2.1 % of Africans have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. We need to close the vaccination gap between advanced economies and developing countries to avoid what Tedros Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organisation, has called 'vaccination apartheid'. Doing so is both morally right and in everyone's interest.

The need of a global action to accelerate the rollout worldwide

Therefore, we need global multilateral action to increase the production of vaccines and accelerate the roll out worldwide. Since the beginning of the pandemic, this is the path chosen by the EU. It is now also the path defined by the G20 leaders at the Global Health Summit in Rome on 21 May.

The pandemic is still killing thousands of people every day and at the current pace, the whole world will not be vaccinated before 2023. Yet, a widely vaccinated world population is the only way to end the pandemic; otherwise, the multiplication of variants is likely to undermine the effectiveness of existing vaccines.

Vaccination is also a prerequisite for lifting the restrictions that are holding back our economies and freedoms. These restrictions penalise the whole world, but they weigh even more heavily on developing countries. Advanced countries can rely more on social mechanisms and economic policy levers to limit the impact of the pandemic on their citizens.

“ *If the vaccination gap persists, it risks reversing the trend in recent decades of declining poverty and global inequalities.*”

If the vaccination gap persists, it risks reversing the trend in recent decades of declining poverty and global inequalities. Such a negative dynamic would hold

back economic activity and increase geopolitical tensions. The cost of inaction would for sure be much higher for advanced economies than what we collectively would have to spend to help vaccinate the whole world. Therefore, the EU welcomes the \$50 billion plan proposed by the International Monetary Fund in order to be able to vaccinate 40 % of the world population in 2021 and 60 % by mid-2022.

We must resist the threats posed by ‘vaccine diplomacy’

To achieve this goal, we need closely coordinated multilateral action. We must resist the threats posed by ‘vaccine diplomacy’, linking the provision of vaccines to political goals, and ‘vaccine nationalism’, reserving vaccines for oneself. In contrast to others, the EU has rejected both since the beginning of the pandemic. Until now, we have been the only global actor that is vaccinating its own population while, at the same time, exporting large volumes of vaccines and contributing substantially to the vaccines rollout in low-income countries. Europeans can be proud of this record.

In 2020, the EU supported the research and development of vaccines on a large scale and contributed significantly to the new generation of mRNA vaccines. The EU then became a major producer of COVID-19 vaccines with, according to the WHO, around 40 % of the doses used globally so far. The EU has also exported 240 million doses to 90 countries, which is about as much as we have used within the EU.

“ *The EU with its member states and financial institutions – what we call ‘Team Europe’ – is also donating vaccines to neighbours in need, particularly in the Western Balkans.*”

The EU with its member states and financial institutions – what we call ‘Team Europe’ – is also donating vaccines to neighbours in need, particularly in the Western Balkans. It aims to donate at least 100 million more doses to low- and middle-income countries before the end of 2021, as agreed at the last European Council. With €2.8 billion, Team Europe has also been the main contributor to the COVAX facility, which enables poorer countries to access vaccines; around one-third of all COVAX doses delivered so far have been financed by the EU. However, this effort is still far from sufficient to prevent the vaccination gap from widening.



Increase vaccines production capacities

To fill this gap, countries with the required knowledge and means should increase their production capacities, so that they can both vaccinate their own populations and export more vaccines, as the EU is doing. In cooperation with vaccine manufacturers, we are working to increase the EU vaccine production capacities to more than 3 billion doses a year by the end of 2021. Our European industrial partners have committed to deliver 1.3 billion doses of vaccines before the end of 2021 to low-income countries at no-profit and to middle-income countries at lower prices. They have also committed themselves to further deliver over 1.3 billion doses for 2022 – many of which will be delivered through COVAX.

All countries must avoid restrictive measures that affect vaccine supply chains. We also need to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and technology, so that more countries can produce vaccines. For our part, we are strongly encouraging European producers to do so, especially in Africa. I participated at the Paris summit on financial support for Africa on 18 May, where the continent's leaders stressed that Africa imports 99 % of its vaccines. This has to change. Team Europe is launching an initiative to this end – backed by €1 billion funding from the EU budget and European development financial institutions – with African partners

to boost manufacturing capacity in Africa for vaccines, medicines and health technologies.

Voluntary licensing is the privileged way to ensure such transfer of technology and know-how. If it turns out to be insufficient, the existing TRIPS Agreement and the 2001 Doha Declaration already foresee the possibility of compulsory licensing. According to some countries, these flexibilities are however too difficult and too slow to use. To speed up these technology transfers, the EU will come forward with a new proposal in the WTO framework by early June.

Health is a global public good

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us that health is a global public good. Our common global COVID-19 vaccine action to close the vaccination gap must be the first step toward a genuine global health cooperation, as foreseen by the Rome Declaration recently adopted at the Global Health Summit.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE WAY OUT: FOOD FOR THOUGHT WITH RICARDO HAUSMANN

13/06/2021 – Blog – *In June 2021 we asked Ricardo Hausmann, Professor at the Harvard Kennedy School, to give a presentation to several EEAS staff members about the global dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way out. In our action, we need indeed to draw inspiration from the most advanced thinking from academia and think tanks.*

I have known and appreciated Ricardo Hausmann for a long time. At the beginning of the 1990s, he was Minister of Planning in Venezuela and board member of the Central Bank of that country before becoming Chief Economist of the Inter-American Development Bank and then joining Harvard in 2000.

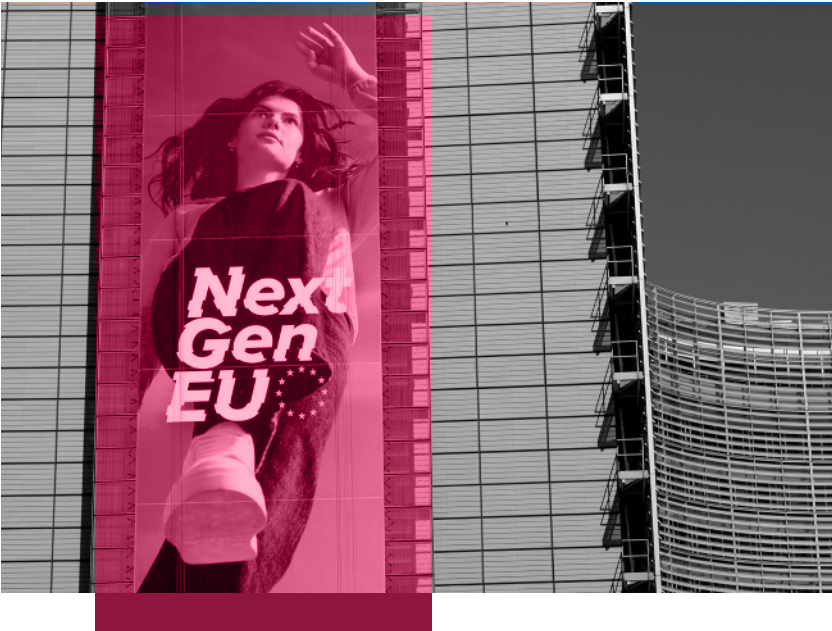
A person of reference on world affairs

These professional experiences, at the crossroads of the North and the South of the planet, has given him a truly global vision. He has become a person of reference in debates on world affairs. In recent months, he has worked extensively on the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for the world, and [has been a regular contributor to public debate on the subject](#) ⁽⁸⁰⁾.

Ricardo Hausmann began by drawing our attention to the many unknowns associated with the evolution of the pandemic. In particular, it is necessary to remain very vigilant in countries where the pandemic has been successfully contained so far: because if the disease has not spread, this means that the population is not yet immune.

“It is necessary to remain very vigilant where the pandemic has been successfully contained so far: as long as people are not vaccinated, the pandemic can wreak havoc.”

⁽⁸⁰⁾ See <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/covid19-vaccine-shortages-pharmaceutical-companies-by-ricardo-hausmann-2021-04>



As long as people are not vaccinated, the pandemic can wreak havoc. India, for example, had a relatively well-controlled first wave of infections before suffering a new, very violent wave in recent months. The same is true of Uruguay, a model for successfully managing the pandemic in 2020 before falling victim to a spectacular rise in infections this year. In this context, Ricardo Hausmann emphasised the risks faced by Africa, which so far has been less affected than other continents. However, because it remains poorly vaccinated, Africa is also very fragile – and the same applies to large parts of Asia.

On vaccination, Ricardo Hausmann highlighted the huge gap between the North and South and stressed that this poses high risks to the entire world. Both economically and socially, with the disruption of supply chains, the return of poverty and a halt to the reduction of global inequalities, and in terms of health, with the risk of the virus mutating and rendering existing vaccines ineffective.

“ There is no doubt that the issue of the global vaccination gap will be crucial to the future of Europe and the world in the coming months.”

As EU, we are aware of these risks and [we have begun to address them](#). The issue was also at the centre of the last G7 meeting in Cornwall. There is no doubt that this issue will be crucial to the future of Europe and the world in the coming

months. Ricardo Hausmann has recommended that we must accelerate the approval processes for vaccines and increase global production capacity, if necessary by sharing patents on vaccines. The issue is currently being discussed at the WTO and the EU has made a proposal to facilitate compulsory licensing by states.

The economic impact of the crisis

On the economic impact of the crisis, Ricardo Hausmann highlighted the gap between developed countries plus China, which economies have been less affected by the crisis (although the EU has been more affected than the US so far) than the ones of many low and median income countries. These countries have suffered heavily because they have often experienced hard lock downs, without being able to resort to monetary and fiscal policies of the same magnitude as developed countries. Now they face the risk that the economic recovery lead to a rise in interest rates, which would further aggravate the difficulties of many developing countries to have access to global finance.

“ With Next Generation EU, Europe has mutualised part of the debts generated by this crisis to help its own South, but the world had not yet done a similar move in solidarity with countries in need.”

Ricardo Hausmann pointed out that, with Next Generation EU, Europe has decided to mutualise part of the debts generated by this crisis to help its own South, but that the world had not yet done a similar move in solidarity with low and median income countries in need. For him, it would be necessary to massively increase the public financing available globally, far beyond what the International Monetary Fund currently provides, associated with rules that give the necessary fiscal space for developing and emerging economies to recover. This is morally the right thing to do. But economically too as this could support and sustain more effectively the global economic recovery.

Enriching food for thought

In short, Ricardo Hausmann provided me and our colleagues at the EEAS with very enriching food for thought and I would like to warmly thank him for his insights and wisdom. Such analyses from academics provide further evidence and

perspectives that can inform the decisions made by policy leaders, even if their recommendations are not always easy to implement in real life.

“*Despite all our difficulties, we are coming out of this ordeal in a better shape than many countries. And if we are not able to show solidarity with these countries, we risk exacerbating major geopolitical tensions.*”

With others, like [Michael Spence, Joseph Stiglitz and Jayati Ghosh](#) ⁽⁸⁾, Ricardo Hausmann underlined a key point that all Europeans must keep in mind: despite all our difficulties and the fact that our continent has seen comparatively more deaths than many others, we are coming out of this ordeal in a better shape than many countries in the world. And if we are not able to show solidarity with these countries, both on vaccines and on financing the recovery, we risk increasing global inequalities and exacerbating major geopolitical tensions.

⁽⁸⁾ See <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/global-economy-avoiding-k-shaped-recovery-by-michael-spence-et-al-2021-03?barrier=accesspaylog>

WE NEED TO DO MORE ABOUT THE VACCINE DIVIDE

13/07/2021 – Blog – *In the first half of 2021, while vaccination rates were rising rapidly in Europe, this was not anywhere the case. We were seeing a more fractured world emerging. In this blog post, I insisted that we needed to live up to our global responsibilities and to our partners' expectations. It is what we have done during the second part of the year.*

Eighteen months after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccination rate has risen rapidly in Europe and the 70 % vaccination target set by the European Commission for the end of the summer 2021 is on track. The number of hospitalisations and deaths has fallen, although infection rates have been rising in the last weeks and we have to remain cautious.

On the global level, mostly due to the vaccination divide, the health and economic crises are far from over. In fact, the pandemic has further deepened global social and economic imbalances. The recovery is a two-speed one and the post-COVID-19 world risks being more unequal, increasing geopolitical tensions. In this context, we need to enhance our help to our partners. It is not only a moral duty. It is also in our self-interest. If some countries and regions remain unvaccinated, new variants can develop, against which current vaccines do not work.

“*The pandemic has further deepened social and economic imbalances globally and the post-COVID-19 world risks being more unequal, increasing geopolitical tensions.*”

Looking back, we should be grateful to the scientists around the world, who have developed vaccines within a year after the appearance of a previously unknown virus. In this context, Europe played an important role, as EU support has contributed significantly to the development of the new generation of mRNA vaccines: with 750 million mRNA vaccines doses produced, we are the global leader in this field.

Team Europe

With Team Europe, which involves the European institutions, the member states and the European financial institutions, we have helped our low- and middle-income partners to face the pandemic and provided flexible financial support. Team Europe was born in the crisis and must now become the norm for how European institutions, member states and financial institutions work together to maximise the EU's global impact.

“ *The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed our choice in favour of multilateralism. We will continue to advocate for strengthening and reforming the World Health Organisation (WHO).”*

The COVID-19 pandemic has also confirmed and strengthened our choice in favour of multilateralism. The EU has played a pivotal role in creating the COVAX facility and we will continue advocating for strengthening and reforming the World Health Organisation (WHO), while avoiding any politicisation of science.

That said, we also have to face the fact that we have encountered – and are still encountering – significant problems in the fight against the virus. From the beginning, we have tried to build our response on solidarity and cooperation, both internally and externally. However, at the start of the pandemic, national reflexes were the dominant political answer and it took months before we could see our efforts bearing fruits.

We have seen a geopolitical ‘battle of narratives’⁽⁸²⁾, first with masks diplomacy, now with vaccines diplomacy. The response to the pandemic has often been interpreted as a competition among rivals and systems, and there were substantial disinformation campaigns targeting the EU. We have had difficulties in publicising our global engagement, mainly because we wanted to do so through multilateral frameworks. Although we have exported about half of the vaccines produced in Europe and have been the first and most important supporter of COVAX, others have been more visible with their actions.

“ *We have also experienced difficulties in anticipating the impact of measures that were taken within the EU on our partners, including travel restrictions or the digital COVID-19 certificate.”*

⁽⁸²⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76379/coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating-en>



We have also experienced difficulties in anticipating the impact of measures that were taken within the EU on our partners, including travel restrictions, the export transparency mechanism, or the digital COVID-19 certificate (DCC). This has led to strains, including more recently with the African Union on the recognition of non-European vaccines such as Covishield, the Astra Zeneca licensed vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India (SII), which is the one most widely used by the COVAX facility.

While our initiatives are legitimate instruments in the context of a pandemic, we must ensure that our partners do not perceive our decisions as unfriendly or hostile. To this effect, we need to develop a common understanding on the criteria underpinning these measures, we need to communicate more clearly with our partners, and we need to better manage their expectations.

The lockdowns have penalised the developing economies

Looking at the economic side: while the lockdowns and related restrictions have penalised all economies, they weigh more heavily on developing and emerging countries. Advanced countries can rely more on social mechanisms and economic policy levers to limit the impact of the pandemic. Global divergences are also

getting worse because of the widening vaccination gap. According to the WHO, by mid-2021, we are at over 60 % of one dose coverage in the EU, while on a global scale the average is only 24 % and in low-income countries the figure is at a dramatically low 1 %.

The WHO predicts that 90 % of the African countries will vaccinate less than 10 % of their populations by September, warning that Africa urgently requires an extra 225 million doses just to reach this goal. T

Hunger and poverty are rising again

If the vaccination gap persists, it risks reversing the trend of declining poverty and global inequalities. Last year, nearly one in three people across the planet – 2.37 billion people – did not have access to sufficient food – an increase of almost 320 million people in a single year (see [the State of Food Security and Nutrition Report](#) ⁽⁸³⁾).

“ Antonio Guterres [told the G20 Finance ministers](#) that developed economies need to demonstrate solidarity that goes beyond words into meaningful, concrete actions”

Such a negative dynamic harms worldwide recovery and increases geopolitical tensions. Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), recently raised the alarms on [the risks associated to a ‘two track recovery’](#) (84). Africa and Latin America are likely to be among the hardest hit regions. Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, rightly [told the G20 Finance ministers](#) (85) that ‘developed economies need to demonstrate solidarity that goes beyond words into meaningful, concrete actions’ in order to be able to vaccinate 40 % of the world population until the end of 2021 and 60 % until mid-2022. The cost of inaction in terms of failing to help vaccinating the whole world would be much higher for advanced economies than what we collectively would have to spend to do so.

⁽⁸³⁾ See <https://www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>

⁽⁸⁴⁾ See <https://blogs.imf.org/2021/07/07/urgent-action-needed-to-address-a-worsening-two-track-recovery/>

⁽⁸⁵⁾ See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/07/1095582>

We need to enhance substantially our direct vaccines donations

In this context, we need to enhance substantially our support and our direct donations. Until now, the EU and its member states have provided 9.5 million vaccine doses to Africa, of which only 3.6 million via COVAX or as a direct donation. In total, the EU has donated so far 25.5 million doses through COVAX or as direct donations of member states to Sub-Saharan Africa, the MENA region, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia. With these figures, we are not yet living up to our global responsibilities. At the last European Council, EU member states have committed to donate more than 100 million doses until the end of 2021. This is a minimum target that we should be able to exceed and member states have so far committed to donate 153 million doses by the end of the year.

In cooperation with vaccine manufacturers, we are also working to increase the EU vaccine production capacities to more than 3 billion doses a year by end-2021, which should enable us to share more doses with partner countries. However, other partners also need to produce more vaccines to join the cooperative approach to global vaccination.

“ We must also help to enhance the production of vaccines and health equipment in poorer regions. Africa currently imports 99 % of the vaccines it uses. It is unacceptable.”

Therefore, we must help enhancing the production of vaccines and health equipment in poorer regions. Africa currently imports 99 % of the vaccines it uses. To tackle this problem, the President of the European Commission announced an important [Team Europe initiative on manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies in Africa](#) ⁽⁸⁶⁾ last May. Backed by €1 billion from the EU budget and the European development finance institutions, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB), this initiative will create an enabling environment for local vaccines manufacturing. On 9 July, Commissioner Breton was in Senegal to launch the construction of a new vaccine factory with the country's Institut Pasteur.

The need to take action on debt relief

In the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the EU has also put forward a proposal to expand the production of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments,

⁽⁸⁶⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_2594

as well as to remove export restrictions on vaccines, therapeutics and their components. Finally, creditor countries need to take action at the multilateral level to tackle the economic and social consequences of the pandemic, particularly in terms of debt relief for those countries that are most affected by the crisis. In this respect, there is still a long road in front of us.

To conclude: this pandemic reminds us how strongly linked European internal and external policies are. We must face our global responsibilities and live up to our promises. It has become a cliché to say that we will not be safe until everyone is safe. Nevertheless, it happens to be true. So let's act on it.

VACCINATION GAP: FROM PROMISES TO ACTION

21/09/2021 – Blog – *In September 2021, I attended the United Nations General Assembly in New York. It was an opportunity to recall once again the EU's commitment to multilateralism. Central was of course during this week the global recovery and how to close the vaccination gap.*

One of the key issues on everyone's mind will of course be the ongoing pandemic, where the global situation remains very worrying. The health situation is still not under control, the delta variant is spreading around the globe causing thousands more deaths every day, widening inequalities and increasing poverty. Indeed, as the IMF put it last July ⁽⁸⁷⁾: *'vaccine access has emerged as the principal fault line along which the global recovery splits into two blocks: those that can look forward to further normalisation of activity later this year (almost all advanced economies) and those that will still face resurgent infections and rising COVID death tolls.'*

The vaccination gap persists

Two months later, this diagnosis remains valid. Global vaccination has accelerated, but the North-South divide remains and vaccination rates still differ significantly. On 16 September, 31 % of the world population was fully vaccinated. In the EU, this was the case for 61 % of the adult population and the choice of joint procurement of vaccines at EU level has paid off in the end. These percentages were 45 % in North America, 36 % in Latin America and the Caribbean and 34 % in Asia, but only 3.8 % in Africa. In fact, only 3.1 % (link is external) of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose (see graphs). And as repeated on numerous occasions, no one is safe until everyone is safe: if this gap persists, we clearly run the risk of new variants emerging that escape the protection of existing vaccines.

The inequality is not acceptable and last June, the IMF estimated that we would need \$50 billion, or 0.06 % of global GDP, to vaccinate the world's population by 2022 – and that this would generate \$9 trillion in additional wealth by 2025. It is

⁽⁸⁷⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/07/27/world-economic-outlook-update-july-2021>

hard to imagine a more profitable investment. It would save many lives, limit the risk that new COVID-19 variants emerge and have a positive effect not only for the economy of low-income countries, but also for the global economy. At a recent seminar at the EEAS on the geopolitics of vaccination, a leading European scholar rightly asked what the reasons were for not being collectively able to finance such a relatively cheap common public good with such a high return.

“ *The IMF estimates that we would need \$50 billion to vaccinate the world by 2022 and that this would generate \$9 trillion in additional wealth by 2025. It is hard to imagine a more profitable investment.*”

The answer lies in the lack of global governance and problems of multilateralism: we have not been able to implement enough cooperation and coordination globally. The world should not wait for the next pandemic before putting in place the global health governance and financing reforms to deal with pandemics more effectively. We will discuss this challenge again at the UN General Assembly, and in particular at the meeting on 22 September organised by US President Biden on this subject.

Enough doses to vaccine the entire world's adult population

In early 2021, there was a shortage of vaccine production capacity, but this is no longer the case: by the end of 2021, we should have produced enough doses to vaccinate the entire adult population on a global scale (see graph below). Europe in particular has succeeded in rapidly increasing its production capacity, thanks also to the efforts of the European Commission and my colleague Commissioner Breton. However, as Gordon Brown, the former British Prime Minister, [noted recently in the Guardian](#) ⁽⁸⁸⁾: ‘*Despite this manufacturing triumph, we are losing badly in the arms race to actually inject every adult in every country.*’

Since December 2020, the EU has exported close to 700 million vaccine doses to 55 countries. Indeed, we have been one of the world's main vaccine exporters and the only ones to reach such a high vaccination rate among our population while at the same time exporting on such a big scale. These figures show that Europe cannot be blamed for restricting vaccine exports: the mechanism we put in place last February has ensured transparency without practically limiting these exports.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/09/west-vaccine-doses-covid-production>

However, these exports were mainly sent to developed countries such as Japan, Turkey, UK or Canada.

“*The EU has been one of the world's main vaccine exporters and the only one to reach such a high vaccination rate among our population while at the same time exporting on such a big scale.*”

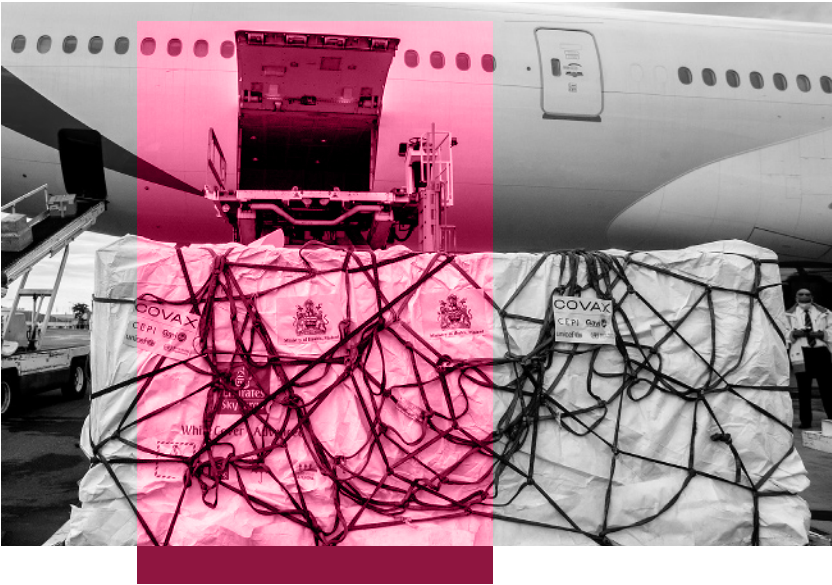
Regarding the distribution of vaccines in low-income countries, the EU has from the start built on a multilateral solution, namely the COVAX mechanism, set up by the World Health Organisation. This was not necessarily the best way to ensure the visibility of the European Union on vaccines distribution globally, but it seemed the most effective way to ensure global coordination. With €3.2bn in pledges, the EU remains the main financial donor to COVAX, together with the US. That said, we have to recognise that the programme has so far not delivered the way we had hoped for: while COVAX's target was to deliver 1.8 billion doses by the end of 2021, it has so far just distributed 210 million doses, half of which have been donated by EU, the US and other donors. COVAX does not produce any vaccines, it gets them from manufacturers. Nonetheless, it has struggled until now to obtain sufficient volumes of doses.

Address the challenge of a persistent vaccine divide

To address the challenge of a persistent vaccine divide, the EU pledged last July to donate 200 million doses to low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2021 and our member states have voluntarily committed to larger amounts. In her [State of the Union address](#) ⁽⁸⁹⁾, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged additional 200 million vaccine doses to low-income countries by mid-2022.

Overall, however, when looking at the figures, we see that our actions have not yet met our aims: as of today, EU member states have given 20 million doses to 65 countries. As Europe has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is understandable that member states prioritised their own citizens before donating vaccine doses beyond their borders. But now that Europe has achieved high vaccination rates and there is no more shortage of vaccines, we must be aware of our moral, economic and health obligations to help vaccinate the whole world and of the geopolitical costs if we fail to do so.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/103935/state-union-2021-taking-stock-past-year-and-looking-forward_en



“ Now that Europe has high vaccination rates, we must be aware of our moral, economic and health obligation to help vaccinate the whole world and of the geopolitical costs if we fail to do so.”

It can also damage our influence and reputation in our immediate neighbourhood, in the Western Balkans or in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, where other actors are very active and an intense ‘battle of narratives’ takes place. This is also the case in Africa, where leaders expect much more of us, given our ambition to be the closest partner of the continent. We are certainly committed to building production capacity on the continent and we have started to work on it, namely in Senegal and South Africa. This is crucial for the future of the continent, but it cannot solve the immediate problem. In Latin America, where the impact of the pandemic has been particularly severe, there is also a strong need for cooperation. So far, nine Latin American countries have received nearly 3 million doses and over 6 million doses will be shared this autumn.

Again: now that we have advanced successfully with the vaccination of our own population, and with enough doses lined up for potentially needed ‘booster’ shots, we should quickly and significantly increase the volumes of our vaccine donations, both through COVAX and directly to those countries in need that count on the EU for help. This is all the more so, as we are the world’s largest producer of mRNA

vaccines. We need to assert our role as positive and responsible global actor and reliable partner in an increasingly competitive world.

The issue of vaccine distribution

Beyond the issue of the pure number of vaccines for low- and middle-income countries, there is also the issue of the capacity to distribute them effectively, especially for mRNA vaccines. With our Team Europe approach, associating member states, the Commission and European financial institutions, [we have disbursed so far €34 billion](#) ⁽⁹⁰⁾ to help our partners cope with the COVID-19 pandemic in the health, social and economic fields. We nonetheless still have to go further, also to help distribute vaccines more effectively.

In short: it is essential that we rapidly close the global vaccination gap and the gap between our ambitions and our actions on vaccine donations. This is not only our moral duty and in our geopolitical interest with view to the EU's position in the world, it is also essential for everyone's health and to get the pandemic globally under control.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_4729

3.

DEFENCE: GLOBAL TENSIONS AND THE STRATEGIC COMPASS



WHY THE EU NEEDS TO BE A GLOBAL MARITIME SECURITY PROVIDER

27/01/2021 – Blog – On 25 January 2021, we launched the first pilot of the new Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of West Africa. In addition to our existing naval operations in the Mediterranean and in the Western India Ocean, we are strengthening our role as a global maritime security provider.

On 23 January, pirates hijacked a Turkish cargo ship off the coast of West Africa, killing one crewmember and kidnapping 15. According to the [International Maritime Bureau of the International Chamber of Commerce](#) ⁽⁹⁾, 195 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships have been registered worldwide last year, 33 more than in 2019.

As the second largest exporter and the third largest importer in the world, the EU rely heavily on maritime transport and infrastructure. However, secure maritime routes are not only important for us: without them, about 90 % of the goods currently available are at risk of simply not reaching their customers around the world. Thus, ensuring a safe maritime environment is a global public good that need international cooperation to fend off the increasing challenges related to geo-strategic rivalries, piracy and organised crime.

Enhancing the EU's maritime presence

Because of this growing maritime insecurity, many partners, coastal countries and the maritime industry are asking the EU to assume a more prominent role. Not only in our immediate vicinity, but also further away. The EU has the technical capacity and the resources to address many of these challenges, from tackling all sorts of seaborne criminal activities to natural or man-made disaster response.

“The EU has the capacity and the resources to address many challenges at sea, from tackling all sorts of seaborne criminal activities to natural or man-made disaster response.”

⁽⁹⁾ See <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1301-gulf-of-guinea-records-highest-ever-number-of-crew-kidnapped-in-2020-according-to-imb-s-annual-piracy-report>

We are already engaged in this field, notably with two major naval operations. One is [Operation IRINI](#) ⁽⁹²⁾ in the Mediterranean aiming to implement the arms embargo to Libya imposed by the UN Security Council, prevent the illicit export of petroleum from that country and contribute to the disruption of human smuggling and trafficking networks. The second one is [EUNAVFOR Atalanta](#) ⁽⁹³⁾ in the Western Indian Ocean to help fight the Somali-based piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa.

With the launch of the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept in the Gulf of Guinea, we add another element to our engagement to promote global maritime security.

A new and flexible tool to increase maritime security

What is this new CMP concept? Depending on the situation, launching a new EU naval operation from scratch is not the only option, and sometimes not necessarily the most appropriate. In fact, many member states already have a large national presence at sea, notably in areas that are of interest to the entire European Union. These naval assets of EU member states are present all year round in all maritime areas of the world.

“*The Coordinated Maritime Presences tool will enable the EU to use these existing member states’ naval and air assets to increase its capacity to act as a maritime security provider.*”

The CMP tool will enable the EU to use these existing member states’ naval and air assets to increase its capacity to act as a maritime security provider. Coordination will take place on a voluntary basis, with assets remaining under the national chains of command. This light and flexible instrument allows EU member states present in areas of interest to cooperate through the [Maritime Area of Interest Coordination Cell \(MAICC\)](#) ⁽⁹⁴⁾ established within the EU Military Staff, using the [MARSUR network](#) ⁽⁹⁵⁾, a technical solution developed by the European Defence Agency. This network will be used for the first time in this pilot to

⁽⁹²⁾ See <https://www.operationirini.eu/>

⁽⁹³⁾ See <https://eunavfor.eu/>

⁽⁹⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/ocean/blue-economy/other-sectors/maritime-security-strategy_en

⁽⁹⁵⁾ See [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/maritime-surveillance-\(marsur\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/maritime-surveillance-(marsur))

facilitate the exchange of operational information, such as ship positions, tracks, identification data or images.

By building synergies between existing national assets, the CMP mechanism will be beneficial to all member states, the EU and a wide range of stakeholders and like-minded partners around the world.

The Coordinated Maritime Presence in the Gulf of Guinea

The CMP concept will be implemented for the first time in the Gulf of Guinea and we do so naturally at the request of and in close cooperation with our African partners of [the organisation of the Yaoundé Architecture](#) ⁽⁹⁶⁾, supporting their objective to tackle piracy and criminal activity at sea. EU member states like France, Italy and Spain are already present in the region. They will provide the naval and air assets that will support this implementation.

“*France, Italy and Spain are already present in the Gulf of Guinea. They will provide the naval and air assets that will support the implementation of the Coordinated Maritime Presence pilot*”

Nowhere around the world is indeed the deterioration of maritime security currently more prominent than in this Gulf: it has experienced an unprecedented rise in the number of crew kidnappings in recent years. In 2020, 84 attacks took place on ships, with a record 130 persons kidnapped in 22 of these incidents. The region also experienced a nearly 60 % increase in kidnapping for ransom between 2018 and 2020. It now accounts for 95 % of all kidnappings at sea. Incidents are particularly dangerous there, as over 80 % of attackers were armed with guns.

Besides piracy, the Gulf of Guinea also suffers from numerous other organised crime activities. Persistent illegal fishing in West African waters cost the sub-region, [according to FAO](#) ⁽⁹⁷⁾, an estimated \$1.3 billion a year. It means also there is not enough fish for their population. Meanwhile, narcotics and other illegal goods are trafficked along the coast and across land borders, which harm local communities and fuel problems in Europe.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ See <https://www.gogin.eu/a-propos/architecture-de-yaounde/>

⁽⁹⁷⁾ See <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1333982/>

“ Youth unemployment in the Gulf of Guinea countries is estimated at over 60 %. Addressing these factors is also necessary to enhance maritime security in the region.”

More broadly, unemployment in the countries of the Gulf of Guinea is estimated at around 40 % with youth unemployment at over 60 %. The risk that young people slip into criminal activity to make a living is high, as many are pushed to become foot soldiers for pirate and criminal gangs, or led into irregular migration in very dangerous conditions. Addressing these factors is necessary to enhance maritime security in the region. That is why [the EU contributes actively in parallel to the development of the local capacities of coastal states in the region](#) ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

In short, global maritime security is a vital issue for the EU and I am very pleased that we can make progress in this area with this new concept, thanks to the work of the EU military staff and the commitment of our member states.



⁽⁹⁸⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/28734/141582.pdf>

MOVING FORWARD ON EUROPEAN DEFENCE

28/02/2021 – Blog – *In February 2021, EU leaders have held a timely discussion on the future of EU security and defence. We needed indeed commitment at the highest political level to make the EU a stronger security actor in a world of fast-changing threats.*

At the last European Union Council of Friday 26 February, EU leaders had an in-depth discussion on how to develop the EU's role on security and defence. It was the first time they did since 2018. Given the close collaboration we have with NATO, it was good to also have Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg sharing his perspective.

A backdrop of a deteriorating security environment

The discussion among EU leaders took place against a backdrop of a deteriorating security environment and a new atmosphere in transatlantic relations: both require us to do more to build a strong, capable EU in the area of security and defence. We need this for ourselves as Europeans but also as an investment in better transatlantic cooperation.

“ We need to build up our collective capacity to protect our security interests, by having the right means and the will to use them.”

The call from EU citizens is clear: last year, [77 % of Europeans supported the efforts to develop a common EU security and defence policy](https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2262) ⁽⁹⁹⁾. It is up to all of us, and in particular for me as High Representative for foreign and security policy, to deliver this. This means building up our collective capacity to protect our security interests, by having the right means and the will to use them.

There are several action tracks underway on EU defence. In recent months we have been very active on the ground despite the pandemic: we have initiated a

⁽⁹⁹⁾ See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2262>

new naval [operation IRINI in the Mediterranean](#) ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾; broadened the scope of operation ATALANTA ⁽¹⁰¹⁾ off the coast of the Horn of Africa; reinforced [our presence in the Sahel region](#) ⁽¹⁰²⁾; and put in place a pilot of the [new Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea](#) ⁽¹⁰³⁾.

More broadly, I have previously set out [what we are doing to acquire more usable defence capabilities](#) ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. Similarly, I have often underlined the need for Europeans to develop a common strategic culture: if we don't share the same perspective on what the threats and challenges are, we will not agree on what to do about them.

The Strategic Compass: a collective answer to a new environment

So it is critical that we come together and decide what our objectives and ambitions are for the next 5 to 10 years; what means we need to achieve them; and how we intend to link means to ends. This is the rationale for the work on [the Strategic Compass](#) ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. I was glad to present the state of play to EU leaders and get their guidance.

The starting point of this process was the [threat analysis presented last November](#). This first-ever EU threat analysis was prepared with inputs from intelligence services from across the EU. It paints a bleak picture of the security and defence challenges we face namely growing geopolitical competition and pressure on the multilateral system; destabilisation of our regional environment; as well as increasingly sophisticated hybrid and transnational threats targeting the EU directly.

Against this background, I believe we need European answers and take more responsibility for our own security. Our motto is and remains that we want to act with partners whenever possible and autonomously when necessary.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76896/eu-launches-operation-irini-enforce-libya-arms-embargo_en

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ See <https://eunavfor.eu/>

⁽¹⁰²⁾ See p. 354.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ See p. 126.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89098/defence-cooperation-how-strategic-perseverance-will-pay-%C2%A0Ao_en

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en

The Strategic Compass should set clear and ambitious goals across four interconnected dimensions:

Make our ongoing engagement as effective as possible

We currently have 17 missions and operations around the world with close to 5 000 women and men deployed. They require a more efficient EU planning and command as well as flexible and robust mandates. This is what we did recently with EUTM Mali (with new activities added in central Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) and Operation Atalanta (to counter piracy but also drug and arms trafficking). The new [European Peace Facility](#) ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾, with €5 billion over seven years, is also a game-changer: it will allow us to move beyond training the armed forces of our partners, to also equip them.

We really need to improve force generation: having the necessary troops and equipment from member states to fulfil the objectives of the missions they have decided we should undertake. Too often, we lack the means to do our job. This is a point I have made on several occasions. I also believe we need to be prepared to undertake new operational engagements. Libya is a case in point where we are entering a new phase with the ceasefire and the new interim authorities. Operation Irini's contribution to the arms embargo is as crucial as ever – so we cannot afford a capability gap. More generally, we need to step up our readiness to meet future crises. We know there is a real risk of continued instability in different regions, which are directly relevant for our own security.

Enhance our resilience to prevent and respond to changing security threats and challenges

We have to guarantee secure access to the global commons, in particular cyber, the high seas and space. For instance, we see a growing demand for the EU to expand its role as a maritime security provider. We should build on our naval operations and the recently launched initiative in the Gulf of Guinea. We should also link defence and 'space' better and move forward with the implementation of the EU Cybersecurity Strategy.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/46285/european-peace-facility-eu-budget-fund-build-peace-and-strengthen-international-security_en

We need the necessary civilian and military capabilities

Further deepening European defence cooperation remains the only way to make our defence sector more efficient and our industry more competitive. We have made good progress over the last years, in particular through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). However, more efforts are required to be more result-oriented, focusing on operational projects. With the PESCO Strategic Review conducted last year, we have identified 26 projects out of 46 that will deliver concrete results by 2025 – from cyber-defence and medical support to advanced weapons systems. The financial incentives made available under the [European Defence Fund](#) ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ – with 8 billion EUR over the next seven years – will boost those efforts. In parallel, we need to continue promoting technological sovereignty and innovation. The technology roadmap requested by EU leaders for boosting innovation and reduce our strategic dependencies in critical technologies will be instrumental.



⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

We should step up cooperation with partners bilaterally and with international organisations, starting with NATO

A strong alliance requires strong partners on both sides of the Atlantic. The presence of NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg at the table of EU leaders was testimony of our close partnership. We can and should do more to boost cooperation between the two organisations, from military mobility to countering hybrid threats, from climate change and security to emerging technologies.

A stronger EU in defence, with more capable member states, will also benefit the Alliance and contribute to a better transatlantic burden-sharing. According to the latest [Defence Data report for the year 2019](#) ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ published by the European Defence Agency the total defence expenditure of the 26 EDA member states stood at €186 billion, marking the fifth year of consecutive growth and a 5 % increase compared to 2018.

Our work on the Strategic Compass will take place while NATO is conducting its own strategic review so we look for synergies and cooperation in these efforts. In parallel, we intend to strengthen our partnership with the UN, regional actors and third countries. With the new US administration in office, we now have an opportunity to reinvigorate our strategic EU–US partnership, in particular in the field of security and defence. During our discussion last Monday between EU Foreign Ministers and US Secretary of State Tony Blinken, we agreed to work extremely closely, bilaterally between the EU and US as well as between the EU and NATO.

Keeping the momentum on EU security and defence

In light of the [guidance of EU leaders](#) ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾, the coming months will be dedicated to discussions with member states, which are driving the process. On my side, the European External Action Service including the EU military staff will continue to take work forward, in close association with the Commission and the European Defence Agency.

“*The Strategic Compass must be based on concrete and actionable objectives, with clear timelines, and making full use of the entire EU toolbox.*”

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ See <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2019-eda-defence-data-report.pdf>

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48625/2526-02-21-euco-statement-en.pdf>

To be meaningful the Strategic Compass must be based on concrete and actionable objectives, with clear timelines, and making full use of the entire EU toolbox. This should be the essence of the first draft of the Strategic Compass that I intend to present by November this year, in view of its adoption by March 2022. We need a document that is both ambitious and operational and that makes a real difference for Europe's security. And we should be prepared to pass from reflection and analysis to concrete action when and where needed.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE?

07/05/2021 – Blog – *It was fitting that we discussed in May 2021 with EU Defence Ministers concrete ways for the EU to do more, more efficiently and faster when a crisis strikes, only a week after my visit to the Sahel, where the EU is heavily engaged to respond to one of today's most important security and governance crises.*

On 6 May, EU Defence Ministers discussed the next steps to strengthen the EU's role as an all-round security actor. I have previously written on this blog about EU operations and missions, the various defence initiatives, including the Strategic Compass, to guide our future actions and strengthen our capabilities and impact, as well as on our partnerships with NATO, the UN and others ⁽¹¹⁰⁾. Yesterday, I put on the table of the ministers a number of very concrete proposals to make EU's operational engagement more effective, also drawing on ideas put forward by member states themselves. These are along three main lines of actions.

“ We need to make sure that our Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations have the staff and the means they need to achieve their objectives.”

First, the European Union needs to take decisions faster and ensure that our missions and operations have the necessary means to make a difference on the ground. We need to make sure that our CSDP missions and operations have the staff they need to achieve their objectives. Together with Defence Ministers, I discussed various incentives that could help member states contribute more to EU missions and operations.

In the end, this is also about burden sharing. This is why I insisted on the importance of developing measurable ways and objectives that could stimulate this burden-sharing. Obviously, this is a sensitive topic and discussions will have to continue, but I am convinced that we need more solidarity among member states in many EU policy areas but also for our CSDP missions and operations. After all, these missions and operations do not only help to build peace and

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ See p. 125 ff.

stability abroad, they also enhance the security of the EU and its citizens. If Europeans benefit, it is reasonable that all contribute their fair share.

We need more flexibility

Second, we need more flexibility. A good example is the work we do on so-called ‘Coordinated Maritime Presences’, where EU member states exchange information gathered by national naval assets. Our current [pilot project in the Gulf of Guinea](#) ⁽¹¹¹⁾ could be expanded, and the same concept could be used in the Indo-Pacific for example.

We often see military operations taking place in ad-hoc formats, outside multinational frameworks, for example the Task Force Takuba in the Sahel or Operation Agenor in the Strait of Hormuz. In the short term, we could enhance coordination and cooperation between our CSDP missions and operations, and such European ad-hoc coalitions. Both would benefit from sharing logistic and medical support, undertaking common exercises and sharing information. More generally, we should learn from those successful endeavours and make it possible for smaller groups of member states to conduct missions and operations under an EU umbrella.

Third, we need to be ready to deploy our missions and operations more rapidly to different parts of the world. This requires trained and equipped staff to be available when necessary, and to have more solid planning capabilities and command and control structures at the EU level.

“ We discussed the idea of an EU ‘initial-entry force’ that could be quickly deployed in the initial phase of a crisis.”

Together with Defence Ministers, we discussed how the work on the [Strategic Compass](#) ⁽¹¹²⁾ could provide guidance for the kind of crises that the military need to prepare for. For example, to prevent a hostile take-over of a legitimate government or react when the safety of maritime shipping lanes is put in danger. We also discussed the idea of an EU ‘initial-entry force’ that could be quickly deployed in the initial phase of a crisis. Such a force would consist of approximately 5 000 military (land forces combined with air and maritime components as

⁽¹¹¹⁾ See p. 126.

⁽¹¹²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en

necessary. The EU Battlegroup, a rotating 2 500 strong force on stand-by for the EU every six months, could be the nucleus of such a force.



These are not abstract concepts but very concrete proposals that can have an impact on the ground at times of crisis. At this stage, these are of course only ideas and I do not underestimate the difficulties to put them in practice. But I believe this is the time to put all ideas on the table and discuss them. If we want to make a difference and raise the level of ambition of the EU as security provider, we should not be afraid of discussing these ideas. Eventually, it will be of course for member states to decide where to set the bar of our ambition.

These work strands are closely interrelated also with other dimensions of the Compass – capabilities, resilience and partnerships – which Ministers will discuss in details in the coming weeks.

Important progress on other fronts

And as we pursue those forward-looking discussions, we are making important progress on other fronts too. I briefed Defence Ministers about our follow-up to Mozambique's request for EU assistance, to help address the security crisis and

the terrorist threat in Cabo Delgado. Work is ongoing on a possible EU Training Mission, which I hope will be launched as soon as possible.

Ministers also adopted three Council Decisions that will allow the United States, Canada and Norway – three key EU partners and NATO allies – to participate in the PESCO project on Military Mobility, bringing valuable expertise and best practices on military movements to the project. It is the first time that the Council decides on the participation of third states in a PESCO project, after having set out the general conditions and related procedures last November. This participation will contribute to strengthening EU–NATO cooperation in the area of military mobility.

In an informal session, we discussed our cooperation with NATO, in the presence of its Secretary General. We focused on the theatres of common interest, such as the Western Balkans, Iraq or the Central Mediterranean. We also exchanged about the situation in Afghanistan and agreed we will continue to coordinate on these matters.

“Ministers discussed the future of the Satellite Centre and its level of ambition, at a time when the importance of geospatial imagery in our security and defence policy is growing fast.”

Last, but not least, today I also chaired the EU's Satellite Centre (SatCen) Board meeting, the first-ever at ministerial level in almost 30 years since the Centre was created. The aim was for Ministers to discuss the future of the SatCen and its level of ambition, at a time when the importance of geospatial imagery in our security and defence policy is growing fast.

The growing value of geospatial intelligence

If anything, the pandemic has shown the growing value of geospatial intelligence. When many sectors were facing mobility restrictions and a significant amount of ground-based operations were halted, satellites remained in orbit, providing critical intelligence, for example to the monitoring of the UN arms embargo on Libya, and helping to counter crude oil smuggling and the trafficking of migrants.

Today's discussions reinforced my conviction that we are making good progress in strengthening the EU's capacity to address the full range of security challenges it faces. But also that we need to do more. The Strategic Compass offers the opportunity to define what we want to be able to do as security and defence actor in 5-10 years from now. We need be realistic and concrete, but at the same time,

we should not be afraid to be ambitious. The reality is that we must prepare ourselves for a world where new threats are emerging, threats that we can only address together.

AFGHANISTAN WAS A WAKE-UP CALL – EUROPE NEEDS TO STEP UP

01/09/2021 – *Op Ed* – Immediately after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, I published an Op Ed in the New York Times ⁽¹³⁾. This takeover has been, first and foremost, a tragedy for Afghans, especially women. It was also a severe blow for the West and a wake-up call for Europe.

The Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan is, first and foremost, a tragedy for Afghans. The world's attention is rightly focused on trying to help those desperately trying to flee the country and worrying about those left behind, notably women and girls.

A severe blow to the West

But it is also a severe blow to the West. Europe and the United States were united as never before in Afghanistan: It was the first time that NATO's Article 5, committing all members to defend one another, was invoked. And for many years, Europeans provided a strong military commitment and an important economic aid program, amounting to a total of 17.2 billion euros, or \$20.3 billion.

But in the end, the timing and nature of the withdrawal were set in Washington. We Europeans found ourselves – not only for the evacuations out of the Kabul airport but also more broadly – depending on American decisions.

That should serve as a wake-up call for anyone who cares about the Atlantic alliance. The United States understandably does not want to do everything alone. To become a more capable ally, Europe must invest more in its security capabilities and develop the ability to think and act in strategic terms. The events in Afghanistan have been harrowing. But they should lead us to deepen, not divide, the alliance with America. And to strengthen our cooperation, Europe must step up.

⁽¹³⁾ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/opinion/afghanistan-europe-nato.html>

“*The events in Afghanistan have been harrowing. But they should lead us to deepen, not divide, the alliance with America. And to strengthen our cooperation, Europe must step up.*”

To do so, we first need to have a shared sense of the threats we face and how best to address them – a common strategic culture. In that vein, the European Union is working on a [European Strategic Compass](#) ⁽¹⁴⁾, a document that will precisely define our ambitions for security and defence for the next five to 10 years.

Member states are fully involved in this exercise. Some, for example, have suggested the creation of a European ‘initial entry force,’ consisting of about 5 000 troops, that could undertake rapid and robust action. Helping to secure an airport in challenging circumstances, as in Kabul, could be the type of operation we aim for in the future. By embracing the spirit and potential of collaboration, we hope the document – to be issued in spring 2022 – will serve as a guide to our collective future.

An uncertain future, full of threats

It’s an uncertain future, full of threats in different domains, including cyberspace, the sea and outer space. That’s why it’s vital that Europeans, whether in NATO, the United Nations or the E.U., work together more on defence. Alongside increasing pivotal military capabilities – airlift and refueling, command and control, strategic reconnaissance and space-based assets – we need forces that are more capable, more deployable and more interoperable. Efforts to achieve just that, in the form of several initiatives, are already underway.

But we must go further and faster. The [European Defence Fund](#), established to boost the bloc’s defence capabilities, will receive close to 8 billion euros, or \$9.4 billion, over the next six years. That should be used to significantly support collaborative research and the development of much-needed defence technologies.

“*A more strategically autonomous and militarily capable E.U. would better address the challenges to come in Europe’s neighbourhood and beyond. It would also be a boon for the United States and in the Atlantic alliance.*”

⁽¹⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en



A more strategically autonomous and militarily capable E.U. would be better able to address the challenges to come in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond. It would also, I am convinced, be a boon for the United States and in the interest of the Atlantic alliance. After all, any partnership needs capable allies and political trust.

An urgent task

The task could not be more urgent. The Taliban's return to power brings with it the risk of renewed terrorist attacks, a growth in drug trafficking and a large amount of irregular migration. We must be resolute in combating these threats, as well as in responding to a changed regional landscape. China, Russia and Iran will have greater sway in the region, while Pakistan, India, Turkey and Gulf monarchies will all reposition themselves. We cannot let them be the only interlocutors with Afghanistan after the Western withdrawal. Europe, along with the United States, has to reframe its engagement.

Not least with the Taliban themselves. After failing to prevent their capture of the country, we will now have to deal with them, carefully weighing our options and

working for a coordinated international approach. That must be subject, of course, to clear conditions on their behaviour, notably respect for human rights.

What's more, we must continue supporting the Afghan people, especially minorities and women and girls. To this end, [the Commission](#) has already decided to quadruple its humanitarian aid this year to 200 million euros ⁽¹⁵⁾, or \$236 million, while suspending development aid. And though it will be a challenge, we will have to find ways to get humanitarian aid in and delivered – and safe passage out for those who feel under imminent threat.

The events in Afghanistan are not an invitation to withdraw from further international challenges. On the contrary, they should embolden Europe to deepen its alliances and strengthen its commitment – and ability – to defend its interests.

Some events catalyse history: The Afghanistan debacle is one of them. We Europeans must learn its lessons.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_21_4381

A STRATEGIC COMPASS FOR EUROPE

12/11/2021 – *Op Ed – The European Union is at risk of ‘strategic shrinkage’, owing to geopolitical, economic, and ideological pressures from all sides. Safeguarding European citizens, interests, and values will require new thinking about the EU’s security and defence responsibilities and the capacities it needs to fulfil them.*

A compass helps one find one’s way, and the ‘Strategic Compass’ that I have drafted at the behest of the European Council will serve as an operational guide for the European Union’s development and decision-making on security and defence. It is now heading to EU foreign affairs and defence ministers for discussions next week.

A compass to answer three questions

The compass is designed to answer three questions: Which challenges and threats do we face? How can we better pool our assets and manage them effectively? And what is the best way to project Europe’s influence as both a regional and global actor?

Our overall threat analysis shows clearly that Europe is in danger. The EU risks what I have called a ‘strategic shrinkage.’ This can be perceived from three points of view. First, our economic reach is becoming increasingly circumscribed. Thirty years ago, the EU represented one-quarter of the world’s wealth; in 20 years, it will account for just over 10 %. Our demographic shrinkage develops similarly: By the end of this century, Europe will account for [less than 5 % of the world’s population](#) ⁽¹¹⁶⁾.

More fundamentally, some of our economic competitors hold values that are very different from ours, thus posing a threat to our normative power. The EU must integrate this fact into its policymaking, recognising that the competition for global standards is already playing out in the race for mastery over artificial intelligence, cloud computing, semiconductors, and biotechnology.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ See [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=The EU in the world - population](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=The_EU_in_the_world_-_population)

“*The competition for global standards is already playing out in the race for mastery over artificial intelligence, cloud computing, semiconductors, and biotechnology.*”

Second, the EU's strategic theatre is increasingly contested, owing to challenges by new ambitious actors, demonstrations of military force, and destabilisation strategies featuring cyber warfare and disinformation. Gone are the days when peace and war constituted two clearly distinct states. We are and will increasingly be confronted with hybrid situations that require a broad range of defensive assets.

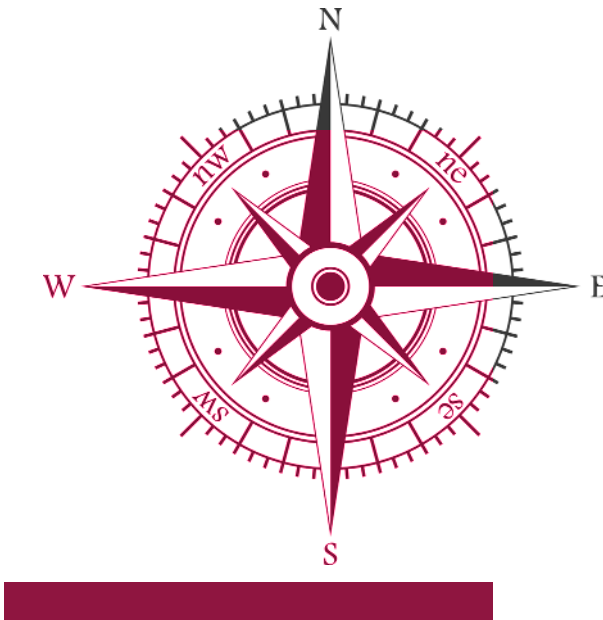
Finally, the EU's political sphere is being squeezed, and our liberal values increasingly contested. In the 'battle of narratives,' the idea that universal values are really just Western constructs has been gaining traction. The old assumption that economic prosperity would always lead to democratic development has been refuted.

In navigating this increasingly competitive strategic environment, the EU must become a provider of security for its citizens, protecting our values and interests. But to do that, it will need to act faster and more decisively when managing crises. That means anticipating fast-changing threats and safeguarding its citizens against them; investing in the necessary capabilities and technologies; and cooperating with partners to achieve common goals.

Increase our capacity to deter attacks

Such measures will increase our capacity to deter attacks, and to react to one if it comes. The main value of military force is not that it allows us to solve problems, but that it can help to prevent problems being solved to our detriment. That is why the Strategic Compass proposes an EU capacity for rapid force deployment across the entire spectrum of actions envisaged by EU treaties.

Past attempts to deploy EU forces swiftly have met with only limited success. But the Strategic Compass aims to make such deployments more readily operational and effective in three ways. First, it would follow a modular approach, with its composition defined by concrete scenarios and reinforced by joint training, rather than being pre-positioned as a permanent force.



Second, there would be clear guidelines stating that it is the mission that determines the type and size of the force, not vice versa. And, third, we could step up our efforts to overcome various shortcomings that have long hampered our operational capabilities, with clear actions that should receive priority.

All of this will require both legitimacy and flexibility. Who decides, and how should decisions be implemented?

Act creatively to decide faster

Without calling into question the principle of unanimity, it is possible to act creatively by activating certain provisions such as constructive abstention or Article 44, which allows for the creation of coalitions approved by the European Council. Above all, we need political will (without which nothing is possible) and operational efficiency (without which everything is pointless).

But the EU should of course not limit its actions to the deployment of military forces. The Strategic Compass also focuses on cyber, maritime, and space security. To anticipate threats, it proposes boosting intelligence capacities and expanding the suite of tools for countering hybrid and cyberattacks as well as foreign

disinformation and interference. It also sets targets for investment to equip our armed forces with the necessary capabilities and innovative technologies, to fill strategic gaps, and to reduce technological and industrial dependencies.

“ *This effort in no way contradicts Europe’s commitment to NATO, which remains at the heart of our territorial defence.*”

Finally, let me emphasise that this effort in no way contradicts Europe’s commitment to NATO, which remains at the heart of our territorial defence. This commitment should not prevent us from developing our own capabilities and conducting independent operations in our neighbourhood and beyond, especially at a time when US policymakers’ attention may be focused elsewhere (not least on the Indo-Pacific). European strategic responsibility is the best way to reinforce transatlantic solidarity. This concept is at the heart of the new dialogue on security and defence between the United States and the EU.

But all Europeans should understand that the Strategic Compass is not a magic wand. It is for the EU member states to determine whether today’s geopolitical shifts will be yet another unheeded wake-up call, and the renewed debate on European defence yet another false start. The Strategic Compass is an opportunity to meet Europe’s security responsibilities directly, in front of our citizens and the rest of the world.

WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGIC COMPASS

XX/11/2021 – Foreword – The Strategic Compass was presented to EU member states in November 2021. This document was not public at this stage. I wrote this preface to the Strategic Compass to present the philosophy behind this work, which has been made public.

Europe is in danger: we need to operate in an increasingly competitive strategic environment. The purpose of the Strategic Compass is to draw an assessment of the threats and challenges we face and propose operational guidelines to enable the European Union to become a security provider for its citizens, protecting its values and interests.

“ *The Strategic Compass is a political proposal to prevent the major risk the EU is facing: that of ‘strategic shrinkage’, or the risk of being always principled but seldom relevant.*”

The Strategic Compass is a political proposal to prevent the major risk the EU is facing: that of ‘strategic shrinkage’, or the risk of being always principled but seldom relevant. That is why it defines a high ambition and presents concrete means to make this ambition a reality.

The debate about European security and defence has switched gear

Recently, the debate about European security and defence has switched gear. In her State of the Union, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen called for the EU to take its work on defence to the next level, moving from a ‘defence eco-system’ to a genuine ‘European Defence Union’. Shortly afterwards, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, declared that ‘2022 will be the year of European defence’, adding that a stronger EU role on security and defence would also strengthen the Atlantic Alliance. That same month, President Biden, in a joint statement with President Macron welcomed ‘a stronger and more capable European defence, that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to NATO.’ Then, in October, EU leaders discussed the impact of major geopolitical events and decisions, which had put into question Europe’s ability to defend its interests and vision. They agreed that Europe cannot afford to be a bystander in a hyper-competitive world.

“ According to many opinion polls, European citizens want the EU to contribute in a more active way to their security and that of the world.”

European citizens are also aware of this new context. According to many opinion polls, they want the EU to contribute in a more active way to their security and that of the world. They want the EU to protect them from the dangerous world we live in. They understand that we must connect the defence efforts of the member states, avoiding duplications and gaps in our critical capabilities, to be more efficient in providing this protection. And they know that our security starts away from our borders. So we need to project our presence in the world, promoting security in our neighbourhood and with our partners.

So far, so good. However, in practical terms major questions remain: act how exactly? To face which threats and challenges? With which means? And with which implications for the EU? Answering these questions is the rationale for the Strategic Compass that EU leaders tasked me as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to prepare.

During the drafting of the Strategic Compass I have become ever more convinced that, because of history and geography, we Europeans don't see the world in the same way. And that is why we don't yet share a common strategic culture. We have to realise that there will always come a time when each Member State needs the EU, just as the EU needs each of its member states to respond collectively to threats of a changing nature. So, a necessary first step was to come up with a shared threat assessment, which we did in November 2020 and we used as the basis for this Strategic Compass.

A new world of threats

The starting point of the Strategic Compass is to recognise that Europe is in danger. It faces new threats that are not just military or territorial. We are seeing the return of power politics and zero sum conflicts with competition between states intensifying. At the same time, interdependence is becoming increasingly conflictual and soft power is weaponised.

In recent years, the classic distinction between war and peace has been diminishing. The world is full of hybrid situations where we face intermediate dynamics of competition, intimidation and coercion. Indeed, the tools of power are not only soldiers, tanks and planes but also disinformation, cyber-attacks, the

instrumentalisation of migrants, the privatisation of armies and the political control of sensitive technologies or rare earths. We have to be aware that the defence of Europe will require a new, comprehensive concept of security and that emerging technologies will have a profound impact on future warfare and European defence.

The geopolitical stage is also becoming more complex. More and more states are behaving as partners on certain issues and competitors or rivals on others. International relations are increasingly organised on a transactional basis. For the EU, which remains the world's most open space and which borders many areas of conflict, this is a real challenge. Even more so because there are also worrying dynamics such as the collapse of states, the retreat of democratic freedoms, violations of international and humanitarian law, plus the attacks on the 'global commons': cyber space, the high seas and outer-space.

Europeans will continue to favour dialogue over confrontation; diplomacy over force; multilateralism over unilateralism. But it is clear that if you want dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism to succeed, you need to put power behind it. That's the point of 'learning the language of power'.

The case for ambition and results

In drafting this Strategic Compass, I have been guided by the conviction that we must be ambitious, because the fast-worsening strategic environment is compelling us to act. But equally, we should be result-oriented and avoid our usual European tendency to go for conceptual or institutional discussions, thus side-stepping the harder task of enhancing our capacity to act. It is often easier to talk – and disagree – in abstract terms, than it is to act and agree on how to do things in concrete terms.

This attitude we cannot afford. To prevent the risk of 'strategic shrinking', the Strategic Compass proposes ways and means for the EU to handle the challenges it faces. This will require political will, without which nothing is possible and operational efficiency, without which everything is pointless. Taken together, these two ingredients will enhance our credibility, without which our ambitions will come up against reality.

The EU must use the full range of policies and instruments, looking at the same time for legitimacy, flexibility and willingness to participate, in line with the Treaty

provisions. The EU needs to be able to conduct operations in all circumstances, including those involving the use of force, as foreseen by the Treaties. To secure European interests, we need to do this in a pragmatic and flexible way, depending on the context of the crisis, the urgency, the willingness and the capacity of member states to act.

In all this we have to understand that in today's world, as in tomorrow's, purely military responses will remain insufficient or inadequate. Recent events, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, have shown the clear limits to the utility of force and the absolute requirement of locally owned political settlements.

The policy answer

We don't start from zero. Let me recall that in recent years, the EU has equipped itself with a number of instruments to introduce more coherence into the field of security and defence. In 2017, it launched the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) to rationalise military spending across the EU and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to increase the capabilities and interoperability of European armed forces. Building on earlier efforts, it established the European Defence Fund (EDF) in January 2021, to promote defence industrial collaboration. These efforts strengthen our operational capacity. The EU currently has 18 civilian and military missions and operations deployed around the world. With the Civilian CSDP Compact agreed in 2018, we committed to strengthen our civilian missions – and we are well on our way.

The Strategic Compass exercise builds on this wider process. It is neither a crystal ball for predicting the future, nor a 'silver bullet' that will magically enable Europe to develop a common defence policy overnight. It is, however, a guide for preparation, decision and action. Based on the guidance of EU leaders, the Strategic Compass is proposing concrete ideas in the following four work strands so that we:

- Act more quickly and decisively when facing crises;
- Secure our citizens against fast-changing threats;
- Invest in the capabilities and technologies we need; and
- Partner with others to achieve common goals.

Why now?

This is, of course, not the first time that the EU describes its strategic environment and how it intends to respond. Indeed, the history of European integration is full of plans and initiatives to strengthen security and defence ties among us and our ability to act together. Most have come and gone. And while we have made progress in recent years, we should acknowledge that not all our stated intentions have been realised.

The difference this time lies in the speed at which the geopolitical context is changing. This makes the case for action more urgent and indeed compelling. All the threats we face are intensifying and the capacity of individual member states to cope is insufficient and declining.

Already in 2017 Angela Merkel said that ‘we Europeans should take our fate into our own hands’. In my opinion, everything that has happened since has only strengthened that conclusion: we Europeans must invest in our capacity to think, decide and act in strategic terms – together with our partners and on our own when needed.



In drafting this Strategic Compass, my job has been to sketch out a path, to specify the why, the what and the how. This is what the Strategic Compass does, offering a range of proposals, small and large, covering the full spectrum.

Results depend not on strategy papers but on actions

As ever, results depend not on strategy papers but on actions. These belong to the Member States: they hold the competences, the prerogatives and the assets. Although the EU is not a military alliance, it should work towards a common defence, as set out in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The decisions of member states will determine whether the geopolitical shifts of recent months and the renewed debate on European defence that has erupted, are yet another wake-up call that goes unheeded. Or whether 2022 is a new start, when we, finally, decide to face our security responsibilities, in front of our citizens and the rest of the world. I am convinced that we cannot afford to treat our security as 'business as usual', repeating the same slogans and sticking to the same mind-set. The cost of passivity and inaction are real and the moment for decisive steps is now.

HONOURING EUROPEANS WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

21/11/2021 – Blog – In November 2021, we paid tribute to the military and civilian personnel who lost their lives while serving in EU crisis management missions. This moving ceremony coincided with the 20th anniversary of the EU Military Staff, providing also a good opportunity to look forward when it comes to European security and defence.

CFSP, CPCC, CSDP, EDA, PESCO, PSC, CIVCOM, EUMC and EUMS – the European Union's actions in the area of foreign and security policy are rich in acronyms and often complex. However, one element is very tangible: our military and civilian operations on the ground. Women and men from all EU member states serve under the EU flag in peace-keeping, crisis management and conflict prevention operations.

The ultimate and selfless sacrifice for a more secure world

At the 20th anniversary of the [EU Military Staff \(EUMS\)](#) ⁽¹¹⁷⁾, we celebrated the efforts of the women and men who have served and continue serving in the EU's missions and operations. Above all, we honoured and remembered those who made the ultimate and selfless sacrifice for a more secure and better world.

“It was very moving to see all these soldiers from our member states gathered in the courtyard of the EEAS around the stele, which pays tribute to those who have fallen in the service of the European Union.”

The ceremony was attended by the Chairman of the [European Union Military Committee \(EUMC\)](#) ⁽¹¹⁸⁾, General Graziano, the Director General of the EUMS, Vice Admiral Bléjean, as well as by former Directors General of the EUMS, [Political and Security Committee \(PSC\)](#) ⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Ambassadors and military representatives of EU member states.

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ See [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/5436/The-%20European-%20Union-%20Military-%20Staff-%20\(EUMS\)](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/5436/The-%20European-%20Union-%20Military-%20Staff-%20(EUMS))

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5428/european-union-military-committee-eumc_en

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/political-security-committee/>

It was very moving to see all these soldiers with their flags gathered in the courtyard of the European External Action Service. Gathered around the stele, which pays tribute to those who have fallen in the service of the European Union. With the EU anthem being played by the Royal Band of the Belgian Airforce, a minute of silence punctuated by a drum beat and followed by a piper's lament, with wreaths being laid under the EU Flag at half-mast and the EUMS Director General and the EUMC Chairman saluting on behalf of all military guests. While today we are used to having military structures under the EU roof, I remember well that just 20 years ago many had to get used at first to see military uniforms in EU buildings.

Serving under the EU flag to provide security around the world

Since the establishment of the EUMS 20 years ago, over [30 EU civilian and military missions and operations](#) ⁽¹²⁰⁾ have been conducted up to now. Militaries from our member states have been active from the Balkans to Central Africa, from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel and from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. At present, the EU deploys seven military missions and operations: four EU Training Missions (EUTMs) in Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic and in Mozambique; two naval operations in the Mediterranean (Operation Irini) and in the Indian Ocean (Operation Atalanta) and the oldest of our military operations – Operation Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“EU missions and operations have been crucial to stabilise crisis zones, manage conflicts and secure free and open sea-lanes, to contribute to international security and protect European citizens and their interests.”

Their work has been and continues to be crucial to stabilise crisis zones, manage conflicts and secure free and open sea-lanes, to contribute to international security and protect European citizens and their interests.

The EU Military Staff was established in 2001. Currently, it consists of more than 200 permanent military and civilian personnel, located in our buildings. It is a unique source of military expertise within the European External Action Service (EEAS) and provides a wide range of activities: early warning, situation assessment, strategic planning, communications and information systems, concept development, training and education. It can be used across the full spectrum of our actions: support to humanitarian assistance, civil protection, security sector

⁽¹²⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en

reform, stabilisation and evacuation of citizens, as well as peace-keeping and peace enforcement operations.

For decades, defence was not part of the European integration process. Only in the 1990s, following the end of the Cold War and the conflicts in the Balkans, military issues came onto the agenda. The 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam affirmed the Union's willingness to develop capabilities for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces. The Treaty defined the range of military tasks that the EU could undertake. Subsequently, the 1999 European Council in Cologne agreed on institutional arrangements for the analysis, planning and conduct of military operations, including the EU Military Committee and EU Military Staff. Subsequently, the [European Defence Agency \(EDA\)](#) ⁽¹²¹⁾ was created in 2004.

The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 launched the [Common Security and Defence Policy \(CSDP\)](#) ⁽¹²²⁾ and since then, its structures have developed further ⁽¹²³⁾. The EU Global Strategy of 2016 opened the way to new defence initiatives, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation or the European Defence Fund. In 2017 was created, within the EUMS, the so-called Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). For the first time the EU was equipping itself with a permanent military command and control structure in Brussels.

The Strategic Compass and the way ahead

Much has been achieved in the last 20 years but more still has to be done. To honour our fallen colleagues, it is our duty to keep up their work and make the EU a credible international security provider. The landscape around us is deteriorating quickly. We are witnessing growing strategic competition and the return of power politics. In this more hostile environment, we need to defend more actively our interests, and protect better our citizens. Above all, we need to increase our capacity and willingness to act. That is precisely the goal of the [Strategic Compass](#) ⁽¹²⁴⁾, which member states began to discuss last week.

⁽¹²¹⁾ See <https://eda.europa.eu/>

⁽¹²²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/431/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp_en

⁽¹²³⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/5388/shaping-common-security-and-defence-policy_en

⁽¹²⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/106337/towards-strategic-compass_en

With the Compass, I put forward a number of concrete proposals to make our military engagement more effective, to build a Rapid Deployment Capacity and to provide our missions and operations with more robust and flexible mandates. I also propose to reinforce our military presence at sea and in maritime areas of interest, such as the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the Compass strives to boost our intelligence capacities and step up our capacities to address hybrid threats, including foreign information manipulation and cyber-attacks.

The EU Military Staff – together with the EU Military Representatives of our member states – will play a key role to move this forward and to give a common EU answer in this more challenging world to European interests and values.



DEFENCE INNOVATION OR DEFENCE IRRELEVANCE IS THE CHOICE TO MAKE

09/12/2021 – Blog – *In December 2021, I opened the Europe Defence Agency's Annual Conference, dedicated to defence innovation. This conference came at a crucial time for the future of our common European security and defence policy. In that field, our choice is a simple one: either defence innovation or defence irrelevance!*

As we see at all our borders, the return of power politics globally requires that the EU becomes really a security provider. Our collective ability to innovate, both at EU and national level, will determine the position of the EU on the global stage in the years to come. This is true in general, but it is especially true in the defence sector.

This is why defence innovation was the central theme of this year's [European Defence Agency's \(EDA\) Annual Conference](#) ⁽¹²⁵⁾, which brought together EU member states and institutions, military and security organisations, academia and think tanks, as well as industry and media. We, the EU and its member states, need indeed to do much more in defence innovation. We need to do more together and we need to do it now.

Why we must invest in defence innovation

Technological innovations have always been decisive factors in international rivalries: from the fortifications in 17th century Europe, to the naval rivalry between great powers on the eve of World War I, the use of radars by the UK in 1940, the nuclear revolution after 1945, the missiles during the cold war and the 1991 Gulf War with battlefield impact of Precision Guided Munitions...

“Today, innovation is again front and centre in the global competition that re-structures the international security environment: those who gain a technological edge today will dominate the future.”

⁽¹²⁵⁾ See <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2021/12/07/annual-conference-discusses-defence-innovation>

Today, innovation is again front and centre in the global competition that re-structures the international security environment: those who gain a technological edge and set the standards today will dominate the future. This is particularly the case with the [emerging disruptive technologies \(EDTs\)](#) ⁽¹²⁶⁾, such as artificial intelligence. Often 'dual-natured', i.e. both affecting civilian and military domains, they will alter profoundly the character of warfare.

Operationalising Emerging Disruptive Technologies (EDT)

Countries around the world are developing and operationalising EDTs for military purposes. In particular, the US, but also China and Russia. To retain an edge over competitors and potential adversaries, also the EU and its member states must harness the potential of EDTs and develop high-end, cutting-edge capabilities to equip full-spectrum military forces.

This brings me to a complex issue: the link between civilian innovation and defence innovation. The defence sector has always been at the forefront of innovation and some of its inventions have had tremendous civilian implications: naval technology, the Internet or space-based navigation systems such as Galileo and the GPS, and many other.

However, there are now fields like information technologies where the civilian market is driving both pure technological innovations (processors) and innovative uses (smart phones). Civilian and defence innovation are now increasingly often associated and revisionist powers but also non-state actors do not accept restrictions on how they weaponise civilian technologies. They rely a lot on innovative uses of civilian technology for their hybrid attacks – the cyber domain is an obvious example of this worrying trend.

Space is another telling example: what until recently had remained a mostly sovereign and non-commercial domain is moving into 'new space', where constellations of 'cube sats' build up by private actors can be misused for hybrid, hard-to-detect aggressions.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ See <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2021/04/20/high-level-conference-discussed-impact-of-emerging-disruptive-technologies-on-defence>



The current situation in Europe gives reasons for concern

The current situation in Europe gives reasons for concern. Comparing the EU and its member states with other global actors, we lag behind in terms of investing in defence innovation. And the gap is widening. [Latest EDA data](#) ⁽¹²⁷⁾ suggests that in 2020 EU member states spent only € 2.5 billion on research and technology – 1.2 % of the total European defence expenditure, with a tendency to further decrease in 2021-2023, whereas the related PESCO commitment sets the bar at 2 % of the defence budgets. While most member states have increased their defence spending, they have not increased their investments in research and technology.

Meanwhile, the US Department of Defence invests at least \$14 billion each year in research and innovation, around 2 % of the whole US defence budget, including \$3.5 billion for DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency). It is not strictly comparable, but Google alone spends on research and development

⁽¹²⁷⁾ See <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/eda---defence-data-report-2019-2020.pdf>

almost 10 times more than what EU defence ministries spend together on research and technology.

“We can no longer afford to sit on the side-line. The EU and its member states need to do much more on defence innovation. And do it more together.”

We can no longer afford to sit on the side-line. The EU and its member states need to do much more on defence innovation. And do it more together. Let me repeat, our choice is a simple one: defence innovation or defence irrelevance!

How can the EU best address the defence innovation gap?

How can the EDA and EU institutions best address this defence innovation gap? The Commission has already put in place relevant initiatives in this context. For example, [Horizon Europe](#) ⁽¹²⁸⁾ is heavily focusing on boosting innovation and the [Action Plan on Synergies](#) ⁽¹²⁹⁾ will enable stakeholders from civil, defence and space industries to work together. The [European Defence Fund](#) ⁽¹³⁰⁾ is also mobilising €2.7 billion for this purpose.

At the same time, defence remains however primarily an intergovernmental domain and, therefore, the EDA has a crucial role to play in coordinating member states' efforts. Technological innovation has been part of the Agency's DNA since its creation in 2004. EDA's first ever [Coordinated Annual Review on Defence](#) ⁽¹³¹⁾ (CARD) in November 2020 proposed over 100 collaborative opportunities in capability development and research & technology.

“The European Defence Agency has already delivered on innovation, for example with drone swarms, technologies for electromagnetic railgun, directed energy weapons, or new clean energy technologies.”

The EDA has already delivered on innovation, for example with projects related to drone swarms, technologies for electromagnetic railgun, directed energy

⁽¹²⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en

⁽¹²⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/action_plan_on_synergies_en.pdf

⁽¹³⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

⁽¹³¹⁾ See [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-\(card\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card))

weapons, or new clean energy technologies that will help lower the defence carbon footprint and decrease energy dependencies in defence sector. In response to the call by the Council last May to enhance efforts in that field, the EDA has also been working to establish a Defence Innovation Hub within the Agency. This is one of the deliverables of the [Strategic Compass](#) ⁽¹³²⁾. By creating a network of defence innovation centres around Europe, this hub would promote synergies with the industrial sector. I discussed this proposal with Ministers of Defence at our last EDA Steering Board in November and I hope it will soon be in place.

Within the EU as well as within NATO, our member states have only 'one single set of experts', so we must avoid unnecessary duplication, and ensure that synergies are developed to the fullest. In the end, what matters is the overall coherence of output and added-value. Working together with the Commission and member states, the EDA is best placed to ensure that defence innovation is not just an ambition on paper, but a reality in practice.

We need political will, leadership and adequate resources

To conclude: the EU needs to invest more in research and technology to maintain its strategic advantage over competitors and interoperability with its partners. This will determine our position in the global stage in the years to come. We have the tools in place to meet this objective and a window of opportunity to accelerate European defence cooperation. What we need now is, as usual, political will, leadership and adequate resources.

⁽¹³²⁾ See p. 145.

4.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE



EUROPE MUST BECOME A GLOBAL CLIMATE POWER

22/01/2021 – Op Ed – *At the beginning of 2021, the year of COP26 in Glasgow, I wanted to underline with Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank, the importance of climate diplomacy for Europe. We were eagerly awaiting at that time the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines but there will never be a vaccine for climate change.*

Apocalyptic images of forest fires in California and devastating floods in Bangladesh are harbingers of what awaits us if we fail to address the climate emergency. Without drastic action, such catastrophes will rage more frequently and ever more destructively. Moreover, climate change is one of the biggest geopolitical challenges we face. As a conflict multiplier, it fuels sociopolitical instability, creates migratory pressures, aggravates global injustices, and jeopardises human rights and peace, especially in fragile states.

A very limited carbon budget

Climate scientists have made clear that to limit the rise in average global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels – the target of the Paris Agreement – the world can emit only another [580 gigatons](#) ⁽¹³³⁾ of carbon dioxide. That is our carbon budget – forever. Yet at the current global emissions rate of about 37 gigatons per year, we will have exhausted our budget by 2032. We therefore need to decarbonise without delay. Since the world has already warmed by 1.1°C, with temperatures in many regions having gone much higher, the next decade represents our last chance to tackle the problem.

“*The European Union has been a global leader on the climate issue for decades, and it has stuck to its ambitions even through the COVID-19 crisis.*”

The European Union has been a global leader on this issue for decades, and it has stuck to its ambitions even through the COVID-19 crisis. Among other things, the EU has launched what European Commission Vice President [Frans Timmermans](#)

⁽¹³³⁾ See <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

has rightly called ‘the world’s greenest stimulus plan.’ With the European Green Deal, the EU has also increased its 2030 emissions-reduction target to 55 %, and committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

The EU’s climate bank

To support this effort, member states have agreed to transform the European Investment Bank (EIB) into the EU’s Climate Bank. As outlined in the Climate Bank Roadmap 2021-2025 ⁽¹³⁴⁾, the EIB Group aims to mobilise €1 trillion (\$1.2 trillion) of investment in climate action and environmental sustainability between 2021 and 2030. It is the first multilateral development bank in the world to be fully Paris-aligned in its operations.

To be truly effective, however, Europe must complement these internal efforts with a proactive foreign policy. In a world where the EU accounts for less than 8 % ⁽¹³⁵⁾ of global emissions, our climate efforts cannot be limited to our continent. If we allow growing energy demand in Africa and parts of Asia to be met through additional coal- and gas-fired power plants financed by China or others, our hope of limiting global warming will literally go up in smoke. We must convince our global partners to embrace our ambition, and we must push – or help – them to take the necessary action.

“ In a world where the EU accounts for less than 8 % ⁽¹³⁶⁾ of global emissions, our climate efforts cannot be limited to our continent. We must convince our global partners to embrace our ambition.”

To that end, Europe will need to put its economic and diplomatic weight behind the climate cause, becoming a global power in climate diplomacy. We must combine our climate efforts with *realpolitik*, recognising the incontrovertible links between innovation and sustainable development. Only through innovation can we ensure Europe’s future competitiveness and tackle the climate challenge both inside and outside our borders. And only through innovation and green investment can we boost economic resilience in Africa and beyond.

⁽¹³⁴⁾ See <https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-307-eu-member-states-approve-eib-group-climate-bank-roadmap-2021-2025>

⁽¹³⁵⁾ See <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/eu-greenhouse-gas-emissions-kept>

⁽¹³⁶⁾ See <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/eu-greenhouse-gas-emissions-kept>

THE CLIMATE HAS NO BORDERS



Europe has the tools to make the difference

Europe has the tools to make a difference globally. As one of the world's largest markets and trading blocs, the EU has the power to set rules and standards for imported goods and services. We already have a wide range of trade agreements and strategic partnerships with countries and regions around the world; and, together, the EU and its member states are the world's leading donor of development aid and humanitarian assistance. Finally, with the EIB, the EU has the largest multilateral lender at its disposal.

The EIB's firepower is sorely needed. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to achieve our 2030 climate and sustainable development goals requires closing an annual [investment gap](#) ⁽¹³⁷⁾ of approximately €2.5 trillion. We cannot rely only on the public sector anywhere, but especially in less-developed regions. As a public-finance institution and pioneer in green bonds, the EIB has an important role to play both in redirecting private finance toward sustainable investment projects globally, and in ensuring (through its banking and engineering expertise) that all projects make economic sense.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ See <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sg-finance-strategy/>

“ *The EIB has an important role to play both in redirecting private finance toward sustainable investment projects globally and in ensuring that all projects make economic sense.*”

To have a global impact, the EU must vigorously deploy all of the instruments at its disposal. For example, all current EU efforts to address the social and economic damage caused by COVID-19 in neighbouring regions should be designed and implemented with the broader climate agenda in mind.

Moreover, other development banks should follow the EIB's example by aligning their operations with the Paris targets, in order to lock in low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathways (or, at a minimum, to avoid undermining the green transition).

The COP 26 in Glasgow, a crucial milestone

The UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) in November will be a crucial milestone for raising global ambitions. Unlike previous COPs, it will be less about new multilateral rules and more about ensuring that as many countries as possible – especially the big emitters – strengthen their commitments. Next week, EU foreign ministers will discuss how to set the tone to ensure success in Glasgow, and how to develop our climate and energy diplomacy to promote the European Green Deal's external dimensions.

“ *We intend to make 2021 a defining year in which Europe puts its full diplomatic and financial weight behind the global fight against climate change.*”

Accelerating climate action and managing the energy transition must be at the core of EU foreign policy and in our work with partners around the world and we welcome in this regard the essential decision by President Biden to rejoin the Paris Agreement. What we do today will set a course for decades to come. We intend to make 2021 a defining year in which Europe puts its full diplomatic and financial weight behind the global fight against climate change. As UN Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) has put it, this is the ‘[defining challenge of our times](#)’⁽¹³⁸⁾.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/10/climate/united-nations-climate-change.html>

THE ARCTIC, A KEY REGION FOR THE EU AND GLOBAL SECURITY

03/02/2021 – Blog – *The Arctic Frontiers Conference in February 2021 was the occasion to present our vision of this region. The Arctic is fascinating and Arctic affairs are becoming ever more geopolitically important. The impact of climate change, security issues and rivalries are growing, as is the need for cooperation and multilateral agreements.*

Yesterday, I gave a [keynote address](#) ⁽¹³⁹⁾ to the [Arctic Frontiers conference](#) ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾, which was also attended, amongst others, by the Prime Ministers of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland as well as by my colleague Commissioner Sinkevicius.

The Arctic regions are a perfect illustration of why we need the EU Green Deal, and of how broadly we must conceive Europe's geopolitical interests. Let me explain why a safe, stable, sustainable, peaceful and prosperous Arctic is important not just for the Arctic itself, but also for the European Union and actually the whole world.

Climate change is the biggest threat

As I have often said earlier, regardless of the current pandemic, climate change remains the biggest global challenge that humanity is facing. This is especially true for the Arctic, where temperature increases are double global averages: an additional 2 degrees Celsius globally becomes 4 degrees or more in the Arctic.

“ Over the next decades the Arctic open coastal stretches will become ice-free during summers and increasingly during winters”

Consequently, the melt of ice and the thaw of permafrost is already accelerating. The impact on migrating fauna and flora from longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons will be dramatic. Last summer saw the second lowest level of Arctic

⁽¹³⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/92475/arctic-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-arctic-frontiers-conference_en

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ See <https://www.arcticfrontiers.com/>

sea ice since records began. We also witnessed gigantic wildfires across the Russian and Scandinavian Arctic, temperatures as high 38 degrees Celsius in Arctic Siberia and critical oil spills as thawing permafrost caused key storage infrastructure to collapse. Over the next decades the Arctic open coastal stretches will become ice-free during summers and increasingly during winters.

The only way to address this crisis is through national measures combined with international cooperation. Under the [EU Green Deal](#) ⁽¹⁴¹⁾, we are pushing hard to reform our internal policies and achieve carbon neutrality in 2050. However, we also know that the European Union only accounts for around 7-8 % of global emissions, so we must work with all our partners around the world, and not least the Arctic states, to reach the aims of the Paris Agreement.

Geopolitics, security and resource competition

In connection with climate change, there is also a lot of attention these days on hard security issues and on competition for resources in the Arctic region. Russia, for instance, is rebuilding many of its Arctic military capabilities that had fallen into disrepair at the end of the Cold War.

The US together with NATO forces have carried out exercises in Arctic waters, and China is becoming increasingly interested in the economic potential of the region and the possibilities for shipping offered by the melting of boreal sea ice. In its 2018 Arctic policy China even described itself as a 'near Arctic state'. These developments cannot be separated from global geopolitical dynamics.

“ There is also a lot of attention these days on hard security issues and on competition for resources in the Arctic region”

With growing competition for resources and influence, it is more important than ever that international cooperation remains the norm in the Arctic region. So, while others may push for nationalist approaches and power projection, the EU must continue to bang the drum for regional and multilateral cooperation to solve related challenges.

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en



Strategic and day-to-day interests in Arctic

While the Arctic states hold the primary responsibility for tackling issues within their territories, many of them can indeed best be addressed through regional and multilateral cooperation.

Take dangerous waste left in and around Arctic waters: we need circumpolar cooperation to mitigate successfully related risks. Alternatively, take social inclusion: the challenges facing indigenous reindeer herders do not stop at national boundaries. When it comes to shared standards in shipping, best practices in telemedicine, northern agriculture, or energy and sustainable heating, we are also more effective working together.

Those living in the Arctic regions, in particular the indigenous peoples and the younger generation know best how important and difficult it is to balance environmental aims with the retention of jobs and benefits from economic activity in their regions. We will continue to pay the utmost attention to their opinion, in particular that from indigenous peoples who have unique knowledge about the landscapes and are first hand witnesses to its changes. Changes that pose imminent threats to us all and direct threats to their way of life in the Arctic.

We want to help achieve a robust balance between the need for precaution and preservation of the environment, and the desire to use and economically develop the Arctic regions and their resources to the benefit of local inhabitants. Over the last seven years, the EU mobilised 200 million euros into Arctic research, linked to the EU's know how in Earth observation, polar science and climate action.

“ *We need balance between need for precaution and preservation of the environment, and the desire to use and economically develop the Arctic regions and their resources to the benefit of local inhabitants*”

We can do much to stimulate the development of innovative technologies in the Arctic that will make a major contribution to the green transition and meet the socio-economic expectations of future generations. EU science, innovation and cross-border funding programmes are already helping the development of renewable energy projects and the phase-out of damaging traditional fuels. The Arctic offers huge potential as a test-bed for geothermal, wind and hydro projects, the carbon-free production of steel, greener battery production and the like. This is important for the peoples who live there, but their innovation and sustainable use of resources can also become key to Europe's strategic autonomy. As Europe transitions to a carbon-neutral future, it will require supplies of critical minerals, many of which are present in Arctic regions. In this particularly fragile context, strict environmental impact assessments will of course be crucial.

Having this complicated puzzle in mind, the European Union is actually updating its Arctic policy. This updated policy, which we will unveil in the autumn, will allow us to take our engagement in the region to the next level.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

26/04/2021 – Op Ed – *In this Op Ed written with my Colleague EC Vice President Frans Timmermans, I wanted to explain that by tackling climate change and biodiversity loss, everyone will be better off, thanks to better jobs, cleaner air and water, fewer pandemics, and improved health and well-being. However, the coming changes will also upset some and benefit others, creating tensions. And we need to address these concerns.*

The European Union is emerging as the world's climate trailblazer. Just recently, lawmakers and European governments agreed on the European Climate Law, which anchors our climate-neutrality target in statute. With the Green Deal as our growth strategy and our 2030 emissions-reduction target of at least 55 %, the EU is well on the way to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. But Europe is not alone: a critical mass is developing globally as more countries strengthen their decarbonisation commitments.

EU and US, once again working closely together on climate

Recent meetings with John Kerry, the US special presidential envoy for climate, confirmed that the EU and the United States are once again working closely to mobilise an international coalition around the goal of substantially raising climate ambitions for November's United Nations climate summit (COP26) in Glasgow.

There is [no time to lose](#). Unchecked climate change – with its devastating droughts, famines, floods, and mass dislocations – would fuel new migration waves and significantly increase the frequency and intensity of conflicts over water, arable land, and natural resources. To those who complain about the large investments needed to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss, we would simply point out that inaction would cost far more.

“Unchecked climate change would increase conflicts over water, arable land, and natural resources. To those who complain about the large investments needed to tackle climate change, inaction would cost far more.”

By tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, everyone will be better off, thanks to better jobs, cleaner air and water, fewer pandemics, and improved health and well-being. But, as with any broad transition, the coming changes will upset some and benefit others, creating tensions within and between countries. As we accelerate the transition from a hydrocarbon-based economy to a sustainable one based on renewable energy, we cannot be blind to these geopolitical effects.

The transition will drive major power shifts

In particular, the transition itself will drive power shifts away from those controlling and exporting fossil fuels, and toward those mastering the green technologies of the future. For example, phasing out fossil fuels will significantly improve the EU's strategic position, not least by reducing its reliance on energy imports. In 2019, 87 % of our oil and 74 % of our gas came from abroad, requiring us to import more than [€320 billion](#) ⁽¹⁴²⁾ (\$386 billion) worth of fossil-fuel products that year.

Moreover, with the green transition, the old strategic choke points – starting with the Strait of Hormuz – will become less relevant, and thus less dangerous. These seaborne passages have preoccupied military strategists for decades. But as the oil age passes, they will be less subject to competition for access and control by regional and global powers.

Phasing out energy imports will also help to reduce the income and geopolitical power of countries like Russia, which currently relies heavily on the EU market. Of course, the loss of this key source of Russian revenue could lead to instability in the near term, particularly if the Kremlin sees it as an invitation to adventurism. In the long term, though, a world run on clean energy could also be a world of cleaner government, because traditional fossil-fuel exporters will need to diversify their economies and free themselves from the 'oil curse' and the corruption it so often fosters.

“ *In the long term, a world run on clean energy could also be a world of cleaner government, because traditional fossil-fuel exporters will need to free themselves from the 'oil curse' and the corruption it so often fosters.*”

At the same time, however, the green transition itself will require scarce raw materials, some of which are concentrated in countries that have already shown a willingness to use natural resources as foreign-policy tools. This growing

⁽¹⁴²⁾ See <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-geopolitics-of-the-european-green-deal/>

vulnerability will need to be addressed in two ways: by recycling more of these key resources, and by forging broader alliances with exporting countries.

A risk of carbon leakage

Moreover, as long as other countries' climate commitments are not on par with our own, there will be a risk of 'carbon leakage.' That is why the EU is working on a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). We know that some countries, even among our allies, are concerned about this. But we want to be clear: setting a price on imported carbon-intensive goods is not meant to be punitive or protectionist.

In addition to ensuring that our plans are compliant with World Trade Organization rules, we will engage with our international partners early on to explain what we have in mind. Our goal is to facilitate cooperation and help others reach their climate targets. The CBAM, we hope, will trigger a race to the top.

“ Our goal is to facilitate cooperation and help others reach their climate targets. The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, we hope, will trigger a race to the top.”



Though the green transition will bring about more sustainable and resilient economies, it will not automatically usher in a world with less conflict or geopolitical competition. The EU, harbouring no illusions, will need to analyse the impact of its policies across different regions, recognising the likely consequences and planning for the foreseeable risks.

For example, in the Arctic, where temperatures are [rising twice as fast](#) ⁽¹⁴³⁾ as the global average, Russia, China, and others are already trying to establish a geopolitical foothold over territory and resources that were once under ice. While all of these powers have a strong interest in reducing tensions and ‘keeping the Arctic in the Arctic,’ the current scramble for position is putting the entire region at risk.

The enormous potential in Europe's south

To Europe's south, there is enormous potential to generate energy from solar and green hydrogen, and to establish new sustainable growth models based on renewable energy. Europe will need to cooperate closely with the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere to seize these opportunities.

“ *The EU has embarked on a green transition because science tells us that we must, economics teaches us that we should, and technology shows us that we can.*”

The EU has embarked on a green transition because science tells us that we must, economics teaches us that we should, and technology shows us that we can. We are convinced that a world run on clean technology would benefit people's well-being and political stability. But the road to get there will be fraught with risks and obstacles.

That is why the geopolitics of climate change must inform all of our thinking. Geopolitical risk is not an excuse to alter our course or reverse direction. Rather, it is an impetus to accelerate our work toward a just transition for all. The sooner we can ensure that global public goods are there for everyone to enjoy, the better.

⁽¹⁴³⁾ See <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/featured-images/2020-arctic-air-temperatures-continue-long-term-warming-streak>

CLIMATE CHANGE: THE EU IS READY TO ASSUME ITS GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

12/08/2021 – *Blog – Extreme weather events around the globe and the IPCC report published in August 2021 underline how much climate change threatens humankind. The new climate law and the ‘Fit for 55’ package proposed by the European Commission, have made the EU ready to assume its responsibilities ahead of COP26 in Glasgow.*

Just in the last weeks, the tragic toll from the severe floods in Germany and Belgium, the persistent wildfires in Greece and Turkey or at the West Coast of North America are just some stark reminders of how serious is the threat that we are facing. And [the new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report \(144\)](#) published last Monday demonstrates the absolute urgency to cut greenhouse gas emissions steeply. With its major geopolitical implications, climate change is the single, most threatening security issue ever in human history: ‘the alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable. It is a code red for humanity’ as UN secretary general Guterres put it.

The coming decade will be decisive

The coming decade will indeed be decisive for keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius, as required by the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾. ‘It’s not too late to stem the tide and prevent runaway climate change, but only if we act decisively now and all act together’, summarised my colleague EC Vice President Frans Timmermans in charge of EU climate policy. It is therefore essential that all countries strengthen their commitments and increase their efforts before the [COP26 climate summit in Glasgow next November](#) ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾.

Over the last thirty years, the EU has been at the frontline of the global fight against climate change. An engagement, which is our duty: as one of the most economically developed areas in the world, we are among those who emit and

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ See <https://www.ipcc.ch/reports/>

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ See <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ See <https://ukcop26.org/>

have emitted in the past the most greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.

“ *Our engagement is a duty: as one of the most economically developed areas in the world, we are among those who emit and have emitted in the past the most greenhouse gases responsible for climate change.*”

Against the backdrop of the accelerating climate crisis and to push others to take their full responsibilities ahead of COP26, the EU has adopted last June [a new Climate Law](#) ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾. It makes climate neutrality by mid-century a legally binding commitment, and raises EU's greenhouse gas emission reduction target from previously 40 % to at least 55 % in 2030, compared to 1990. It will be a tough task: by 2019, the EU's greenhouse gas emissions had fallen by 24 % since 1990. This means that we need to reduce our emissions in the 2020s alone more than we have done in the previous 30 years.

Last year, we have seen the return of the US to the Paris Agreement and a number of major economies committing to a net zero emission pathways. Around 60 % of the world's emissions are now subject to an upgraded climate target for 2030. Not just the EU and the US are raising the bar, but also [China](#) ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾, Russia and others recognise that ‘more must be done’. The challenge is now to make sure at the Glasgow summit that all major economies take ambitious enough, measurable and verifiable 2030 targets and climate neutrality commitments.

Target setting is the easier part

However, target setting is the easier part. Implementation is the harder and decisive part. The EU is now also walking the talk with the [‘Fit for 55’ package](#) ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾, a set of thirteen legislative proposals to deliver the emission cuts aimed for, that the European Commission has put forward last July. Given that we represent only 8 % of global emissions, the EU wishes to assume leadership by example, with policy proposals able to inspire others to become equally ambitious and undertake similar structural economic transformation as embodied in our green deal.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/28/council-adopts-european-climate-law/>

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87431/china-carbon-neutrality-2060-possible-game-changer-climate_en

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3541



Three core ideas

At the root of the package lie three core ideas. First, the need to make the necessary emissions cuts in the most cost-effective way. Efforts will be asked from basically all sectors of the economy, be it through carbon prices, stricter regulations or higher targets for energy efficiency or the share of renewables in energy. Second, climate action is an engine of innovation and jobs creation, with decarbonisation as a major plank of our industrial policy. Third, energy transition should be fair, ensuring that the most vulnerable people and actors get the necessary help to adjust to the radical changes underway in transport, housing or employment.

“The Fit for 55 package is key for Europe future, but it also has wide-ranging global implications. Therefore, compliance with international trade and environmental rules has been a central concern in their design.”

The Fit for 55 package is key for Europe future, but it also has wide-ranging global implications. Therefore, compliance with international trade and environmental rules has been a central concern in their design. One of the proposals that could potentially affect most our partners is the introduction of a [Carbon Border](#)

Adjustment Mechanism ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ (CBAM). Its aim is to avoid so called ‘carbon leakage’, resulting from the relocation of production outside of the EU to countries with less stringent climate rules. This would cost the EU jobs without reducing global emissions. CBAM does so by putting a carbon price, reflecting their carbon content, on imports of a limited number of high-polluting goods, in the same way as these goods produced in the EU are subject to a carbon price through the EU’s emission trading system.

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) does not target particular countries

The CBAM does not target particular countries, but specific goods. It conveys a policy signal to our partner countries to introduce carbon pricing at home and for foreign producers to lower the carbon contents of the products they export to the EU. The best outcome would be that the CBAM induces effective carbon pricing mechanisms around the world. There are already encouraging signs from third countries, like Canada, and Japan, who may follow our ambition to introduce a CBAM. There is also growing interest in the US for exploring the possibility of a carbon border levy. And China has just started its own emission trading scheme covering the power sector.

Candidate countries, potential candidates, as well as many of our partners in the neighbourhood are committed in implementing a large portion of the EU climate and energy acquis and in participating to the EU Emission Trading System ⁽¹⁵¹⁾ or implementing mechanisms equivalent to the EU ETS. If this level of compliance with the EU rules is achieved, they will be exempted from CBAM.

Fit for 55, the maritime sector and airlines

Fit for 55 proposals also subject the international maritime sector to the EU’s carbon pricing system, ask greater efforts from airlines operating in Europe, and impose gradually more demanding sustainable fuel requirements on international aviation and shipping. These proposals stem from the realisation that while climate change is a global responsibility, we cannot afford to wait for an agreement at a multilateral level if we are to meet our goal of cutting transport emissions drastically by 2050.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_3661

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en

“As the world’s largest provider of climate finance, the EU will of course continue to support low- and middle-income countries that are mostly in need in the transition to net zero emissions.”

We will continue our dialogue with our partners on the fit for 55 package, as well as engaging with them on their own ideas for climate action. As the world’s largest provider of climate finance, the EU will of course continue also to support low- and middle-income countries that are mostly in need in the transition to net zero emissions through technical assistance, technology transfer, extensive capacity building and financial support.

Together with our member states and our financial institutions, working as Team Europe, we have been so far the greatest donor to the \$100 billion global [Green Climate Fund](#) ⁽¹⁵²⁾ under construction. This effort will increase in the future with [the new Global Europe NDICI fund](#) ⁽¹⁵³⁾ which earmarks 30 % of its resources for climate mitigation or adaptation purposes.

The EU can be counted on to do its fair share

With data technology, climate change is the most decisive issue of our time. As I wrote earlier with Frans Timmermans ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾: [science tells us that we must embark on the green transition NOW, economics teaches us that we should, and technology shows us that we can](#). A just transition to a decarbonised world is also key to limit geopolitical tensions between countries: as asked by the European Council ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾, [climate diplomacy is and will remain at the heart of EU’s foreign policy](#). With the new climate law and the Fit for 55 package, we show that, in the necessary global effort, the EU can be counted on to do its fair share.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ See <https://www.greenclimate.fund/>

⁽¹⁵³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/09/ndici-global-europe-final-green-light-for-the-new-financial-instrument-to-support-the-eu-s-external-action/>

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ See p. 174.

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/25/council-adopts-conclusions-on-climate-and-energy-diplomacy/>

ENERGY PRICES, THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND EU FOREIGN POLICY

14/10/2021 – Blog – *At the end of 2021, the EU has been facing exceptional energy prices hikes. This crisis was due to a variety of reasons, but all pointing to the need to accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal. We also need to improve our energy security. Both issues are key for EU foreign and security policy.*

The current energy price rises are due to a combination of factors, but mostly to high demand for natural gas on the world markets in connection with a quite strong economic recovery. The European and Asian markets (primarily China, Japan, Thailand, South Korea) are linked, as gas suppliers are the same. China has become the largest importer of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) with an increase of 20 % in 2021. This is a global development, affecting many countries, regardless of their location or market arrangements.

A probably transitory shock

There are good reasons to consider this shock as probably transitory, but it nevertheless raises important issues for the EU, internally and externally. Europe needs to act: the current situation risks creating real energy poverty, destabilising governments, derailing the economic recovery and undermining the political and social support to the green transition in member states. It also risks increasing our vulnerability in our relations with third countries.

“Europe needs to act: the current situation risks creating real energy poverty, destabilising governments, derailing the economic recovery and undermining the support to the green transition in member states.”

To address the rising energy prices, the European Commission [presented yesterday a Joint Communication](#) ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾. The EU has tools that the member states can use to address rising prices in the short term: for instance by reducing Value Added Tax rate and/or other taxes on energy, by adopting targeted measures to support poor

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5204

and vulnerable consumers, or through other temporary measures to support households and small businesses. As stated by the Joint Communication, all these steps can be taken in line with the EU rules. These measures mitigate the impact of the rising prices by distributing the cost to all taxpayers but do not address the root causes. We may also need to revise the rules governing our electricity and gas markets; however, this can only be a medium-term task. With current EU regulations, the price of gas determines indeed the price of electricity and we have to analyse if the current model is the best possible to achieve the goals of the Green Deal and those of the EU's geopolitical agenda.

A greater external dependency on fossil fuels than other regions

Higher energy prices raise major issues for EU foreign and security policy. Our external dependency on fossil fuels is greater than for the vast majority of other regions in the world because we have been the first to industrialise and have hence depleted most fossil fuel resources on our territory. In 2019, according to Eurostat, the EU27's external dependency ratio was 70 % for hard coal, 90 % for natural gas and 97 % for crude oil. This external dependency is increasing year by year. In the same year, according to Eurostat, we imported €363 billion worth of fossil fuels, 2.6 % of our GDP or the equivalent of the cost of more than 9 million European jobs.

In addition to mitigating climate change, this strong external dependency on fossil fuels is an important reason why we need to decarbonise our economy as quickly as possible. The direction is clear, but we need to accelerate. This is the purpose of the European Green Deal and the ambitious goal that we have set last April by committing ourselves legally to become carbon neutral by 2050 and to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 55 % in 2030. Last July, the European Commission also presented [the Fit for 55 legislative package](#), to further adapt our rules and toolbox to fulfil our commitments.

“*In addition to mitigating climate change, our strong external dependency on fossil fuels is an important reason why we need to decarbonise our economy as quickly as possible.*”

The energy transition will for sure be accompanied by a rise in the price of fossil fuels. However, this increase must be gradual and controlled to give all stakeholders time to adapt in an orderly manner. Short-term price shocks risk endangering this process by damaging the economy and weakening the social consensus and support for measures to fight climate change and for the green transition towards

a more sustainable future. To limit the various risks linked to energy price shocks, we need to better ensure the EU's energy security. This implies that we act proactively to diversify our own sources, suppliers and routes, assist other countries to accelerate their own energy transition and help stabilise our international environment, particularly in our wider neighbourhood.

We need to diversify our sources, suppliers and routes

Energy security is an important reason why Europeans should intensify efforts to contribute to the stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, which has great energy potential, including renewables, and in the [Gulf region](#) ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾, for example through the Iran nuclear deal/JCPOA or by [helping Iraq to stabilise](#) ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ and develop again. Gulf countries remain heavily dependent on oil and gas exports. However, they have understood that they too need to transition to renewable energy. We can help them in this transition as well as cooperate on mitigation and adaptation measures to tackle water security issues. They also need to stay reliable suppliers today if they want to be considered as potential reliable suppliers in the future, for example of green hydrogen.

Energy security is also relevant when we help stabilise the Sahel region and countries like Libya or Mozambique and prevent terrorism from spill over on the African continent. This is also a reason why we need to be [a global maritime security provider](#) ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾, as we already are with [EUNAVFOR Atalanta](#) ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ to help fight the Somali-based piracy at sea off the Horn of Africa or with our new Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept off the coast of West Africa.

“Energy issues are one important reason why the EU needs to become more cohesive in its relation with Russia and preserve the unity of purpose among its member states.”

Last but not least, our energy dependency is one of the key issues in our relations with Russia. Russia is meeting its contractual obligations on gas deliveries, but is not putting additional gas into the European system as it could do, hence contributing to drive prices upward. [As I said before](#) ⁽¹⁶¹⁾ on this blog, ‘we share a

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ See p. 412.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ See p. 407.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ See p. 126.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ See <https://eunavfor.eu>

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ See p. 281.

continent with Russia and it remains a vital actor on numerous fronts. We therefore have no alternative but to develop a principled, balanced and strategic approach.' The EU is dependent on Russia for fossil fuel imports, but the Russian economy and state also need the revenues of our energy imports. Energy issues are one important reason why the EU needs to become more cohesive in its relation with Russia and preserve the unity of purpose among its member states. This has not always been the case in the past and to face this crisis we need to make progress in this direction.

Europe has to act more united on the global stage

In sum, the current rise of energy prices is another example why Europe has to act more united on the global stage and in relations with our neighbours: in isolation, none of us can really address this issue. We need to act collectively as a Team Europe as we have successfully done with our external partners in the COVID-19 crisis or by purchasing together vaccines. An important tool could be to prioritise energy dialogues with key suppliers. I am ready to go down this road.

“ This crisis calls for better coordinated and more coherent global energy governance to ensure both fully functioning global markets and affordable energy throughout the green transition for everyone in the world.”

This crisis calls for better coordinated, more inclusive and coherent global energy governance to ensure both fully functioning global markets and affordable energy throughout the green transition for everyone in the world. We should put this issue on the table in international fora like the International Energy Agency and the G20. In 2008, when the oil prices were very high, we called for an international conference of suppliers and buyers. We could make a similar proposal concerning gas: the global gas market has no obvious home like OPEC for oil. Enhanced international coordination will not reduce the gas prices automatically, but the world acting visibly together could help calm down speculative markets. We will develop our medium-term proposals in the new International Energy Strategy that the European Commission will present in the spring 2022.



Stabilising our energy supplies is not the only issue we have to face. We also need to avoid that the current tensions on the energy market worsens the environmental degradation caused by the exploitation of fossil fuels. It is particularly important [in the Arctic region](#) ⁽¹⁶²⁾ (we have released today also [our new EU Arctic Strategy](#) ⁽¹⁶³⁾) but also in the Mediterranean which is already one of the most polluted and threatened seas in the world.

Decarbonising our economies, a key task for the EU and humanity

Decarbonising our economies is a key task for the EU and humanity. It will be the defining challenge of the 21st century, a make or break for the future of humankind. Globally, the main issue will be to provide adequate energy to all the population that today consumes very limited or no energy at all while fighting climate change. In 2019, 759 million people still lived without electricity. This delicate process must be fine-tuned to avoid also short-terms shocks with brutal price hikes that could derail the entire energy transition in the EU. We can achieve this by using various tools, such as those put forward by the European Commission yesterday. Our foreign and security policy can also contribute to both long and short terms goals.

⁽¹⁶²⁾ See p. 170.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5214

GLASGOW: THE DECISIVE ROLE OF EU CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

01/11/2021 – Blog – *In November 2021, the COP26 UN climate summit took place in Glasgow. Ahead of this summit, I insisted in this blog post on the fact that the necessary acceleration of the green transition has major geopolitical dimensions. Despite tensions among world powers, the EU need to rally the whole world to act now.*

The fight against climate change is a global issue. We Europeans are currently only responsible for 8 % of global emissions, so to succeed we need to work together, above all with the biggest emitters (China, the US, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, Canada and others). As noted in a recent [ECFR report](#) ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾, we need a ‘climate of cooperation’, with the EU helping to ‘deliver a green grand bargain’.

We must accelerate the green transition

To fight climate change, we must accelerate the green transition, shifting away from hydrocarbon sources of energy and this transition will also have major geopolitical consequences. For years, we have seen attempts by oil and gas producers to use their exports as a weapon in international relations. The latest example is Moldova, where Russia tried to link negotiations for a new contract of gas supplies to political considerations, such as Moldova’s choice to strengthen relations with the EU. We have also witnessed the phenomenon of the so-called ‘oil curse’, meaning that countries that are rich in hydrocarbon resources are often struggling with problems of governance, instability and an undiversified economic structure.

The green transition will redistribute the cards and could help solve some of these problems. However, it will also know winners and losers. It could create new dependencies on technologies and raw materials needed for renewables and

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ See <https://ecfr.eu/publication/climate-of-cooperation-how-the-eu-can-help-deliver-a-green-grand-bargain/>

adaptive technological developments. We need to manage the transition in an intelligent manner, being alert to [geopolitical stakes and dynamics](#) ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾.

Nearly thirty years after the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 we have to recognise that, despite our constantly repeated solemn declarations, we have failed to act decisively enough. Nearly 80 % of energy used worldwide is still produced with fossil fuels and the science tells us we are far off track to reach the climate targets of the Paris Agreement. The [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change reported](#) ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ last week that we are on course for 2.7°C of global warming by the end of this century.

“COP26 is probably our ‘last best chance’ to keep the goals of the Paris Agreement in reach and global warming as close to 1.5°C as possible.”

This would mean devastating consequences for the planet and our lives, in terms of droughts, sea level rise, storms, bio-diversity loss and more. This would have serious socio-economic and geopolitical repercussions, including in security terms and especially for those countries least able to cope. In this context, the UN climate summit COP26 is probably our ‘last best chance’ to keep the [goals of the Paris Agreement](#) ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ in reach and global warming close to 1.5°C.

A huge global investment

The green transition needs a huge global investment effort. As Jean Pisani-Ferry rightly [noted recently](#) ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾, private investors and entrepreneurs seem ready to invest massively in the green transition. However, they need a credible, stable and favourable policy framework established by the international community and national governments. That is not the case now. This uncertainty has negative consequences: investors and multilaterals lenders like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the World Bank are turning their back on fossil fuels, but investments in green technologies are [still far lower than what is necessary](#) ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. With the consequences we are witnessing actually.

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ See p. 174.

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ See <https://unfccc.int/news/updated-ndc-synthesis-report-worrying-trends-confirmed>

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ See <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ See https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/10/16/jean-pisani-ferry-le-vieux-monde-de-l-energie-se-meurt-le-nouveau-tarde-a-apparaître_6098599_3232.html

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ See https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/economic_investment_report_2020_chaptero8_en.pdf



“ Private investors and entrepreneurs seem ready to invest massively in the green transition. However, they need a credible, stable and favourable policy framework. That is not the case now”

As EU, we are still far too dependent on fossil fuels coming from abroad and the [current crisis of high energy prices](#) ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ show how problematic this is. So, the rationale for the green transition in Europe is not only climate-related: it is also about enhancing our strategic autonomy, preserving the purchasing power of our citizens and creating competitive advantages for Europe.

Ahead of Glasgow, the EU has made its homework. With the [European Green Deal](#) ⁽¹⁷¹⁾ we are accelerating our actions. The European Climate Law has set the legally binding goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and member states are committed to a minimum 55 % emissions cut by 2030. With the [Fit for 55 package](#) ⁽¹⁷²⁾, the EU is working on the necessary concrete measures to achieve these targets. It will not be easy. To name just two important elements: the digitalisation of the economy has a significant impact on our energy consumption

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ See p. 183.

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

⁽¹⁷²⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3541

and the decarbonisation of our economy will have important redistributive effects in terms of employment and revenues. We must find effective ways to cushion them.

The question of climate finance will be decisive

The question of climate finance will be decisive for the global success of the Paris Agreement process. The financial and human costs of climate change are growing and, as usual, they will hit developing countries hardest. The status quo is unsustainable while the green transition is also an economic opportunity. Investment in green technologies can be a key driver of a global recovery from the pandemic and provide hundreds of millions of good, safe, sustainable jobs worldwide. Developed countries have many problems to solve, but if they are not able to support developing and emerging countries to adapt to climate change and make their green transition, the global fight against climate change will fail. Together the [EU, its member states and the EIB are the biggest contributor to developing countries](#) ⁽⁷³⁾, with €21 billion (about \$25 billion) of the \$100 billion yearly Green Fund promised by developed countries. In September, European Commission President von der Leyen announced a further €4 billion by 2027 in her last [State of the Union speech](#) ⁽⁷⁴⁾. In that matter, we have concrete cooperation projects with developing countries in the making that we will announce during the coming days.

“ In Glasgow, the EU will focus principally on mobilising others to act. The European Green Deal is our ‘calling card’ and our invitation to others to match our ambition.”

In Glasgow, the EU will focus on mobilising others to act. The European Green Deal is our ‘calling card’ and our invitation to others to match our ambitions. Our outreach has contributed to persuading several major emitters to step up their climate action by committing themselves to mid-century climate neutrality targets after the EU took the lead in December 2019. One week after President von der Leyen called on the US to increase their climate finance contribution, President Biden did so at the UN General Assembly; after our continued engagement with China, President Xi announced the end of overseas coal

⁽⁷³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/international-action-climate-change/international-climate-finance_en

⁽⁷⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/state-union-addresses/state-union-2021_en

financing; a week after our High Level Climate Dialogue, Turkey proposed to ratify the Paris Agreement, etc. As next step, President Von der Leyen and US President Biden will launch the [Global Methane Pledge](#) ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ in Glasgow to reduce methane emissions, a gas that creates much more greenhouse effect than CO₂.

“*Beyond the Glasgow summit, lasting success in the fight against climate change will depend on the ability of the world’s major powers to find ways to cooperate even if geo-political tensions run high.*”

Beyond this summit, lasting success in the fight against climate change will depend on the ability of the world’s major powers to find ways to cooperate even if geopolitical tensions and ideological disagreements run high. Through its climate diplomacy, the EU has played since thirty years an important role to make the necessary global cooperation possible. In the tense international context, it will have to play more and more this role in the future. At heart, climate action is a global public good: it can only be produced if all major actors play their part. It is a test case for the multilateral system. Given the dramatic stakes for humankind, it is a test we cannot afford to fail.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_21_5206

5.

FOR A RULES- AND VALUES-
BASED WORLD ORDER



TAKING ACTION TO PROTECT OUR ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

25/01/2021– Blog – In January 2021, the European Commission adopted a new strategy to strengthen the international role of the euro and increase our resilience to extraterritorial unilateral sanctions. In this blog post, I wanted to underline that the fields of finance and economics are increasingly used as tools in international competition. We need to enhance EU's strategic autonomy in these areas.

On 19 January, we approved in the College [a new strategy](#) ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾, prepared by my colleague European Commission VP in charge of the economy Dombrovskis in close cooperation with the European External Action Service, on what is often referred to as 'economic sovereignty'. This strategy is central for our broader common foreign and security policy.

We have discussed a lot about "strategic autonomy". We need to act now

In today's increasingly competitive world, not only do the classic tools of power play a role, but soft power itself is increasingly used as a weapon: trade, technology, data, information are now instruments of political competition. We have discussed a lot in recent months about the 'strategic autonomy' of the EU. I have already stressed that we need to act now on this subject, especially in economic matters.

To achieve this goal, the EC intend to strengthen the international role of the euro, develop further the EU's financial infrastructure, increase their resilience to the extraterritorial application of unilateral foreign sanctions and promote the uniform enforcement of EU sanctions.

We have measured the importance of this issue in particular with the JCPOA, the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme: it is one of the major achievements of European diplomacy, but its implementation has been called into question by the withdrawal of the United States and the unilateral sanctions decided by the Trump

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_108

administration. In recent years, we have not been able to protect the legitimate trade relations between European companies and Iran.

Strengthening the international role of the euro

To increase EU's strategic autonomy, an excessive dependence on the dollar is one of our weaknesses. Such a dependence entails economic risks and additional costs for European players, associated with the euro/dollar exchange rate, difficulties for private or public actors to raise money on European financial markets due to a lack of interested investors and important political risks related to potential unilateral decisions by foreign actors.

Therefore, the EU should foster a greater use of the euro in international transactions. Currently the euro is the second most used currency internationally. As the chart below shows, the euro gained rapidly ground as a currency of international use (i.e. used by non-EU residents) in its early years. However, since the 2008/09 recession, the trend had been reversed and the euro lost weight as a global currency.

Although the US was the epicentre of the global 2008/09 financial crisis, US Treasury securities maintained their primacy as so called 'safe-haven assets', financial instruments expected to retain value during economic downturns. From 2010 onwards, the sovereign debt crisis in the euro area highlighted weaknesses in its architecture and made a dent in its international use. A lot has been done to fix underlying problems after this crisis. However, we need to continue to make improvements, notably by completing the Banking Union and by making progress on the Capital Markets Union.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our vulnerabilities

In the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has again highlighted some vulnerabilities of the European Union, but has also revealed its strengths. The quick and bold reaction of the European Central Bank in terms of easing monetary policy and of the member states on the budgetary side, as well as the new [Next Generation EU \(NGEU\) recovery fund](#) ⁽⁷⁷⁾ have strengthened confidence in the EU and the euro. These reactions sent a clear signal to the markets and potential international users

⁽⁷⁷⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

of our currency: EU leaders have now powerful instruments to protect social and economic stability and are ready to use them.

“*The quick and bold reaction to the COVID-19 crisis of the ECB and of the member states, as well as the [Next Generation EU \(NGEU\) recovery fund](#) have strengthened confidence in the euro.*”

Also, the euro debt market has a great potential. The success of the financing of the [SURE programme](#) ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ has highlighted the high credit quality of the Union and the massive appetite of international investors for euro-denominated safe assets. The EU bonds under the NGEU recovery fund will add significant depth and liquidity to the EU's capital markets and make the euro even more attractive for investors.

In addition, the green transition opens up a big opportunity in that respect. [Through in particular the European Investment Bank](#) ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾, the EU has been a pioneer in the green bond market and almost half of global green bond issues have been denominated in euro in 2019. This percentage should be boosted also by the NGEU recovery fund: at least 30 % of the investments should be financed by green bonds. The [EU is also working on a EU Green Bond Standard](#) ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ to further consolidate this market.

“*The green transition opens up a big opportunity for the international use of the euro: almost half of global green bond issues have been denominated in euro in 2019.*”

Another way to strengthen the global role of the euro is to promote its use in certain markets. Important progress has been made for instance in the gas market: ‘*For natural gas contracts, we have seen the euro denominated share rise from 38 % to 64 % between 2010 and 2018*’ ⁽¹⁸¹⁾, pointed out my colleague, Commissioner for Energy Simson. In 2022, the Commission will revise the Benchmarks Regulation to facilitate the creation of euro-denominated indices covering key sectors of the economy, including emerging markets such as hydrogen. This should help to boost the use of the euro in financial markets.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure_en

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ See <https://www.eib.org/en/investor-relations/disclaimer.htm>

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/european-green-bond-standard_en

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_108

The Commission intends to organise outreach activities with public and private market participants, especially outside the EU, to promote investment in euro-denominated bonds and the use of the euro in general. To this end, the European External Action Service and the EU Delegations will have an important role to play.

Protect the EU's financial infrastructure from foreign interferences

To enhance its economic sovereignty, the EU also needs to protect from foreign interferences the financial infrastructures based in Europe, such as the [SWIFT payment network](#) ⁽¹⁸²⁾ (based in Belgium), which transmit money transfer instructions, or Euroclear (in Belgium) and Clearstream (based in Luxembourg), [the clearing houses](#) ⁽¹⁸³⁾ which take on counterparty risk between sellers and buyers of securities, guaranteeing that the transactions can be completed. The sanctions decided by the Trump administration following its abandonment of the nuclear treaty with Iran had a major impact on them.

“ We must prevent that a third country can force our financial systems to apply its unilaterally adopted sanctions.”

It is essential for the EU to maintain the global reach of these mechanisms, while better safeguarding the EU's strategic autonomy. We must prevent that a third country can force these systems to apply its unilaterally adopted sanctions. To this end, the Commission, together with the ECB and other European supervisory authorities, will identify tools to counteract the effects of such illegal measures.

Our tools are not very efficient for the time being

For instance, with [INSTEX \(Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges\)](#) ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ our member states have developed since 2019 a European instrument for facilitating legitimate trade payments between the EU and Iran. I dedicated quite a lot of my times last year to work on it, however, its effectiveness has remained limited until now. In order to ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential financial services

⁽¹⁸²⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/consumer-finance-and-payments/payment-services/payment-services_en

⁽¹⁸³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/10/15/capital-markets-union-council-adopts-new-clearing-house-rules/>

⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ See <https://instex-europe.com/about-us/>

between the EU and its legitimate trading partners, we will explore ways to improve rapidly INSTEX.

Since 1996, we have also at our disposal the so-called [Blocking Statute](#) ⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ to counter third country sanctions and other extraterritorial measures against European companies and individuals. We tried also to use it last year, however, we must recognise that this tool has not been very effective until now. We will consider additional policies to address these practices, including a reform of this statute.

“*When a foreign company seeks to take control of an EU company, consideration will be given to the fact that this could make the European company subject to extraterritorial sanctions.*”

We now have at our disposal the new ‘[screening](#)’ [mechanism](#) ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾, [which assesses the impact of Foreign Direct Investment in the EU](#) on security and public order. When a foreign company seeks to take control of an EU company, consideration will be given to the fact that this could make the European company subject to extraterritorial sanctions. It could therefore jeopardise its ability to maintain critical EU infrastructure or ensure continuity of supply of essential inputs.

Finally, we need also to strengthen our international cooperation on sanctions and extraterritoriality, in particular with the G-7 countries. The start of Joe Biden’s Presidency could be an opportunity to open up a new chapter on this file and I intend to put my full weight in this direction.

Renowned economists like Larry Summers, former Secretary of the Treasury in the US administration ⁽¹⁸⁷⁾, or Maurice Obstfeld, former chief economist of the IMF, [have recommended stopping exploiting the dominance](#) of the dollar as a tool for sanctioning, except in cases of very broad multilateral consensus. As many economists and observers have pointed out that although in the short term the primacy of the dollar as an international currency is not directly at stake, the abuse of this practice could be an important threat to the US currency’s international role in the long term.

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/international-relations/blocking-statute_en

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1867

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ See <https://www.pjie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/memo-biden-administration-priorities-us-treasury>



To improve EU's 'strategic autonomy', the monetary and financial field has become an important area for action. With the euro, we have a powerful tool at our disposal to enhance our economic sovereignty if we are able to use it wisely and effectively. It has to become an integral part of our global foreign and security policy.

BUILDING MULTILATERALISM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

17/02/2021 – Blog – Why do we need to invest in multilateralism?
Because it works. In February 2021, the European Commission and me, as High Representative, have issued a Joint Communication defining what the EU can do to strengthen and modernise the global system of rules and institutions on which we all depend.

We live in a world that is increasingly multipolar and less and less multilateral. But, what is multilateralism? Multilateralism is essentially a set of rules and methods that international actors (states, companies, civil society) agree to follow and implement on the basis of shared principles that are binding on all. Whether you are strong or weak, the rules are, at least in principle, binding on all. Multilateralism reflects a preference for norms over force. And it is in this that it speaks a great deal to Europe.

Support the rules-based international order

But to support this rules-based international ‘system’ is not just an article of faith for the EU. It stems from the factual observation that multilateralism has coincided with the longest period of global peace, stability and human development. The multilateral system has been a global public good benefitting all countries, including the EU. We do not want to live in a world of ‘might makes right’, but one where strong institutions, agreed rules and international law ‘tame the savageness of man’ and form the basis for global cooperation.

“ We see a gridlocked UN Security Council, a contested WHO and WTO and few outcomes in the G20. But as EU, we want and indeed need all these organisations to succeed.”

In recent years, this vision has been challenged, because of great power rivalry, competitive nationalism and populism. In the main multilateral organisations, we see a lot of vetoes and national point scoring instead of a search for common ground. The results are a gridlocked UN Security Council, a contested WHO and

WTO and few outcomes in the G20. But as EU, we want and indeed need all these organisations to succeed.

The timing for this erosion of multilateralism is particularly bad. Right now, the world is facing two overriding challenges that cry out for collaborative, multilateral approaches: to end the pandemic and address the climate crisis. But, supply has not kept up with demand. Fortunately, the start of the Biden administration has indicated a welcome shift in tone and substance, but it should not reduce the imperative for the EU to set out what we can do to ‘make multilateralism fit for purpose’.

[The twin horizontal priorities for the EU’s foreign policy](#) ⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ in 2021 are to develop our strategic autonomy, of which we have spoken a [lot](#) ⁽¹⁸⁹⁾, and to revitalise multilateralism. These are sometimes and mistakenly seen as conflicting priorities. However, they are actually flip sides of the same coin: we want to operate multilaterally whenever we can and autonomously only when we must. This is the political backdrop for the unveiling of a new proposal, what we call a [Joint Communication](#) ⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ [by the European Commission and me as High Representative](#), on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism.

“ We will work to uphold what works, reform what needs to change and extend global governance to new areas.”

When discussing multilateralism, the diagnosis is the easy part. There is widespread agreement on the nature of the problem. Equally, just repeating the mantra, calling for multilateralism and preaching support is quite easy. The real question is what treatment to prescribe and, more specifically, what we as EU can and should do. Our answer is that we want to leverage the EU’s collective strength, deepen partnerships and alliances and strengthen consistency between EU internal and external policies. Overall, we will work to uphold what works, reform what needs to change and extend global governance to new areas.

⁽¹⁸⁸⁾ See p. 29.

⁽¹⁸⁹⁾ See p. 24.

⁽¹⁹⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/en_strategy_on_strengthening_the_eus_contribution_to_rules-based_multilateralism.pdf



The pandemic, the most pressing challenge on the agenda

The Joint Communication lists many areas where the EU wants to do more, differently and better. Let me focus here on a few key ‘clusters’. First, the pandemic is still the most pressing challenge on the agenda. It may sound like a cliché, but it remains true that a global crisis demands global cooperation. This also applies to the issue that now tops everybody’s agenda: the roll out of vaccines. We need the whole world vaccinated and not just ourselves and our neighbours. And we must vaccinate faster than the virus mutates, as new strains of the virus can spread among unprotected populations and mutate further. This is why the EU is supporting the WHO’s work, including by being the biggest donor to the [COVAX facility and building on our Team Europe](#) ⁽¹⁹¹⁾ effort to support partners’ capacities to handle the health crisis. We are also keen to strengthen the WHO, giving it the authority, tools and resources it needs to succeed in handling this and future pandemics.

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76341/coronavirus-latest-updates-eeas_en

Beyond the health crisis, we must stay fully mobilised to ‘build forward better’. We are determined to work for a more sustainable and inclusive economic model: more respectful of nature and the ecological boundaries and without growing inequalities within and between countries. This post-pandemic recovery must be transformative. To do so, we count on all G20 countries to implement debt relief and work on new resources for development finance.

“ *On the climate crisis, everyone must do more on all fronts: mitigation, climate finance, technology, bringing together governments, industry, scientists and others. It is a giant test for ‘multilateralism 2.0’.*”

Second, climate change remains an existential threat to the entire world. The scientific consensus is clear and the warning signs are obvious. The Paris Agreement remains a great example of successful multilateralism, but collectively we are not doing nearly enough to achieve its goal of keeping the global temperature rise to below 1.5-2 degrees. So we need a step change ahead of the COP26 Glasgow Summit to a net zero pathway for all major emitters. This in turn requires everyone to do more on all fronts: mitigation, climate finance, technology, bringing together governments, industry, scientists and others. It is a giant test for ‘[multilateralism 2.0](#)’⁽¹⁹²⁾.

Digital technologies based on human rights and the rule of law

A third area where we need new and effective multilateral solutions is the digital world. It is a vital domain where technological change has outpaced our capacity to define and implement common rules. There are competing models at play and a battle of standards is underway, with fundamentally different assumptions about digital rights and freedoms and about who owns whose data. As EU, we want to develop digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, in a human-centric way, based on human rights and the rule of law. The key point here is not to focus on EU-only solutions, but on working with partners to set ambitious standards and rules. This agenda should also include joint work on digital taxation, data protection and privacy, disinformation, 5G, internet governance, cybersecurity, digital finance including payments and cryptocurrencies, and e-government where current rules are insufficient.

⁽¹⁹²⁾ See <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/multilateralism-2-0-the-transformation-of-international-relations.html>

Peace and security

The fourth and final cluster I want to mention is peace and security. Whether it is the Iran nuclear deal, UN peacekeeping, joint efforts to strengthen maritime security, or combat non-proliferation and terrorism, we must push for output-focussed multilateral cooperation in the UN and other appropriate organisations. Whenever feasible, we should be ready to shoulder greater responsibilities to make security multilateralism work and build a more stable and peaceful world.

There are many proposals in the Joint Communication on how we can achieve our multilateral goals, including by adapting to the more transactional global context. We must be firm in our principles yet agile in how we apply them. But if there is one scarlet thread, it is the notion of strengthening partnerships, for we know that we cannot be multilateralist alone. This begins by supporting the UN and the reforms that Secretary General Guterres is pursuing. It extends to reinforcing values-based partnerships with the more like-minded and issue-based coalitions with the less like-minded to promote global goods like action on climate change, biodiversity and health.

Working with regional organisations

And it very much includes working with regional organisations, those close to home, like the Council of Europe and the OSCE, as well as the African Union (AU), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Regional organisations are key building blocks in a world where reaching consensus among 193 countries is proving exceedingly difficult. We need to strengthen their role, including inside the UN system. To that end, we are proposing regular annual meetings of the heads of these regional organisations.

A more multipolar and unequal world needs agreed rules and strong institutions. The point of this paper is to put the spotlight on our multilateral commitments. To keep up the pressure, including on ourselves, to follow up and deliver. In short, to act. And this what we intend to do, with EU member states and our partners.

WHY EUROPE'S DIGITAL DECADE MATTERS

10/03/2021 – Op Ed – *In March 2021, the European Commission presented its vision for a European ‘digital decade.’ With my colleague EC Vice President Margrethe Vestager, we explained in this Op Ed EU’s policy targets for 2030 focusing on their geopolitical implications.*

To ensure that technology empowers citizens and businesses to build a more prosperous and inclusive society, we will need open and competitive markets. Enterprises of all sizes must have an equal opportunity to innovate and deliver their products and services to consumers.

Digitalisation, the key to economic and societal resilience

More broadly, digitalisation is now the key to building economic and societal resilience and exercising global influence. Our shared future is already taking shape in the digital domain. In a world marked by geopolitical competition for technological primacy, we must ensure that the EU’s vision of digitalisation – based on open societies, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms – proves its worth over that of authoritarian systems that use digital technologies as tools for surveillance and repression.

By boosting its own capabilities, the EU can help shape the world’s digital transformation for the better. The success of Europe’s digital decade will require the EU to forge strong alliances and working relationships with likeminded countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally. After all, reaping the full benefits of technological innovation requires maintaining an open digital economy in which investments can flow freely. And whether we are deploying digital health solutions, fighting terrorism, mitigating climate change, protecting biodiversity, or using technology to predict natural disasters and future pandemics, we will need much more international technological collaboration.

But digitalisation carries serious risks, ranging from mass surveillance and cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure to the spread of state-sponsored disinformation designed to polarise societies and undermine democracy. This means we must strike a balance between openness and our other core interests and values.

“Digitalisation carries serious risks, ranging from mass surveillance and cyber-attacks to the spread of state-sponsored disinformation. We must strike a balance between openness and our other core interests and values.”

Specifically, we should adhere to three overarching principles: a level playing field in digital markets, security in cyberspace, and freedom online (including protections for free speech and assembly, and against discrimination and violations of privacy).

In keeping with our determination to strengthen the EU's bilateral relationships, set clearer standards, and establish more resilient digital supply chains, we have already approached US President Joe Biden's administration with a proposal to create a joint Trade and Technology Council.

A global coalition around a human-centric digitalisation

The EU is also seeking to form a global coalition around a shared vision of human-centric digitalisation. We must join with others who are willing to cooperate to provide effective democratic governance over technology and the digital economy. Any such coalition should be open to all who are ready to defend an open, decentralised model of the internet and the principles of fairness in digital markets, security in cyberspace, and individual freedoms online.

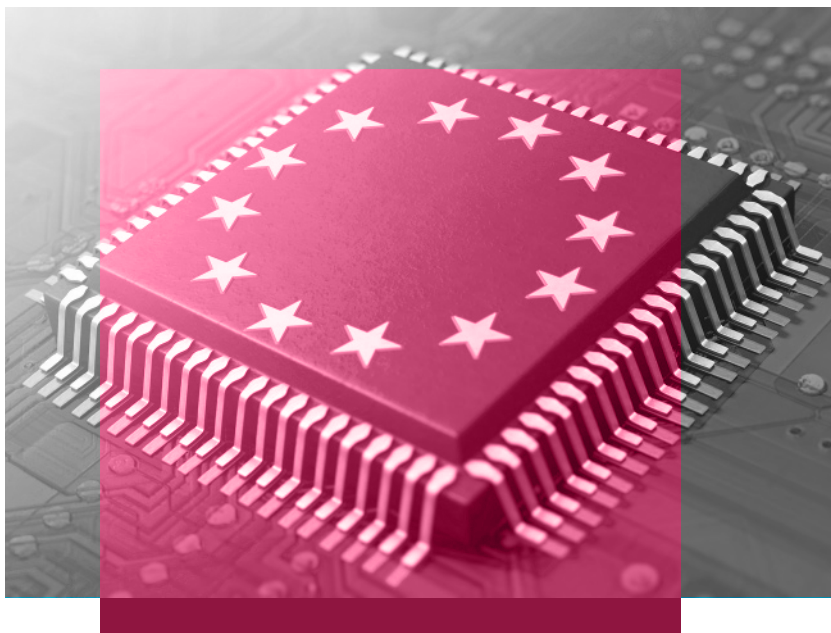
“By working together, we can set standards for artificial intelligence and on the basis of shared values, reaping the fruits of one another's innovations and building stronger protections against cyberattacks.”

By working together, we can set standards for artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies on the basis of shared values, reaping the fruits of one another's innovations and building stronger protections against cyberattacks. A coalition of likeminded partners can ensure that the interdependence of our digital supply chains becomes a source of security and resilience, rather than added risk.

Equally important, the digital decade is our last chance to follow through on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. We know that digital technology has the potential to facilitate inclusion and access to public services around the world. In Africa, the share of the population with [internet access has increased from 2 % in](#)

2005 to 40 % in 2019 ⁽¹⁹³⁾ enabling more children to be educated, and more women to secure employment. Until we close the global digital divide, however, we will not be realising the full potential of new technologies.

To that end, the EU will soon propose an initiative combining financial resources and technical assistance to help its partners develop their own digital governance frameworks, including in areas such as cybersecurity and data protection. For example, a new Digital Connectivity Fund could underpin these efforts; together with our partners, we will be exploring the feasibility of such ideas in the coming months.



Preserving a safe but open internet

Finally, preserving a safe but open internet requires that we develop a more inclusive model of multilateralism, bringing together not just governments but also representatives of civil society, the private sector, and academia. This model can then guide our actions within international organisations – from the United

⁽¹⁹³⁾ See <https://www.ifc.org/wps/connect/6a94oebd-86c6-4a38-8cac-5eab2cad271a/e-Conomy-Africa-2020-Exe-Summary.pdf>

Nations and the World Trade Organization to the International Telecommunications Union – to ensure that international rules are fit for purpose.

Through it all, a common thread, woven from shared principles, will guide our efforts to achieve a more human-centric digital transformation that maximises the benefits of technology and minimises the risks it poses. In cyberspace as in the physical world, Europe will continue to stand up for core global values. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights established the dignity of the individual, the right to privacy and to non-discrimination, and the freedoms of speech and belief. It is our common duty to make sure that the digital revolution lives up to that promise.

TRADE POLICY: A LEVER OF THE EU AS A GEOPOLITICAL GLOBAL PLAYER

10/03/2021 – Blog – *In February 2021, Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis presented a new trade strategy at the College of the European Commission. EU trade policy can be an important foreign policy instrument: we should leverage more actively our trading power to promote EU interests and values and build a fairer globalisation.*

On 17 February, the European Commission approved [a new EU trade strategy](#) ⁽¹⁹⁴⁾, prepared by my colleague Executive Vice-President Dombrovskis in charge of trade, in cooperation with the European External Action Service. It is based on the concept of ‘Open Strategic Autonomy’, which holds that we must make best use of the EU’s traditional openness and international engagement but also stand ready to enforce EU rights and protect our workers, businesses and citizens when others do not play by the rules.

“*In the field of trade, the EU can take quick decisions and it has a lot of clout. The question is: what do want to use it for?*”

EU trade policy is one of our most important tools to support European strategic interests and values around the world. Why? Because size matters. The Union is still one of the largest trade and investments players in the world. It is the world’s largest trader of agricultural and manufactured goods and services and ranks first in both inbound and outbound Foreign Direct Investment. The EU has the largest network of trade agreements in the world. On trade issues, the EU speaks with one voice because trade policy is an exclusive competence of the European Commission. Decisions require a qualified majority of member states instead of unanimity, as is the case in foreign and security policy. So in the field of trade, the EU can take quick decisions and it has a lot of clout. The question is: what do want to use it for?

Since the EU’s previous trade strategy of 2015, the world has changed a lot. The rise of global value chains has *left individuals and communities behind and* increased inequality within countries. It has led to growing *criticism of globalisation*. We have

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_644

seen also the erosion of the multilateral system because of great powers rivalry and competitive nationalism with an aggravated crisis at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and an open US–China ‘trade war’. In this new multipolar global order, [trade has been more and more weaponised as a tool for power projection and to generate networks of dependencies](#) ⁽¹⁹⁵⁾.

China has not become a real market economy

During the last decade, China’s growth has certainly been impressive, but its economy has not become a real market economy as the result of its WTO membership. China has not opened its internal market in a way that is commensurate with its weight in the global economy. It has also not fulfilled all the commitments it made when it entered the WTO, for instance on government procurement. Moreover, current WTO rules are inadequate to deal with key issues regarding China, such as state capitalism, property rights and its enduring classification as a ‘developing country’ which sits badly with its high tech development.

But the WTO’s problems go beyond China. In fact, the WTO *is going through a deeper crisis*. Its core functions – negotiating trade liberalisation deals, monitoring members’ trade policies and the binding settlement of trade disputes – are currently stalled or ineffective. The organisation needs structural reform and find ways to support the global economic recovery from the pandemic, addressing at the same time the challenges of sustainability and digitalisation.

“As EU, we believe the world economy needs a stable and predictable, rules-based multilateral trade system”

As EU, we believe the world economy needs a stable and predictable, rules-based multilateral trade system. Therefore, we need a new consensus to update the WTO rulebook. It will be a hard task, given the diverging views among the key players. However the significant change in attitude of the new US administration and the recent designation of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as new WTO Director General give some hope.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ See <https://voxeu.org/content/europe-s-trade-strategy-age-geo-economic-globalisation>



EU, champion of openness and global cooperation

In any case, the EU has been and will remain a champion of openness and global cooperation. It will continue to forge solutions based on a modernised, rules-based global trade framework. We will engage with like-minded countries to pursue a strong environmental agenda in the WTO and work to ensure that trade policy and practice supports decent work and social fairness around the world. We will also continue pushing for the creation of an International Procurement Instrument to level the playing field in public procurement markets.

“ The EU must equip itself with the necessary trade tools to operate in a fiercely competitive international environment, and defend itself robustly from unfair trade practices”

However, the EU must equip itself at the same time with the necessary trade tools to operate in a fiercely competitive international environment, and defend itself robustly from unfair trade practices. To reinforce our defensive arsenal, the Commission will propose new legal instruments to better follow and [address distortions caused by foreign subsidies on the EU's internal market and to protect](#)

[us from potential coercive actions of third countries](#) ⁽¹⁹⁶⁾. We are also working on an EU strategy for export credits and new, due diligence legislation for corporations to support human and labour rights worldwide and fight against forced labour.

When it comes to trade agreements, nice promises on paper are not enough. Commitments need to be implemented. We certainly need a stronger focus on the enforcement of existing bilateral trade agreements, so that European businesses, farmers and workers can benefit, as much as possible, from the rights that have been negotiated and agreed through the 46 bilateral deals which the EU has signed with 78 partners all over the world.

Regarding our bilateral trade agenda, EU–US trade relations will continue to play a central role. We want to revive the core transatlantic relationship and have proposed to the new Biden administration a new [‘Transatlantic agenda for global change’](#) ⁽¹⁹⁷⁾. The participation of Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the February Foreign Affairs Council already demonstrated a shared commitment to develop a common agenda on all strategic issues, including trade and technology. The agreement between the EU and the US to suspend all punitive tariffs on exports imposed in the Airbus and Boeing disputes last week is an important step forward in that direction.

Quickly resolve our trade disputes with the US

We want to quickly resolve our trade disputes with the US, to pave the way for strategic cooperation on WTO reform. *We also intend to work with the US* and other partners to establish the right rules for digital trade, avoiding digital protectionism. We need to set the standards for newly emerging technologies and make sure these standards reflect our values, and in particular the EU’s high privacy standards under the General Data Protection Regulation. To this end, we have proposed to create an EU–US Trade and Technology Council. We also hope also to work closely with the US and other like-minded partners on human rights, child labour and forced labour.

EU–China trade and investment relationships are both important and challenging. Building a more balanced, rules-based economic relationship with China is a priority and the recent political conclusion of the negotiations on a Comprehensive

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ See p. 194.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2279

Agreement on Investment (CAI) can be a step in this direction, provided we ensure the commitments China has made are fully implemented.

The CAI is a rebalancing and catching-up agreement. As the Chinese market is more closed than the European one, it was important for Europe to obtain greater market access. This is what we achieved in the manufacturing sector, the automotive sector, financial services, health, telecommunications and maritime transport. The EU is getting through the deal what the US was able to achieve under the US–China phase one agreement of early 2020. In other areas, such as subsidies, we got more than the United States. As these benefits are mostly on a Most Favoured Nation-basis they will also become available to all of China's trading partners.

The CAI also raises the bar of China's international commitments in the areas of sustainable development and level playing field. It includes obligations related to state owned enterprises, forced technology transfers and enhanced transparency rule for subsidies. It will allow the EU to gather more information on the behaviour of state-owned enterprises and levels of subsidies in China. It can help to update the WTO rulebook and [could contribute to the revitalisation of global economic cooperation](#) ⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. We need to work with China while keeping our eyes wide open.

Beyond the US and China

Beyond the US and China, the overall focus of the new EU trade strategy is on the EU neighbourhood, including enlargement countries, and Africa. Our will to strengthen our 'strategic autonomy' and reduce our economic dependency on distant countries also means developing our trade and investment ties with them, and better integrating our partners in these regions into EU's supply chains. It is part, for example, of [the new southern partnership we are proposing to our neighbours in the Mediterranean region](#) ⁽¹⁹⁹⁾.

With Asia and the Pacific, which is where a lot of the world's economic growth will come from, we will seek to consolidate our partnerships and enhance trade and investment reaffirming our commitment to conclude a series of FTAs with partners

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ See <https://www.piiie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/can-eu-china-investment-deal-lead-global-economic>

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ See p. 302.

in the region. Our [new strategic partnership with the ASEAN](#) ⁽²⁰⁰⁾ [should help us to engage more actively in that direction.](#)

Regarding Latin America, we intend to create the right conditions to [conclude negotiations with Chile and ratify our pending agreements with Mexico and Mercosur](#) ⁽²⁰¹⁾. With both regions, we want to strengthen regulatory partnerships focusing on climate and digital.

All in all, when it comes to trade the EU is fully committed to leveraging its global power to promote EU interests and values and build a fairer and more sustainable form of globalisation.

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89962/eu-asean-strategic-partnership-how-did-happen-and-what-does-it-mean_en

⁽²⁰¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87216/latin-america-europe-%E2%80%99%E2%80%99-transatlantic-relationship_en

HOW TO REVIVE MULTILATERALISM IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

16/03/2021 – Blog – *In debates on EU foreign policy, people often refer to multilateralism and multipolarity. At the beginning of 2021, I met with the Inter-Parliamentary Conference. I choose to explain how I see these concepts and how they relate to each other. It is useful for the definition and implementation of European external policy.*

We all know that multilateralism is essential to our world vision but also facing strong headwinds. However, with the new US administration in office there is a real opportunity to work for its revival even if this is not going to be an easy task. First because there are differences all over the world about how to rebuild it. Second because in a multipolar and fractured world, the geopolitical basis for multilateralism is changing. Third because Europe, like other global players in the world, will have to work in a more assertive way to advance its interests in a more transactional world.

I mean that if you want to advance some key principles on the world stage you need to throw your political weight behind them and not simply rely on their moral value. For example, since Europeans want to defend the principle that borders cannot be changed by the use of force, they adopted sanctions against Russia over its attempt to do just that in Ukraine. Those violating key principles must pay a price for their behaviour. That is why following my last visit to Moscow I proposed to approach EU–Russian relations based on three elements: push back when Russia infringes international law, contain when Russia wants to weaken our democratic system and engage when we have an interest to work with the Russian regime.

The world is becoming more multipolar and less multilateral

The world today is becoming more multipolar and less multilateral. The challenge for Europe is to reconcile both dimensions, adapting to the new distribution of power, while working to mitigate the political fracturing of the world into competing poles.

Over the last three decades, we have seen a rapid transformation in the distribution of power around the world. We went from a bipolar configuration between 1945 and 1989 to a unipolar configuration between 1989 and 2008, before entering in what we today could call 'complex multipolarity'. Economically, for example, we have three dominant poles: the United States, China and the European Union. However, politically, the structuring is more complex. First, because an emerging Sino-American bipolarity is increasingly structuring the world system. Second, because there are important political and military powers without necessarily being strong economic powers (like Russia, or Turkey at regional level). Third, because there are actors in the middle of the fork, such as the EU, who carry a strong economic weight but who are political poles in the making. The ambition of what we call geopolitical Europe is precisely to close the gap between economic power and geopolitical influence.

“*The development of Europe as a political pole is not contrary to the defence of multilateralism, but a basic condition for its effective defence.*”

Let us be clear here. The development of Europe as a political pole is not contrary to the defence of multilateralism, but a basic condition for its effective defence. In the first place, multilateralism is above all a methodology designed to regulate world relations on stable, transparent principles that apply equally to all, regardless of their size. This means that regardless of whether you are a smaller country or a great power, the rules are the same. However, as George Orwell imagined in 'Animal Farm', we know that even if states are formally equal, some are more equal than others.

Multilateralism is not a magic wand. However, it can mitigate the power differences that exists between states by binding them by common rules. That is why Europe and the vast majority of states worldwide endorse it.

Multilateral rules do not fall from the sky

Now, multilateral rules do not fall from the sky. They reflect a state of play and very often the preferences of the most powerful. If, for example, we want to win the battle of the European Green Deal we will have to put in place a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which is indispensable but also controversial. Indispensable because without CBAM we will face carbon leakage and comparative disadvantage for our industries. Controversial because many countries see it as a protectionist mechanism, which it is not. Therefore, it must be WTO compliant. We must build strong alliances with like-minded states and convince the most reluctant of them to join us in this endeavour.

We need to think in terms of balance of power while advancing our interests. We are a principled Union, but principles alone are not enough to make a policy and even less a successful policy. This is the main lesson we need to draw from the current global scene where power politics is on the rise.

“*There is no contradiction between playing power politics and promoting values. On the contrary. Showing that you will not abandon your principles is a sign of strength.*”

The second reason for the crisis of multilateralism is that the liberal values of 1945 are on the defensive in our changing world. Alternative narratives challenge ‘the West’ in every field, whether it be the economy, health, history, individual liberties or human rights. Russia, China and others see any discussion on human rights in their spheres of influence as an infringement on their sovereignty. While for the EU, human rights are universal values and a corner stone of our foreign policy. If Russia now tries to bypass the Union and deal directly with member states, it is also because the EU matters and hinders Russian goals. In fact, and contrary to what is generally believed, there is no contradiction between playing power politics and promoting values. On the contrary. Showing that you will not abandon your principles is a sign of strength.



The foundation of multilateralism was not exclusively Western

The foundation of multilateralism in 1945 and its resurgence after 1989 were not exclusively Western, but resolutely liberal. In this multilateral and rules-based order, we Europeans were comfortable because it essentially reflected our preferences and interests. In tomorrow's world, the situation will be more difficult because there are competing claims and visions for how the international system should look like. The liberal voice is simply one voice among others. The states that challenge this view want to transform multilateralism from within and redefine it. They are investing in multilateral institutions to roll back this liberal vision.

In the face of this, Europe urgently needs to demonstrate the existence of a European point of view and forge alliances with like-minded states. In its conduct, it must be capable of forging issue-based coalitions, and being more assertive, more reactive and agile. For, once again, the balance of power does not always work in our favour. Europe defends a diversity of points of view and has no hegemonic ambitions. At the same time, it must ensure that this does not lead to a generalised relativism in which everyone does what they want within their own borders. That is why our commitment in international organisations such as the Human Rights Council is very important.

“ We have three objectives when it comes to shaping multilateralism: to consolidate what works, to reform what no longer works well and to extend the scope of multilateralism to new areas.”

There is a third reason for our work on becoming a political pole in a multipolar world. It is the need for us to defend our priorities on how to shape the multilateral system. On this we have three objectives: to consolidate what works, to reform what no longer works well and to extend the scope of multilateralism to new areas. That is the main message of the [new strategy on multilateralism](#) ⁽²⁰²⁾ recently endorsed by the Commission and by me as High Representative. It offers concrete ideas on how the EU intends to revitalise and modernise the rules-based international system, in key priority areas from trade and investment, to health, climate change or rules on emerging new technologies. The strategy highlights the commitment to invest in creative partnerships, not least with regional organisations like the African Union, ASEAN and others, to strengthen collectively the UN and other multilateral fora.

⁽²⁰²⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_622

The main challenge is to implement international rules

Indeed, the challenge is not so much to change international rules, but to ensure their implementation. We can no longer be content, for example, to defend the WTO without modernising its procedures, particularly with regard to state subsidies. Finally, there are new subjects such as digitalisation or artificial intelligence where we urgently need to define new global standards. We need to be in a position of strength to do this. In addition, to achieve this we need to define a common position, develop arguments and build alliances.

“ We are not obliged to choose between multipolarity which is a given and multilateralism which is an ambition.”

All this to say that we are not obliged to choose between multipolarity, which is a given, and multilateralism, which is an ambition. Accepting multipolarity means facing the reality of a world that is diverse, and also fractured and conflictual. To defend multilateralism is to reject fatalistic viewpoints and rally around our strengths and our partners to make the global game more fluid, while always bearing in mind the interests of Europe and the values that underpin them.

MEDIA FREEDOM IS MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER

02/05/2021 – Blog – Before 2021 World Press Freedom Day, I wanted to reaffirm my commitment and that of the EU to media freedom, which has unfortunately declined in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having grown up in a dictatorship, I know how precious open access to information and freedom of speech is.

Last week, two journalists were killed in Burkina Faso, just for doing their job. Their deaths are a vivid reminder of the threats that journalists face – and indeed our democratic societies, who rely on a free press. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, journalists often are forced to operate in dangerous conditions. Lockdown measures have also caused a severe economic blow to an already embattled independent media sector, forcing layoffs and closures. With democracy backsliding in many parts of the world, media freedom stands on increasingly shaky ground.

“With democracy backsliding in many parts of the world, media freedom stands on increasingly shaky ground.”

I grew up in a country where at the time the press was not free and I know precisely what costs this entails for public debate and the rights of citizens. I am a big media consumer and rely heavily in my daily work on the information and analysis provided by journalists. Throughout my career, I have come to know and appreciate a large number of journalists working for a wide range of media. I know how difficult their job had already become before the pandemic in many countries, due to the change in business models linked to the Internet and the rise of illiberalism on all continents.

The second World Press Freedom Day during the pandemic

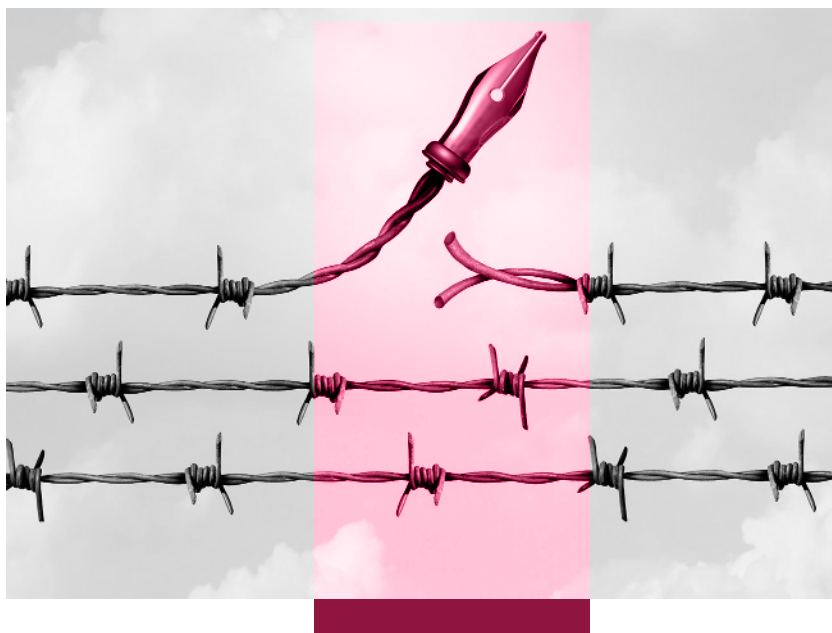
This is the second time we celebrate World Press Freedom Day in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the health crisis, journalists have worked to keep us informed and safe – sometimes at great personal risk. There is now abundant evidence that the pandemic has accelerated the erosion of media freedom and pluralism. According to the [V-Dem Institute](https://www.v-dem.net/) ⁽²⁰³⁾, two-thirds of all countries around the world imposed new restrictions on media in 2020.

⁽²⁰³⁾ See <https://www.v-dem.net/>

“There is abundant evidence that the pandemic has accelerated the erosion of media freedom and pluralism.”

With the world's attention focused on combating the virus, many governments have taken advantage of the health crisis to escalate censorship, overlook or allow ill-treatment of journalists and impose restrictions to silence free speech. Over the past year, journalists across the world have been intimidated, threatened, fined, jailed, assaulted and even killed for doing their job.

In 2020, 274 journalists, a despicable record number, were imprisoned globally for their work, often without any charges being disclosed, according to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) ⁽²⁰⁴⁾. The highest number of journalists has been jailed in China -for the second year in a row, followed by Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. In the [2021 World Press Freedom Index](#) ⁽²⁰⁵⁾, Reporters Without Borders state that media freedom is ‘totally blocked or seriously impeded in 73 countries and constrained in 59 others, which together represent 73 % of the countries evaluated.’ This is a very worrying trend.



⁽²⁰⁴⁾ See <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ See <https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries>

An ‘Infodemic’ accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic continues also to be accompanied by an ‘infodemic’ – a massive spread of disinformation about the virus and the efforts to combat it. Many actors – state and non-state – have capitalised on people’s fears to advance their political or economic agenda, to the detriment of the global fight against the pandemic. We are closely [monitoring and exposing these disinformation campaigns](#) ⁽²⁰⁶⁾, when they target the EU.

“Supporting and protecting independent media has never been more important. If free and accurate information is not available for all, democracy cannot work.”

Supporting and protecting independent media has never been more important. For citizens to make an informed choice between different policy options, they need indeed to know precisely about the facts on which to base their choices. If free and accurate information is not available for all, democracy cannot work. That is why we must stand firm for freedom of the press and fight against disinformation.

If we fail to safeguard media freedom and pluralism in Europe and worldwide, we could also lose our best rampart against harmful narratives that seek to undermine our democracies and our unity.

Our commitment to press freedom

In 2020, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to step up its work in support of open and free media with the adoption of three different action plans ⁽²⁰⁷⁾ calling for strengthened EU actions, both politically and financially – not only within the EU but also in the rest of the world. We also adopted a global human rights sanctions regime last December, which gives us an additional tool to target serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide, irrespective of where they occur.

Together, we must denounce all violations of media freedom; call for the unconditional release of imprisoned journalists around the world; and secure

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/countering-disinformation_en

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ See [The 2020-24 action plan on human rights and democracy](#), the [European Democracy Action Plan](#) and [the EU Media Action Plan \(link is external\)](#).

the economic survival of independent media. Just as we are joining forces to end this pandemic and fight climate change, we must ensure that future generations continue to enjoy their fundamental right to a free and independent media.

A BIG STEP FORWARD FOR GLOBAL TAX JUSTICE

26/07/2021 – *Op Ed – The European Union should not merely emphasise its multilateral credentials, but must demonstrate that coordinated international action can effectively deliver for all. With my colleague, Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni, I explained in this Op Ed that the recent global G20 agreement to reform corporate taxation does just that.*

Multilateralism has been on the defensive in recent years. In a global setting that is more multipolar than multilateral, competition between states seems to prevail over cooperation nowadays. However, the recent global agreement to reform international corporate taxation is welcome proof that multilateralism is not dead.

Interdependence is becoming more conflictual

But it is not healthy, either. While globalisation has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic – albeit more unevenly than before and despite people’s feelings of increased isolation – interdependence is ever more conflictual. Even soft power is being weaponised, with vaccines, data, and technology standards all becoming instruments of political competition.

The world is also becoming less free. Democracy itself is under attack, amid a pitched battle of narratives over which political and economic system can best deliver for its citizens.

“*The European Union continues to believe in and work for a predictable world of rules-based multilateralism, open markets, positive-sum outcomes, and social justice and solidarity.*”

The European Union continues to believe in and work for a predictable world of [rules-based multilateralism](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/european-union-stands-with-united-nations-by-josep-borrell-2020-09?barrier=accesspay) ⁽²⁰⁸⁾, open markets, positive-sum outcomes, and social justice and solidarity. We remain convinced that today’s challenges – from fighting the pandemic to tackling climate change – can be handled only through global

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ See <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/european-union-stands-with-united-nations-by-josep-borrell-2020-09?barrier=accesspay>

cooperation. The EU will thus continue to lead on reviving rules-based multilateralism, in order to show our citizens the concrete benefits of a seemingly dry, technocratic concept.

After all, the alternative to such multilateral engagement – ‘going it alone’ – means reduced access to vaccines, insufficient climate action, festering security crises, inadequately regulated globalisation, and increasing global inequality. No country, not even the biggest, can succeed on its own. For all these reasons, Italy has rightly put multilateralism at atop the agenda for its current G20 presidency.

Multilateral action can deliver for all

But it is not enough for the EU merely to emphasise its multilateral credentials. Europe must demonstrate that multilateral action can deliver for all if every country invests in it. And the new global tax agreement does just that.

The deal, [endorsed](#) ⁽²⁰⁹⁾ earlier in July by G20 finance ministers and backed by [132 countries](#) ⁽²¹⁰⁾, will establish a global minimum tax rate of at least 15 % for multinational corporations and ensure that these firms pay taxes in the countries where they generate their profits. This is a historic step toward fairer globalisation and a landmark achievement of effective multilateralism.

In recent years, governments have taken important steps to tackle tax evasion by individuals. According to the OECD, the automatic exchange of tax information between states netted [€95 billion](#) ⁽²¹¹⁾ (\$112 billion) in additional tax revenue for G20 countries between 2009 and 2019, while deposits in tax havens fell by 34 %.

Curbing tax avoidance by multinationals has proved more difficult

But curbing tax avoidance by multinationals, an even bigger problem, has proved more difficult. In 2018, the OECD estimated that multinationals’ tax avoidance results in global revenue losses of [\\$100-240 billion each year](#) ⁽²¹²⁾, or 4-10 % of total

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-57791617>

⁽²¹⁰⁾ See <https://www.oecd.org/tax/beps/statement-on-a-two-pillar-solution-to-address-the-tax-challenges-arising-from-the-digitalisation-of-the-economy-july-2021.pdf>

⁽²¹¹⁾ See <https://www.oecd.org/tax/exchange-of-tax-information/implementation-of-tax-transparency-initiative-delivering-concrete-and-impressive-results.htm>

⁽²¹²⁾ See <https://www.oecd.org/tax/beps/>

corporate-tax proceeds. Moreover, the current international corporate tax system was designed more than a century ago and is increasingly out of sync with today's globalised and digitalised economy.

The EU has long strived to mount a global response to this challenge. But it was the constructive engagement of US President Joe Biden's administration over the past six months that enabled the recent breakthrough. This was a striking and welcome sign of America's return to supporting a multilateral vision of the world.

“ While the G20 agreement will not fully solve the issue of multinational firms' tax avoidance, it is a decisive step forward. It marks the beginning of the end of the global race to the bottom in corporate tax rates.”

The 132 jurisdictions currently supporting the new corporate-taxation deal represent 90 % of global GDP. And while the agreement will not by itself fully solve the issue of multinational firms' tax avoidance, it is a decisive step forward. It marks the beginning of the end of the global race to the bottom in corporate tax rates, a contest that has produced some very rich winners but also billions of losers who can now start regaining faith in the power of rules.

More stable government revenues

The agreement will lead to higher and more stable government revenues at a time when all countries must bear the costs of battling the pandemic and mobilise the investments needed to tackle the climate crisis. And it will deliver greater fairness at a time of increasing inequalities between the developed and the developing world.

Above all, the recent tax accord shows how multilateral action can foster a more equitable form of globalisation. We now need similarly effective international responses in other areas, from vaccine access and the climate crisis to data security and technology standards.

Future generations will not forgive us if we waste the pandemic's main lesson: that we are in this together. We need wise strategies and bold tactics to deliver on a truly multilateral agenda for all.

THE EU AND EXTRATERRITORIAL SANCTIONS

07/10/2021 – Speech – *In a discussion on a policy paper published by the Jacques Delors Institute in October 2021, I have presented the EU's principled position opposing extraterritorial sanctions and outlined policies and initiatives counter harmful effects of such measures.*

Thank you for the invitation and for the important contributions that the Jacques Delors Institute has been making, under the leadership of my friend Pascal Lamy. I appreciate your work on EU foreign policy in general and all the papers you are publishing.

“*The EU has always been firm and vocal in condemning any extraterritorial application of sanctions.*”

I want to be clear upfront on the subject of today's debate: the EU has always been firm and vocal in condemning any extraterritorial application of sanctions. We also oppose the growing use of secondary sanctions, as well as the use of sanctions as a trade and economic tool. For the EU, sanctions are exclusively a foreign policy tool. And in any event, they must respect international law.

You know we are concerned about US sanctions against European companies and interests, such as in the cases of Iran, Cuba, the International Criminal Court and the Nord Stream 2 (although we have seen positive steps on this) and Turk Stream projects. At all levels, we consistently share our concerns with US counterparts and call for a reversal in the application of extraterritorial sanctions.

Our cooperation with the US on sanctions has improved a lot

I do want to underline that our cooperation on sanctions has improved a lot with the new US administration and we have managed concrete progress. I would cite recent coordination on Nordstream 2, Russia, Belarus, Myanmar, Venezuela – just to mention a few. And the fact that the US has now repealed its sanctions against the International Criminal Court is certainly a good sign. Let's recognise the changes since the Trump administration.

At the EU–US Summit in June, we committed, and I quote: ‘to enhance cooperation on the use of sanctions to pursue shared foreign policy and security objectives, while avoiding possible unintended consequences for European and US interests’. More dialogue with the US is essential to make progress on the issues we are discussing today. I believe we have the best opportunity we have ever had with the current US administration.

This issue is of course not confined to the US only; other international players, such as China are gearing up for extraterritorial sanctions and the EU must be able to react to that.

“ The issue of extraterritorial sanctions is part of a growing global phenomenon affecting the autonomy and sovereignty of the EU.”

In fact, the issue of extraterritorial sanctions is part of a growing global phenomenon affecting the autonomy and sovereignty of the EU. In recent years, there has been an increasing number of examples of foreign countries seeking to influence the decisions or behaviour of the EU or EU member states in the area of trade and investment policy. We must respond to these attempts by deploying a combination of tools (diplomatic, political, legal, economic and financial) to prevent these activities and to mitigate their effects.

Strengthening EU's strategic autonomy

This is why, in January 2021, we outlined in a Communication ⁽²¹³⁾ a number of parallel actions to strengthen the EU's ‘open strategic autonomy’ and to increase the resilience of the EU economy and financial markets to protect ourselves from any unfair and abusive practices.

One important strand of this strategy focuses on promoting the international role of the euro as well as on strengthening the EU's financial market infrastructure. This is something you rightly mention in your paper.

Another strand aims at improving the implementation and enforcement of the EU's own sanctions regimes.

And the third strand is about increasing the EU's resilience to the effects of the extraterritorial application of unilateral sanctions by third countries.

⁽²¹³⁾ See p. 194.

For example, the EU is working to overhaul the so-called 'Blocking Statute' that protects EU operators, by nullifying the effect in the EU of any foreign court ruling based on the foreign laws. We want to modernise the Blocking Statute and simplify its application, including by reducing compliance costs for EU citizens and businesses.

“ *The Commission is working on a so-called 'anti-coercion' instrument to apply trade, investment or other restrictions towards any-country that is unduly interfering in the policy choices of the EU or its member states.*”

The Commission is also working on a so-called 'anti-coercion' instrument. This would empower the Commission to apply trade, investment or other restrictions towards any non-EU country that is unduly interfering in the policy choices of the EU or its member states. The goal is to deter or offset such coercive action, in line with international law.

Let me conclude: we know that we need to look more actively to protect our economic operators from the effects of extraterritorial sanctions and other measures. There is no magic solution, but the different initiatives we are taking reinforce each other and can make a real difference.

I welcome this debate and the proposals put forward in your paper. Some go in the same direction as the EU initiatives that I mentioned. Others go beyond current EU initiatives. But they are interesting ideas on which it is worth reflecting, for example the creation of *European Office of Foreign Assets Control* or a *European External Trade Bank*. Yet others are far-reaching and it would be interesting to hear more about them to understand how they could work in practice.

In full respect for international law

One thing is clear: while we must defend the interests of the EU and its operators, we should always do that in full respect of international law. Our sanctions respect international law. We must not counter extraterritoriality with extraterritoriality.

6.

EU FOREIGN POLICY IN THE WORLD





6.1 TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

THE 6 JANUARY EVENTS IN WASHINGTON AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR EUROPE

10/01/2021 – Blog – *The shocking events in Washington on 6 January 2021 must be a wake-up call for all democracy advocates around the world. We need to fight harder in Europe as elsewhere against disinformation and inequalities and renew international cooperation to promote globally the rule of law and democratic values.*

I was shocked, as all democracy advocates and friends of the United States worldwide, by the scenes we witnessed in Washington: a mob assaulting the Capitol Hill to prevent the vote to confirm Joe Biden as President of the country. It had a particular echo for me because I had to remember how, forty years ago, the young Spanish democracy had been threatened by an assault of the Congress of Deputies by a group of military police. Fortunately, Spain was able to overcome this ordeal, starting since the best years of our modern history

A damaged and divided American society

Wednesday's bewildering events show how damaged and divided the American society is after four years of Trump administration. Certainly, it cannot be compared with the assault on the Spanish Congress in 1981 or other historic precedents of that type: the security forces, like almost all of the State apparatus and democratic institutions of the United States, fulfilled their duties, as they did in the weeks before, since the 3 November. However, one cannot underestimate the significance of what happened and the potential disaster caused if the matter had derailed even further.

What we saw on Wednesday was only the climax of very worrying developments happening globally in recent years. It must be a wake-up call for all democracy advocates. To fight delusion and attacks on democratic values, and to overcome divisions of our societies. Not only in the US. All over the world, there are political leaders – in opposition and also increasingly in power – ready to undermine democratic institutions.

Everybody needs to understand that if we accept setbacks after setbacks, even if they seem minor, democracy and its values and institutions can eventually and irreversibly perish. To avoid this fate, we must stand up immediately to every violation of the independence of democratic institutions, to every demagogic outbursts by populist leaders, to every inflammatory and hateful speech by demagogues, to every disinformation campaign and fake news that feed and encourage the enemies of democracy. In order to strengthen our capacity to respond to these challenges we have adopted last December a new [European Democracy Action Plan](#) ⁽²¹⁴⁾.

“Every citizen in the world needs to understand that if we accept minor setbacks after minor setbacks, democracy and its values and institutions can eventually and irreversibly perish”

The discontent and dysfunctions of our economies

However, we must also reflect on the root causes of the dynamics that fuel such forces. The worrying success of the opponents of democracy worldwide is also linked to the fact that an increasing number of citizens do not feel sufficiently protected and respected any longer.

There are numerous reasons for this, but they are also on both sides of the Atlantic deeply linked to dysfunctions of our economies over the last few decades. The significant growth in inequalities in our societies, tax evasion and tax havens, the weakening of the ability to regulate large multinational companies, deindustrialisation and high unemployment – all these phenomena have contributed, in Europe as in the United States, to weaken the legitimacy of representative democracy, particularly among the ones at the lower scale of income and wealth.

“The significant growth in inequalities, tax evasion and tax havens, deindustrialisation and high unemployment have weakened, in Europe as in the United States, representative democracy.”

⁽²¹⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250



In Europe, we have begun to act to reverse these trends. We want to better protect our companies and our jobs through the screening of foreign investment and by asking for more reciprocity in our trade relations. We also want to regulate better the activity of large multinational companies, particularly in the digital sector, and to fight more actively for tax justice. And with the Next Generation Europe EU initiative, we intend to strengthen solidarity within Europe by helping the countries most affected by the current crisis. Of course, there still is a long way to go on all these issues, but we are now on the right track.

Disinformation, a real threat to democracy

In case anyone had any doubts, the events in Washington also show that disinformation constitutes a real threat for democracies. As one of my former collaborators at the Spanish Foreign Affairs Ministry [has recently written](https://elpais.com/opinion/2021-01-07/y-la-desinformacion-asalto-la-democracia.html) ⁽²¹⁵⁾, democracy is based on the presumption that the free exchange of ideas and opinions will lead a political community to take the best collective decisions. If the information fails, so does democracy, as a car engine that uses an appropriated fuel.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ See <https://elpais.com/opinion/2021-01-07/y-la-desinformacion-asalto-la-democracia.html>

Unlike classic propaganda, aimed at persuading political ideas, disinformation does not operate on the convictions, but seeks to subvert facts, until they form a parallel reality. It has had tremendous effects in the US. Breaking the consensus on facts and reality means that political debates are not about what measures to take to solve real problems, but about what is the reality to apply policies to. If some people believe that an election was fraudulent, because their leader has been once and again telling them, they will behave accordingly.

“ *We need to fight the scourge of disinformation more effectively and guarantee the right of citizens to receive truthful information.*”

Proliferation of disinformation favoured by social networks has powerfully reinforced authoritarian and xenophobic tendencies in our societies. We need to fight this scourge more effectively and guarantee the right of citizens to receive truthful information. We need in particular to fight disinformation campaigns supported by authoritarian regimes. The EEAS [has vast experience in that domain](#) ⁽²¹⁶⁾ and is further increasing its actions in that area.

We also need to be able to better regulate the contents of social networks, while scrupulously respecting freedom of expression. It is not possible for this regulation to be carried out mainly according to rules and procedures set by private actors. Last December, the European Commission proposed [the Digital Services Act](#) ⁽²¹⁷⁾, notably to remedy precisely this problem.

The need to reshape globalisation

Another substantive challenge we face to maintain open and democratic societies and economies is to succeed in reshaping globalisation and rebuilding a multilateral system capable of tackling the dysfunctions that have weakened democracies in recent decades. Given the weight that nationalist and authoritarian regimes have acquired on the world stage, the task will not be easy, but it is essential for all those who believe in democracy and its future. This project must be at the heart of our future relationship with the incoming Biden administration. It also means developing closer ties with the other like-minded democracies around the world. The EU will play its full part in this endeavour.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91038/essential-fight-against-disinformation-and-manipulation_en

⁽²¹⁷⁾ See <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>

“ *Our challenge is to strengthen the faith our democratic societies have in themselves to be able to travel through troubled waters, without falling into autocratic temptations.*”

More broadly, our challenge is to strengthen the faith our democratic societies have in themselves to be able to travel through troubled waters, without following the siren songs of irresponsible populists who always find someone to blame and put forward easy solutions, and without falling into autocratic temptations. We have to work on renewing our social contract in times that are changing and develop stronger collective narratives able to challenge populist doctrines.

The strength of US institutions

Coming back to the horrific scenes at the Capitol: what we witnessed is not the America that we know and identify with the ideals of democracy and freedom. I believe in the strength of US institutions and I am confident that the American democracy will succeed in overcoming the ordeal it is currently going through. I even hope that it will emerge stronger, for the good of its citizens and the whole world.

BIDEN'S PRESIDENCY BEGINS: A FRESH START FOR THE US, BUT ALSO FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

22/01/2020 – Blog – *The inauguration of Joe Biden on 20 January 2021 opened a welcome new chapter in EU–US relations. As President Biden has signalled at that occasion, there was much to repair and rebuild, both at home and abroad. We as EU were ready to revive our partnership with the US, which is so important at a time of tumultuous global change.*

Like millions of people around the world, I followed President Biden's inaugural address. Naturally, the President focused his speech principally on how to heal a divided nation, how to bring Americans back together and cope with the pandemic crisis by building back better. However, looking beyond America, he also announced that the US will 'lead, not merely by the example of our power, but by the power of our example' and vowed to 'repair our alliances and engage with the world once again'.

“ *The transatlantic partnership has shaped international relations and global order more than any other relationship. It is our most strategic relationship.*”

The EU is ready for that: we have a unique opportunity to work together again to tackle a variety of global challenges. Even during the turbulence and challenges of the Trump administration, the truth remained: the transatlantic partnership, which more than any other relationship has shaped international relations and global order. It is our most strategic relationship, being not only indispensable for security and prosperity in the transatlantic area, but also to sustain a world order anchored in democracy, the rule of law and multilateralism.

‘Making multilateralism great again’

The President underlined that the US will ‘be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress and security’. Europe wants its closest partner back at the world's table. The EU and US must pull in the same direction when it comes to resolving the growing number of conflicts and geopolitical tensions, to define common standards and norms for the 21st century, and to work on shaping and strengthening

the multilateral system. I look forward to work with State Secretary Blinken, who has also already vowed a new era of international cooperation. Let's work together in making multilateralism great again.

Together with the European Commission, I put forward a comprehensive [EU-US agenda for global change](#) ⁽²¹⁸⁾, which spans four broad areas: green leadership, the COVID-19 response and global health, trade and technology, and global action and security.

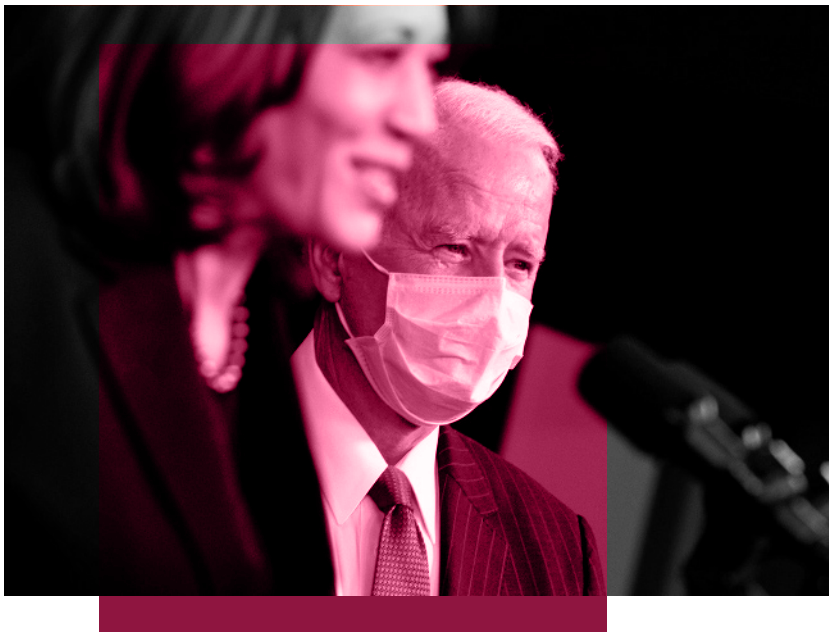
“*The world needs American and European leadership in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and shaping the global recovery.*”

In the coming weeks and months, the focus on both sides of the Atlantic will be on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring a solid pathway to global recovery. The world needs American and European leadership in this battle and I am very happy that President Biden has already signed an executive order reversing the decision to leave the World Health Organization (WHO) and that the US has announced yesterday to sign up to the WHO's international vaccine-sharing COVAX programme. We look forward to work with the new administration on fighting the pandemic and shaping the recovery. At all levels: be it government to government, but also business, civil society, and scientists. It is already underway: the first vaccine used in the US and the EU is a 'transatlantic product', developed by a joint venture between a German and a US company.

We can all see how the pandemic and the related economic downturn also provide a perfect breeding ground for populism, radical ideas, and consequently divisions and social unrest. The assault on 6 January storm on the Capitol was [a wake-up call for all democracy advocates around the world](#) ⁽²¹⁹⁾. Indeed, as President Biden said, 'we have learned again that democracy is precious, democracy is fragile'. We must fight disinformation and inequalities and ensure that our democratic narrative prevails. It is urgent that both the EU and the US take concrete steps to stem the rise in authoritarianism, corruption and human rights abuses.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2279

⁽²¹⁹⁾ See p. 233.



The decision of President Biden to rejoin the Paris Agreement is fundamental. Working together on the climate crisis is at the forefront of our agenda: today, we – EU Foreign Ministers and my colleague Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans – already held a video conference with the new US Climate Envoy John Kerry and discussed how the EU and the new US administration can cooperate again in the global fight against climate change.

“*The decision of President Biden to rejoin the Paris Agreement is fundamental.*”

The EU proposes to establish a comprehensive transatlantic ‘green agenda’, to mobilise more ambitious global climate action, starting with a joint commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050. For this, we need in particular to work on measures to build a green technology alliance; phase out fossil fuels; avoid carbon leakage; develop a global regulatory framework for sustainable finance; help poorer countries to adapt to climate change and pursue a joint leadership in the fight against deforestation. We have much to do together and we have no time to waste.

The global order, peace and security

There can be no doubt that the US plays an essential role in the maintenance of peace and security, and also in European security. Indeed, in many places on our continent and at our borders, we need to work together to get sustainable results, from the Western Balkans, to the Eastern Mediterranean to Ukraine and beyond. As global partners, we will have to deepen our dialogue and cooperation in all areas, including on reviving the Iran nuclear deal and the broader area of non-proliferation and arms control. In addition, we will soon begin a dialogue to discuss the full range of issues related to China. We will also look at opportunities for cooperation across the globe where our interests coincide.

“ *A strong and capable Europe is not a rival to the trans-Atlantic alliance but a precondition for it.*”

Many US administrations have insisted that Europe increases its defence efforts to take better care of its own security and act as a security provider. So it matters that we are already actively working to strengthen EU defence policies, capacities and operations. Our flagship defence initiatives now include the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and military mobility. Indeed, a strong and capable Europe is not a rival to the trans-Atlantic alliance but a precondition for it.

Reinforcing defence capabilities of EU member states strengthen the Alliance and contribute to transatlantic burden-sharing. A more assertive, more capable and resilient Europe is the best partner for the US. Enhancing Europe's security role will allow for a better cooperation with the US when it comes to the security risks of today and those of the future. It is clear that we have much to gain from close cooperation with the US to address pressing security challenges, from cyber security to hybrid threats, protecting our critical infrastructure and the security implications of climate change. We should certainly be ambitious in this area.

While we step up cooperation, we should be mindful that the experience of the last four years have left their toll on European public opinion. Indeed a clear majority of Europeans, as explained in a recent [ECFR report](https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/) ⁽²²⁰⁾, now believe that even under President Biden, the US will be mostly consumed with healing internal divisions and will have little capacity or will to help solve global problems. And there are underlying reasons—demographic, economic, and political—why the historical trajectory of the United States and Europe could well diverge. However,

⁽²²⁰⁾ See <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/>

we appreciate that at least for the next four years there will be a US President who believes in partnership with democratic allies. And we don't just feel appreciation for this restoration, but we recognise its necessity.

Working together on technology, trade and standards

Technology issues are now part of foreign policy. That's why the rapid technological change in front of us gives us a window of opportunity to develop a joint EU-US strategic 'high tech agenda'. We want to cooperate on devising clear rules and their enforcement on the responsibility of online platforms and Big Tech, work together on fair taxation and market distortions, and develop a common normative approach to the future development of key technologies. Let us in the 'tech democracies' provide a response to these challenges before it is too late.

In sum, the list of challenges we face is long. And sometimes differences in views between us will persist. That is normal. However, with Biden, the tone and basic posture is changing. In diplomacy, that matters a lot. *C'est le ton qui fait la musique*, as they say in French. Let's get to work and rebuild our alliance for democracy, prosperity, global security and a better and more stable world.

EU-US SUMMIT: A PROMISING MOMENT IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

13/06/2021 – Op Ed – Ahead of the EU-US summit in June 2021, I wanted to underline in this Op Ed how important this moment was for the future of our relation. We need to work again closer together on climate change, trade issues, digitalisation... and address together the international challenges to our security and our values.

The European Union and the United States are united by a common history and shared values. We have worked arm in arm to secure peace and prosperity, both for our own citizens, and for the people around the world. In times of crisis, Europeans and Americans have had each other's backs.

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads, facing challenges to the very foundations of our societies and values. Indeed, this is perhaps the most crucial period in transatlantic relations in a generation. Building upon the 'New EU-US Agenda for Global Change' that the EU put forward in December, next week's EU-US Summit is a call to leverage our collective strength, defend our common interests, and jointly provide global leadership.

Joint EU-US action on addressing global challenges

Our first shared priority is ending the COVID-19 pandemic and building a sustainable recovery. The EU has already secured €1.8 trillion in budgetary firepower, designed to relaunch Europe's economy in a way that makes it greener, more digital, and more equitable. The Biden administration passed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan in March. With these actions, the EU and the US will both be able to 'build back better'.

In fighting the virus, our unmatched scientific capacity has been demonstrated through our partnership on vaccine development. The first vaccine approved for use in the EU and the US, BioNTech/Pfizer, was a joint effort by a European and an American pharmaceutical company. Together, we donate millions of doses of vaccines to low and middle-income countries, through the COVAX Facility and we will also support and strengthen the World Health Organization.

“With COP26 only a few months away, the time has now come to shape a comprehensive and ambitious transatlantic green agenda, working side by side to getting the world's major emitter to move further and faster.”

With COP26 only a few months away, the time has now come to shape a comprehensive and ambitious transatlantic green agenda, starting not only with a joint commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, but also working side by side to getting the world's major emitter to move further and faster. President Biden administration's decision to rejoin the Paris Accord and to set ambitious targets to cut emissions is a welcome step.

Building a transatlantic economy for the future

With a focus on reflecting both EU and US domestic priorities and interests, our economic relationship remains a big source of prosperity, a driver of innovation, and a testament to resilience. Millions of good jobs have been created across the Atlantic, and our 780 million consumers have benefited from the most profitable global economic artery in the world. But getting our economies moving again will require more than financial stimulus.

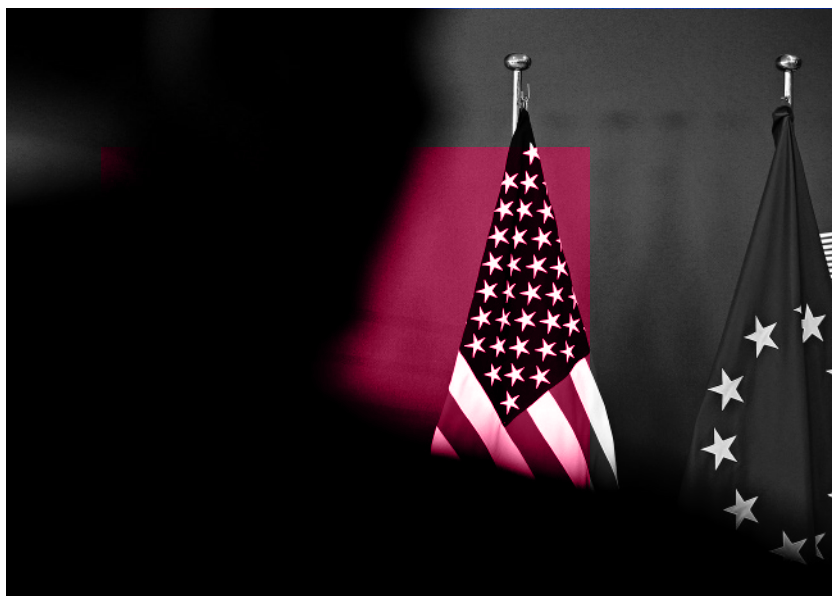
While trade irritants have always existed, it is in our mutual interest to address them in a cooperative spirit bearing in mind that it is others who will benefit from any divisions. We must restore trust in the World Trade Organization, while leading efforts to reform it.

We remain the two biggest human rights promoters in the world. We must remain vigilant in protecting democracy also at home, including through our commitment to social justice and racial and gender equality.

“We in the EU are committed to playing our part, by strengthening our capabilities in a way that is complementary and mutually reinforcing with NATO.”

The EU and the US must join forces to counter the rise of authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and corruption. If we defeat the pandemic and restore economic activity in a way that helps our planet, this may be the most convincing case for our citizens that democracy truly delivers, and that populism and authoritarianism are not the answer.

The EU and the US remain the largest security and peace providers globally. We in the EU are committed to playing our part, by strengthening our capabilities in a way that is complementary and mutually reinforcing with NATO, notably through the establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation. The U.S. and other close partners are already accompanying us on this journey.



On China, our approach is increasingly aligned, based on competition when unavoidable. Since the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the EU and the U.S. have also worked hand in hand to push back against Russia's destabilising behaviour and to uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. We stand ready to apply sanctions where necessary, in coordination where possible. At the same time, we should strive for cooperation when necessary and possible, and continue to engage on issues of our interest and as the situation merits.

The EU–US Summit is finally an opportunity to reaffirm jointly our support for a rules-based multilateral order. We will work to strengthen and reform multilateral institutions to ensure that they respond to current challenges.

We are under no illusion as to the scale of the challenges we face. At the EU–US Summit, we will be engaging with the Biden administration based on a simple tenet: we are stronger together.

CLOSE EU-US RELATIONS REMAIN VITAL FOR GLOBAL SECURITY

17/10/2021 – Blog – During my visit to Washington D.C in October 2021, we cleared the air on the transatlantic agenda after the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the AUKUS announcement and focused on pressing international challenges. A better balanced EU-US cooperation will remain key for international peace, security and prosperity.

At the end of my two-day visit to Washington D.C. I visited the Arlington National Cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial. At Arlington, the United States honours its military dead, buried with dignity under a multitude of identical headstones. The national memorial built to honour Abraham Lincoln, the president who abolished slavery and led his nation through [Civil War, stands at the end of the Mall](#) ⁽²²¹⁾.

Reminders of what it takes to build democracy

While we currently still see tensions in the American society, these two sites are stark unifying reminders of what it takes to build a democracy and to defend its values and fundamental rights – at home and abroad. And Arlington Cemetery reminds us Europeans of the numerous young Americans that gave their lives on European soil for our freedom, fighting Nazism and fascism, which also laid the foundations of our transatlantic partnership.

The deepening of this partnership was the central focus of my first visit to Washington D.C. since the new Biden administration took office. During my meetings with Secretary of State Blinken and Deputy Secretary of Defence Hicks, we reviewed and worked on the commitments from the June EU-US Summit and discussed concrete projects to reinforce and improve our cooperation.

Since January, we have been working closely together building an ambitious new transatlantic agenda. We do this not only because we are the closest partners in terms of values and as to how we organise our societies, our democracies, and our market economies, but also because friends and allies look at us and expect

⁽²²¹⁾ See <https://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>

us to work together to address global challenges. In times of immense geopolitical shifts, the EU and US have a shared responsibility to prevent the international order to slide towards an exacerbated competition among nations. Working together, we have to actively promote a vision of global cooperation based on democratic values that contrasts with that of authoritarian powers, which strive for a very different world.

“ Naturally, we also discussed recent difficulties and differences – which also did serve as a wake-up call to deepen trust and improve early warning mechanisms.”

Naturally, we also discussed recent difficulties and differences, including the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the circumstances of the AUKUS announcement. *Inter alia*, a [lack of consultation and communication](#) ⁽²²²⁾ created real difficulties for allies and did not show the West at its best. These difficulties did serve as a wake-up call and an impetus to focus more on the need to deepen trust and to improve our early warning mechanisms. Building on the achievements of the last months – such as the outcome of the [EU–US Summit](#) ⁽²²³⁾ and the recent launch of the [Trade and Technology Council](#) ⁽²²⁴⁾ in Pittsburgh – we were able during my visit to agree on concrete steps to deepen our engagement.

A dedicated EU-US dialogue on security and defence

To start, we confirmed our pledge to launch a dedicated dialogue on security and defence by the end of the year. There is no doubt that our security and prosperity will be enhanced by deeper bilateral cooperation in this field. In the same spirit, I was glad to receive again US support for a stronger and more capable European defence as a contribution to transatlantic and global security. As I have said many times: the stronger we become as EU, the better a partner we can be for the US and NATO. We should avoid a divisive, and in my view often artificial, debate on whether we should strengthen Europe's own security capacities or whether we should do so in NATO. It is a false dichotomy and we clearly need to do both.

I informed both Secretary Blinken and Deputy Secretary Hicks how we intend to strengthen European defence through the [Strategic Compass](#) – [which EU leaders](#)

⁽²²²⁾ See p. 71.

⁽²²³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2021/06/15/>

⁽²²⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_4951

[have tasked me to develop](#) ⁽²²⁵⁾. It will strengthen our capacity to act and allow us to deal with some threats on our own. This is part of the burden sharing that our American allies have repeatedly asked for, and I stressed again that of course this will happen in cooperation with NATO.

EU-US consultations on the Indo-Pacific

In addition, we agreed to launch EU–US consultations on the Indo-Pacific, to step up transatlantic cooperation and joint engagement [in this region](#) ⁽²²⁶⁾. We also agreed to launch a high-level dialogue on Russia, based on our principled approach towards this country. For both, the first meetings are planned to take place before the end of this year. We will also hold the next meeting of the EU–US Energy Council early next year to discuss the current high energy prices, the [global impact of this crisis](#) ⁽²²⁷⁾ and the green energy transition.

Finally, let me briefly highlight some other international issues that we addressed:

We agreed that in dealing with China a multifaceted approach is needed, comprising elements of cooperation, competition, and systemic rivalry. The next high-level meeting of the EU–US Dialogue on China will be held in December.

Regarding Afghanistan, we will continue to work together to support the Afghan people and avoid the socio-economic collapse of the country.

As to the Western Balkans, we discussed the necessity of continued EU–US partnership. Regarding the EU-facilitated Dialogue on normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, we highlighted the need for de-escalation and re-engagement in negotiations.

On Iran and the JCPOA, we will continue to work to ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme and to uphold the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture, as well as the need to return to the Vienna talks soon.

Regarding Venezuela, we reiterated our strong intention to support political processes to restore stability and democratic reconciliation.

⁽²²⁵⁾ See p. 145.

⁽²²⁶⁾ See p. 399.

⁽²²⁷⁾ See p. 183.

On the Sahel, we will continue to focus our common efforts towards stabilising the region; a region in which Europe will need to lead the efforts to do so.



Overall, a very positive feeling

Overall, I return from my visit to Washington with a very positive feeling of how we will continue to deepen and strengthen a well-balanced transatlantic partnership. The global challenges we face today make it essential and let me end in this regard with a quote from Abraham Lincoln, which struck me when visiting his memorial: 'You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today'.



6.2 NEIGHBOURHOOD

ADDRESSING THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

05/01/2021 – Blog – *During the last weeks of year 2020, we have witnessed a serious humanitarian crisis concerning hundreds of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The crisis is largely due to the disfunctioning governance in the country. However, it also reminds us of the urgent need to update our common asylum and migration policy.*

During the past days, in the middle of Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations, we have been working with my colleagues Commissioners Johansson and Lenarčič, to mitigate a dramatic humanitarian situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where thousands of vulnerable refugees and migrants are without protection, out in the open in dire winter conditions with their lives at risk. It is an experience from which lessons should be learned.

Inappropriate and dangerous living conditions

On 23 December, the Lipa reception centre for migrants was closed down. It was a summer tent facility opened in response to COVID-19 in the Una Sana canton of Bosnia and Herzegovina, bordering Croatia. Over 1 200 migrants were staying there in totally inappropriate and dangerous conditions during the winter.

After BiH authorities ignored repeated appeals to provide basic and secure living conditions and humane treatment, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which administered the Lipa centre, started to close it on 23 December. Reportedly, a handful of occupants then set fire to the camp in protest, rendering it uninhabitable.

There would be an alternative: the Bira centre in the nearby city of Bihac, which was refurbished with €3.5 million EU support. It is suitable for winter conditions but stands empty, due to the opposition of local authorities and population to open it.

“ The Bira migrants centre, refurbished with €3.5 million EU support, is suitable for winter conditions but stands empty, due to the opposition of local authorities to open it.”

The BiH Council of Ministers took the decision to open Bira centre – actually twice, on 21 and 31 December. The local authorities however continue to block it, resisting the implementation of the decision of the Council of Ministers. They refer to the lack of sharing of responsibility between the different regions of BiH for managing the presence of migrants and refugees and the local population has expressed concern about its safety, especially in Bihac.

In an attempt to find alternative solutions, the BiH Minister of Security tried to relocate the migrants to Bradina in the Hercegovina-Neretva canton. However, the plan also encountered resistance by the local authorities. The Council of Ministers of BiH did not support the idea and it was ultimately abandoned. Because of the dysfunctionality of decision-making in BiH, no other solution has been made available to the migrants by the state authorities.



With nowhere else to go, some 900 persons have had to continue to sleep in Lipa in the open for a week now and some 800 people have gone off to sleep in abandoned buildings and the woods. The weather is cold and wet, and there is a

strong probability of conditions worsening significantly in coming weeks. Lives of many hundreds of people are being seriously jeopardised and their basic human rights disregarded.

The EU is engaged from the start of the crisis

The EU has engaged with all actors from the start of the current crisis and called for months on the authorities to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Finally, after concerted EU outreach over New Years' Eve, the armed forces of BiH were deployed to provide emergency tents and assistance. This is an important first step, and now urgent work must be carried out to provide basic services such as sanitation, running water, beds and heating.

On 2 January, EU Ambassador/EUSR to Bosnia and Herzegovina Johann Sattler and Ambassadors of Austria, Germany and Italy met in Sarajevo with the Minister of Security of BiH Selmo Cikotic to discuss urgent solutions to address the basic needs of the people and provide humane conditions on the ground.

Looking at the bigger picture, a total of around 8 000-9 000 refugees and migrants are present in BiH. The migrant centres Bira, Borići, Miral, Sedra, Lipa, Ušivak and Blažuj have a capacity of 7 400 places for 5 600 officially registered migrants. Since 2018, the EU has repeatedly asked BiH authorities to address migration effectively. Lipa is not the first crisis.

Despite repeated and high-level EU advocacy and important financial help to address the needs of migrants and refugees and to strengthen border and asylum management, the country's authorities have not ensured an effective management of reception capacities and a functioning asylum system. Around 3 000 refugees and migrants are actually left without access to basic shelter and services in winter conditions in whole BiH. Regardless of the fact that these migrants and refugees are overwhelmingly only in BiH because they seek a brighter future in our Union, BiH has an obligation under international human rights instruments to care for them on its territory.

The EU has consistently supported BiH to do so. Since 2018, the EU has provided more than €88 million, to address the immediate needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants and to help the country strengthen its migration management capacities. Most recently, on 3 January, the [European Commission has announced](#)

[€3.5 million in humanitarian aid](#) ⁽²²⁸⁾ to help the refugees and migrants that face a humanitarian disaster in the Una Sana canton.

“ We have to ensure that migrants seeking asylum in the EU get everywhere decent treatment and humane living conditions during the entire application process.”

We have to ensure that migrants seeking asylum in the EU get decent treatment and humane living conditions during the entire application process. This has to be requested everywhere, in the EU and in our partner countries. Unfortunately, it is not only in BiH that this is a problem. However, what is particular in this case is that fully equipped capacity is available and remains unused. While we stand ready to assist our partner countries to achieve this goal, they must assume their responsibilities in that domain. As an aspiring member of the EU, these principles should apply in BiH.

More broadly, the current crisis in BiH reminds us that the global challenges around migration and addressing migration towards Europe remain one of the most important responsibilities and at the same time, one of the most complex issues that we face. To address this challenge successfully, we need to strengthen our common migration and asylum policy.

The urgency of a new European Pact on Migration and Asylum

To achieve this goal, the European Commission has proposed last September a [new Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) ⁽²²⁹⁾, which is currently discussed by the EU member states. It sets out more efficient and faster procedures, to avoid that people spend years in limbo, waiting for their asylum applications to be processed. It tries to balance the principles of fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity. At the same time, it looks at cooperation with partner countries on migration and legal pathways. The package's rapid adoption and implementation is crucial for rebuilding trust between member states and confidence in the capacity of the European Union to manage migration.

⁽²²⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2

⁽²²⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

AFTER BREXIT, HOW CAN THE EU AND UK BEST COOPERATE ON FOREIGN POLICY?

30/01/2021 – Blog – *On 1 January 2021, Brexit took full effect, with the UK becoming a ‘third country’. While the public debate has focused on the economic fallout, we also need to decide how the EU and the UK can cooperate on foreign and security policy. During the January 2021 Foreign Affairs Council, EU Foreign Ministers discussed the issue.*

Although the UK had already left the EU on 1 February 2020, de facto not much had changed during the so-called ‘transition phase’. We had intense negotiations, with no shortage of drama, which eventually led to a deal just before Christmas on the so-called Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA). This agreement is now the basis for EU–UK relations, pending ratification by member states and the European Parliament.

Since 1 January, there are headlines every day on what this all means, for importers and exporters, for fishermen and students, indeed for anyone in the EU who deals with the UK and vice versa. Inevitably, Brexit is affecting the deep ties that exist at so many levels between us. And while the economic aspects of Brexit tend to dominate the debate, there is another important question: how will the EU and the UK cooperate on foreign and security policy? What we can do together in a turbulent world? Building this type of cooperation will not happen by itself, nor is it an easy task. So, I was pleased to discuss with EU Foreign Ministers how best to approach this new phase.

“With Brexit, nothing gets easier and a lot gets more complicated. How much more complicated depends on the choices that both sides will make.”

It is clear that the UK has lost the ‘multiplier effect’ of EU membership and that it faces a diminished international stature. In turn, the EU has lost UK assets: its permanent seat on the UN Security Council; its security and defence capabilities and its global outlook and diplomatic heft. With Brexit, nothing gets easier and a lot gets more complicated. How much more complicated depends on the choices that both sides will make.

No framework of cooperation on foreign and security policy

Unfortunately, the UK side decided to forego a structured, legally binding framework of cooperation on foreign and security policy, as the EU had proposed. Still, we don't start from zero as the TCA contains provisions on human rights, climate change, disarmament and non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and cybersecurity. These elements give us a basis to start dialogues and cooperate with the UK in those areas.

In areas such as sanctions, crisis management operations and capabilities, positions in multilateral fora, aid spending or consular protection and more, both sides should be able to work together, as mutual interests are at play. Indeed, there was good ad-hoc cooperation during the transition phase on the pandemic and its fallout. So where there is a need, I am convinced the path will be found.

Politically, the current UK government is determined to 'make a success of Brexit' and act under the rubric of 'Global Britain'. Later this year, an Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy should give substance to this phrase and spell out how to link means and ends. We can already expect the UK to prioritise using its seats in key organisations and platforms, namely the UN Security Council, the G7 (which is chairs this year) and G20, NATO, the 'Five Eyes' intelligence sharing club, as well as the chairmanship of the COP26 climate summit. When it comes to Europe, it will want to maintain close ties with European partners but perhaps opt for bilateral or minilateral channels to advance issue-specific approaches.

“*The UK will be a key ally and strategic partner on the world stage. But in some instances it will also be an assertive competitor.*”

On substance, we count on the UK to continue to share our main interests and values. This is true at the macro-level of promoting the 'rules-based global order' and protecting open, democratic societies, but also in concrete policy areas such as climate, development and many regional files. In some specific cases, the UK may want to diverge, putting its own accents, and we will have to manage these cases pragmatically. In short, the UK will be a key ally and strategic partner on the world stage. But in some instances it will also be an assertive competitor.

Where do we go from here?

At last Monday's Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) there was widespread support for a constructive and prudent approach with EU interests and unity as the guiding principles. Protecting this unity was a key achievement during the negotiations led by Michel Barnier. Also in the coming years, this will require discipline from member states when the UK will approach them, as it probably will.

For the legitimacy and success of EU foreign policy, the autonomy of the EU decision-making system must be protected. At the FAC, all Foreign Ministers subscribed to this view. They warned against cherry-picking and pointed to the risks of the 'bilateralisation' of relations.

It is understandable for member states to get together in different configurations and informal sub-groups to facilitate the convergence of positions. But meetings of smaller groups do need careful handling, especially if they bring together the more powerful ones (such as the E3 or Quints and Quads). Minister agreed that the EU, on the basis of unity, should pursue synergies whenever EU and UK objectives converge.

We also agreed that mutual respect was essential for relations to develop constructively. That is why we cannot accept the UK's recent decision not to treat the EU Ambassador to London with the normal diplomatic privileges. It goes against the UK's own rhetoric of seeking a relationship as 'sovereign equals'. Besides, the UK itself supported that the EU Delegations have full diplomatic status when it was still an EU member. So we do not ask for something new, nor do we ask for special treatment. Indeed, 143 other countries where the EU has a Delegation do not share the UK position.

“ We cannot accept the UK's recent decision not to treat the EU Ambassador to London with the normal diplomatic privileges. It goes against the UK's own rhetoric of seeking a relationship as 'sovereign equals'.”

For these reasons, I [remarked to the press](#) ⁽²³⁰⁾ that we consider this decision, the first signal that the UK sent us after leaving the EU, as not a friendly one. As also my colleague Maros Sefcovic [said](#) ⁽²³¹⁾: we expect the UK to confirm as soon as soon as possible that it will grant our diplomats in London the status they need

⁽²³⁰⁾ See <https://newsroom.consilium.europa.eu/events/20210125-foreign-affairs-council-january-2021/129451-4-press-conference-part-4-q-a-20210125>

⁽²³¹⁾ See <https://www.ft.com/content/bd9491fe-f9ae-4cfb-a966-8330bbe8643e>

to do their job. So that we can focus our combined energies not on process issues but on devising substantive collaboration regarding pressing global problems.



In the coming weeks and months, I will do my best to develop a constructive EU–UK partnership on foreign and security policy, mindful of preserving EU interests and unity.

I remain convinced that on the big issues, we ought to operate in lockstep: protecting European and global security, defending open societies and tackling the climate crisis. As EU, we are ready to do our part and we count on good old British pragmatism to allow this global partnership to grow.

THE LEADERS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA MUST DELIVER ON REFORMS

09/05/2021- *Blog – Ahead of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May, I have sent a clear message to the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): they must stop using divisive nationalist rhetoric and instead focus on rapid progress on reforms.*

Tomorrow at the EU Foreign Affairs Council, we will discuss the situation in the Western Balkans. This region, in our immediate neighbourhood, has a high priority on the EU agenda: we want to accompany these countries towards a future EU membership. However, the Western Balkans are currently facing several serious difficulties, such as tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, the relations between Belgrade and Pristina, the lack of progress in the accession negotiations of Albania and North Macedonia and the current problems in Montenegro. We will discuss all these issues tomorrow. However, I would like to emphasise in this blogpost the particularly difficult situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A deteriorated political atmosphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ten days ago, I had a video conference with the three Members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, Milorad Dodik, Šefik Džaferović, and Željko Komšić. Building on my strong engagement over the last months, I asked for this meeting because the political atmosphere in Bosnia and Herzegovina has significantly deteriorated recently.

We have witnessed a [disturbing migrant crisis](#) ⁽²³²⁾ at the end of last year with very dysfunctional responses from the BiH authorities. In recent weeks, a negative spin around the ongoing talks on the necessary electoral and constitutional reforms culminated in various ‘non-papers’, some of which criticised the EU/US for their facilitating role in these efforts.

⁽²³²⁾ See p. 251.

“ *A call for redrawing borders in the region and partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines, has triggered a push for inflammatory reactions.*”

One of them also called for redrawing borders in the region and partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines, which has aggravated the atmosphere and triggered a push for a secessionist agenda and the inflammatory reactions.

I therefore decided to call the members of the Presidency together. It was a difficult meeting, with many attacks and recriminations between the three members of the BiH Presidency. For my part, I sent them a strong and clear message.

First, the Western Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, are the priority on the EU agenda. This is why I have scheduled a discussion on the region at the next Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May. Our commitment to the region and its EU perspective is reflected in the unprecedented levels of EU financial support – including to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

The EU funded 213 822 doses of BioNTech/Pfizer vaccines

Last week, alongside other Western Balkan countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina received the first batch of the EU-funded vaccines from [the specific arrangement we have made for the region](#) ⁽²³³⁾: 213 822 doses of BioNTech/Pfizer out of a total of 651 000 for the entire region will be delivered until the end of August. The EU vaccines come with no strings attached – we do not sell them, we donate them.

When we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement in Sarajevo last November, the BiH Presidency committed to step up efforts to ensure that all citizens can live in dignity, with mutual acknowledgment, respect and understanding. Rhetoric calling into question the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina goes in the opposite direction and it has to stop. Talking about secession, new borders, further ethnic divisions or war, is dangerous and unacceptable.

“ *Rhetoric calling into question the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina has to stop. Talking about secession, new borders, further ethnic divisions or war, is dangerous and unacceptable.*”

⁽²³³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_1826

The EU's position has not changed and will not change: we support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its future lies within the EU as a united and sovereign country. I have strongly encouraged my counterparts to put an end to any counterproductive discourse and actions.

Move from Dayton to Brussels

When I was in Sarajevo last November, I had an in-depth exchange with the BiH Presidency members. We expected then the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina to use this non-election year to move decisively [from Dayton to Brussels](#) ⁽²³⁴⁾, with substantial progress on implementing the [14 key priorities](#) ⁽²³⁵⁾ identified by the European Commission's Opinion back in May 2019. It's already May 2021 and regrettably there has been very little progress thus far.



BiH citizens and EU member states want to see more progress and they want to see it now. The country's leaders should seize the opportunity of the upcoming FAC discussion in May and the upcoming EU–BiH Stabilisation and Association

⁽²³⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89104/dayton-brussels-speech-high-representative-european-future-bih_en

⁽²³⁵⁾ See <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2019-05/20190529-bosnia-and-herzegovina-opinion.pdf>

Council to deliver positive news. They should come to the table with concrete results, not just promises, especially when we have heard these promises before. No more hollow words. Only action and progress can move Bosnia and Herzegovina forward on its EU accession track and lead to candidate status. The lack of progress and continuing retrograde rhetoric and actions would have the opposite effect.

The constitutional and electoral reform: a key deliverable

A key deliverable is the constitutional and electoral reform. This may sound ambitious, but there is no way around amending the BiH Constitution to meet EU standards and implement the pending [European Court of Human Rights Sejdic/Finci case](#) ⁽²³⁶⁾. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs also an amended electoral framework in line with OSCE and GRECO recommendations. I know these reforms are difficult and touch upon very sensitive issues: we need constructive engagement of all leaders across the political spectrum and civil society in order to succeed.

“ I know these constitutional and electoral reforms touch upon very sensitive issues: we need constructive engagement of all leaders across the political spectrum and civil society in order to succeed.”

Strengthening the rule of law also remains essential. It is perfectly possible to finalise the adoption of the law on public procurement, the law on conflict of interest and the amendments to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Law in the coming months in line with EU requirements. Anything else would only signal obstruction of the reforms needed on the European path.

Finally, the role of the EU, together with the US, is to facilitate the talks and ensure that the proposals on the table are aligned with EU standards. Attempts to misrepresent the role and intent of the EU and our international partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina are unacceptable. The Special Representative, who is also the EU's representative in BiH Ambassador Johann Sattler and his staff have my full confidence and support.

During the last months, I invested time and energy to support Bosnia and Herzegovina on the path of reforms and EU accession. The BiH authorities need now to show EU member states that they can deliver on this important agenda.

⁽²³⁶⁾ See <file:///C:/Users/iduvalgu/AppData/Local/Temp/001-96491.pdf>

WESTERN BALKANS: WE NEED TO CHANGE THE DYNAMIC

21/05/2021 – Blog – In May 2021, together with Commissioner Várhelyi, I had an informal dinner with leaders of the Six Western Balkans countries. We have seen a proliferation of nationalistic, often divisive rhetoric. At our May Foreign Affairs Council, EU Foreign Ministers agreed on the need to increase our efforts to bring the region closer to the EU.

Last Tuesday, I had invited President Đukanović of Montenegro, Prime Minister Rama of Albania, Prime Minister Brnabić of Serbia, Chairman of the Council of Ministers Tegeltija of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Prime Minister Zaev of North Macedonia and Prime Minister Kurti of Kosovo for an informal dinner to discuss the situation in the region. Commissioner Várhelyi, in charge of the accession process, also joined our discussion.

Since 2017, it has been customary to hold such meetings twice a year, but since the beginning of my mandate, we have not had the opportunity to do so due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was all the more important to reconvene in this informal setting, as the region is currently once again at a crossroads in terms of European integration.

“ I wanted to exchange with the Western Balkans leaders openly and informally about their concerns and proposals for the region and its European future.”

I wanted to exchange with the Western Balkans leaders openly and informally about their concerns and proposals for the region and its European future, as well as a more strategic approach to the European foreign policy. I am also keen to build a personal relationship with those leaders who need space to work on good neighbourly relations, with the European Union and amongst them.

Demonstrate EU engagement with the region

It was important to demonstrate EU engagement with the region on a political level, beyond enlargement. However, the discussion showed clearly that

enlargement is the topic, almost an existential topic, which unites the region. All leaders stated they have chosen to put EU integration at the top of their agendas and invested maximum political capital to move the people in the region closer to the EU. Coming from a country that started to thrive in the years when preparing for European Union membership, I know how the EU can serve as a magnet, and help countries recover, grow and prosper.

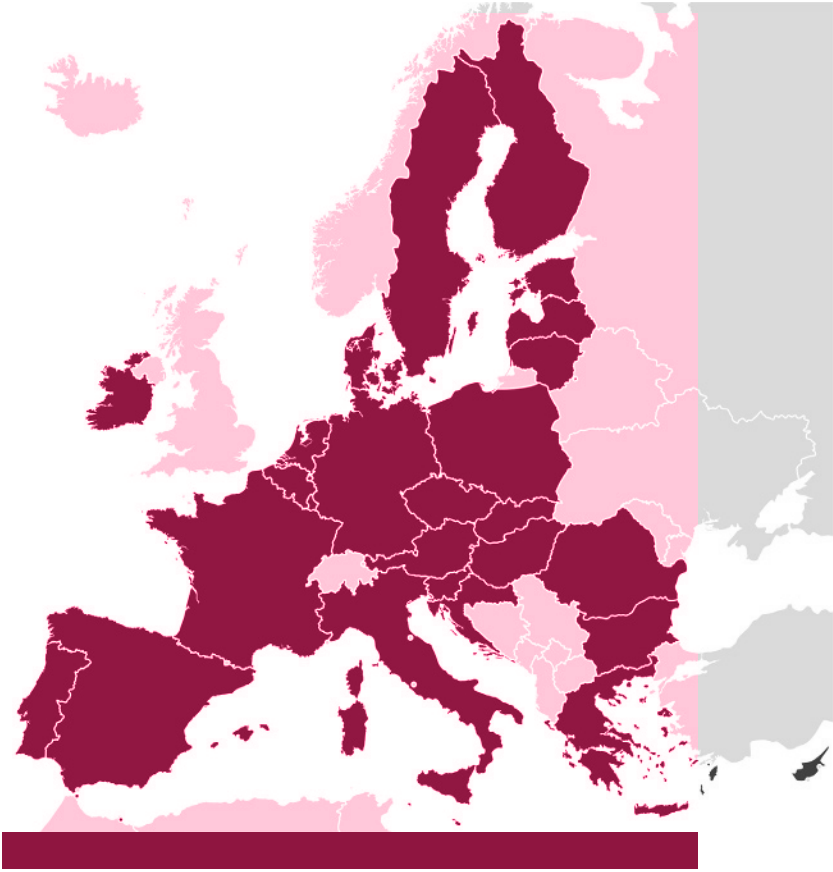
One only has to look at a map to understand how much the Western Balkans are engulfed in the EU, as one leader put it on Tuesday. The EU is the leading trade partner for all Western Balkans countries, with almost 70 % of the region's total trade. Over the past 10 years, our trade has grown by almost 130 %. Western Balkans exports to the EU have increased by 207 %. In 2018, EU companies accounted for over 65 % of foreign direct investment in the region.

However, it also takes little knowledge of European history to understand why the region remains fragile and its integration process into the EU complex. It was in the Balkans that the First World War started in 1914, and it was also in the Balkans that war and its trail of death and destruction returned to European soil in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of former Yugoslavia.

The dangerous game of aspiring 'new empires'

These wars left deep wounds that are still far from being healed, despite the time passed since the 1995 Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the 1999 ceasefire between Serbia and Kosovar independence fighters. In addition to this difficult history comes also the game of the aspiring 'new empires', with Russia and China trying to increase their leverage and weaken the EU. Despite a more secure and stable environment now, the region is still far from resilient.

“ *Identity politics are thriving in the region and we see dangerous ideas about reshaping borders along ethnic lines. Such narratives are the very opposite of what European integration stands for.*”



Recently the pandemic and its economic and social consequences have worsened the situation, despite the efforts of the EU and its member states, which have mobilised [€3.3 billion to help the region's recovery](#) through the Team Europe initiative and will deliver 651 000 COVID-19 vaccines by August, with the help in particular of Austria. Identity politics are thriving in the region and with it, we see dangerous ideas about reshaping borders along ethnic lines. Such narratives are the very opposite of what European integration stands for. [Read [my recent blog on Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) ⁽²³⁷⁾, where I discussed this issue.]

In view of these developments, I put the Western Balkans on the agenda of the [last Foreign Affairs Council](#) ⁽²³⁸⁾. It was the first time since 2018 that such a

⁽²³⁷⁾ See p. XX

⁽²³⁸⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2021/05/10/>

discussion took place – about time. Foreign Ministers expressed their concerns about ‘losing the region’ and stressed their determination to engage in bringing the Western Balkans closer to its European future. We agreed that when the Western Balkans deliver, we should deliver.

Concerns about losing the region

Concretely, Albania and North Macedonia are expecting the first Intergovernmental Conferences on EU accession in June and so are Serbia and Montenegro. Kosovo’s visa liberalisation is long overdue: the country has met all related criteria and we now need to make progress on this issue. I will fully support this. I will also facilitate another High Level Belgrade Pristina Dialogue meeting in June. A comprehensive legally binding agreement between Serbia and Kosovo is also long overdue. [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) ⁽²³⁹⁾ need to use this year of non-elections to the full for difficult negotiations and decision on electoral reforms, the rule of law and the necessary constitutional amendments.

I appreciated the leader’s frankness on all these subjects. Their call to the member states was clear: ‘make the effort to read the map and the history of the Balkans, try to understand us better and plan for a future together within the European Union’.

“ *The Western Balkan leaders call to the member states was clear: ‘make the effort to read the map and the history of the Balkans, try to understand us better and plan for a future together within the European Union.’* ”

EU engagement with the region will continue during the June Councils, the [Berlin Process Summit](#) ⁽²⁴⁰⁾ in July and the EU Western Balkans Summit in October. For my part, I will continue to be fully involved in and with the region and I plan to visit the region in July if the COVID 19 pandemic finally allows doing so. We need to make of 2021 the year of a breakthrough for the relations in all areas between the EU and Western Balkans.

⁽²³⁹⁾ See p. 259.

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ See <https://berlinprocess.info/>

SREBRENICA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RECONCILIATION TO MOVE FORWARD

11/07/2021 – Blog – *In the heart of Europe 26 years ago, the darkest page of our modern history was being written. In July 1995, over 8 000 people have been intentionally killed. In July 2021, 19 additional victims were laid to rest at the Srebrenica Memorial Centre. We have to learn from what happened and need reconciliation to move forward.*

These killings are a genocide, as recognised by the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia in 2004 and the International Court of Justice in 2006. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the region there still is a tendency of denial of the Srebrenica genocide. Our duty is to remember Srebrenica and the victims, to honour the memory of those laid to rest and all those still missing, and to learn from what happened and do everything possible to prevent it from happening ever again.

“ Any attempts to revise history, deny genocide and war crimes, and glorify war criminals have to stop.”

We can observe again attempts to revise history, deny genocide and war crimes, and glorify war criminals, which have to stop. Leaders from the whole region have to reject hate and divisive rhetoric and work in support of justice, promote dialogue and cooperation. The best way to achieve reconciliation is to build stronger and better societies where pluralism, justice and human dignity prevail. This is exactly what the European Union is offering to Bosnia and Herzegovina through the European path, and that is the reason why we promote reforms, political dialogue but most of all the reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a strategic orientation and a day-to-day activity. In Bosnia and Herzegovina reconciliation becomes a reality through fostering dialogue and initiatives in schools, on the streets, in villages and in cities. Reconciliation starts with young people. The youth will shape the country's development, they have the right to a qualitative and inclusive education system and deserve to live in a peaceful and just country.

A huge majority of Bosnians want to follow the European path

Last November, I travelled to Sarajevo on the occasion of the [25th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement](#) ⁽²⁴¹⁾. I visited the War Childhood Museum and met with champions of reconciliation. Paying tribute to victims of the war reminds us how essential it is to acknowledge historical facts of the past in order to learn, and to build the future. Commemorating is understanding, healing and moving forward.

The country can move forward on its European path. According to recent surveys, more than 75 per cent of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina support this because they understand the transformative power of the European Union and the strength of the European idea.



On 13 July, I will chair the EU–Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Council. This will be the first meeting after three years. I look forward to our discussion on current challenges and way forward with the reforms needed to make the governance more effective, enhance the rule of law and unlock the economic potential. We will review progress on the 14 key priorities mentioned

⁽²⁴¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89104/dayton-brussels-speech-high-representative-european-future-bih_en

in the European Commission's Opinion on the accession request of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the sensitive, but necessary [constitutional and electoral reforms](#) ⁽²⁴²⁾.

“ *The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a part of common European history.*”

EU accession is a process, which demands responsibility, leadership and vision, and joint efforts by the whole of society. And while remembering Srebrenica, the European Union reiterates its firm commitment to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in overcoming the legacies of the past, facing facts and steering societies towards a better future. The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a part of common European history and the future of the country and of the whole Western Balkans lies in the European Union.

⁽²⁴²⁾ See p. 259.

BRINKSMANSHIP AND GAMESMANSHIP ARE NOT LEADERSHIP

30/11/2021 – *Op Ed* – *At the end of 2021, the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina stands to hijack the country's potential. I explain in this Op Ed that the European Union is prepared to fully uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH and that instead of destabilising the country, Bosnia's political leaders should focus on reconciliation.*

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is making headlines for all the wrong reasons. Instead of celebrating milestones on its EU path, news about BiH harkens back to the past. The political crisis caused by threats to undo 26 years of peace and progress stands to hijack BiH's potential.

Blocking progress and engaging in gamesmanship

The Republika Srpska (RS) ruling coalition leadership is testing the limits of brinksmanship, threatening actions that undermine the economic and health interests in the RS and the fabric of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. In the Federation of BiH, many politicians guard the status quo by blocking progress and engaging in gamesmanship instead of improving power-sharing and functionality of institutions.

“The EU stands by one sovereign Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and by all the BiH citizens tired of corruption and looking to hold leaders accountable for creating a better future.”

The EU stands by one sovereign BiH, and by all the BiH citizens tired of corruption and looking to hold leaders accountable for creating a better future. A European vision for BiH and for the Western Balkans offers a vision of prosperity and security underpinned by rule of law and free movement of goods, capital, people and services. A vision of BiH firmly anchored within the EU. Enough of the past, the European future is far more attractive.

BiH citizens want EU standards and EU membership

BiH citizens are united in their wish for economic growth, better healthcare and education, stability and security for their family or business, living free from corruption, raising their children in an environment that is neither polluted nor polluting their minds. They want to enjoy their ethnic, religious, cultural and civic identities, regardless of where they live, and for those identities not to be a barrier for employment or public, social and political life. They want EU standards and EU membership.

The Western Balkans are overall experiencing unprecedented economic growth, yet BiH is lagging behind and is ill-prepared to reap the benefits of regional economic integration. Attempts to reclaim competencies over medicines, armed forces, VAT or other centralised functions create instability and set BiH further back. RS citizens stand to lose more than ever. Are all the concerns articulated by RS parties unjustified? No, not per se.

The lack of a state-level property law creates uncertainties that will continue to prevent full protection and functional use of public land by the entities. The decision taken by former High Representative Valentin Inzko to use the so-called Bonn Powers for criminalising denial of genocide is not about collective blame or an attack on the RS but about the dignity of all victims. The BiH Parliament is the venue to debate such issues. Instead of taking unilateral measures that contribute to destabilising the country, focus should lie on reconciliation, building trust and respect between communities.

“ *Instead of taking unilateral measures that contribute to destabilising the country, focus should lie on reconciliation, building trust and respect between communities.*”

As to the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the European Union's position remains that the goal is to hand over supervision to BiH's citizens through accountable institutions. We agree on the '5+2' agenda for the closure of OHR, but the conditions have not been met yet. Current actions simply delay the completion of international supervision. Those who call for OHR's closure the loudest contribute the most to the need for its continued presence.

Political solutions have not been exhausted. Further escalation must be avoided and a positive way forward to return to constructive decision-making processes within BiH institutions is needed. We have seen that when there is sincere political

will, the BiH leadership can deliver reforms. Currently, however, BiH is held back from unfolding its full potential due to the lack of trust and willingness to compromise by coalition 'partners' SDA, SNSD, HDZ BiH and DF, resulting in stalemates and an inability to reach common-sense agreements.

Constitutional and electoral reform is an urgent priority

Constitutional and electoral reform is therefore an urgent priority. It is a crucial measure for trust-building and preventing electoral fraud. The constitutional reform aims to remove discrimination from the BiH Constitution through full implementation of the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the BiH Presidency and BiH House of Peoples. This includes amendments to the Election Law to strengthen the integrity of elections. It is not about removing the concept of the constituent peoples or their rights but about securing rights for all in a way that preserves the territorial structure of BiH.

The EU is working to facilitate these discussions, also together with the United States. Our expert teams, led by senior officials Angelina Eichhorst and Matt Palmer, together with our ambassadors, are facilitating a political dialogue to explore options in line with standards that would have the necessary support in parliament. Our senior officials are currently in BiH again this week to work intensively with leaders on the ground. As part of this process, we seek to improve the functionality of governance, especially in the Federation of BiH. Changes affecting elections must be made well ahead of the 2022 elections.

“ *A better future for all in BiH demands building up, not tearing down. The politics of fear is a losing strategy.*”

The EU will fully uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of BiH, and the EU's military operation on the ground, EUFOR ALTHEA, will continue to deliver on its core mandate to maintain a safe and secure environment for all citizens of BiH, and the implementation of civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. A better future for all in BiH demands building up, not tearing down. The politics of fear is a losing strategy. It is time to return to the table, for leaders from both entities to build consensus and solutions for a better future for all citizens in BiH.



6.3 RUSSIA AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

MY VISIT TO MOSCOW AND THE FUTURE OF EU–RUSSIA RELATIONS

07/02/2021 – Blog – In February 2021, I went to Moscow to test, through principled diplomacy, whether the Russian government was interested in addressing differences and reversing the negative trend in our relations. The reaction I received pointed in a different direction. So, as EU we have had to reflect on the implications and chart a way forward.

I have just returned from a very complicated visit to Moscow, on which I had embarked to discuss the fraught state of EU–Russia relations. They have been low for a number of years, and deteriorated even further after recent developments linked to the poisoning, arrest, and sentencing of Alexei Navalny as well as the related mass arrests of thousands of demonstrators.

The purpose of this mission was to express directly the EU's strong condemnation of these events and to address, through principled diplomacy, the process of a rapid worsening of our relationship with Russia, and to help prepare the forthcoming European Council discussions on EU–Russia relations.

“*The Russian authorities did not want to seize this opportunity to have a more constructive dialogue with the EU. This is regrettable and we will have to draw the consequences.*”

An aggressively-staged press conference and the expulsion of three EU diplomats during my visit indicate that the Russian authorities did not want to seize this opportunity to have a more constructive dialogue with the EU. While not fully unexpected, this is regrettable, also, dare I say, from a Russian strategic perspective. As EU, we will have to draw the consequences, reflect carefully on the direction we want to give to our relations with Russia and proceed in a united manner with determination.

Human rights issues were at the centre of my visit

Human rights issues and fundamental freedoms, and in particular the case of Alexei Navalny were very much at the centre of my visit and of my exchanges with

Foreign Minister Lavrov. At times, the discussion with my Russian counterpart reached high levels of tension, as I called for Mr. Navalny's immediate and unconditional release, as well as for a full and impartial investigation into his assassination attempt. I reminded Minister Lavrov that Russia's obligations in the field of human rights stem from international commitments it has freely assumed (i.e. the European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe), and cannot therefore be discarded as interference in internal affairs. I reiterated these points in the press briefing.

I also met with representatives of civil society, think tanks and representatives of the European business community. Despite huge challenges and dwindling space, civil society continues to play a vital role in promoting respect for democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights. I pay tribute to their work and to what they represent. My team had contacts with Mr. Navalny's close circle to signify our support. Unfortunately, I could not meet him as he was standing trial during my visit. I further expressed EU support to human rights and political freedoms by paying tribute to Boris Nemtsov, a leading opposition figure, at the bridge where he was murdered six years ago.

In my exchanges with Minister Lavrov, in addition to human rights issues and diverging views, we also explored broader aspects of our relations, including the potential for cooperation in facing global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and in the Arctic region which are areas where we could find common interests.

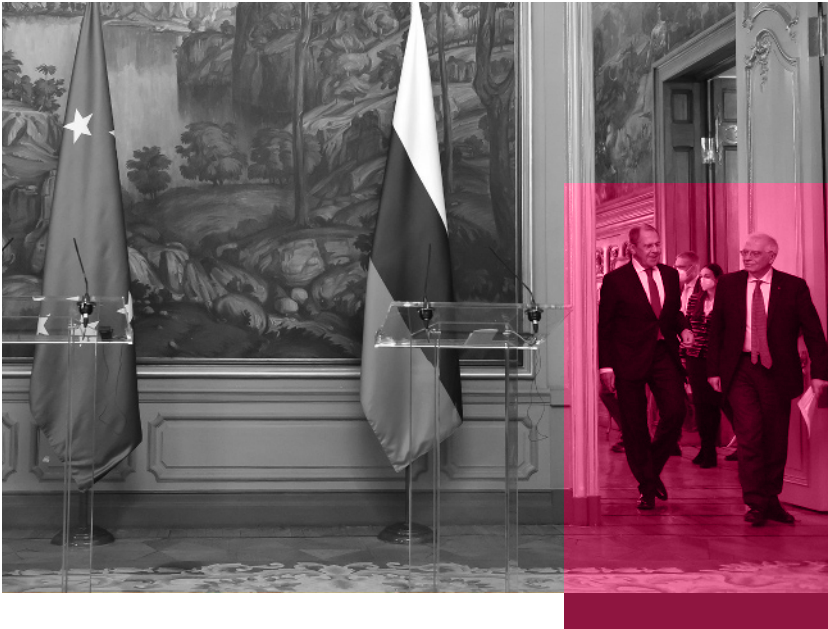
Conflicts in our immediate neighbourhood

We also discussed conflicts in our immediate neighbourhood, and I insisted on the need to advance towards the full implementation of the Minsk agreement and on respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity. I argued as well the need to heed the call of the people of Belarus – which has been loud and clear for six months now – to freely choose their President. Respect for the territorial integrity of Georgia, the situation in Nagorno Karabakh, and the Syrian and Libyan crises were also among the issues we touched upon in a review of our troubled neighbourhood, where Russia and the European Union remain more often than not at odds. In discussing all of this, I stressed there should be full respect for OSCE commitments, including respect for territorial integrity.

We also acknowledged the need to keep good cooperation on the Iran nuclear deal (the JCPOA) and the potential for joint engagement in supporting peace and reconciliation efforts in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

“My meeting with Minister Lavrov highlighted that Europe and Russia are drifting apart. It seems that Russia is progressively disconnecting itself from Europe.”

I had planned this trip to convey EU positions and to stress our fundamental concerns, but also to test if in some areas where our interests converge, we can try to cooperate, and start building some trust. Regrettably, at the very end of our meeting we learned, through social media, of the expulsion of three EU diplomats on unfounded allegations that they did not comply with their status as foreign diplomats by participating in demonstrations. I asked Minister Lavrov to reverse this decision, but to no avail.



Deep concerns over Russia's geostrategic choices

I returned to Brussels with deep concerns over the perspectives of development of Russian society and Russia's geostrategic choices. My meeting with Minister

Lavrov and the messages sent by Russian authorities during this visit confirmed that Europe and Russia are drifting apart. It seems that Russia is progressively disconnecting itself from Europe and looking at democratic values as an existential threat.

We are at a crossroads. The strategic choices we make now will determine international power dynamics in the 21st century, and notably whether we will advance towards more cooperative or more polarised models, based on closed or on freer societies. The European Union can influence these developments, which requires a clear vision and objectives, accompanied by intense diplomatic engagement, supported by our many means of external action and projection of influence.

We will discuss these issues with my fellow EU foreign ministers. As ever, it will be for member states to decide the next steps, and yes, these could include sanctions. And we also have another tool in this respect, thanks to the recently approved EU human's rights sanctions regime.

The nature of the challenge we face is clear

The nature of the challenge we face is clear. Locking ourselves up behind walls and calling on others from the safety of that position will not bring greater security to the EU. And it is not in this way that I see my role as being the first diplomat of the EU. We have to face challenges, including meeting others in their home turf, just when negative events are unfolding to allow us to better assess the situations we are confronting and the actions we should take. I prefer this to remaining reactive and waiting for things to happen. If we want a safer world for tomorrow, we have to act decidedly today and be ready to take some risks.

WHY AND HOW THE EU IS SUPPORTING UKRAINE

20/04/2021 – Blog – *In the spring of 2021, tensions were rising fast in and around Ukraine. At the April Foreign Affairs Council, we have sent a clear signal of our collective support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in front of Russia's military deployment and its continued negative actions and provocations.*

Once again, our monthly meeting of EU Foreign Ministers had to be held via video-link because of the enduring pandemic. And we devoted – yet again – a lot of attention to the growing tensions on the eastern part of our continent. This time, our core focus was on Ukraine and how we can best support that country, as it faces a growing array of challenges. Chief among them is Russia's continued, even increased, military presence.

I had invited the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dimytro Kuleba to join us so that we could hear directly his assessment of the challenges that Ukraine is facing and how the EU and its member state can best tailor our already substantial support. Our exchanges covered several aspects.

“ For years now, Ukraine has been facing Russian aggression... What is especially worrying is the military build-up in the proximity of the Ukrainian border and in the illegally annexed Crimea.”

First, security and the conflict in Ukraine. For years now, Ukraine has been facing Russian aggression. Moreover, Kyiv's steps towards conflict resolution are not reciprocated by Moscow. What is especially worrying is the military build-up in the proximity of the Ukrainian border and in the illegally annexed Crimea. There are more than one hundred thousand Russian troops amassed. With [G7 partners](#), we have called on Russia to stop this dangerous escalation. In addition, Russia has announced the closure of certain parts of the Black Sea until October 2021, for military manoeuvres, which is another provocative move and violates the freedom of navigation as guaranteed by UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).



Urge Russia to de-escalate

From my side, I stressed that we must commend Ukraine for its restrained response; we must continue to urge Russia to de-escalate and defuse tensions, and we should all push back on Russia's attempts to portray itself as a mediator, rather than a party to the conflict. We reiterated our strong support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and our insistence on the need for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Escalating tensions require both a principled stance but also intensified diplomacy. We agreed that we should speak with one voice bilaterally in our conversations with Russia and in all relevant international fora – the G7, the OSCE, with the US – and pass coordinated messages of steadfast solidarity with Ukraine. We will keep supporting the efforts in the Normandy format and the OSCE including its Special Monitoring Mission, and peacebuilding measures. Now is the time to de-escalate. We are keeping these developments under close scrutiny, and we should stand ready to look into our options should the aggression continue.

Looking ahead, President Michel and myself have confirmed our participation in the Summit on the International Crimean Platform planned for 23 August in Kyiv,

which will be an important occasion to keep the spotlight on the illegal annexation of Crimea as well on our broader support for Ukraine.

“Reforms make Ukraine more resilient and stronger and that’s why we have mobilised more than €16 billion in support of reforms since 2014.”

Second, we discussed reforms. Ukraine has made a lot of progress, but more remains to be done, in particular on anti-corruption and judicial reforms. Indeed, reforms make Ukraine more resilient and stronger and that is why we have mobilised more than €16 billion in support of reforms since 2014, making Ukraine the biggest recipient of EU financial support. With Minister Kuleba, we agreed that Ukraine’s economic integration and regulatory approximation with the EU is beneficial for Ukraine’s trade and economy.

Third, we will continue to support Ukraine in combating the pandemic. Last Friday, COVAX delivered 117 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Ukraine and it is scheduled to deliver almost 3 million doses of vaccine by the end of June. As we don’t stop repeating, [the EU is a strong supporter of vaccine multilateralism](#) ⁽²⁴³⁾ and one of the biggest contributors to COVAX.

Discussing Ukraine also means discussing Russia

Discussing Ukraine of course also means reflecting on the situation in and with Russia. Unfortunately, the negative trend that we have seen for some time in Russia continues. The treatment of Mr Navalny is a key illustration. I went to Moscow in early February to raise the issues directly with the Russian leadership but Russia has clearly opted to persist in its course.

This has now led to a very worrying situation with respect to Mr Navalny’s health. We have made clear that we expect him to receive the medical care that he needs and from doctors he trusts (which is only logical given that he’s been poisoned before). We will hold the Russian authorities accountable for his fate.

I have set out [earlier](#) ⁽²⁴⁴⁾ that Russia is disconnecting from Europe. As the EU, we need to and we will draw the consequences, upholding the principles underpinning European security and supporting partners that share our interests and values.

⁽²⁴³⁾ See p. 94.

⁽²⁴⁴⁾ See p. 274.

HOW TO DEAL WITH RUSSIA

28/06/2021 – Blog – In June 2021, the European Council held an important discussion on EU–Russia relations. I presented the Joint Communication that I had prepared with the European Commission. It sets out the state of our relations and makes the case for a principled and strategic approach to Russia, built around EU unity and resilience.

In recent years, relations with Russia have deteriorated sharply. Russia under President Putin has distanced itself from Europe, through deliberate policy choices, both at home and abroad. We wish these choices were different, but we have to base ourselves on this reality and the possibility that EU–Russia relations could even take a turn for the worse. At the same time, we share a continent with Russia and it remains a vital actor on numerous fronts. We therefore have no alternative but to develop a principled, balanced and strategic approach.

At the Summit, all EU leaders confirmed their resolve to work for ‘[a united, long-term, and strategic European approach based on the five guiding principles](#)’⁽²⁴⁵⁾. These [five principles](#) were established by the Council in 2016⁽²⁴⁶⁾, after the outbreak of the conflict in and around Ukraine, and have guided us ever since. Indeed, leaders tasked the Council, the Commission and me as High Representative to continue to implement them fully.

Within this overall context of the five principles and to make them more operational, the Commission and I have proposed to develop our policies on Russia along three main action tracks: to push back, constrain and engage. What does this mean?

First push back

First, we must push back against deliberate violations of international law by Russia in our member states and our neighbourhood, and continue to speak up

⁽²⁴⁵⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/25/european-council-conclusions-24-25-june-2021/>

⁽²⁴⁶⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2016/03/14/>

for democratic values. These are matters of direct concern to all members of the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of any country.

Push back also means we must continue our support to Ukraine and its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. This includes continuing to call on Russia to assume its responsibility and to implement the Minsk agreements. We will also continue to pressure Russia for its failure to cooperate with the international efforts to achieve justice for the victims of the downing of flight MH17 over Ukraine.

“*The Union itself must become more robust, resilient and cohesive. The first form of cohesion is preserving the unity of purpose among our member states.*”

Second, we must constrain Russia's attempts to undermine the EU. The Union itself must become more robust, resilient and cohesive. The first form of cohesion is preserving the unity of purpose among our member states. If member states agree on a common position in Brussels, but back in respective capitals and bilaterally pursue a different policy, a strong European Union position vis-à-vis Russia will remain an empty shell.

We must fully enforce EU legislation to counter crime emanating from Russia, including cyberattacks, working closely with like-minded partners. The EU needs to develop its cyber security and defence capacity, as well as our strategic communication capabilities, by stepping up work on foreign information manipulation and disinformation. We will also have to intensify our fight against corruption and money laundering and ensure greater transparency of the origins and purpose of such financial flows to and from Russia.

Reinforcing the resilience of EU partner states

Another aspect of a constraining policy consists of reinforcing the resilience of partner states of the European Union, especially the members of the Eastern Partnership. This requires them to improve their internal governance: fighting corruption, promoting the independence of the judiciary and guaranteeing fundamental freedoms. The more successful they are in their reform process, the more resilient they will be and thus better able to resist Russian pressure or

interference. As EU, we will continue our support to Russia's neighbours so they and their citizens remain free to determine their own future.

Like it or not, Russia is a major player on the global stage

Third, the final pillar of our relationship with Russia: engagement. Like it or not, Russia is a major player on the global stage and it has increased its political presence in many parts of the world, including in countries and regions where EU interests are at stake: Libya, Afghanistan and Syria, as well as the South Caucasus are telling examples. I am also thinking of the JCPOA on Iran, to which Russia is a party and which we must put back on track.

There are also global issues on which it is in our interest to engage Russia because not solving these issues will affect us all. The most important of these is climate change, where there is a clear need for cooperation, for example through the introduction of a CO₂ price in Russia, or the implementation of an ETS, or the development of hydrogen. The pandemic has also shown the need for global cooperation on public health. The virus knows no borders, and the border the EU and Russia share is over 2 000 kilometres long.

“ *Our quarrel is with the policy choices of the Russian government, not the Russian people. So, we should strengthen people-to-people contacts.*”

Crucially, we must continue to engage with Russian civil society and citizens. Our quarrel is with the policy choices of the Russian government, not the Russian people. So, we should strengthen people-to-people contacts, which could include more visa facilitation for young people, academics, or other cross-border exchanges. We must continue to support Russian civil society and human rights defenders and be more flexible and creative in the way we do so.

After the European Council, what's next?

The European Council agreed on a balanced way forward. It followed an intense debate on the last-minute proposal by France and Germany to consider re-establishing Summits with Russia (there have been none since 2014). The pros and cons of this were discussed and in the end, leaders agreed to 'explore formats and conditionalities of dialogue with Russia'.



From my side, I can only reiterate my commitment to work on this basis: demanding an improvement of Russia's behaviour on numerous issues and recognising the need to be ready to engage.

“ Foreign policy is about talking to people with the power to influence events, including those with whom we have profound disagreements. The point of that engagement is precisely to influence actions and thinking.”

Foreign policy is about talking to people with the power to influence events. Engaging Russia is not a luxury and even less a concession. A global player has to talk to all actors, including those with whom we have profound disagreements. The point of that engagement is precisely to influence actions and thinking.

We all know that Russia, at present, has no interest in seeing the EU develop as a global actor. But they cannot ignore us nor should we allow them just to bet on, or encourage our divisions. EU member states may have tactical divergences but no fundamental ones when it comes to defending our values.

In the coming weeks and months, I will take forward the various action tracks that leaders have identified:

First and foremost this means working to preserve EU unity, which is our strongest asset when dealing with Moscow.

Second, the European Council invited the Commission and myself to present options for additional restrictive measures to be ready in case Russia continues to breach International law in our member states and in our neighbourhood.

Third, the European Council also asked the Commission and myself to develop options on topics such as climate and the environment, health, as well as foreign policy issues where we can explore ways of engaging with Russia. It also recalled the importance of people-to-people contacts, and the need to further support Russian civil society.

A clear direction for our relations with Russia

In sum, the European Council conclusions set a clear direction for our relations with Russia: keeping a firm line on substance while preserving the necessity to maintain open channels of communication.

WHY WE NEED MORE EU ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

02/07/2021 – Blog – End of June 2021, EU Foreign Ministers from Austria, Lithuania and Romania have made a much-needed visit to the three countries of the South Caucasus. They went there on my behalf to signal EU support and engagement. It is important that we are present in all regions where EU interests are at stake.

At the last informal Foreign Affairs Council, the so-called Gymnich, EU Foreign Ministers discussed the unresolved conflicts in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. We agreed on the need for the EU to be more actively engaged. That is why I mandated [three EU Foreign Ministers to visit the South Caucasus countries on my behalf](#) ⁽²⁴⁷⁾. They were accompanied by the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and crisis in Georgia, Toivo Klaar and a senior official from the EEAS, Michael Siebert.

The practice of mandating one or several EU Foreign Ministers to travel on my behalf is becoming more common. For example, the Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto has visited Sudan several times, reporting back to all member states. It is a good way to build a 'Team Europe' approach to EU foreign policy, strengthening the buy in from member states and enabling us to be present on the ground in more countries and regions than any single person can be.

The EU's stake in the South Caucasus

I was glad that Alexander Schallenberg, Gabrielius Landsbergis and Bogdan Aurescu, the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Lithuania and Romania, accepted my invitation and travelled to the region at short notice. It was evident that the South Caucasus merited such a visit, to support the EU's agenda and build on the recent developments and positive steps from Armenia and Azerbaijan. Indeed, I [have](#)

⁽²⁴⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/100571/south-caucasus-visit-foreign-affairs-ministers-austria-lithuania-and-romania-mandated-high_en

welcomed the actions ⁽²⁴⁸⁾, facilitated by Georgia, that led to Azerbaijan releasing 15 Armenian detainees on 12 June and Armenia handing over maps of mined areas.

The Ministers passed three main messages to the leaders of the South Caucasus countries:

- The EU is committed to be an active player to promote conflict resolution in the region;
- The EU is ready to develop bilateral relationships while supporting regional cooperation and connectivity; and
- The EU is attached to the inclusivity and flexibility of the Eastern Partnership policy framework.

Why do we need to be involved in the region?

The South Caucasus is a region at the crossroads between Europe and Central Asia, bordering the wider Middle East. We see a growing number of countries that are active in the region, politically and economically, starting with Russia but also Turkey, China, Iran and others. The South Caucasus is important to the EU, in terms of transport corridors linking the EU with Asia and the diversification of EU energy resources. So, we should foster the region's role as a connectivity hub.

“ There is a growing expectation on the side of EU member states and partners for the EU to take a more active role in addressing the conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood.”

All three countries in the South Caucasus suffer from unresolved conflicts. The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in autumn 2020 shook the region and altered the regional balance. There is a growing expectation on the side of EU member states and partners for the EU to take a more active role in addressing the conflicts in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/togo/99984/armeniaazerbaijan-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-latest-developments_en

Georgia, a good example of what the EU can do for peace

Our involvement in Georgia is a good example of what the EU can do for peace, democracy and reform. The EU brokered an agreement to cease hostilities in 2008 and is in the lead of the conflict resolution efforts led by the EU Special Representative for South Caucasus, including in his role as co-chair of the Geneva International Discussions. The EU Monitoring Mission is the most important contributor to the security of Georgia and the only international monitoring presence on the ground since 2009. Overall, the EU is the biggest contributor to confidence-building through its activities in Georgia.

The EU has never been directly involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, which for the last 25 years is conducted under the leadership of the Minsk Group co-chairs (France, US, Russia). This does not mean that the EU has remained passive: we have supported the co-chairs through confidence building measures such as projects implemented at the community level under the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK).

We were also closely engaged during the hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan last autumn: I had many exchanges with my counterparts from both countries and was in contact with other international actors to help end the conflict. Supporting the efforts of the Minsk Group co-chairs remains the best way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement. However, [we want to be helpful to these efforts](#) ⁽²⁴⁹⁾ and are ready to engage more.

One of our tools for engaging with the region is the Eastern Partnership. It is the only platform bringing the three partners and the EU together, even if this is not without its challenges. It is a framework helping partners to cooperate in areas that are non-confrontational and can improve the lives of citizens in concrete ways, boost better governance and create more links across the partner countries themselves.

“We are ready to help rebuild not only physical roads and bridges, but also paths to reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.”

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/togo/98501/armeniaazerbaijan-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-border-situation_en

We are now [preparing for the December summit of the Eastern Partnership](#) ⁽²⁵⁰⁾. In this context, the three Ministers sent a clear message that the Eastern Partnership is and will remain an inclusive cooperation format, while highlighting to Georgia that we appreciate its higher level of aspiration as an associated country. The EU has a vision to offer for the region and is a trustworthy reform partner. We are ready to help with confidence building and conflict transformation, together with multilateral partners such as the OSCE and the UN. We want to support efforts to build an environment free of fear and hate. We are ready to help rebuild not only physical roads and bridges, but also paths to reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.

An appreciated visit

The leaders of three countries have appreciated the EU visit and indicated they want more EU involvement in the region. They stressed their readiness to cooperate with the EU on regional economic development and connectivity and that they value the EU's role in building trust and in contributing to conflict transformation. After this well-received and appreciated visit, we are ready to follow up with concrete steps, starting with an exchange on this visit at the next [Foreign Affairs Council on 12 July](#) ⁽²⁵¹⁾.

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3367

⁽²⁵¹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2021/07/12/>

BELARUS: LUKASHENKO MADE A MISTAKE

13/11/ 2021 – Interview – In this interview for the French newspaper Journal du Dimanche, I analysed the crisis occurring during the autumn 2021 at the EU border with Belarus and, ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council in November 2021, the response that the EU would give to the aggressive actions initiated by the Lukashenko's regime.

Journal du Dimanche: What will the EU Council of Foreign Ministers decide on Monday?

HR/VP Josep Borrell: We will give the green light to extend the legal framework of our sanctions against Belarus so that it can be applied to all those involved in the smuggling of migrants to that country, for example the airlines or travel agencies involved, by banning their managers from travelling and freezing their assets in Europe. But this will not prevent us from sanctioning on Monday, under the framework already in force and for the fifth time, some 30 officials of the Lukashenko administration who are involved in this crisis.

Discussion is never harmful. But we continue to deny the Lukashenko regime any legitimacy.

But apparently the previous sanctions have not been a sufficient deterrent as Alexander Lukashenko engages in this tug of war...

That's right, but Lukashenko made a mistake. He thought that by retaliating in this way he would twist our arm and get the sanctions cancelled. The opposite is true. We are strengthening them by targeting those who cooperate with him. We are sanctioning individuals but also companies with a strong export presence. We have not exhausted our capacity to sanction companies, but we do not want this to affect the living conditions of the population. What has been a deterrent, however, is that the mere threat of sanctions has triggered travel bans to Minsk for Syrian, Iraqi and Yemeni citizens in the countries of origin, such as Iraq and Turkey.

The European Commission has achieved other results in Dubai and Beirut, but what levers should it use on Syria?

I myself was approached in Paris on Friday by the Jordanian representative, who promised to ban all flights between Amman and Minsk – a route that did not exist until a few weeks ago. For Bashar El-Assad's Syria, everything that could be sanctioned was sanctioned. But the most important thing is to put pressure on its allies, especially Russia. For the time being, Russia is washing its hands of this story as if it had no influence on Lukashenko. It even suggests that the EU should do with Belarus what it did with Turkey, i.e. pay for the migrants to stay on its soil. This is the height of cynicism.

Russia even invites the EU to negotiate with Lukashenko; wouldn't that give him the legitimacy he is denied?

Talking is never harmful. We still have a chargé d'affaires in Minsk. But we continue to deny this regime any legitimacy since we do not recognise President Lukashenko as legitimately elected. The non-recognition of this legitimacy should not prevent us from talking to each other according to our own interests.



At the same time, Russia is conducting military exercises with Belarus near the Polish border and massing troops near the Ukrainian border. Are you worried about a possible military derailment of the current crisis?

I am aware of all the risks. There are major movements of Russian troops coming back to position themselves near the logistical stocks they left behind after their big manoeuvres a few months ago. For the moment, the situation is calm; we are in contact with our Ukrainian partner, and I appeal to all sides to take responsibility so as not to add fuel to the fire.

We have remained in a power struggle between carnivores where herbivores have little chance of survival

The head of US diplomacy, Antony Blinken, on a visit to Kiev, has warned Russia not to repeat the scenario that led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014...

If Antony Blinken says so, he must have good reasons.

Despite all this, why do you persist in wanting to maintain a dialogue with Russia?

Russia is not going to move, it remains our big neighbour, a global partner on climate change, on Iran or the future of the Arctic. So I want to continue to talk with the Russian leadership. I saw the Russian head of diplomacy, Sergei Lavrov, in September in New York and I may see him again in a few days at the OSCE summit in Stockholm. Diplomacy is about dialogue even with those with whom you have very strong differences, diplomats are paid to keep channels of communication open. Even in the worst of circumstances. I remember very well my visit in February to Moscow, the day they tried Navalny. It was the right time and the right place to say what Europe thought about it.

In your draft 'Strategic Compass' that you have just sent to the EU-27, you mention this hybrid threat that consists of exploiting migratory flows. How can the EU combat these new threats?

Let's stop being hypocritical. Of course there is a Russian threat, otherwise we would not have troops deployed in the Baltic States. I want this 'Strategic Compass' to be a catalyst for action to protect Europe from all threats. Europe is in danger and Europeans do not realise it. We must therefore be aware of who we are in the

world as it is. We have been inoculated against war after our unfortunate experiences of the last century, but today's world, lubricated by the logic of trade, is no longer governed by the desire for peace and benevolence. We have remained in power struggles between carnivores where herbivores have little chance of survival. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was a wake-up call, as was the Aukus affair with Australia. The EU must therefore be an institution that protects us.

But how, with what means?

The French like to talk about a European army, but that is not what will be created. On the other hand, our national armies must be better coordinated. If we add up the capabilities of all the European countries, they represent four times the military power of Russia and the equivalent of China's in budgetary terms. The problem is that we spend these defence budgets in a far too fragmented way, with too much duplication.

Hybrid threats don't care about walls, no matter how high they are

Coming back to the instrumentalisation of migration, why doesn't the EU fund a wall on the eastern Polish border, which is the EU's border?

Hybrid threats don't care about walls, no matter how high they are. Of course we have to defend our borders, that is the first obligation of states, but we have to get to the root of the migration problem rather than building a fortress Europe. To achieve this, we must project ourselves as a power. In 2050, there will be one billion more Africans on the continent south of ours. Europeans must therefore invest much more in this environment. Not just with soft power, as if we were an attractive Switzerland, but with tools of power and by taking responsibility. This means being autonomous in our strategy towards the rest of the world. We will not solve our problems with the outside world by building a huge Chinese wall around Europe.

COUNTERING POWER POLITICS IN THE EAST

19/12/2021 – *Blog* – *At the end of 2021, the crises occurring in and around Ukraine and Belarus have been at the top of the agenda with hybrid threats destabilising our neighbourhood. We must be firm and united in our response and strengthen our own defence policy. At stake are the principles underpinning the European security order.*

The military build-up of Russian troops at the Ukrainian border, combined with the escalation of threats and subversive actions aimed at Ukraine, have dominated the international news and diplomacy in recent weeks. They have led to a flurry of activities at all levels and in all fora: the G7, NATO, the OSCE as well as bilaterally. Logically, it was also at the heart of EU foreign policy this week, first on Monday when EU Foreign Ministers met; at the European Parliament debates on Tuesday, at the Eastern Partnership Summit on Wednesday and at the European Council on Thursday.

We have to deal with the fallout of the Belarus crisis

At the same time, we still have had to deal with the fallout of the Belarus crisis. Thanks to nimble EU diplomacy, the flow of irregular migrants, brought in under false pretensions to then be pushed to the border, has now receded. But even if many have been repatriated to their country of origin (for example, more than 4 000 have flown back to Iraq), many thousands remain stuck in Belarus, in need of humanitarian help. Meanwhile, the domestic repression inside Belarus continues unabated.

Both crises are unfolding against a backdrop of high tensions with Russia, and in a context of extraordinarily high energy prices: gas prices have risen by around 40 % just in December and around 300 % since this summer. Any discussion on Russia/Ukraine/Belarus includes the energy dimension, given that 40 % of EU gas imports come from Russia, principally through three transit routes: Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic Sea.

Energy as a tool for political influence

Russia has used energy as a tool for political influence (see for instance in Moldova), and while it is strictly speaking fulfilling its commitments on gas supplies, many see its current refusal to increase export volumes to Europe or to re-fill Gazprom-owned storage facilities as a means to exert pressure on the EU and specifically to secure the regulatory licensing of Nord Stream 2. This project, which the European Commission does not consider as priority and which in any case will have to fulfil European regulations requirements, continues to be an issue for discussion, also demonstrating that solidarity is a two-ways street. No one can increase their own security without taking into account the security of the whole Union, which should be a basic principle to make the EU stronger and counter attempts to divide us.

All these developments came together at the Foreign Affairs Council, the European Parliament debates and at the European Council summit.

So, what was discussed and where does it leave us?

On Ukraine, everyone agreed that it is a moment to be firm and united and to deter possible further Russian moves. We have to uphold the core principles on which European security is built, and which are also enshrined in the Paris Charter of 1990 and the CSCE/OSCE Helsinki Final Act – all signed by Russia: the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states; the inviolability of internationally recognised borders; the freedom of countries to decide their foreign policy and security arrangements. The European Council [agreed on sending a strong message](#) ⁽²⁵²⁾ to the Russian leadership that any action against Ukraine and those principles, by military or hybrid means, would have serious consequences.

Russia's ultimate intentions are not clear, except that it seeks to threaten and weaken Ukraine. Different scenarios can unfold. As I said in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, we have to hope for the best and prepare for the worst. We cannot exclude Russia's desire to use this crisis as leverage for its declared purpose to reshape the security framework in Europe, also excluding the Europeans from the discussions. But we know that our American allies will not fall into this trap.

⁽²⁵²⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53575/20211216-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

Words and statements alone are not enough

We know that words and statements alone are not enough to change the calculus of the Russian leadership and that is why it is so important that EU leaders decided to roll over existing economic sanctions and warned that any Russian move against Ukraine would carry heavy consequences. This has been underlined by both the President of the Council and the President of the Commission. And this is an important tasking for me as HR/VP, because, according to the Treaty, decisions on the adoption, renewal, or lifting of sanctions regimes are taken by the Council (i.e. member states), on the basis of proposals from the High Representative. Subsequently, the European Commission has an essential role to give effect to these sanctions and in overseeing the implementation by member states.

“Diplomacy works best if done in partnership with others, which is why we have been in constant and close contact with the US and other like-minded partners.”

It is also important to remember that the EU has been working with Ukraine for years, including for instance through the [EU Advisory Mission](#) ⁽²⁵³⁾ on civilian security sector reform within the framework of our Common Defence and Security Policy. Recently we have added a €31 million support package to the Ukrainian army under the [European Peace Facility](#) ⁽²⁵⁴⁾, for the provision of military medical and cyber defence support.

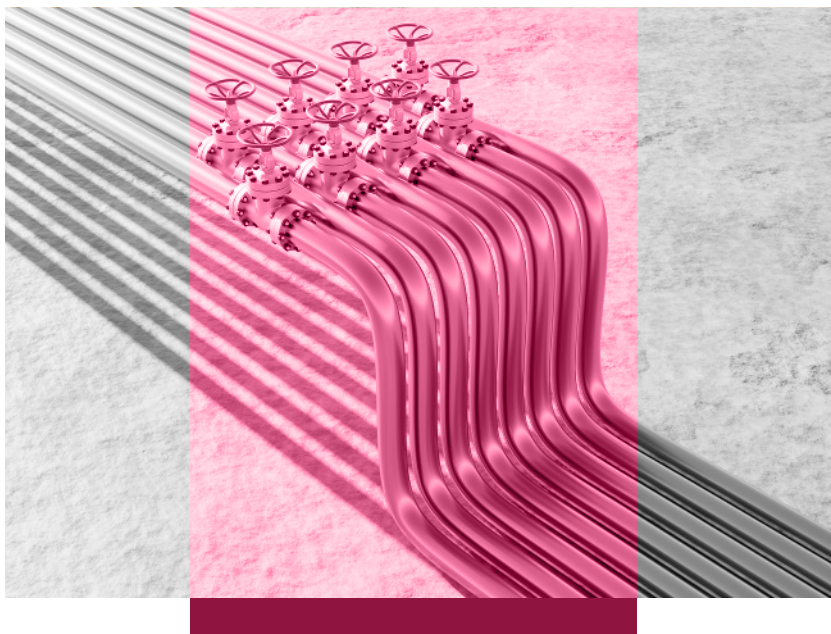
Diplomacy works best if done in partnership with others, which is why we have been in constant and close contact with the US and other like-minded partners, including [G7 Foreign Ministers](#) ⁽²⁵⁵⁾, passing a united message of support for Ukraine and to deter further Russian actions.

Many EU leaders underlined the need to continue this coordination and support diplomatic efforts.

⁽²⁵³⁾ See <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/>

⁽²⁵⁴⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-sets-up-the-european-peace-facility/>

⁽²⁵⁵⁾ See [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/108775/G7: %2520For-eign %2520Ministers %25E2 %2580 %2599 %2520Statement %2520on %2520Rus-sia %2520and %2520Ukraine](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/108775/G7-%2520For-eign-%2520Ministers-%25E2-%2580-%2599-%2520Statement-%2520on-%2520Russia-%2520and-%2520Ukraine)



The EU at the table of any discussion on the European security

I also stressed that the EU must of course be at the table of any discussion on the European security architecture. Russia's Foreign Ministry this Friday released a draft proposal on security guarantees between Russia and the US as well as to European members of NATO. It is clear that the EU must be an integral part of such discussions. The Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter have offered us key principles around which to build European security for the past 50 years. The OSCE, in particular, offers mechanisms and rules, which remain cornerstones of any engagement with Russia.

“ Our dispute with Belarus is not limited to its blatant manipulation of migrants. Far from it.”

On Belarus, the acute phase of the crisis at the border with the EU is receding. However, the dispute with Belarus is not limited to its blatant manipulative use of migrants. Far from it. At the root lies the brutally repressive and illegitimate nature of the Lukashenko regime, where more than 900 political prisoners languish in jail. On Tuesday, the regime convicted the husband of Svetlana

Tsikhankovskaya, the leader of the opposition in exile, to an absurd 18 years sentence.

On 12 December, together with President of the European Council Charles Michel, I [hosted a meeting with representatives of democratic Belarus](#) ⁽²⁵⁶⁾ – civil society and NGO activists, human rights defenders, bloggers and members of political opposition. I was impressed by their stories and resolve. They asked the EU to keep supporting a democratic change and maintain the pressure on the regime. As EU, we have recently passed a [5th round of sanctions](#) ⁽²⁵⁷⁾ that targets those involved with the organisation of the cynical trafficking of migrants but also those behind the constant repression, the so-called Lukashenka ‘wallets’. The regime will continue to have the support of other like-minded regimes, like Venezuela’s Maduro. Both illegitimate regimes have signed new agreements of cooperation and back each other.

Recovery, resilience and reform

The regional tensions and the destabilising actions by Russia were also central to the [Eastern Partnership Summit](#) ⁽²⁵⁸⁾ that took place on Wednesday, just prior to the European Council. We met with the leaders of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan – with a chair left empty for Belarus as a sad symbol. The Summit was structured around the triptych of ‘recovery, resilience and reform’, with the [EU offering a regional Economic and Investment Plan](#) of €2.3 billion that could leverage up to €17 billion in investments.

We of course know that the positions and level of ambition to get closer to the EU – and what we stand for – varies among the Eastern Partnership countries and that some level of differentiation is needed, all while keeping the overall inclusivity of the group.

At the Summit, we agreed to step up vaccine sharing; to strengthen the rule of law; and to deepen our cooperation on security (see, for example, the recent support measures under the [European Peace Facility for Georgia, Moldova as well](#)

⁽²⁵⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/108776/belarus-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-hosts-meeting-representatives_en

⁽²⁵⁷⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/11/15/belarus-eu-broadens-scope-for-sanctions-to-tackle-hybrid-attacks-and-instrumentalisation-of-migrants/>

⁽²⁵⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/109019/eastern-partnership-summit-launches-new-and-ambitious-agenda_en

as [Ukraine](#) ⁽²⁵⁹⁾). We also signed a new financing agreement for €60 million to assist Moldova to cope with the impact of the gas crisis.

“It was striking that the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan, two countries that have been in open military conflict, exchanged constructively at the Eastern Partnership summit.”

The discussion, which was more open than the diplomatic formalities that often dominate this type of meetings, confirmed that our Eastern partners have a strong demand for more cooperation and integration with the EU, and the EU is prepared to respond to this demand in a way that reaffirms its role as a significant geopolitical actor in the region.

It was also striking that for the first time the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan, two countries that have been in open, military conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, exchanged constructive comments at the Eastern Partnership summit, instead of open confrontation. This was possible thanks to mediation efforts facilitated by President Michel, who had hosted an intense and fruitful meeting with both leaders the evening before. I welcome the outcome of that meeting, and the readiness of both sides to engage in concrete projects and ideas that could pave the way to reconciliation. This meeting highlighted the EU's commitment to work closely with Armenia and Azerbaijan in overcoming conflict, creating cooperation and an atmosphere of trust, to build sustainable peace in the region, and the EU's readiness to play a stronger role in the conflict resolution efforts in the South Caucasus.

Enhance EU's capacity to act in the security domain

The second big external relations item at this European Council was the Strategic Compass, which I presented to member states last month. The first line I used in the [foreword](#) ⁽²⁶⁰⁾ is significant: ‘Europe is in danger’. The Ukraine and Belarus crises are clear illustrations, if any were needed, of the kind of threats that Europe is facing: hybrid tactics, power politics, intimidation and disinformation. At stake are the fate of individual countries and societies, but also the wider principles underpinning the European security order.

⁽²⁵⁹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/02/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measures-for-georgia-the-republic-of-moldova-ukraine-and-the-republic-of-mali/>

⁽²⁶⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/foreword_-_a_strategic_compass_to_make_europe_a_security_provider.pdf

These developments demonstrate the urgent need for the EU to enhance its capacity and means to act in the security domain. Our member states need to have stronger and more interoperable defence capabilities. This will also contribute to NATO's efforts in protecting our Eastern borders and enhance our collective deployment and projection capacity.

I briefed leaders on the state of play on the Strategic Compass and underscored the need to be ambitious and result-oriented – and not to lose ourselves in ideological discussions. At heart, the Compass is not only a description of the threats and challenges we face, but really a [guide for action](#) ⁽²⁶¹⁾. It contains concrete proposals, big and small, with clear targets and timelines to measure progress.

It is worth stating that the proposals in the Compass to establish hybrid response teams, ways to strengthen our ability to counter cyber threats and aggressive disinformation campaigns, and plus the options to boost the resilience and security of our partners with trainings and equipment, have gained extra relevance, in light of recent crises.

“*The open displays of power politics, in the East, but also elsewhere are a fundamental challenge. We have to remain clear-eyed and firm in our response – and equip ourselves with the means to act.*”

When it comes to the Compass, I was pleased that EU leaders agreed on the diagnosis and the sense of urgency. Member states must decide the next steps: they own the assets and take the decisions. They echoed my plea for ambition and actionable results. I will present an updated version of the Strategic Compass in January, at the informal meeting of EU Foreign and Defence Ministers in Brest, in line with the goal to adopt it in March.

The open displays of power politics, in the East, but also elsewhere are a fundamental challenge. We have to remain clear-eyed and firm in our response – and equip ourselves with the means to act.

⁽²⁶¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/106337/towards-strategic-compass_en



6.4 THE MEDITERRANEAN

A NEW START FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

02/03/2021 – Blog – *The challenges facing the region have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2021, the European Council discussed the renewed partnership with our Southern Mediterranean neighbours that I proposed together with the European Commission as High Representative of the European Union.*

In presenting to the European Council [the Communication on Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood](#) (262), I recalled the [Barcelona Declaration](#) ⁽²⁶³⁾. In 1995, in Barcelona the European Union and its partners in the region declared their joint commitment to make the Mediterranean basin an area of dialogue and cooperation, guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity. I was present as a minister of the Spanish Government, and I remember the hope that this declaration generated at the time.

The unrealised hopes of the Arab Spring

Later, ten years ago now, the Arab Spring gave rise to even greater hopes. It seemed that these might, in a sense, represent something like the year 1989 for the Southern Mediterranean. At that time, one believed that there could be a new impetus towards freedom and democracy in the region. But we all know the rest: the terrible war that ravaged Syria and still continues, the collapse of Libya and its serious repercussions in the Sahel, the spread of terrorism, the refugee crisis, etc.

“The young are leaving their countries because of war and the lack of freedom, jobs and prospects for the future.”

Optimism has been replaced by desperation. Young people in particular are leaving their countries because of war and the lack of freedom, jobs and prospects for the future. In many respects the situation in the southern Mediterranean may seem worse today than it was in 1995 or 2011.

⁽²⁶²⁾ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0002&from=EN>

⁽²⁶³⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/euromed/docs/bd_en.pdf

The situation of our neighbours is difficult above all from an economic point of view. We Europeans are on average eight times more wealthy than our southern neighbours, and the gap is widening between the two shores of the Mediterranean. The Southern Mediterranean is one of the least economically integrated areas in the world: intra-regional trade accounts for less than 6 % of these countries' international trade. Our Southern Mediterranean neighbours also face massive challenges connected with climate change. The region is warming faster than the rest of the world, desertification is advancing, and competition for already scarce water resources is worsening.

Challenges related to demographic dynamics

The difficulties faced by our southern neighbours are, however, also to a great extent connected with their demographic dynamics: the population of the region accounts for just half that of the EU, but it is growing much faster. The population of the five Maghreb countries increased by 57 % between 1990 and 2019, compared with only 6 % in the case of the EU. A quarter of the population of our southern neighbours is under the age of 25, compared to 15 % in Europe. Their economies are not creating sufficient numbers of jobs for these many young people, who are increasingly well educated. This has led to growing frustration, which is driving emigration.

“*The economies of our southern neighbours are not creating sufficient numbers of jobs for their many young people, who are increasingly well educated. This has led to growing frustration, which is driving emigration.*”

There are undoubtedly serious governance issues in several countries in the region. We must, however, also ask ourselves why we have not managed to better help our neighbours make a transition similar to that which took place in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in 1989.

It is in this already adverse context that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the region hard. Tourism, a key source of employment and income, is almost at a standstill. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that these countries lost around 17 million jobs in the second quarter of 2020 and unemployment more than doubled due to the pandemic.

A common response to the many challenges

In any event, the many challenges that the region continues to face call, more than ever, for a common response, since our destinies are inextricably linked. This has long been obvious to the countries of the Union that border the Mediterranean, such as the one I know best, but I believe that the events of recent years have amply demonstrated this to all Europeans.

So we need now to determine what we aim to do to redress these missed opportunities. The Joint Communication that I presented in early February with my colleague, Commissioner Várhelyi, who is responsible for neighbourhood and enlargement, provides some answers.

First of all, we need to work more closely together to solve our common problems: COVID-19, conflict, migration, climate change, terrorism, etc. On all these issues, progress can only be achieved by strengthening regional integration through increased cross-border cooperation.

Promoting carbon neutrality and renewable energy

In particular, we will propose to our partners initiatives to promote carbon neutrality and renewable energy. The region possesses considerable potential, which is still largely under-exploited, particularly in the area of wind and solar energy. We will also seek to encourage the regional integration of electricity networks. And we will help our partners increase their resilience to climate change by reinforcing our action on adaptation, particularly in the most vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and water supply.

Drawing upon all the instruments available to the EU, we are proposing an investment plan to address the region's structural imbalances through engagement with, in particular, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Over the period 2021-2027, the Commission proposes to mobilise € 7 billion from the EU budget to support the economies of the Southern Mediterranean. This support should help mobilise € 30 billion of private and public investments in the region. The communication proposes launching 12 flagship initiatives, focusing in particular on green investment projects.



We must, however, do more. The development of economic relations between the EU and our southern neighbours must play a key role in supporting the recovery of economic activity on the other side of the Mediterranean. Our partners criticise the fact that their trade imbalances with the EU have increased in recent years, and we must make an effort in this area. In this context, our desire to increase the Union's strategic autonomy by reducing our dependence on distant countries represents an opportunity to develop our economic ties with our southern Mediterranean neighbours.

“ *Our desire to increase the Union's strategic autonomy by reducing our dependence on distant countries represents an opportunity to develop our economic ties with our southern Mediterranean neighbours.*”

To achieve this, however, it will also be necessary to implement essential reforms regarding the rule of law and good governance. These are urgent, both in order to restore citizens' confidence in the future of their societies and for the region's economic development. In particular, we will need to help governments that are ready to move forward in these areas.

A major geopolitical challenge

It will be a major geopolitical challenge to develop closer relations with our Southern Mediterranean neighbours. In order to become more effective in this area, we will have to act at the highest level, and in concert. The joint engagement of all the EU member states in this partnership is essential both as regards security and in the field of economic cooperation. Their diplomatic networks, the long-standing cooperation between them and the Southern Mediterranean countries, as well as their capacity to mobilise private actors from EU countries, will be essential if we are to achieve the ambitious goals that we have set for ourselves.

“*The joint engagement of all of the member states of the EU in this partnership is essential both as regards security and in the field of economic cooperation.*”

In order to demonstrate this collective engagement, we must send a strong political signal. That is why I have suggested that Heads of State or Government hold regular meetings at the highest level with all the States in the region, as we do in the context of our Eastern Partnership.

Given the scale of the challenges facing the Mediterranean, we will need to act with all the determination required to successfully address these together in the coming years. In particular, we will need to work in the spirit of ‘Team Europe’, closely coordinating the activities of the member states and the Commission. The Heads of State or Government strongly encouraged us to do so on 26 February last.

TIME TO ENGAGE AGAIN FOR PEACE IN CYPRUS

07/03/2021 – Blog – *At the beginning of March 2021, I visited Nicosia to reiterate the EU's strong support for a settlement of the Cyprus issue. We were at that time at a crucial point: UN Secretary-General Guterres has convened an informal meeting in Geneva at the end of April in the hope of finding common ground to negotiate a lasting solution to this issue.*

I started my visit by meeting with Elizabeth Spehar, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, and Colonel Neil Wright, Officer-in-Charge of the military component of the UN Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). They briefed me on the situation on the ground.

The crucial role of United Nations peacekeeping operations

It was a reminder of the crucial role of United Nations peacekeeping operations and I pay tribute to the women and men who dedicate their careers, sometimes at the cost of their lives, for peace in the world. 186 members of UNFICYP have thus died on mission since 1964. Fortunately, no peacekeepers, nor citizens' lives have been lost in Cyprus for years now. Nonetheless, it is a sobering reality that, with currently 802 soldiers on the ground, UNFICYP is one of the oldest of all UN peacekeeping missions: it operates on the island since 1964. 57 years later, the Cyprus problem remains one of the most difficult and longstanding conflicts in Europe. In 2007, I went to Cyprus as President of the European Parliament and it hurt my heart to find out that 14 years later the situation has not changed.

However, the present attempt to relaunch peace negotiations is not starting from scratch. We can build upon a legal framework and convergences from past negotiations. The UN has been very clear on the parameters for finding a lasting peace: UN Security Council Resolution 2561 of 29 January 2021 recalls the importance of achieving a comprehensive settlement based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality. The EU supports fully the UN line.

“ The UN has been very clear on the parameters for finding a lasting peace: achieving a comprehensive settlement based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality. The EU supports fully the UN line.”

However, the solution to the Cyprus issue cannot come from outside. The responsibility for finding a solution lies first and foremost with the Cypriots themselves. We know it is going to be a complex process but during my meetings, I was encouraged by the readiness of both President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar to engage with the UN in order to find a common ground on the way forward. I felt a positive determination to return to talks and seek a solution.

The EU stands ready to provide whatever assistance is needed

The EU stands ready to provide whatever assistance both leaders and the UN would find most useful. The Cyprus problem is clearly an EU problem: Cyprus is a member state of the Union, now and after reunification; regional stability and prosperity in the Eastern Mediterranean is closely bound to a solution to the Cyprus problem.

A future settlement needs in particular to comply with the EU *acquis* and safeguards, the integrity and decision-making responsibilities and processes of the EU. The EU is an observer to the formal Conference on Cyprus. For above-mentioned reasons, the sooner the EU becomes fully involved in the renewed settlement talks, the better.



“*Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens and the EU has always been clear: Cyprus’ EU membership is for the benefit of all Cypriots.*”

Turkish Cypriots are EU citizens and the EU has always been clear: the Cyprus’ EU membership is for the benefit of all Cypriots. EU direct aid has reflected this: since 2006, the EU has spent €600 million in aid for the Turkish Cypriot community; 1 600 young Turkish Cypriots have received scholarships to study in the EU; the EU has helped to broker GSM network connectivity between the two Cypriot communities; cultural heritage in the Turkish Cypriot community have been restored with EU funds and there are many more examples. After years, we are now about to settle the question of the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for Halloumi/Helim cheese. Finally in the fight against COVID-19, the vaccines purchased through EU mechanisms will be shared equitably with all Cypriots no matter where on the island they live, with ratios based on population figures.

The Cyprus issue matters for broader relations with Turkey

Of course, as referred to, the Cyprus issue matters also for the broader relations between Turkey and the European Union. These relations are equally approaching a turning point [after a particularly difficult year 2020](#) ⁽²⁶⁴⁾: the relative calm that we are currently experiencing at sea in the Eastern Mediterranean and on settlement related issues is tenuous. Progress in the Cyprus talks is more important than ever before.

Success is crucial for regional stability and overall world peace. After 57 years, being able to start considering a satisfactory ending of UNFICYP will bring rays of hope: conflicts can be solved and communities can find reconciliation and reap its benefits. The EU itself is a true model in this regard.

For all these reasons, working together with the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission and my colleagues in the Foreign Affairs Council, we will extend in the coming weeks and beyond, the EU’s full support for the upcoming Cyprus talks.

⁽²⁶⁴⁾ See <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90861/way-ahead-after-difficult-2020-eu-turkey-relations-%C2%A0-en>

OPERATION IRINI AND THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN LIBYA

21/03/2021 – Blog – The EU's naval Operation IRINI has been launched in March 2020. For the first anniversary of this EU mission, I visited IRINI's Headquarters in Rome, the air base Sigonella and one of the ships currently at sea. My visit came at a critical juncture for Libya and the efforts to support peace: we were beginning to see a more hopeful phase.

I have said before that the Libyan conflict had become '[a theatre of proxy wars](#)'⁽²⁶⁵⁾, right on the EU's doorstep. As EU we should do whatever we can to help bring an end to the fighting and support a genuine political settlement, even if we know how difficult this will be.

“After 10 years of conflict in Libya, the country and its people have a new chance.”

After 10 years of conflict in Libya, the country and its people have a new chance: a ceasefire agreement is in place, a political process is under way, elections are scheduled for the end of the year, and an interim government was just sworn in. I am proud that the European Union has been able to contribute to these positive developments, including through Operation IRINI.

How the IRINI Operation monitors and tracks ships

At the Operation's Headquarters in Rome, I had the opportunity to see how the Operation monitors and tracks ships and airplanes suspected of violating the UN arms embargo and coordinates action at sea. In Rome, I also met with Foreign Minister Di Maio and Minister of Defence Guerini, whom I thanked for Italy's contribution to one of the most significant European operational engagement at our doorstep. We had the occasion to discuss also other important issues that are on the agenda at the moment.

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82612/united-nations-security-council-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell_en

At the Sigonella Air Base and on board of one of the four ships currently deployed in the central Mediterranean, FGS Berlin, I paid tribute to the hard work done by all the women and men serving this Operation. While on board of the German ship, the FSG Berlin, I also spoke with the Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer and expressed my gratitude for Germany's contribution to the Operation and more broadly to the peace process in Libya.

“ *Naval assets from France, Italy, Greece and Germany; a Lithuanian team serving on a German ship; a Luxemburg plane next to a Polish one; staff of six different countries working together: European defence in action.*”

At the same time, with 24 Members States contributing to the operation, Operation IRINI is a truly European endeavour. Naval assets from France, Italy, Greece and Germany; a Lithuanian boarding team serving on a German ship; a Luxemburg plane next to a Polish one; staff of six different nationalities working together in the same room of the Joint Operation Centre: this is European defence in action.

Implementing the arms embargo on Libya

Let me recall how the EU came to launch IRINI. In January 2020, at the Berlin Conference on Libya, the implementation of the UN arms embargo was recognised as a priority. As long as weapons are flowing into Libya, it is difficult to build sustainable peace. The EU took the decision to act. It was not an easy process. Some feared the so-called ‘pull factor’ for migrants, which in fact never materialised. It took some time to explain, convince and reassure. Reaching unanimity often is hard, but we managed. Together with member states, we carried out all the necessary planning in just six weeks, and the EU was able to launch Operation IRINI on 31 March 2020.

“ *IRINI's ships, planes and unmanned aircrafts have patrolled the Central Mediterranean, conducting more than 2 300 hailing, close to 100 friendly approaches, and 9 inspections.*”

Throughout last year, IRINI's ships, planes and unmanned aircrafts have patrolled the Central Mediterranean, conducting more than 2 300 hailing, close to 100 friendly approaches, and 9 inspections. IRINI also seized one illegal cargo and prevented an illegal export of fuel.



With IRINI, we also contribute more broadly to maritime security in an area of strategic interest for Europe. This is what we do also with Operation Atalanta off the coast of Somalia or in the [Gulf of Guinea with the new Coordinated Maritime Presences](#) ⁽²⁶⁶⁾. As the maritime domain is becoming an arena for greater geopolitical competition, our engagement at sea is important for the security of Europe and our citizens.

IRINI monitors violations of the UN embargo at sea

IRINI monitors violations of the UN arms embargo on Libya occurring at sea but also on land and by air. During the past year alone, it tracked 16 Libyan ports and oil facilities, 25 airports and landing strips and close to 200 flights suspected of carrying military related cargos to and from Libya. For that purpose, IRINI can also rely on the information provided by the European Union Satellite Centre (EU SATCEN), thus demonstrating the importance of this capability to European security.

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ See p. 126.

Operation IRINI is sharing this crucial information with the United Nations. So far, IRINI has sent more than 20 classified reports to the UN Panel of Experts on violations of the UN arms embargo. However and despite all our efforts, [the latest UN Panel of Experts' report issued just this week concluded that this embargo](#) ⁽²⁶⁷⁾ is 'totally ineffective'. We know that, unfortunately. This is fully consistent with our own assessment and confirms the need for an Operation like IRINI. The report also acknowledges the good cooperation with Operation IRINI, the only actor implementing the arms embargo and serving at the same time as a deterrent. So we have to step up and broaden our efforts.

It is worth recalling that IRINI can only inspect suspect vessels in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions and the International Law of the Sea. It cannot intervene on-shore, nor intercept planes. But we do know exactly what the spoilers are doing because IRINI is watching them. It is now up to the Security Council to take action in the light of this report. It is crucial that all UN member states abide by their obligations to implement the arms embargo and that all flag States comply with the Security Council's call to cooperate with inspections.

Operation IRINI's mandate is set to be renewed for a further two years. We will continue to monitor suspect vessels, regardless of their provenance. In accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions, we will conduct inspections with the highest degree of professionalism.

Libya today is more stable than before

Libya today is more stable than before but it isn't yet at peace. There is a window of opportunity for Libya, which must be seized. As EU, we are ready to do more to help end the conflict and further support the UN-led peace process

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087562>

EU-TURKEY RELATIONS: THE NEED TO BUILD BRIDGES

30/03/2021 – Blog – *In March 2021, the European Council opened a hopefully new chapter in EU–Turkey relations. EU leaders are ready to engage on important avenues of cooperation including modernising the Customs Union, relaunching high-level dialogues and people-to-people contacts, plus strengthening cooperation on migration.*

This comes after a very complicated year, when our relations reached a low point, with unprecedented levels of tension. Nevertheless, towards the end of 2020, Turkey's authorities started communicating their interest in re-engaging with the EU. Negative rhetoric was substantially toned down and actions contrary to interests of EU member states in the Eastern Mediterranean were halted.

A strategic interest in a cooperative relationship with Turkey

The situation remains fragile, but the EU welcomes these forthcoming developments and gestures on the part of Turkey and has responded by extending its hand. Indeed, the EU has a strategic interest in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey. And this is equally true for Turkey. The EU is by far Turkey's number one import and export partner, as well as source of investment.

Looking at the latest pre-pandemic figures, we see €69.8 billion of Turkey's exports directed towards the EU, and €58.5 billion of its foreign direct investment (FDI) coming from the EU. More than 5.5 million Turkish citizens are living in EU member states, and according to Eurobarometer 61 % of Turkish citizens look at the EU as an actor that counts in the world. And with its security and defence anchored within NATO, it seems difficult to believe that Turkey could realistically envisage better options than pursuing a European path.

“ *The EU is by far Turkey's number one import and export partner, as well as source of investment.* ”

It would of course be naive to consider that problems are over. The report on EU–Turkey relations that I have presented jointly with the European Commission to the European Council has a double-track approach and identifies four main elements of tension in the relationship: maritime disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean; the Cyprus settlement question; divergent objectives in regional conflicts, notably in Libya and Syria; and the deterioration of democratic standards in Turkey.

Substantial work ahead

On the regional aspects, we have substantial work ahead, in particular on Syria (on which we are currently co-chairing with the United Nations the fifth [Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’](#) ⁽²⁶⁸⁾) and on Libya, where more recently convergences of interests are slowly starting to appear. More generally, the entire neighbourhood has suffered dramatically from turmoil and a new brand of terrorism has appeared.

“*Dialogue and action on democratic standards will always be an integral part of the EU–Turkey relationship.*”

Democratic standards remain a key element, not just for the EU, but also for the people in Turkey. The targeting of political parties and free media and other recent decisions run counter to the respect of democracy and fundamental rights (see two recent statements in this regard ⁽²⁶⁹⁾). Dialogue and action on such issues will always be an integral part of the EU–Turkey relationship.

A big impact on bilateral relations

The report on the state of play of EU–Turkey political, economic and trade relations explains the impact tensions have had on our bilateral relations, virtually freezing the main instruments and processes for cooperation. Last week’s [Statement of the members of the European Council](#) ⁽²⁷⁰⁾ rightfully refer to these various

⁽²⁶⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/93313/brussels-v-conference-%E2%80%93-supporting-future-syria-and-region_en

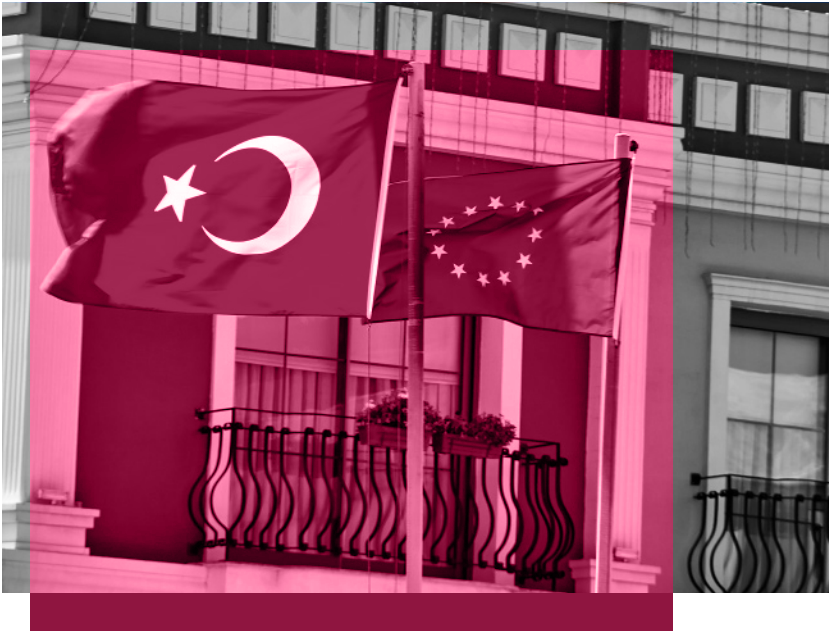
⁽²⁶⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/turkey-joint-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-and-neighbourhood-and_en et https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95380/turkey-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-turkey%E2%80%93withdrawal-istanbul_en

⁽²⁷⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48976/250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf>

elements, acknowledging their significance in ensuring that a path of cooperation and dialogue can succeed.

The task ahead is far from easy. EU leaders have stressed the need for a phased and proportionate, but also reversible approach. Courage and determination, but also flexibility and understanding, are necessary to redress our relationship in a sustainable manner. Some of the pending issues have been entangled in decade-long disagreements and conflicts. However, one key difference distinguishes today's efforts in finding solutions from those of the past: there is a heightened consciousness of how old disputes deeply affect security interests of the European Union. They can no longer be considered just bilateral matters between Turkey and some member states.

“*The old disputes deeply affect security interests of the European Union and can no longer be considered just bilateral matters between Turkey and some member states.*”



Turkey is an important regional power and its historical destiny could well be to join the rest of Europe in the unique peace project that we are building under the banner of the European Union. At a moment when strategic polarisation seems to be resurfacing around the world, the strengthening of a European democratic pillar that includes Turkey could be a key balancing element. This is not a given, but the European Council has offered a possible bridge.

We have to build this bridge

We now have to build this bridge and I believe we can do this. With political clear choices and commitment from all sides. On our side, the EU is ready to invest the required efforts. If Turkey is equally willing to do so, and underlines its more positive rhetoric with respective actions, we can continue to move from de-escalation to building a mutually beneficial agenda.

SYRIA: 10 YEARS ON, WE STILL NEED A POLITICAL SOLUTION

31/03/2021 – *Blog – The Syria conflict has wreaked havoc for more than ten years. We must continue to mobilise international support for the Syrian people. We achieved this in the spring 2021 with the Fifth ‘Brussels Conference on Syria’ – generating € 5.3 billion of new pledges. But we also need a political solution to the crisis.*

We all know how devastated Syria is. How much its people have suffered, for ten years now, and what they still endure every day. Syria has become synonymous with death, destruction, and this century's largest human exodus.

We should never forget how it all started. Exactly a decade ago, in the tidal wave of the Arab Spring, ordinary Syrians took to the streets peacefully asking for freedom, justice and economic perspectives. The regime responded with extreme violence, at a level unseen elsewhere in the region. The situation escalated into a deadly conflict.

We know all the horrors of this conflict

We know all the horrors of this conflict but some key figures bear repeating: over 400 000 people have died, perhaps 100 000 have disappeared. The economy is in freefall. Around 90 % of Syrians live in poverty. Over 13 million Syrians – nearly 60 % of the population and half of them children – are facing severe food insecurity and need humanitarian assistance. Over 12 million Syrians have fled their homes. In northern Syria, hundreds of thousands live in tents. The past year, the pandemic has further worsened the already dire situation.

“ *The Syria conference, which gathered over 85 delegates from more than 55 countries and over 25 international organisations, enabled us to jointly generate €5.3 billion of new pledges.*”

Throughout the past ten years, the EU and its member states have been the largest provider of support to Syrians. Yesterday, during the fifth Brussels Conference on

[‘Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region’](#) ⁽²⁷¹⁾, the EU pledged another €560 million, the same amount as last year. They add up to the close to €25 billion we have delivered since the start of the crisis. The conference, which gathered over 85 delegates from more than 55 countries and over 25 international organisations, enabled us to jointly generate €5.3 billion of new pledges.

Now people sometimes wonder how the money that gets pledged at this type of events is actually distributed, reaching the people in need. Last year, at the Fourth Brussels Conference in 2020, donors pledged €4.9 billion in grants and macro financial funding for all the following purposes: support humanitarian, resilience, stabilisation, development activities in Syria and the region, and a further €2 billion for 2021 and beyond.

We keep track of these promises and last week we published the [financial tracking report](#) ⁽²⁷²⁾, which shows that as of January 2021 donors have contributed with €6.8 billion in grants to Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It means that this is 54 % more than the original amount pledged at last year’s conference. That is good news, even if everybody knows that money alone does not solve the crisis. But the financial support is badly needed. And for years our support has made the difference, both within Syria and its neighbourhood.

Yet does this bring Syria anywhere closer to the end of the conflict? Anywhere closer to addressing the root causes of the crisis, namely the demands of the Syrians back in 2011 for reform and justice?

It does not.

A new generation of Syrians have only known war. They need a future and ask for it. Syria cannot be rebuilt on the same foundations that led to its collapse. Going back to pre-2011 Syria is not an option. Even the inner circle of the regime knows it. Even Russia and Iran know it.

“No matter how difficult, we need Syrians to sit together, look back at the causes of the war and unite around a vision for their country’s future.”

⁽²⁷¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/93313/brussels-v-conference-%E2%80%93-supporting-future-syria-and-region_en

⁽²⁷²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/95762/supporting-syria-and-region-post-brussels-conference-financial-tracking_en

Our interest, as Europeans, is simple and it is what Syrians want too: we need Syria back on its feet, as a stable neighbour. No matter how difficult, we need Syrians to sit together, look back at the causes of the war and unite around a vision for their country's future. Aspirations for a free, safe and dignified life. Safety for refugees to return. A real search for the missing and the disappeared. And yes, accountability for the many war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been committed.

Another crime awaiting justice

Just last week, on 21 March, there was a deliberate shelling by the Syrian regime of a medical facility in Atareb. It killed five medical staff and six patients. The hospital is now inoperable. Its GPS co-ordinates had been shared by the UN with all warring parties. This is another crime for which evidence is being collected, awaiting justice.

We know from direct experience how hard it is, but we need to move forward with the political process. International actors and the parties have agreed that Syria should have a new constitution and UN-supervised, free and fair elections.



After ten years of conflict, perhaps this seems unrealistic. A pipe dream. Yet a hard-nosed analysis of the situation shows that the current trajectory of Syria is not sustainable. It will only lead to more of the instability and hardship that we see already.

Syria needs to change path. Only a different Syria will be stable and prosperous, and a reliable partner to its neighbours and the international community. Even Syria's allies can no longer afford to prop up a faltering regime. Indeed, without a political solution, refugees and displaced persons will not return.

“ *If the Syrian regime takes steps in the right direction, we will respond. Until that moment. There will be no end to sanctions, no normalisation, no support for reconstruction until a political transition is underway.*”

The onus is therefore on the Syrian regime to take the steps set out in UN Security Council resolution 2254. If it takes steps in the right direction, we will respond. Until that moment, we will keep up the pressure. There will be no end to sanctions, no normalisation, no support for reconstruction until a political transition is underway. This is the long-standing position of the European Union. I recalled it in my [statement](#) marking the ten years of war, and I reiterated it to our international partners at the Fifth 'Brussels Conference' that I co-chaired this week with UN Special Envoy Pedersen.

The EU will continue to engage diplomatically with all actors involved in the Syria conflict – the UN, the US, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Arab countries and others – to build a consensus that can put an end to the war. In parallel, and this is equally important, we will continue to engage with civil society. Their voice is crucial, as I saw for myself when meeting them this week, to understand fully what is happening, what is needed, and how tomorrow's Syria can be shaped. They carry hope for the future, for a peaceful and different Syria. They are not giving up, and neither are we.

The future of Syria belongs to no single faction

The future of Syria belongs to no single faction and to none of the outside powers. It is for Syrians to decide, in Syrian-owned and Syrian-led negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations. Denying the Syrians' needs and demands, denying them their dignity, will only waste more time and bring more misery.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE AFTER THE CEASEFIRE: WHAT SHOULD EUROPE DO?

22/05/2021 – Blog – At the end of May 2021, a ceasefire started between Israel and Hamas after 11 days of fighting. In this blog I underlined the need then to build on it to address the underlying conflict. Security alone will not provide peace. Only a negotiated, political solution will give Israelis and Palestinians security and peace.

The start of the ceasefire is a very welcome step. It follows the calls by the UN Secretary General, the US President and 26 out of 27 EU member states. It should end the horrible cycle of violence we have seen that started with clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli police in East Jerusalem. The violence has left well over 200 dead in Gaza and the West Bank, including many women and children, and at least 10 dead in Israel, plus thousands injured. The task now is to use this opportunity to build a genuine peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The role of the EU

As European Union, we are deeply affected by the conflict, not least because of our historic and extensive links to Israel and Palestine. I have been very active throughout this crisis in reaching out to all the protagonists, to try to de-escalate tensions and promote the ceasefire.

Given the urgency of the situation, I convened an extraordinary video-conference of EU Foreign Ministers on 18 May. While we should acknowledge that there are nuances in the positions of member states – and any differences tend to get media attention – there was a wide common understanding shared by 26 out of 27 member states

Being an informal meeting, there were no written conclusions. But my main take away of this general agreement, as I explained to the press, was on the urgent need to end the crisis through a ceasefire – which we now have – but also that it should be fully implemented. We also stressed the need for humanitarian access; we strongly condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups into Israel; we acknowledged Israel's right to self-defence, while needing to

respect proportionality and respect for international humanitarian law; we regretted the unacceptable loss of lives, especially of women and children. In line with the European Union's long-standing positions on settlements, we recalled the importance of not proceeding with evictions in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem; and finally we called for respecting the status of Holy sites and guaranteeing the right to worship. All this remains relevant.

From an untenable status quo to a negotiated peace

However, the most important point that Ministers discussed is that we need to not just end this wave of violence in a 'crisis management mode', but actually solve the underlying conflict. Because in the end, real security for Israel and Palestine can only come through real peace and a true political and negotiated solution. It is precisely the absence of any progress towards the two-state solution, which the international community has long supported, that ultimately created the latest upsurge in violence.

With the relative calm since 2014 and the agreements that Israel reached with various Arab countries in recent years, the so called 'Abraham agreements' brokered by the Trump administration, some in Israel may have had the feeling that the Palestinian question had been settled and that the status quo could continue indefinitely. And certainly some argued that the Arab-Israeli conflict was reaching an end. But this did nothing about the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which remains the core of the problem. As my friend Shlomo Ben Ami has [written](#) ⁽²⁷³⁾ the Abraham accords created the impression that the Palestinian cause was dead, removed from the international stage. Years before, Simon Peres, another friend of mine, said that he could not have imagined Russian and China embassies to Israel. He would be still more surprised at the current level of international recognition.

“ We have seen years of ‘peace process negotiations’ which, have not solved the conflict, nor halted the expansion of settlements undermining the solution that the international community backs.”

We have seen years of ‘peace process negotiations’ which, however, have not solved the conflict, nor halted the expansion of settlements on Palestinian territory that in practical terms are undermining the solution that the international

⁽²⁷³⁾ See <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/palestinian-resistance-shatters-israeli-consensus-by-shlomo-ben-ami-2021-05>

community backs. In this context, a strategy of ‘maximum security’ seemed to work and allow some to claim that the Palestinian problem was over. But the clashes of the last few weeks, including tensions that have emerged inside Israel itself, show that this is not the case. Indeed, the crisis demonstrates that the status quo is not sustainable and that there is no alternative to a negotiated peace, accepted by all parties.

Not leave aside the underlying causes of the conflict

Now that there is a truce in place, some might be tempted to ‘move on’ and leave aside the underlying causes of the conflict. This would most likely lead to new cycles of violence that will only further strengthen extremists. There is an important difference between a short-term form of security delivered mainly through military and technological means, and a sustainable peace, emanating from an agreement. Enforcing security without underlying peace comes at too high a price and is anyway unsustainable.

“ *Walls will never be high enough. You can only be prosperous and secure if your neighbour is prosperous and secure too. As Yitzhak Rabin said: ‘You don’t make peace with your friends, but with your enemies.’* ”

Walls and other forms of separation will never be high enough. In the end, you can only be prosperous and secure if your neighbour is prosperous and secure too. As Yitzhak Rabin used to say: ‘You don’t make peace with your friends, but with your enemies.’

Find the narrow political pathway

That is why we must do all we can to find that narrow political pathway: to return to meaningful negotiations for a two-state solution, based on the internationally agreed parameters. It is the only way to ensure the rights and the security of both Israelis and Palestinians. We will need many steps and perseverance to get there, including Palestinian elections and agreed ways to end the isolation of Gaza.

This year we will be marking the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Peace conference that launched the process leading to the Oslo agreements. It will be a good occasion to ‘re-internationalise’ the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Perhaps it doesn’t

have the same strategic central role it had in the past. However, that is not a reason for us Europeans to forget about it and wait for a new tragedy.

“ *This conflict has for decades defied international efforts at peace making. So we have to prove the sceptics wrong and engage in a very concrete way to help bring about this negotiated solution.* ”

It is true that we have said all this many times before. Indeed, this conflict has for decades defied international efforts at peace making. So we have to prove the sceptics wrong and engage in a very concrete way to help bring about this negotiated solution.

We cannot afford the stalemate we have had for years. The EU cannot be expected to finance yet again the re-building of Gaza without a meaningful prospect of actually solving the underlying conflict. Of course, there are many reasons to doubt that ‘this time will be different’. But we have a duty to try. Because sticking to the current path will certainly mean more cycles of violence.



“ *The EU cannot be expected to finance yet again the re-building of Gaza without a meaningful prospect of solving the underlying conflict.*”

That is why I will do all I can to try to re-open the space for negotiations and develop confidence building measures. I am in [touch with the key actors](#) ⁽²⁷⁴⁾ from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, the US etc. So too is the EU Special Representative Sven Koopmans who will soon travel to the region. Equally, we are working to revive the Middle East Quartet (US, UN, Russia and EU). Last but not least, we must try to build as much unity as possible among the EU member states.

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/98505/israelpalestine-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-intense-efforts-contribute-de_en

LEBANON DESERVES BETTER

22/06/2021 – Blog – As Lebanon had slid further into a very serious crisis during the spring of 2021, I was in Lebanon on 19 and 20 June to discuss this with the country's leaders and public figures and explained to all actors that the country urgently needs a government able to halt the spiral of collapse and initiate vital reforms.

In recent weeks we have had to confront numerous open crises: Russian manoeuvres causing alarm at Ukraine's borders, violent clashes between Israel and Hamas and the scandalous forced landing of a European aircraft in Belarus... We must of course continuously respond to these types of emergency.

“ We must tackle these crises which, although they are not on the front pages of European newspapers, could turn into open crises if they are allowed to deteriorate.”

However, we must tackle these crises which, although they are not on the front pages of European newspapers, could turn into open crises if they are allowed to deteriorate. This is particularly true of the serious crisis that Lebanon has been experiencing for more than a year. It has already created a dire situation for the people directly impacted, and threatens to destabilise the region and affect the EU. I travelled to the country on 19 and 20 June to try to contribute to alleviating the crisis. We then discussed the issue at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday 21 June.

The Beirut disaster, 4 August 2020

We all remember: on 4 August 2020 large parts of the city of Beirut were destroyed by a huge explosion in its port. This disaster occurred during a protracted economic, social and political crisis caused by serious shortcomings on the part of the Lebanese state. These long-standing problems had been exacerbated by the consequences of the Syrian crisis: the estimated 1.5 million refugees who have arrived from Syria since 2011 now make up almost a quarter of Lebanon's population (and a total of 40 % of the country's residents are not Lebanese citizens). In 2020 the COVID-19 outbreak compounded this situation.

Over the past 10 years, however, the EU has provided a great deal of support to Lebanon. To this end, between 2011 and 2020 we made available EUR 2.4 billion, EUR 340 million of which was mobilised in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, to which was added EUR 170 million following the explosion in the Port of Beirut. Following the explosion, we established the [*Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework \(3RF\)*](#) ⁽²⁷⁵⁾ together with the UN and the World Bank, which allows us to help the Lebanese people directly.

The path to economic and financial collapse

However, Lebanon has continued on the path to economic and financial collapse. Despite continued calls by the EU and the international community, the negotiations to form a new government, which have been ongoing for months now, are stalled. Although the sectarian system underlying the division of powers in Lebanon has clearly reached its limits, it remains very difficult to replace.

“No tangible progress has been made, either on the emergency measures needed to obtain IMF assistance, vital to halt the spiral of collapse, or on the more structural reforms necessary to combat corruption.”

Consequently, the country has been led by an interim government for ten months. This government is serious about tackling the country's difficulties and has proposed solutions. But it has neither the support of Lebanon's Parliament, nor a mandate to undertake reforms. As a result, no tangible progress has been made, either on the emergency measures needed to obtain the assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which will be vital to halt the spiral of collapse, or on the more structural reforms necessary to combat corruption, increase the independence of the judiciary, clarify public procurement rules, and provide a framework as to how the Central Bank should operate or regulate key sectors such as electricity.

In September 2020, following his exchanges with Lebanese leaders, France's President Emmanuel Macron proposed a programme of reforms with short implementation deadlines. This programme remains valid and should constitute the roadmap for any new government.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/lebanon/89920/lebanon-reform-recovery-reconstruction-framework-3rf_en



The Lebanese people have suffered as a result of this failure.

The Lebanese people have suffered greatly as a result of this failure: 55 % of the population live below the poverty line. According to the IMF, Lebanon is expected to be the only economy in the region to contract further this year, despite an unemployment rate that already stood at an estimated 39 % at the end of 2020. In recent months, the Lebanese pound has lost 90 % of its value against the US dollar. Many educated Lebanese are leaving the country, and poverty is increasing. These conditions have heightened social tensions. Protests against the devaluation of the Lebanese pound and the deterioration of living conditions regularly break out across the country.

“ *The worsening socio-economic situation could have serious consequences for the stability and security of the country.* ”

The worsening socio-economic situation could have serious consequences for stability and security in the country, which was the scene of a lengthy civil war between 1975 and 1990 and still experiences regular outbreaks of violence. On 4 February 2021, the prominent Lebanese intellectual and critic of Hezbollah Lokman Slim was found dead, raising fears of a return to the days of political

killings in Lebanon. Then, in March this year, the Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces warned that the army should not allow itself to be drawn into the political stalemate. He was more concerned about the risk posed by internal conflict to Lebanon's security than conflict with Israel or Syria.

I therefore travelled to Lebanon on the weekend of 19 and 20 June and met with President Aoun, Speaker of Parliament Berri, interim Prime Minister Diab, Prime Minister-designate Hariri, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and interim Minister for Foreign Affairs Akar, Head of Security General Ibrahim, Commander-in-Chief of the Army Aoun as well as public figures and independent experts.

“ *We are ready to step up EU's support, provided that Lebanon formed a government that struck an agreement with the IMF and reformed the country.*”

I conveyed our concerns to them. Because of the current crisis, neither the Gulf states nor the Lebanese diaspora will be riding to the country's financial rescue this time. I reminded the Lebanese leaders of the significant support we were already providing to the country and indicated that we were ready to step up this support but that, before this could happen, Lebanon needed a government that struck an agreement with the IMF and reformed the country.

Everyone I spoke to told me that they were in favour of such an agreement and a judicial investigation into the workings of the Central Bank. As urgent as this agreement with the IMF is, it has proven difficult to finalise, because the reforms required will inevitably call into question the distribution of economic power and advantages in Lebanon. However, there is no other way to avoid the collapse of the country. We must therefore insist on this point; however, we must also be ready to assist Lebanon further once an agreement with the IMF has been concluded.

The issue of targeted sanctions

I also informed my hosts that if Lebanon's leaders do not fulfil their responsibilities, we would have to consider alternative measures. Certain member states have raised the possibility of our adopting targeted sanctions. None of the leaders to whom I spoke were opposed to this idea. Some even declared that they were in favour of sanctions, provided of course that they were imposed on the real

‘culprits’. The Lebanese public figures I spoke to all told me that the potential use of sanctions was essential in order to exert pressure on political leaders.

We took stock of my visit at the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 June and we will continue to work on the criteria that could form the basis of our triggering possible targeted sanctions. Nonetheless, the threat of sanctions will not suffice if we want to avoid the collapse of the country and help to bring about genuine change in Lebanon.

“*I insisted that the local, parliamentary and presidential elections due to be held next year should take place as scheduled. They offer a real opportunity for change, but they must be free and fair.*”

We must also monitor the illegal financial flows out of the country more closely, and put in place the instruments at our disposal to more effectively combat money laundering originating in Lebanon. We must also begin to help Lebanon to prepare for next year’s local, parliamentary and presidential elections. I insisted that they should take place in 2022, as scheduled. They offer a real opportunity for change, but there must be a level playing field. We should consider the possibility of sending EU observers.

Real change will take time

In Lebanon, real change will take time. Our commitment and our support should encourage such change. In the immediate future, we must make it a priority to maintain pressure on the Lebanese leadership to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities. The EU has been and remains in full solidarity with the Lebanese people during this difficult time. However, to maintain this pressure, we must only provide support to the government once reforms are under way. In the coming months, Lebanon will remain one of the main priorities of the EU’s external policy.

AFTER HITTING THE BOTTOM, LEBANON NEEDS TO GET BACK TO THE SURFACE

05/08/2021 – Blog – *In August 2020 a huge explosion shook Beirut. Since then, the political class has been unable to tackle the Lebanese crisis. The EU stands ready to help Lebanon more, if the necessary steps are taken. At the same time, the EU has adopted a new framework for restrictive measures against those who prevent solving this crisis.*

We all remember how one year ago, on 4 August 2020, 2 750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser exploded on the dockside at Beirut port, killing more than 200 people, injuring thousands, and inflicting severe damage to tens of thousands of homes.

Experts have estimated that the explosion was the equivalent of 1 000 to 1 500 tonnes of TNT – about one 10th of the intensity of the nuclear bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. This makes it one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in history, far bigger than any conventional weapon. How did this happen? Why were no measures in place to prevent such catastrophe? One year on, the investigation that is to shed light over the causes of this tragedy is still to deliver results.

Conveying our concerns and our intentions

During [my June visit to Lebanon](#) ⁽²⁷⁶⁾, I met with the Lebanese leadership and with members of its civil society. I was very clear in conveying our concerns, and our intentions. Government formation was stuck as the different political factions failed to compromise repeatedly and continued haggling over the allocation of ministerial portfolios.

“No one was taking the bold measures we and the international community at large have called on to stop an economic collapse of historical proportions.”

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ See p. 327.

No one was taking the bold measures we and the international community at large have called on to stop an economic collapse of historical proportions – the World Bank considers the Lebanese economic crisis one of the top 10, possibly top 3, most severe crises in the world in recent times. According to the United Nations, extreme poverty registered a threefold increase from 2019 to 2020, rising from 8 % to 23 % of the population. A recent assessment by UNICEF estimates that 77 % of households in Lebanon do not have enough food or enough money to buy food. In Syrian refugee households, the figure reaches 99 %.

The capabilities of the Lebanese army affected

This economic meltdown has also affected the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a key guarantor of Lebanon's stability. Before the actual crisis, most of the 80 000 personnel employed by the institution earned the equivalent of \$800 a month, but due to the Lebanese currency losing its value, they now take home \$70-\$90. It was important indeed that France, with the support of Italy, organised on 17 June an international conference on supporting the LAF, an institution that the EU has collaborated with for many years. The stability and security of Lebanon are essential for the region and for the EU as well.

“ We hope Najib Mikati will succeed as soon as possible in forming a government, because we are back to square one and many precious months have been squandered ”

The country has been led by a caretaker government for a year, with no real progress on the necessary reforms, including on talks about a much-needed IMF programme. The negotiations between President Aoun and Prime Minister-designate Hariri to form a government have dragged on for over nine months due to divergences on the cabinet composition but also to personal mutual mistrust. After nine months of negotiations, on 15 July, Saad Hariri recused himself from forming a government due to divergences with President Aoun.

Following parliamentary consultations last week, Najib Mikati has been nominated Prime Minister-designate. He is now working to form a government and we hope that the new PM-designate will succeed as soon as possible, because we are back to square one and many precious months have been squandered. But although the chances of seeing a government being formed have somewhat increased – this is not a done deal. While public and political pressure to form a government are high, the political difficulties encountered by Hariri in recent months remain

unchanged. At least a compromise should be found, even with a limited mandate to prepare for next year's elections and discuss a relief programme with the international donor community.

A specific framework for targeted restrictive measures

To address these situation in Lebanon, the [EU Council adopted on 30 July a framework for targeted restrictive measures](#) ⁽²⁷⁷⁾. And we are ready to use our toolbox to effect change in Lebanon – both positive but also negative measures. In fact, all the Lebanese public figures I spoke to during my visit in June told me that the potential use of sanctions was essential in order to exert enough pressure on political leaders (although everyone is blaming the others for the stalemate). There is no two ways about this: there is no blaming anyone else but the Lebanese political class. The current state of affairs in Lebanon is a self-inflicted, man-made catastrophe and Lebanon's political leadership bears responsibility for steering the country towards recovery now.

“ We are ready to use our toolbox to effect change in Lebanon – both positive but also negative measures.”

The recently adopted framework provides thus for the possibility of imposing sanctions against persons and entities who are responsible for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Lebanon through any of the following actions:

obstructing or undermining the democratic political process by persistently hampering the formation of a government or by obstructing or seriously undermining the holding of elections;

obstructing or undermining the implementation of plans approved by Lebanese authorities and supported by relevant international actors, including the EU, to improve accountability and good governance in the public sector or the implementation of critical economic reforms, including in the banking and financial sectors and including the adoption of transparent and non-discriminatory legislation on the export of capital;

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/30/lebanon-eu-adopts-a-framework-for-targeted-sanctions/>

serious financial misconduct, concerning public funds, insofar as the acts concerned are covered by the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, and the unauthorised export of capital.

Eventual sanctions would consist of a travel ban to the EU and an asset freeze for persons, and an asset freeze for entities. In addition, EU persons and entities would be forbidden from making funds available to those listed.

No names on the list at present

There are not any names on this list at present. And we would greatly prefer not to have to use this instrument. Therefore, the conference gave me the opportunity to repeat our key message: a government that can take on the current challenges for the good of all Lebanese must be formed soonest. The investigation on the Beirut port explosion must be completed. An agreement with the IMF is urgently needed. Preparations for the 2022 elections must commence in earnest. Long due key reforms – the electricity sector, the banking system, etc. – must be enacted and implemented. Nothing new here: same tasks still pending, just less and less time to get things done.

On the positive side, we are also ready to continue using positive measures to help Lebanon. In 2020 alone, the EU provided around EUR 333 million assistance to this country. We are ready to assist Lebanon further once an agreement with the IMF has been concluded. We could also deploy a new observation mission to help with the elections next year. We are also ready to discuss with a new government the priorities and key areas of cooperation between EU and Lebanon until 2027. There is thus a variety of possibilities to continue helping Lebanon.

“ *The international community was, once more very clear: we can help, but Lebanon must shoulder its part of the burden, and do it fast.*”

At yesterday's international conference in support of the most vulnerable in Lebanon, organised by France and the UN, the international community was, once more very clear: we can help, but Lebanon must shoulder its part of the burden, and do it fast.



The people of Lebanon, incredibly resilient and resourceful

As I said before: the people of Lebanon deserve better and have already shown the world how incredibly resilient and resourceful they can be. They rebuilt their country after 15 years of civil war – and I know from my own country, Spain, how daunting such a task can be. I am therefore convinced that if there is a unity of purpose across all groups and formations, Lebanon can get back on its feet again.

Lebanese people should then take a hard look at the tenets of their country, at their social contract, at their economic model, and introduce the changes that might be necessary to ensure the sustainability of a safe, stable and prosperous Lebanon. It is by exploring with a critical eye the fundamentals of their country that the Lebanese will find the right answers, and we are ready to assist in this process if they so wish.

The famous French moviemaker Claude Lelouch held that, *C'est en touchant le fond que l'on refait surface* ('It is by hitting the bottom that we get back to the surface'). This image is quite befitting of the country's present situation: the only way is up, Lebanon must urgently go back to the surface now.

LIBYA AT THE CROSSROADS

12/09/2021 – Blog – *In September 2021, I visited Libya at a critical moment. The following weeks should determine if the hope generated since the beginning of the year will be consolidated or if vested interests will bring again a serious danger of a return to armed violence. I told to the Libyan leadership that we were ready to do our part to help avoid it.*

I have been to Libya several times in the last two years and I can measure the progresses made lately toward peace. However, the political divisions and the fragmentation of Libya are still defining a complicated scenario, made worse by the absence of the State in large parts of the country. In this context, violence can still erupt at any time and escalate rapidly. None of the actors can achieve victory by himself, but each can provoke the others into a direct confrontation.

The difficult path toward the elections

The current interim period should end on December 24th with general elections, but the path towards them is fraught with all sort of difficulties and oppositions. Huge efforts will be needed by domestic and international stakeholders to make sure that they take place in a free, fair and credible manner and that all would accept the results. However, a shared vision for the future of the country, a common sense of purpose, and a spirit of compromise among Libyans cannot be generated by international pressure, or replaced by procedural mechanisms. It will be primarily up to the Libyan leaders themselves to rise to the challenge for their country.

“ *A shared vision for the future, a common sense of purpose, and a spirit of compromise among Libyans cannot be generated by international pressure. It will be up to the Libyan leaders themselves to rise to the challenge.* ”

Prime Minister Abdelhamid Dbeiba, in office since March this year, is the main actor in charge of ensuring the success of the political process in this very complex environment, with the added challenges of operating without control over the majority of the territory, and, so far, without a budget.

Peace in Libya would be a regional game changer

Peace in Libya would be also a regional game changer, given its strategic location in the Mediterranean, the North of Africa, and the Sahel, as well as its size and economic potential. With a surface equivalent to France, Spain, Italy and Germany put together, a population of only 7 million, and the largest oil reserves in Africa, Libya's fate has the potential to impact the whole region, both in positive and in negative terms.

“ The risks that instability in Libya poses are evident with the number of weapons in circulation and the potential of its vast uncontrolled areas to become safe havens for terrorism and organised crime.”

In terms of security, the risks that instability in Libya poses are all too evident with the number of weapons in circulation and the potential of its vast uncontrolled areas to become safe havens for terrorism and organised crime. The current crisis in the Sahel was triggered by events in Libya in 2011, and the recent death of the President of Chad Idriss Deby in a clash with rebels coming from Libya clearly underlines its persistence. With peace in Libya and better control of the South of the country, security in Tunis, Algeria, Chad, Niger, Sudan and, potentially, Egypt would be greatly reinforced.

In economic terms, Libya's reconstruction will need an investment of around \$100 billion. The country has substantial resources coming from oil exports, currently 1.2 million barrels per day, as well as a Sovereign Fund worth over \$60 billion. A recent study by [UN ESCWA estimates](https://www.unescwa.org/news/new-escwa-study-peace-libya-will-generate-gains-reaching-162-billion) ⁽²⁷⁸⁾ [that the total gains](https://www.unescwa.org/news/new-escwa-study-peace-libya-will-generate-gains-reaching-162-billion) for the region from peace in Libya will be worth more than \$160 billion over the period 2021-2025; unemployment would decrease by around 6 % in Tunisia, 9 % in Egypt, and 14 % in Sudan. These are spectacular figures.

In terms of migration, the impact of peace in Libya would also be very significant. The country hosted around 2.5 million foreign workers before the revolution, and 3 million are estimated to be needed in the coming years for reconstruction. Remittances reached the \$3 billion in 2013, benefitting almost exclusively Libyan neighbours Egypt and Tunis.

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ See <https://www.unescwa.org/news/new-escwa-study-peace-libya-will-generate-gains-reaching-162-billion>



“It is difficult to imagine a single EU policy that would contribute as effectively as the promotion of peace and stability in Libya to the achievement of our priorities in the region.”

Given this potential, it is difficult to imagine a single EU policy that would contribute as effectively as the promotion of peace and stability in Libya to the achievement of our priorities in the region. This brings us to the issue of what we can do better to contribute to peace.

The immediate priority: consolidate peace and stability

In a context of post-conflict nation, institution-building and economic reconstruction our help could be significant and Libyan authorities are very much aware of our readiness to engage. Governance, including in the economic and security area, could be a main focus of our cooperation. It would not require large sums of aid money, because Libya is able to finance its own development, but together with our member states we can have an added value by providing technical expertise, helping find foreign investment, and coordinate with International Financial Institutions.

But we are not there yet. The immediate priority is to consolidate peace and stability. Here as well the European Union is still providing an important contribution through its naval operation Irini to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council imposed arms embargo and could further envisage assistance in the security and defence domain within a UN framework of stabilisation.

The December elections provide a key milestone to advance towards political reconciliation. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya has the direct mandate to mediate in this context, and we are strongly supporting their efforts.

Talks are ongoing in the political, security and economic tracks

Talks are ongoing in the political, security and economic tracks, and the EU and member states actively participate in them. As co-chairs of the Economic Working Group (together with UN, US and Egypt) we as EU are trying in particular to make sure that the economy becomes a driver for peace instead of a driver for conflict, as has been the case until now. Some progress has been achieved, and the focus now is the unification of economic institutions.

However, we need to reinforce these talks with a sense of urgency; current dynamics will not provide the necessary political energy to generate a sustainable political agreement. EU and member states should be in a position to impact the process more effectively, but that can only happen if we act together: the EU needs a single voice if it wants to have a meaningful contribution.

“*The EU and member states should be in a position to impact the peace process in Libya more effectively, but that can only happen if we act together: the EU needs a single voice to have a meaningful contribution.*”

One final word about migration. We first need to understand the very specific situation of Libya. It shares more than 4 000 km of borders with six countries (Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia), with a population of over 200 million, all of them significantly poorer than the 7 million Libyans. Borders are little more than lines in the sand in many areas, and, to make things worse, the fragile ethnic balance in the South can be affected by migration movements from neighbouring countries.

The humanitarian conditions of migrants and refugees need of course to be addressed urgently in this context. The appalling conditions of Detention Centres are unacceptable, and improving the treatment of migrants will be central to our work in this area.

The appalling conditions of Libyan Detention Centres

Libyan authorities are clearly requesting the reinforcement of EU support in the South of the country, using EU Border Assistance Mission and our other tools to achieve an integrated approach linking border management and security with job creation and improvement of basic services. It is however important to bear in mind that, under the current circumstances, the security situation in the region makes it impossible to establish a stable international presence on the ground.

A more balanced approach to migration in Libya, already under discussion, should include effective border management in the North and the South of the country, the protection of vulnerable migrants and refugees, and migration governance, in particular related to foreign workers needed for reconstruction.

Our security and our prosperity are clearly interlinked

Libya is a key actor for the stability of the Mediterranean, the North of Africa and the Sahel. Our security and our prosperity are clearly interlinked: what is good for Libya is good for Europe. We are ready to do our part and I am looking forward to returning to Libya soon.

THE MEDITERRANEAN SHOULD BE A COMMON PLACE TO BUILD A SHARED FUTURE

02/12/2021 – Blog – *For many Europeans, the Mediterranean is mainly about conflicts and migration. But our relations are and must be about so much more. It was the key question of the Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean and the EU–Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial Meeting held that took place in November 2021 in Barcelona.*

During last Sunday's '[Day of the Mediterranean](https://mediterraneanday.com/)'⁽²⁷⁹⁾, which was celebrated for the first time to remind us that 'that our similarities largely overcome our differences,' I was asked what the Mediterranean means to me. It has a special place in my personal and political life. For me and many of my generation, the Mediterranean is the title of an iconic song by Joan Manuel Serrat that brings together many positive emotions and memories from my youth.

“ *The Mediterranean is the sea of crossbreeding’ – and also a subject of worries and a border that divides two worlds with enormous economic and social differences.*”

And as Pope Francis recently said: 'The Mediterranean has a special vocation: it is the sea of crossbreeding' and 'this sea forces the peoples and cultures along its shores to be in constant proximity'. But with view to the political responsibility that I have today, the Mediterranean is also a subject of worries: it has become a border that divides two worlds with enormous economic and social differences.

Two worlds separated by a huge gap in revenues and living standards. According to World Bank data, the per capita GDP in the countries of the EU Southern Neighbourhood⁽²⁸⁰⁾ was on average 6 times less than in the EU in 2020 (and 6.8 times if we consider only the four Maghreb countries). While we in Europe are ageing quickly, the population on the other shore is significantly younger: 31 % of people are under the age of 14, compared to 15 % in Europe. Since 1990, the EU's population grew by 6.5 %, while the population of the ten countries of our southern neighbours grew by 72 %.

⁽²⁷⁹⁾ See <https://mediterraneanday.com/>

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia.

The lack of personal and economic opportunities fuels conflicts

These divergences and the lack of personal and economic opportunities fuel persisting conflicts and the migration pressure. It explains why many people, mainly the young and the educated, look to cross the Mediterranean for a better and more prosperous life in Europe. But young people do not only seek jobs and better prospects, they also struggle with the consequences of political instability and mismanagement in some countries and the persisting conflicts and limits to basic freedoms.

Many Europeans look at the Southern Neighbourhood mainly from that angle. Both with dismay as to desperate migrants losing their lives in the ‘blue cemetery’ Mediterranean and with concerns about the migratory pressure and attempts to come to Europe irregularly. And they think about the persistent conflicts – in the Middle East, Libya and Syria –, and political instability.

But there is so much more to it. For the benefit of the societies on both shores we have to work together to tackle discrepancies and tensions and to reduce the ‘brain drain’ and achieve orderly migration. While the ageing societies in Europe need migration to maintain their prosperity, many Southern Neighbourhood countries also struggle with migratory pressure – some more as transit countries, others as country of destination.

We need to engage in developing a positive story

We need to engage in developing a positive story. We must learn from each other and build human and cultural links and exchanges. But above all, it requires to improve living conditions and to focus on creating jobs and economic growth. Because only if we achieve a more inclusive economic and human development and close the economic and wealth gap, we can overcome what separates us.

“ *Only if we achieve a more inclusive economic and human development and close the economic and wealth gap, we can overcome what separates us.*”

To move this agenda forward, we held last Monday the [Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean](#) ⁽²⁸¹⁾ and the [EU–Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial](#)

⁽²⁸¹⁾ See <https://ufmsecretariat.org/6th-ufm-regional-forum-2021/>

[Meeting](#) ⁽²⁸²⁾ that I co-chaired. To hold these meetings in Barcelona was very appropriate, not least because the so-called Barcelona Process that started there in 1995 laid the foundations for what became in 2008 the [Union for the Mediterranean](#), which today brings together the EU member states and 15 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean). 26 years ago, I was part of this founding event as Spanish Minister of Public Works and Transports.

A record number of Ministers of Foreign Affairs

The meetings brought together a record number of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood. Unfortunately, the representation from our Southern friends was not as high as hoped. Some ministers could not travel due the deteriorating sanitary situation but others attended instead of the Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. This is an indication of the global competition taking place and should push both sides of the Mediterranean to reflect well on the needs and the benefits of our cooperation – also compared to what others could offer.

We had wide-ranging discussions about what we can achieve together by implementing the [Agenda for the Mediterranean](#) ⁽²⁸³⁾ and boost sustainable economic development and build more inclusive and equal societies. To help achieve this goal, the EU has put in place last year a new [EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood](#) ⁽²⁸⁴⁾, which aims to allocate up to €7 billion for the period 2021-2027 in the region order to mobilise up to €30 billion in private and public investment in the next decade. There is no space in this blog post to account for all the issues we covered, but let me focus on one concrete area that offers enormous, mutually beneficial opportunities and is a main challenge of our time – fighting climate change and accelerating the green transition.

“ *The Mediterranean is warming 20 % faster than the rest of the world.*”

⁽²⁸²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/108096/eu-southern-neighbourhood-ministers-review-progress-made-renewed-partnership_en

⁽²⁸³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-02/renewed_partnership_southern_neighbourhood_en.pdf

⁽²⁸⁴⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_426



The Mediterranean is warming 20 % faster than the rest of the world. Climate change already causes major distress to Mediterranean societies, economies and infrastructure, affecting food and water security and regional stability. To fight climate change, the EU has an ambitious Green Deal agenda. To succeed on this way the EU will need to buy large quantities of green electricity in the future.

Working together on the green transition

We should work together on the green transition to make use of the abundant sun, wind and water resources that exist in the region and build an entirely new energy system, based no longer on oil and gas, but on green electricity and hydrogen. Moving from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources is as much a necessity for our common future as it is an opportunity for economic diversification and growth on both shores of the Mediterranean – also for the oil and gas exporting countries in the region. COP 27, which we will take place in Egypt next year, must be a landmark for this renewed engagement.

For tackling climate change and managing the green transition, as well as for many other crucial issues: let us maintain high ambitions and deliver together the scale of action that is needed.



6.5 AFRICA

PLACING CULTURE AT THE HEART OF OUR DIALOGUE WITH AFRICA

03/01/2021 – Blog – *In 2021, we intended to give a fresh impetus to the partnership between the EU and Africa. However, this partnership should not be limited to economic and political issues. Culture and cultural exchanges should become a key part of it.*

Culture is so present in our lives that it often becomes invisible. Whether in the form of music, dance, cinema, television, plastic arts, literature, theatre or gastronomy, culture feeds our imaginations and punctuates our daily lives.

It is also at the heart of our identity. By forging a common aesthetic, common references and narratives, together living culture and our cultural heritage – material and immaterial – define our place in, and our relationship with, the world.

Culture as an important economic resource

Culture is, in short, an important economic resource. Design, cinema and the creative industries are all sectors that generate employment and income. Archaeological heritage and museums attract tourism, which in turn encourages growth in other areas of activity, such as local production of artisan souvenirs, the hospitality industry and the tour guide sector...

Supporting the cultural sector has become all the more necessary now that these industries have been badly hit by the COVID-19 crisis, both in Africa and in Europe.

“ Without the legacy of African and Afro-descendant music, there would be no pop, no RnB, no jazz, no blues, no rock, no funk, no disco, no salsa, no reggae and no rap. ”

What's more, a distinctive feature of cultures is that they themselves are enriched by mixing with other cultures. In this respect, the contribution made by Africa and its diaspora to global culture is considerable. Without the legacy of African and Afro-descendant music, there would be no pop, no RnB, no jazz, no blues, no rock,

no funk, no disco, no salsa, no reggae and no rap. Similar observations could be made with respect to the whole spectrum of the arts.

In addition to these benefits it brings, I also share the belief that culture should be an integral part of the response to foreign policy challenges, whether they are health crises, conflicts or threats related to climate change.

Culture as a response to foreign policy challenges

It is precisely because it touches people's hearts, resonating with what is most unique in each of us and at the same time common to humankind, that culture can help to find solutions where traditional policy tools fall short. Culture allows us to convey certain values – such as respect for human rights and the rule of law – to trigger reflexes of humanity, solidarity and assistance to others, and to encourage protection of those in danger.

“ *It is because it touches people's hearts, resonating with what is most unique in each of us and at the same time common to humankind, that culture can help to find solutions where traditional policy tools fall short.*”

Protecting cultural heritage can also contribute to (re)establishing what it is to be ‘a citizen’ and ‘a nation’. To cite just a few examples, the European Union is working with UNESCO in Mali to safeguard the mausolea and manuscripts of the Mali Empire that are under threat from jihadists. In Niger and Burkina Faso – because strengthening education and respect for other cultures is an essential part of the response to terrorism – the EU is supporting numerous projects that aim to strengthen civic values and solidarity by involving young people from the two countries in artistic co-productions. The European Union is also fighting the trafficking in works of art perpetrated by international terrorist organisations which finance their attacks by plundering museums and archaeological sites, thus depriving populations of their collective memory and their cultural treasures.

Fespaco, a showcase of African cinema

The Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (Fespaco) is another example of European support being provided to cultural industries in Africa. Over the last 50 years, Fespaco has established itself as one of the main events for showcasing African cinema on the world stage. Through its support for the Ethical

Fashion Initiative, the EU also helps to train and equip over 10 000 artisans who then supply large international fashion houses using their own traditional designs as a basis for their work. Other programmes involve a wide range of actions, such as providing support for production and distribution, organising training, ensuring access to microcredit and promoting cultural entrepreneurship.

On a smaller scale, the Youth Hub, which was set up by the African Union and the European Union, has in recent years allowed young people from the two continents to meet and to formulate concrete proposals for strengthening the partnership between Europe and Africa. In the same vein, a unique European and African music co-creation – the MAISHA project – was launched two years ago. It brought together 12 musicians from the two continents, and led to the creation of original pieces of music that were performed during a public concert held in Addis Ababa in 2019 to mark Europe Day and the founding of the African Union, and again virtually in 2020.



Now, at the start of 2021, it is my wish that we will succeed, together with our member states, in establishing real European Houses of Culture, i.e. spaces in partner countries that, in the same way as national cultural institutes, represent both European cultures and those of the host countries and encourage dialogue

between the two. This process has already been launched but I would like it to be strengthened.

“Over 26 000 exchanges have taken place since 2014 through the Erasmus+ programme. We want to go further and to allow at least 105 000 African students to benefit from a mobility programme by 2027.”

In the same way, I would like to see an expansion of exchange programmes for individuals. Over 26 000 exchanges have taken place between Europe and Africa since 2014 through the Erasmus+ programme. We want to go further and to allow at least 105 000 African students to benefit from a mobility programme by 2027.

These examples show that culture can and should play a significant role in the partnership between Europe and Africa – a partnership we want to redefine. In this regard, the theme chosen by the African Union for the year 2021 ‘Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want’ holds much promise for the future.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TO TIGRAY, A NECESSARY FIRST STEP TOWARDS PEACE IN ETHIOPIA

15/01/2021 – Blog – *Since autumn 2020, war has been raging in the Tigray region in Ethiopia. The situation was desperate for the local population and the conflict was unsettling dynamics within the country. Unless there is access for humanitarian aid, the EU cannot disburse the planned budget support to the Ethiopian government.*

Without deliberate efforts of de-escalation, conflicts tend to worsen, as Ethiopia's bloody conflict in the northern Tigray region is reminding us. What started two months ago as an internal matter between an autonomous region and the federal government has become a fight affecting the whole region.

“While people are in dire need of aid, access to the affected region remains extremely limited, which makes it very difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance.”

The situation on the ground goes well beyond a purely internal 'law and order' operation. We receive consistent reports of ethnic-targeted violence, killings, massive looting, rapes, forceful returns of refugees and possible war crimes. More than 2 million people have been internally displaced. And while people are in dire need of aid, access to the affected region remains limited, which makes it very difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Regional spillover effects

Moreover, there are regional spill-over effects of the conflict, with for instance Eritrean troops being involved in the military operations in Tigray and with Ethiopian troops being withdrawn from Somalia. 55 000 refugees have fled to Sudan and tensions grow dangerously at the border between Sudan and Ethiopia. By affecting or involving other countries, the conflict is also a direct threat to the stability of the whole region.

Just over a year ago, in October 2019, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It was a recognition for his firm efforts to

achieve peace, in particular with neighbouring Eritrea, and for promoting peace and reconciliation in the country and in the East and Northeast African regions. Today the world needs Ethiopia's Prime Minister and his government to live up to this prestigious recognition – by doing all it takes to end the conflict. As an immediate first step, the Ethiopian authorities must comply fully with international humanitarian law and ensure that people in need get access to life-saving aid. This applies to all states in conflict.



When I spoke to the Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen last week, I underlined that the European Union has been and will remain a reliable partner of Ethiopia. We strongly support the democratic and economic reform agenda of the authorities. Just in terms of bilateral development cooperation, we have provided € 815 million over the last 7 years (2014-2020). On top of this, Ethiopia is benefitting from € 409 million worth of projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, focused mainly on support to refugees and host populations.

“ I stressed that in the absence of full humanitarian access to all areas of the conflict, we have no alternative but to postpone the planned disbursement of €88 million in budget support.”

To help Ethiopia face the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU mobilised € 487 million to support the government's Health Preparedness and Response Plan. And several budget support operations were fast-tracked to enable the country to face the economic strains of the pandemic. However, I also stressed that, under the current circumstances, in particular in the absence of full humanitarian access to all areas of the conflict, we have no alternative but to postpone the planned disbursement of €88 million in budget support.

The best interest of Ethiopia

It is in the best interest of Ethiopia and the wider region to allow humanitarian access and to resume the path towards an inclusive and sustainable peace. Regional experiences are relevant here: Sudan stared into the abyss of civil war two years ago, before the parties to its political dispute stepped back and chose a peaceful transition instead. Ethiopia was the midwife to that transition, together with the African Union and the United Nations. Maybe Khartoum can now return the important effort. But this requires that there first be a de-escalation of tensions between the two countries.

I hope we will be able to work out swiftly a favourable outcome with the authorities and we are ready to meet government representatives in Addis Ababa very soon. As EU, we will continue to do our part, in cooperation with the African Union. As we often say, we support 'African solutions to African problems'. It is urgent, now, to find these solutions.

SAHEL: IF THE WAR IS TO BE WON, PEACE MUST BE WON NOW

21/02/2021 – blog – The G5 Sahel and the Pau+1 summit, bringing together the five Sahel countries and their international partners, took place on 15 and 16 February 2021. It is clear that the military achieved so far will only have lasting effects if the state's sovereign functions are restored and basic public services are delivered once more.

On Monday and Tuesday, N'Djamena hosted the summit of the heads of state of the five Sahel countries and the summit of the Coalition for the Sahel (which reviewed the commitments made at the Pau Summit in January 2020). I was invited to participate, as was European Council President Charles Michel. Once again, COVID-19 restrictions meant that we had to take part by videoconference.

A rapidly expanding population

Together, the G5 Sahel countries – Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania – cover a larger area than the European Union. However, they are home to just 84 million people, five times fewer than the EU. Be that as it may, their population has almost doubled in 20 years and is very young: in 2019, the under-15s accounted for 47 % of people living in those countries, compared with 15 % in the EU. The region is also very poor: according to the World Bank, its average GDP per inhabitant was \$ 777 in 2019, 45 times lower than the EU average.

In recent years, demographic growth has outstripped economic growth in the Sahel. As a result, the G5 Sahel countries, which are among the world's poorest, are faced with the challenge of offering a future to the millions of young people who, each year, join a labour market that is struggling to absorb them.

“ *The G5 Sahel countries, which are among the world's poorest, are faced with the challenge of offering a future to the millions of young people who join the labour market each year.* ”

In these vast countries, low population density, limited state resources and governance issues make it difficult for people to access basic public services like

security, justice, healthcare, education and water. Instability in the region has been aggravated by a number of factors: the crisis in Libya, ancestral land-use conflicts between farmers and livestock breeders that have been exacerbated by climate change, poverty, and inequalities that have deepened as a result of population growth.

Developments in the Sahel are of particular concern to Europeans because the huge political, social and economic challenges facing the region could spill over into the rest of Africa and reach Europe. These chronic problems have sparked frustrations, fuelling the rise of Islamist terrorist groups that could threaten Europe and contributing to a range of criminal activities that also affect us, including drug and human trafficking.

The chronic problems fuel the rise of Islamist terrorist groups

This is what led the European Union and several of its member states – France in particular – to take action on various fronts (political, humanitarian, security and developmental) in the region several years ago. Since 2014, the EU and its member states have mobilised more than € 8.5 billion in the Sahel. Over 5 000 French military personnel are involved in Operation Barkhane, and almost 15 000 peacekeepers have been deployed in the region by MINUSMA (to which 19 EU member states are contributing).

The EU's three Common Security and Defence Policy missions have deployed more than 900 Europeans in the Sahel, at an average annual cost of €100 million. The Takuba task force, which was created in Pau last year, is made up of members of the special forces from several European countries and currently has over 250 European military personnel on the ground.

The EU also supported the creation, in 2017, of a G5 Sahel Joint Force to enable the Sahel countries to increasingly handle the regional security situation themselves, in a coordinated manner. The Joint Force now has 5 000 personnel. The EU has provided EUR 266 million to kit out the Joint Force with vehicles and communication equipment and develop tools to ensure that its operations respect human rights and comply with international humanitarian law.



Limited results so far

Despite this unprecedented effort, it must be recognised that the results achieved to date have been limited. While there have been some military achievements, with headway being made against the terrorist groups JNIM (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2020, the region remains insecure. More than 4 500 people were killed in the Sahel in 2020, making it the deadliest year on record.

Moreover, the humanitarian situation deteriorated further last year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is estimated that in the Central Sahel, forced displacement, food insecurity or reduced access to basic services currently affect more than 13 million people. Even before the pandemic began, 3 300 schools had been forced to close because of security issues. At present, 13 million children – 55 % of the children living in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso – are no longer in school.

“ One thing is certain: military victories will have lasting effects only if public services are (re-)established in the areas liberated from terrorists.”

These alarming statistics make it clear that military victories will have lasting effects only if public services are (re-)established in the areas liberated from terrorists. Today, the only way to disarm the ticking time bomb threatening the region is to get these millions of children back into school. Likewise, the only way to deal a lasting blow to terrorists and all those bent on undermining stability is to make significant, rapid progress in terms of providing access to other essential services. We and the G5 Sahel urgently need to determine how we will jointly implement this new approach, and we must monitor the results closely.

Good governance and the rule of law at the heart of our endeavours

Good governance and the rule of law will now be at the heart of our endeavours in the Sahel. We are in the region not to tell people how to live, but to get results and support government efforts, including in very sensitive areas, such as the fight against corruption and impunity. If terrorism is to be stamped out once and for all, it is essential to send strong signals to local people: justice and other state services must be more accessible and more effective than the alternatives offered to them – or rather, forced on them – by the terrorists.

“*When people think of the state, they should not just think of the army and the police. They need to see the state as a provider of basic public goods, a defender of human rights and a protector.*”

When people think of the state, they should not just think of the army and the police. They need to see the state as a provider of basic public goods, a defender of human rights and a protector. Military advances are undermined by impunity, which is why alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law must be addressed systematically, diligently and in full. In that connection, the creation of a Casualty and Incident Tracking and Analysis Cell (CITAC) is a welcome development. The report by Niger's National Commission on Human Rights on disappearances in the Tillabéry region and the Malian authorities' cooperation with the independent international commission of inquiry provided for in the Algiers agreement are further steps in the right direction.

In the coming months, we will prioritise drawing up national action plans to implement this new approach, paying special attention to the situation in Mali, as the stability of the entire Sahel region is largely dependent on the stability of that country. However, after a promising start, the transition to civilian rule

initiated in September following the August 2020 coup d'état seems to have ground to a halt.

Bringing the G5 Sahel Force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter

Over the next few months, we will also reopen the debate on bringing the G5 Joint Force under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter to ensure that it has more sustainable funding. Furthermore, we will enhance coordination with the G5 Sahel on such matters as strengthening the security and defence capabilities of the Sahel states and offering greater support with restoring the state's sovereign functions in these countries; Pillars 2 and 3 of the Coalition for the Sahel's activities focus on these areas and are spearheaded by the EU and its member states.

I hope that we will see progress in all these fields at the next summit of the Coalition for the Sahel, which will take place in Brussels before the summer. In the Sahel, like everywhere else, the war cannot be won unless the peace is won too. Now more than ever, the onus is on us to come up with the goods.

ETHIOPIA URGENTLY NEEDS TO RETURN TO PEACE

03/04/2021 – Blog – *The situation in the Ethiopian Tigray region has not improved since the beginning of 2021. The Tigray conflict threatens also to destabilise the whole Horn of Africa. In April 2021, I have asked Pekka Haavisto, Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, to travel to Ethiopia to repeat our requests to the government and assess the situation.*

Five months into the conflict, the situation in the Ethiopian Tigray region remains alarming. Active hostilities are ongoing in some parts of the federated state and humanitarian aid remains very limited because of fighting, highly fluid security situation and the low capacity of humanitarian actors to address the security risk effectively.

“*Reports are abundant of destructions, massive looting, extra-judicial killings, systematic rapes and gender-based violence, forceful returns of refugees and allegations of ethnic cleansing and war crimes.*”

The situation continues to deteriorate further, with millions of people not receiving assistance. Reports are abundant of destructions, massive looting, extra-judicial killings, systematic rapes and gender-based violence, forceful returns of refugees and allegations of ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

Ethnic tensions in other Ethiopian regions

Ethnic tensions are reported also in other Ethiopian regions, including in Benishangul-Gumuz and mostly in Oromo and Amhara Regions. Not to mention the COVID-19 pandemic which is accelerating: last week, Ethiopia has recorded the highest number of cases in the African continent, with 12 000 reported new cases.

This crisis risks destabilising an already fragile region. In the last months, we have witnessed the arrival of around 68 000 Ethiopian refugees to Eastern Sudan, an escalation of tensions along Ethiopia/Sudan border and a near stalemate in the

difficult negotiations between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt on [the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam \(GERD\)](#) ⁽²⁸⁵⁾.

After many weeks of denial, some positive steps have been announced by the Ethiopian government. However, to be credible, they need to materialise very quickly. In this context, I have asked my colleague Pekka Haavisto, Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, to go back to the region this weekend as my representative. He will travel to Ethiopia, visit Tigray and report to the Foreign Affairs Council on 19 April where, together with the 27 Ministers from the European Union, we will discuss the steps forward.

Assess the progress made so far

Minister Haavisto is tasked to repeat our requests and assess the progress made so far on various fronts.

Firstly, hostilities must cease. As long as they continue, humanitarian aid cannot be delivered as it should and the insecurity that prevails in many parts could jeopardise in the whole country the elections foreseen for 5 June.

“*Firstly, hostilities must cease. Secondly, humanitarian access must be granted to all people in need. Thirdly, investigations on human rights abuses must be carried out. Fourthly, Eritrean troops must withdraw.*”

Secondly, humanitarian access must be granted to all people in need in all areas. Despite improved access, the needs remain enormous and largely unaddressed and the situation is worsening. This is also the case even in areas that receive assistance. The number of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs), acknowledged by the Tigray Interim Regional Government, has increased from 700 000 to 900 000 in the past two weeks.

Thirdly, investigations on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights abuses must be organised. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have agreed to conduct a joint investigation into violations and abuses committed by all parties. Discussions on the exact modalities have started and should be

⁽²⁸⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/83120/nile-and-beyond-geopolitics-water_en

accelerated so that investigations may start quickly. This is part of the much-needed accountability process for the victims.

Fourthly, and particularly important, Eritrean troops must withdraw. There have been recent announcements on that front, however, we do not have confirmation at this stage that this withdrawal is happening on the ground. Here again we need to see this materialise quickly.

Not enough visibility on the world stage

The crisis in Tigray has not received the appropriate visibility on the world stage until now. However, US Secretary of State Blinken has recently denounced ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the region, top UN senior officials have called for a stop to indiscriminate and targeted attacks against civilians and it remains a high priority for the European Union. [With my G7 colleagues](#) ⁽²⁸⁶⁾ [we confirmed yesterday our will to move forward together](#) on all the above-mentioned points.

“*No one has an interest to see further destabilisation and fragmentation – neither at country level nor at regional level.*”

Precisely because Ethiopia is an important partner for the EU, we want to continue discussing and keep a door open. No one has an interest to see further destabilisation and fragmentation – neither at country level nor at regional level. Together with the US administration, we will increase our efforts in the coming weeks to make progress.

Time is of the essence

Time is of the essence: human rights abuses have to stop without any delay. For the good of the citizens of Tigray, of the citizens of Ethiopia and of the citizens of the whole region. Because the longer a conflict lasts, the longer it takes for reconstruction, reconciliation and healing.

⁽²⁸⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/96145/ethiopia-g7-foreign-ministers-statement-situation-tigray_en



As Prime minister Abiy Ahmed Ali said by [receiving the peace Nobel Prize](#) ⁽²⁸⁷⁾ 2 years ago for having restored peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea after 20 years of war: *'nurturing peace is like planting and growing trees. Just like trees need water and good soil to grow, peace requires unwavering commitment, infinite patience, and goodwill to cultivate and harvest its dividends.'* This is exactly what Ethiopia urgently needs again today.

⁽²⁸⁷⁾ See <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/abiy/lecture/>

THE SAHEL NEEDS A CIVIL AND POLITICAL AWAKENING

25/04/2021 – Blog – In April 2021, I visited Mauritania, Chad and Mali to meet the authorities and assure them of Europe's unfailing commitment. However, I stressed also the urgent need for more concrete results and for the return of the rule of law and delivery of public services.

The security situation in the Sahel remains very worrying. One figure suffices to illustrate this point: in central Mali, two serious security incidents involving deaths and/or injuries are reported every day. How can we improve this situation, which no European state would tolerate? How can the military gains be consolidated in the long term? Via a 'civil and political surge' as decided at the G5 and Sahel Coalition Summit held in N'Djamena last February ⁽²⁸⁸⁾.

“*In the Sahel, it is not enough to reconquer territories by force. The challenge is above all to regain the trust of the people. They want to see schoolteachers, doctors and judges. As much, if not more, than soldiers.*”

In the fight against instability in the Sahel, it is not enough to reconquer territories by force. The challenge is above all to regain the confidence of the people: they expect an exemplary state and access to basic services that respect human rights. They hope for the return of the state, everywhere and for everyone. They want to see schoolteachers, doctors and judges. As many, if not more, than the military. This was a central theme of the mission that took me over the last few days to Mauritania, then to Chad and Mali.

As already expressed on this blog on several occasions ⁽²⁸⁹⁾ (see here and there), the Sahel is one of the regions of the world where the Union and its member states are most committed to peace, stability and development. Between 2014 and 2020, the EU and its member states have spent €8.5 billion on development, humanitarian, security and defence aid. The Union has also deployed three

⁽²⁸⁸⁾ See p. 354.

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73022/sahel-shared-responsibility_en and p.XX

Common Security and Defence Policy missions in the region ⁽²⁹⁰⁾. However, I had not yet had the opportunity to visit the region, as my previous visits were cancelled due to the health situation.

A pivotal moment for the Sahel

My visit this week comes at a pivotal moment. After the reinforcement of military action decided at the Pau Summit at the beginning of 2020 ⁽²⁹¹⁾, the Summit of the G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad) and the Sahel Coalition held in Ndjamena, Chad, a few weeks ago ⁽²⁹²⁾, focused this time on the return of the rule of law and public services in the fragile areas. This is also the central axis of the new strategy for the Sahel that the EU Council has just adopted ⁽²⁹³⁾. It is this reorientation that I wanted to discuss with my interlocutors on the ground.

“*The enormous challenges facing the region are fuelling the activity of terrorist groups and drug and human trafficking. This threatens to destabilise neighbouring regions and ultimately Europe.*”

The Sahel is a vast and sparsely populated region and governance problems make it difficult for people to access basic public services such as justice, health, education and water. Poverty and inequality have also increased due to high population growth. The enormous political, social and economic challenges facing the region fuel the activity of terrorist groups and contribute to the growth of drug and human trafficking. This threatens to destabilise neighbouring regions and ultimately Europe.

Chad's territorial integrity and stability

The initial programme of my visit was however disrupted by the death of President Idriss Déby of Chad. I wanted to attend his funeral in N'Djamena last Friday to show the EU's support for the Chadian people at this difficult time. And to express our attachment to the territorial integrity and stability of a country that has long played a major role in the region, particularly in terms of security.

⁽²⁹⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en

⁽²⁹¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73022/sahel-shared-responsibility_en

⁽²⁹²⁾ See p. 354.

⁽²⁹³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/sahel-council-approves-conclusions-on-the-eu-s-integrated-strategy-in-the-region/>

My presence there also gave me the opportunity to call for a rapid conclusion to the transition period that began after the death of President Deby and for the strengthening of the country's cohesion. A new page is opening for Chad. It must enable the foundations of a new social contract to be laid, taking into account the aspirations of Chadian men and women on the basis of democratic principles.

My mission started last Thursday in Mauritania. This country, which has assumed the presidency of the G5 until February 2021, plays an important and growing role in the region. In Nouakchott, I met President Ghazouani, who since his election in 2019, has undertaken to open up the political space. I expressed the EU's appreciation for his significant efforts in the fight against terrorism, criminal networks and irregular migration and our support for his ambitious programme of economic and social reforms.

The need for a civil transition in Mali

Finally, in Mali, I reminded my interlocutors from the transitional authorities put in place last August – President Bah N'Daw, Prime Minister Moctar Ouane and several of his ministers, as well as the President of the National Transitional Council, Colonel Malck Diaw – of our support for the ongoing civil transition that should lead the country to elections.

“ *The key reforms needed to lay the foundations for a truly new Mali must be undertaken now. More than 8 of the 18 months planned for the transition have already passed and we must accelerate the pace.*”

But it is also necessary to engage today in the key reforms necessary to lay the foundations of a truly new Mali. More than 8 of the 18 months planned for this transition have already passed and the pace must be accelerated. In a country with almost 350 000 displaced people, delaying the transition is not an option. The EU is ready to mobilise €100m to support the preparation of elections and the implementation of reforms, subject to concrete commitments and progress.



The first democratic transfer of power in Niger

Unfortunately, I was unable to visit Niger as originally planned, but I was able to meet with President Bazoum on the margins of President Deby's funeral. I welcomed the first democratic transfer of power in the country's history, which took place a few weeks ago, and reiterated our desire to consolidate the work undertaken under the mandate of President Issoufou.

This visit to the Sahel also took place in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic that is seriously affecting the region, notably due to the prolonged closure of schools. It was an opportunity to underline the importance of Team Europe's support ⁽²⁹⁴⁾ to the countries of the region in the face of the pandemic.

Finally, I took advantage of my trip to pay tribute to the French soldiers of Operation Barkhane who died in the region, and to visit the European training missions present in Mali. I was also able to visit the headquarters of the French operation Barkhane in N'Djamena and to exchange views with President Macron

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/96366/team-europe-one-year-supporting-global-response-coronavirus_en

and the military leaders. Our common analysis is clear: progress has been made, thanks to greater coordination of forces and better security management by the G5 Sahel troops. However, the security situation remains tense and the level of violence high.

“Progress has been made, thanks to greater coordination of forces and better management of security by G5 Sahel troops. However, the security situation remains tense and the level of violence high.”

Beyond our common responsibility in the face of the threat of terrorism, I have insisted throughout my mission on the obligation of results that binds us, Sahelian partners and the international community. Because the absence of results sooner or later alienates our populations and our opinions. We must show our citizens that our massive commitment is bearing fruit. The Summit of Heads of State of the Sahel Coalition, scheduled for this summer, will provide an opportunity to take stock of the progress made.

AFRICA AND EUROPE: LET'S BUILD COMMON RESPONSES

24/10/2021 – Blog – *In October 2021, the foreign ministers of the African Union and the EU have met in Kigali, Rwanda to prepare for the summit in early 2022. My objective was clear: to make our partnership take a qualitative leap. My visit had also as a goal to strengthen the good relations between the European Union and Rwanda.*

My first mission to Rwanda as HR/VP will be an opportunity to visit the genocide memorial in Kigali as well as the Interpeace project in Bugesera, supported by the European Union in cooperation with Sweden, which deals with reconciliation and post-traumatic care. The genocide against the Tutsis, which left nearly a million people dead, reminds us that the initial objective of European integration – to prevent war on our continent and to contribute to peace in the rest of the world – must continue to remain central to our actions today. The international community failed to prevent this genocide in 1994, this must never happen again.

“ *A quarter of a century after the genocide, Rwanda has made remarkable advances in the areas of reconciliation, poverty reduction, health, education or gender equality.*”

A quarter of a century after the genocide, Rwanda has made remarkable advances in the areas of reconciliation, poverty reduction, health, education or gender equality. We will discuss the increased role of Rwanda in various crisis on the continent with President Kagame and the country's authorities. We will also talk about will our common fight against COVID. Rwanda is one of three African countries for which a bilateral vaccine manufacturing support program has been initiated. As a first step, the EU will help the Rwanda Food and Drug Authority (RFDA) to gain momentum, a condition for subsequently allowing the establishment of production units for vaccines and other drugs in the country.

The other part of my mission will be devoted to the meeting of the foreign ministers of the African Union and the European Union, which I will co-chair with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christophe Lutundula Apala Pen 'Apala.

COVID-19, climate change, terrorism, etc. Many challenges threaten Africa and Europe.

COVID-19, climate change, terrorism ... many challenges threaten both Africa and Europe. Yet there are countless opportunities available to us as well. We have known for a long time that it is only together that we can move forward better and faster, but there is now an urgent need to accelerate the pace, taking inspiration from the Olympic motto 'faster, stronger, higher'. To be stronger together on the world stage and to aim higher, to jointly carry out concrete, innovative and transformative projects – this is what I want us to work on together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected our two continents. To overcome it, the only solution is to generalise the vaccination. This includes equitable access to vaccines for everyone, everywhere. Unfortunately, we are still very far from this aim, especially in Africa. We need to be more active in bridging this gap.

EU member states have pledged to speed up vaccine deliveries, including through the COVAX facility and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Now, it is urgent that actions follow promises. However, it is not enough to have vaccines, it is also necessary to be able to distribute them in good conditions: the European Union has allocated 100 Million Euros to do this.

The Covid-19 pandemic also underlined the large disparities that exist in the production of vaccines and medicines on a global scale. Neither Europe nor Africa can continue to depend so heavily on external actors for such vital productions. Vaccines must be made for Africa, in Africa by Africa.

This is why the European Union is engaged in the 'Team Europe' initiative, cooperating with its member states and the European Investment Bank (EIB) to devote 1 Billion Euros to developing the production of vaccines and other drugs in Africa, particularly in Senegal, Rwanda and South Africa. In Kigali, we will discuss how to speed up the African production capacity as quickly as possible. We must also continue the work started to generalise vaccination certificates in order to facilitate mobility between our two continents.



The pandemic threatens the economic recovery in Africa

Finally, this pandemic threatens the economic catch-up initiated in recent decades, particularly in Africa. We fully support the actions undertaken within the framework of the G20 to reduce the debt of our African partners. However, we must expand these activities and make sure that all creditors play their part.

We also want to cooperate closely with Africa in the fight against climate change. Europe, which holds a large responsibility in this issue, is engaged in substantial efforts to limit its greenhouse gas emissions. Most of the countries of the African continent emit few greenhouse gases but are already disproportionately affected by climate change.

In recent years, the EU mobilised to help Africa adapt to its consequences, notably through the Great Green Wall against Desertification project, but we will have to increase this effort significantly in the future. We must also combine our efforts to make the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) a success. Together we represent 40 % of the countries of the United Nations and together

we can put the world on track towards more equitable and sustainable development.

“ We must combine our efforts to make COP26 a success. Together we represent 40 % of the United Nations and together we can put the world on track towards more equitable and sustainable development.”

The digital transition can also accelerate economic development while promoting the inclusion of all, especially in rural areas, provided that it respects freedoms and does not serve hegemonic ambitions. Young people, particularly numerous in Africa, can and should be key drivers of these green and digital transitions. Consequently, the education they receive and their effective participation in the political, social and economic life of our countries is of central importance.

Finally, Africa and Europe are facing serious common threats: terrorism, extremism, trafficking of all kinds, piracy and even cybercrime. These scourges can only be overcome through close international coordination.

Peace and security are essential pillars of our partnership because instability and insecurity in Africa inevitably have an impact on Europe. The EU has long been involved in Africa, with Africa and for Africa in this sector. In close coordination with the African Union, the EU is thus putting its forces at the service of ‘African solutions to African problems’ in Somalia, the Sahel, the Central African Republic and even in Mozambique.

However, as President Kagame recently pointed out, ‘no external funding or troop commitment can create lasting peace if governance is not at the heart of the matter.’ In addition to proper security interventions, we need to find the means to more effectively foster the political dialogue between the actors concerned, and thus support the fight against corruption, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the return of public services and economic development.

We do not agree on everything, but we agree on the essentials.

In conclusion, in a world where the democratic values on which both the African Union and the European Union were founded are increasingly under threat, we urgently need to strengthen our cooperation. We must effectively produce concrete results for our fellow citizens both in terms of a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery, as well as in the green transition and access to energy, digital

transformation, human development, peace and good governance or even migration and mobility. We don't always agree on everything, but we agree on the essentials. And this is enough to make our partnership take this unprecedented qualitative leap from which the world could also benefit.

RWANDA: KWIBUKA AND LESSONS LEARNT FROM A TRAGEDY

31/10/2021 – Blog – *Back from my mission in Rwanda, I wanted to share the strong impression that visiting the Genocide Memorial had on me. Visiting this Memorial and meeting both survivors and perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, I witnessed indeed one of the most dismaying and moving human experiences of my life.*

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country in the Great Rift Valley, where the African Great Lakes region and East Africa converge. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. 27 years ago, it experienced one of the greatest horrors of the last century: in 1994, around one million people were killed in less than 100 days. One in eight inhabitants of the country was assassinated in the genocide against the Tutsi, with the international community unwilling but not unable to protect them.

Applaud the Rwandese reconciliation efforts

Prison sentences of some of the perpetrators of the genocide are ending now, which means that around 30 000 of them are being released. Imagine the impact this can have on any society in the world. Imagine the impact it can have on Rwanda and its people. One can only applaud the Rwandese reconciliation efforts to allow for a peaceful coexistence and to avoid that societal wounds be reopened.

“Prison sentences of some of the perpetrators of the genocide are ending now, which means that around 30 000 of them are being released.”

During my stay in Rwanda, I went to the Bugesera district, around 45 km from Kigali. I visited a project funded by the EU that aims at the healing of trauma, at reconciliation and the integration of prisoners, to prevent that the trauma is passed on to future generations and the risk of a resurgence of conflict. This ‘Interpeace’ pilot project focuses on the Bugesera district, which was amongst the worst affected by atrocities in 1994. The lessons learnt from this project will be disseminated at national level and could be replicated in other countries.

I attended a ceremony, during which a woman shared how she was raped and her children were taken from her and disappeared. She desperately searched for them, for weeks and weeks. Then, one day, while eating in the kitchen of her neighbours, she was told that she was seated at a table beneath which her children were buried, after they had been brutally killed by a militia group.

A powerful and vivid testimony

The woman, called Monica, told us how she suffered, how she despaired, and how she tried to get her life back, while the loss of her children haunted her every day. Her testimony was powerful and vivid, as if we were talking about something that happened yesterday – and not 27 years ago. At the end of her testimony, she told us that the person responsible for raping her and killing her four children, was found and put on trial. He has now been released from jail.

They are neighbours again and she has decided to forgive him. Monica looked at us and said that this man was in the audience and she offered him to also present his testimony. This he did, expressing his regrets and trying to explain how he had become part of a murderous mob, killing dozens of people.

“Looking at the victim and the killer, standing together, was an unforgettable and indescribable moment. How can human beings be strong enough to forgive the ones who have hurt them so much.”

There is nothing but silence and sadness that can follow such testimonies. Looking at the victim and the killer, standing together, was an unforgettable and indescribable moment. I cannot stop thinking about how such things are possible – both the unbelievable cruelties that happened, as well as the reconciliation that is taking place.

How can human beings be strong enough to forgive the ones who have hurt them so much and in such an unspeakable way? How has this country and its people managed to reach a situation where the worst of humanity can now give space to the best of humanity?

After the testimonies, the organisers of the ceremony invited me to address the audience, which I was not aware of before or had prepared for. Speaking spontaneously and from the heart, I also shared my own experience. Coming from Spain, which suffered an awful civil war many years ago, many people still look at

the other, blaming each other for what happened. But one cannot build a future by blaming each other for what happened in the past, and this is what the Rwandese know in their remarkable reconciliation efforts.

Remember

And how do they do this? The answer is Kwibuka, as they say in Kinyarwandese, 'remember', and the theme of the national commemoration is 'remember, unite and renew'. It already demands a lot of courage to talk to the ones who killed your children and forgive them. But it is one thing to forgive; and another to forget. You have to remember what happened, because people who do not keep the memory are condemned to repeat the same mistakes.

As Europeans, I told my interlocutors, we do not have lessons to give to anyone. We have been killing each other for centuries, because of religions, race, nationalism and ideologies. But we also decided to stop fighting and create a unity based on reconciliation. Reconciliation is also based on memory. We want to build a better future together because we remember how awful our past was.

The Kigali Genocide Memorial, which I visited, serves that objective. It is the final resting place for more than 250 000 victims. Even today new bodies are being found and buried in this place. The memorial serves to inform and educate about how the genocide took shape. And while what happens remains beyond comprehension, the memorial helps the survivors to heal.

Hundreds of thousands of deaths

The hundreds of thousands of deaths were obviously not the only outcome of the genocide as the Memorial reminds us. Tens of thousands of people who survived had been tortured, raped and mutilated; tens of thousands suffered machete cuts, bullet wounds, infections and starvation. There were more than 300 000 orphans and over 85 000 children who became heads of their households, as all the elders in their families were killed. There were tens of thousands of widows. Many women had been the victims of rape and sexual abuse, or had seen their own children be murdered. A UNICEF survey estimates that 80 % of Rwandan children at that time experienced a death in the family and 70 % witnessed with their own eyes how someone was killed or injured. It goes without saying that today many in Rwanda continue to suffer from the traumatic effects of the genocide.

“ *The international community is also guilty for not helping.*”

In remembering the catastrophe, we also have to look to the failure of the international community. The Memorial documents well how the force commander Dallaire of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) warned early on what was about to happen. However, due to the limitations of the mission's mandate and the lack of support to expand it, UNAMIR was reduced to a bystander role and did not prevent the genocide. The international community is also guilty for not helping, and during my address, I asked the Rwandese to forgive us also.



Unite and renew

No one can build a future by blaming each other for what happened in the past. As difficult as this must be, one needs to forgive and move forward again. Based on reconciliation and forgiving, Rwanda has undergone a remarkable post-genocide trajectory in many ways.

During my visit in Rwanda, I have been the privileged witness of an extraordinary lesson of humanity. I bring back home many feelings and strong impressions. Peace building starts with your neighbours, with the very ones with whom you

share a common history of cruelty and pain. Nevertheless, it is with them that you have to build your future. The remarkable results Rwanda has achieved in recent years is a powerful testimony of such a renewal. *Kwibuka*, as they say in the beautiful 'country of a thousand hills'.

“ *Rwanda, more than 25 years after the genocide, is not only successful in its reconciliation process, but that it also enjoys a good progress in the areas of health and education and in poverty reduction.*”

Let me conclude this blog post by mentioning how Rwanda, more than 25 years after the genocide, is not only successful in its reconciliation process, but that it also enjoys a positive economic development and good progress in the areas of health and education and in poverty reduction. When you walk on the streets of Kigali, which is a beautiful and positively developing city, you feel the engagement of the Rwandese to continue to build a better future. To paraphrase President Kagame: no matter how much money, no matter how many troops you engage, there is not going to be a solution without the strong ownership of the people on building a good governance. And this ownership you feel across the country.



6.6 ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

THE EU NEEDS A STRATEGIC APPROACH FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC

12/03/2021 – Blog – *The shift in the world's centre of gravity to the Indo-Pacific started years ago, but the pandemic is accelerating it. As EU, we need to look at the consequences in geo-political terms and define our approach to the Indo-Pacific. We have a big stake in the region and should do our part to keep the regional order open and rules-based.*

For some time now, the EU has been developing a politically rounded Asia strategy, based on two pillars. First, we are re-balancing our relations with China based on a strategy of treating China as 'partner, competitor and rival'. At the same time, we are investing more in scaling up our relations with the rest of Asia, especially with like-minded partners.

Work is underway

Work is underway on both axes. With China we have a complex and demanding agenda, mixing cooperation on global issues with pushback where needed and a focus on reciprocity and strengthening EU resilience. We need to engage China because it does not make sense to ignore this great power. However, we need to engage while keeping our eyes wide open. I remain in close contact with State Counsellor/Foreign Minister Wang Yi to pass EU messages and expectations on the bilateral and multilateral agenda. And together with President von der Leyen I will submit a report on the state of implementation of the EU's China policy to the March European Council.

Fundamentally, our China strategy is about engaging in matters of global interest, upholding our interests and values, while also recognising that we need to increase our own leverage and reduce certain vulnerabilities. Ultimately, the choices that Beijing makes will influence the nature and the depth of our relationship.

“Asia is big and should not be reduced to looking only at China, quite the opposite. In recent years, we have strengthened and diversified our ties with Japan, India, South Korea, ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand.”

But Asia is big and diverse and should not be reduced to looking only at China, quite the opposite. In recent years, we have strengthened and diversified our ties with Japan, India, South Korea, ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand, complementing our traditional strong economic relations with more cooperation on foreign and security policy. Let me recall some of the milestones:

With Japan, we signed a [Strategic Partnership Agreement and an Economic Partnership Agreement](#) ⁽²⁹⁵⁾. To date, the EU–Japan agreement is the largest Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in terms of economic liberalisation impact. We have also agreed ambitious Free Trade Agreements with South Korea, Viet Nam, Singapore and we are advancing rapidly with Australia and New Zealand.

Expand EU security engagement in and with Asian partners

In May 2018, EU Foreign Ministers committed to [expand EU security engagement in and with Asian partners](#) ⁽²⁹⁶⁾. We have since created a project ‘Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia’ (ESIWA), to implement this ambition, working concretely with partners such as India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam on maritime and cyber security, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, or training in peacekeeping.

We adopted an [EU Connectivity strategy](#) ⁽²⁹⁷⁾ to advance our vision of developing connectivity that is sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based. A definition for sustainable connectivity was endorsed by 53 Asian and European partners at the ASEM12 Summit, hosted by the EU in October 2018.

Last December, culminating many years of intensifying our work with ASEAN, we upgraded our relations to a [Strategic Partnership](#) ⁽²⁹⁸⁾.

It is important that this year we build on this progress and intensify our work. In this respect, I see three priority areas:

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM_%3A4359401

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/28/deepening-eu-security-cooperation-with-asian-partners-council-adopts-conclusions/>

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50699/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership_en



Framing an EU approach to the Indo-Pacific

In many ways, the Indo-Pacific now represents the world's economic and strategic centre of gravity. This was already the case before the pandemic and it is even more the case today. The confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, stretching from East Africa to the Western Pacific represents an integrated strategic region. Crucially, as EU we are connected to the region in numerous ways: through trade, investment and security links.

“ *The EU has a big stake in the Indo-Pacific region and has every interest that the regional architecture remains open and rules-based.*”

The Indo-Pacific is home to the world's fastest growing economies, representing 62 % of global GDP; it is the second largest destination of EU exports and is home to four out of the top ten EU trading partners. So, the EU has a big stake in the Indo-Pacific region and has every interest that the regional architecture remains open and rules-based.

As EU, we want to work with many partners to promote fundamental values and principles that we share. A good example was the recent [participation of Japanese](#)

[Foreign Minister Motegi at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in January](#) ⁽²⁹⁹⁾. He gave a very interesting presentation on Japan's vision of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' and the scope for EU–Japan cooperation on numerous issues, from maritime security to rules-based trade and investment, to quality infrastructure and the avoidance of 'debt traps'. Many EU Foreign Ministers echoed the main message that in a world of great power competition and the erosion of the rules-based order, the EU and Japan have a strong interest to intensify their cooperation.

Since several EU member states (for instance France, Germany and the Netherlands) have adopted a national strategy or guidelines on the Indo-Pacific, the time has come for the EU as such to do the same. The intention is for the EU to set out, in the coming months, a common vision for its future Indo-Pacific engagement. For sure, we will apply a broad and inclusive prism, putting the accent on our support for regional and multilateral approaches. And we should keep in mind this is as much about what we do as EU *in* the Indo-Pacific as what we do *with* the countries of the region on trade and investment, on climate and biodiversity, on emerging technologies or on new security threats. The common denominator will be our interest in upholding and devising rules-based approaches.

Working for a step change in EU–India cooperation

Within the Indo-Pacific, India certainly plays a pivotal role. The EU and India have long shared a commitment to the rules-based international order and democracy. But, if we are honest, relations have historically tended to operate below their potential. Fortunately, in recent years, there has been a serious attempt by both sides to give a new impetus.

“*India for its part has also decided to invest more in its relations with the EU, driven in part by China's growing assertiveness and Brexit, requiring New Delhi to no longer see London as its sole entry point into 'Europe'.*”

The reasons for doing this are clear: in the next decade, India will become the country with the world's largest population, with 50 % of Indians being under the age of 25. For the EU there is a need to intensify relations with such a heavyweight country. India has also decided to invest more in its relations with the EU, driven in part by China's growing assertiveness and Brexit, requiring New Delhi to no longer see London as its sole entry point into dealing with 'Europe'. So there is a

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ See https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressie_000168.html

convergence of interest at the top level on both sides and this is translating into progress at the operational level.

Last year's EU–India Summit confirmed the interest in increased cooperation on key bilateral and multilateral fronts like the clean energy transition, the digital economy, connectivity as well as security and foreign policy, where India is starting to see the EU as an important partner. There is a lot of scope to do more in this domain now that India is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2021-2022), sits on the UN Human Rights Council (2019-2021), and will hold the G20 presidency in 2023.

The next big opportunity to take EU–India cooperation forward will come in May, in Porto, when we should have a Summit with all EU27 Heads of State and Government attending, together with Prime Minister Modi, the President of European Council and the President of the European Commission. At that occasion, we hope to launch an EU–India Connectivity Partnership. It should cover the areas of digital, energy, transport and human connectivity, with the EU and India working bilaterally, but also by converging our efforts to better connectivity with third countries and regions. At the Summit we also hope to affirm ambitious climate change related commitments ahead of COP26. Finally, boosting trade and investment relations will be important too, with high expectations from both sides to make real progress also on this dimension.

Renewing our work on connectivity

For years, connectivity has been a buzzword in strategic discussions in the Indo-Pacific region. The pandemic has reinforced the sense how connected and interdependent we are in strategic domains. As ever, the key question is: who controls these flows and who will set the rules and standards?

“ *The European approach to connectivity with its emphasis on rules, sustainability and local ownership matches with what many in the region want.*”

Many Asian partners welcome greater European engagement. The European approach to connectivity with its emphasis on rules, sustainability and local benefits and ownership matches how many in the region want to proceed. But this is a competitive field: some big players are moving in a determined way. There is a battle of standards underway. Therefore, as the post-pandemic regional order

is being shaped, the EU will need a pro-active approach and to leverage its economic and other assets, working with like-minded partners wherever this makes sense.

The need for sustainable connectivity

For example, the need for sustainable connectivity was emphasised by Minister Motegi in his presentation to EU Foreign Ministers at the Foreign Affairs Council, adding that the EU and Japan ought to work closely together. Indeed this was the main reason why already back in 2019, the EU and Japan signed a Connectivity Partnership.

Since then we have advanced with our common principles of sustainability and quality infrastructure, but also with concrete operation on the ground, be it in the energy sector in Kenya and working on transport corridors in Africa, or with cybersecurity cooperation together with partners in ASEAN. We are already doing a lot to support ASEAN's own Masterplan on Connectivity and, as stated, hope to launch a Connectivity partnership with India in May.

“*In the field of connectivity, the EU is a super power. Between 2013 and 2018, the EU provided €410 billion in development assistance world-wide compared to China's €34 billion.*”

In the field of connectivity, popular perception and reality are two very different things. This perception gap matters as connectivity is very much part of the geopolitical landscape. Let me recall that in the six years between 2013 and 2018, the [EU provided €410 billion](#) in official development assistance world-wide ⁽³⁰⁰⁾ compared to China's [€34 billion](#) in the same period ⁽³⁰¹⁾. Even under China's flagship BRI projects funded by public debt – not grants – stood at [€464 billion in the same period](#), as estimated by the World Bank ⁽³⁰²⁾.

The EU is by far the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment, [with a total stock of €11.6 trillion, compared to China's €1.9 trillion](#) ⁽³⁰³⁾. The EU has been and remains a Connectivity super power, both at home and abroad. But we do need to think

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/european-union-remains-worlds-leading-donor-official-development-assistance_en

⁽³⁰¹⁾ See <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1212306.shtml>

⁽³⁰²⁾ See <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/regional-integration/brief/belt-and-road-initiative>

⁽³⁰³⁾ See <https://data.oecd.org/fdi/fdi-stocks.htm>

of ourselves in these terms and draw on these strengths to frame and execute a strategic approach, working with the private sector, EU development banks and other public financial institutions and EU member states.

Connectivity means connecting people, and discussions on it can be abstract or discursive. Being strategic means defining priorities in terms of regions, sectors and above all deciding on a handful of flagship projects. People should be able to see, in a very concrete way, what the EU and its partners are doing.

“ *The Connectivity field is a good example of geo-economics and geo-politics merging into one and we need to treat it as such.* ”

We often complain that the EU is seen as a payer and not as a player. Or that we may have a big market and standard setting power, but that we do not see these as tools to promote EU strategic goals. The Connectivity field is ripe to change this impression. It is a good example of geoeconomics and geopolitics merging into one and we need to treat it as such.

As someone whose job it is to coordinate the foreign policies of the member states in the Council and ensure coherence of the external policies of the Commission, I am well aware of the need to think and act in a joined-up manner. We must make connectivity a priority work strand, both for the post-pandemic recovery and for our overall foreign policy, in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR

11/04/2021 – Blog – *In the spring of 2021, the world was horrified by the bloody military coup in Myanmar. We were then pursuing a robust diplomatic initiative in close coordination with like-minded partners. However, geopolitical competition has made it difficult to find common ground, to halt the violence and ensure a return to democracy.*

Democracy is increasingly challenged these days, but in few places in such a dramatic and brutal fashion as in Myanmar. In the early morning of 1 February, the clock on Myanmar's democratic transition was turned back many years with a 1970s-style military coup. The army claimed that the November 2020 elections, which the National League for Democracy (NLD) had won with a landslide, had somehow been 'fraudulent', without offering any evidence. It declared a state of emergency and put State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint under arrest, together with other democratic leaders.

Civilian resistance to the coup has been so widespread, creative and courageous that, I believe, it caught the military by surprise. They resorted to the only means they know and have used so often in the past: violence and repression. So far, at least 550 unarmed protesters, including 46 children, have been killed. Over 2 800 persons have been detained. The world watches in horror, as the army uses violence against its own people.

Myanmar: the object of geopolitical tensions

Yet, even in the face of such brutality, geopolitics divides the international community and hampers a coordinated response. Myanmar borders the two largest countries in the world by population: China and India. Its location makes it a strategic point for China's Belt and Road Initiative (offering deep-sea access to the Indian Ocean), but also to India's own corridor to the South China Sea. Other countries like Japan, South Korea and Singapore also have strong economic interests in Myanmar. And Russia is the country's second supplier of weapons, after China.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Russia and China are blocking the attempts of the UN Security Council, for example to impose an arms embargo. China is keen to protect its strategic interests in the country and has called the coup 'a major government reshuffle', while Russia insists that it is a purely 'domestic matter'. Last week, Alexander Fomin, Russia's deputy defence minister, was the highest-ranking foreign official to attend Myanmar's Armed Forces Day parade when others including Asian countries had downscaled their level of representation.

The situation is complicated by Myanmar's highly diverse and complex ethnic fabric: there are 135 recognised ethnicities within its borders and some, like the Rohingya, are not even recognised. Conflict between ethnic minorities and the central government has been going on since independence.

“ For decades, the wrong answer to this high degree of ethnic diversity was a centralised, military dictatorship which meant violence between the army and the ethnic groups plus the suppression of democratic rights for all.”

Vast swathes of land are not controlled by the government but ruled by 'ethnic armed organisations' or militias, which in some cases number in the tens of thousands. For decades, the wrong answer to this high degree of ethnic diversity was a centralised, military dictatorship, which meant violence between the central army and the ethnic groups plus the suppression of democratic rights for all.

A gradual process of democratisation

After 2010, a gradual process of democratisation led to free elections in 2015, won by the NLD of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The democratic transition was accompanied in the same year by ethnic peace. After decades of armed conflict, a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed in October 2015 between the government and the armed ethnic groups. This was a milestone and demonstrated the strong political will to address long-standing grievances through dialogue and co-operation rather than violence. The EU was invited to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as an international witness.

Just like the introduction of democracy favoured ethnic peace, its abolishment now risks re-creating ethnic violence. For the ethnic organisations are increasingly siding with the protesters and resuming fighting against the military. It may spiral out of control: at the end of March, airstrikes launched by the military in Kayin

State killed several civilians and displaced around 10 000 people. The crackdown is becoming more violent, as also the killings in Bago show.

The EU's economic presence in Myanmar is limited, but we are becoming a major export market for garments thanks to the [Everything But Arms preferences](#) ⁽³⁰⁴⁾ which offer duty free, quota free access to the EU market for developing countries. Myanmar exported €2.4 billion in 2020, with a decline of 20 % over 2019 due to the pandemic. In terms of foreign direct investment, the EU has a rather limited footprint (\$ 700 million in 2019), compared to China's \$19 billion.

“Despite setbacks, Myanmar was a rare example of transition towards democracy, in a region where we increasingly see backtracking from democracy.”

Yet, while recognising we have limited direct leverage, the EU can and should try to play an active role. We cannot accept that a democratically-elected government is overthrown and replaced by military rule. Despite setbacks, Myanmar was a rare example of transition *towards* democracy, in a region where we increasingly see backtracking *from* democracy. The EU has also invested significant capital (financial and political) into this transition, with Electoral Observation missions, increased development assistance (€688 million between 2014-2020) and favourable trade preferences (EBA).

The regional dimension

Then there is the regional dimension. In December 2020, we agreed on a Strategic Partnership with ASEAN, to reinforce our links with one of the most dynamic regions in the world. This also gives us the opportunity to engage in more depth with ASEAN on Myanmar.

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ See <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/everything-arms-eba>



The ASEAN [Charter](#) ⁽³⁰⁵⁾ cites ‘adhering to the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms’ as a basic precept in its preamble. At the same time, ASEAN is a consensus-based organisation that ‘moves at a pace comfortable to all’ which limits the degree to which it can play a major role in this type of conflict. However, as EU we have an interest in promoting regionally-led attempts to mediate and address the crisis and we should support all forces inside ASEAN that make this case as well.

We could reinforce this diplomatic track by offering to increase our economic ties if Myanmar returns to the path of democracy: in addition to more trade, we could offer good quality investments that could help the country with a sustainable development path through state-of-the-art technologies and sustainable business principles. Myanmar needs a more diversified set of external investors so the type that European companies typically offer is valuable. The need for sustainability is crucial given that Myanmar is one of three countries in the world [most at risk from the impact of climate change](#) ⁽³⁰⁶⁾.

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ See <https://asean.org/about-us/>

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ See <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>

The immediate EU response and next steps

Our response to the coup has been swift and closely coordinated with our partners. As [EU27, we issued a strong statement](#) ⁽³⁰⁷⁾ on 2 February, condemning the coup, calling for the immediate release of all prisoners and for the restoration of the democratically-elected authorities.

The EU immediately put on hold all development assistance payments that were paid into the government's coffers. Activities benefiting the authorities such as police training, where the EU assists with adherence to high standards for civilian policing, were also frozen. On 22 March, the EU adopted a first round of sanctions against 11 key individuals responsible for the coup, including the Commander-in-Chief and his Deputy. We are now working on a second package on additional individuals and targeting companies owned by the military. We want to signal the junta that their actions bear consequences.

In our action, we are driven by the principle of 'do no harm': we only hit those who are responsible for the coup and their business interests, avoiding negative impact on the wider population. This is why our sanctions only target military-owned companies, and include a 'humanitarian clause' allowing the delivery of aid. In fact, ECHO has already allocated €11.5 million in emergency aid, and is ready to do more, if needed.

In parallel, we have been pursuing a robust diplomatic initiative, reaching out to all key stakeholders (ASEAN, China, Japan, India), in close coordination with our like-minded partners, notably the US and UK. We advocate a domestic solution, supported by the region and the wider international community. This should begin with de-escalation and the release of detainees.

“ *Sanctions in itself are not a policy. We need to create a shared diplomatic platform to kick-start a process of dialogue aimed at restoring democracy in Myanmar, in accordance with the clear will of its brave people.*”

Sanctions in itself are not a policy. We need to create a shared diplomatic platform to kick-start a process of dialogue aimed at restoring democracy in Myanmar, in accordance with the clear will of its brave people.

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/02/myanmar-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union/>

While our action is relentless, our expectations need to be realistic. Geopolitical competition in Myanmar will make it very difficult to find common ground, as we have witnessed again and again at the UN Security Council. The Myanmar military is used to international isolation and has a decade-long record of ignoring the needs and the will of the country's citizens.

But we have a duty to try. First, to make sure that the will of Myanmar's people, as expressed at the November 2020 elections, is respected. But also to defend the country's experiment in democracy, which – notwithstanding its limitations – made it an important example, as we are increasingly facing challenges to fundamental freedoms and democracy across the world.

PRESENTING THE EU POLICY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

03/06/2021 – Speech – During a trip to Indonesia, I presented in the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) the new EU's strategy for the Indo-Pacific and set out our commitment to help keep the regional order open and rules-based. Based on the EU–ASEAN Partnership, I called for an agenda on key common priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues

Thank you for your invitation and for the opportunity to set out the EU's commitment to the Indo-Pacific region. This is a dynamic region. It is as much a strategic space as a geographical reality, which we define as stretching from East Africa to the Pacific Island States. It is becoming the world's centre of gravity, both in geo-economic and geopolitical terms.

The EU has significant stakes in the region

As EU, we have significant stakes in the region: The EU is the top investor and development assistance provider for the Indo-Pacific. And one of its biggest trading partners. Put differently, we are also an actor of the Indo-Pacific development. Let me give some figures to make this point: the Indo-Pacific creates 60 % of global GDP and two-thirds of global growth. It is the second largest destination for EU exports; and home to four out of the top ten EU trading partners. By 2030, the overwhelming majority (90 %) of the 2.4 billion new members of the middle class will come from this region.

“ Amid all its dynamism, the regional stability of the Indo-Pacific is increasingly challenged: maritime and land disputes, internal crises and conflicts, and the US–China geo-political competition is intensifying.”

However, amid all this dynamism, the regional stability is increasingly challenged: maritime and land disputes, internal crises and conflicts, and the US–China geopolitical competition is intensifying. We see the consequences around the world, but most sharply in this region. A clear sign is the strong regional military build-up. Here is another telling statistic: The Indo-Pacific's share of global military

spending increased from 20 % in 2009 to 28 % in 2019 and is rising further. That means countries in this region are investing heavily in their militaries, as they are not sure what the future holds. It is a sign of a worsening regional security landscape.

Democracy and fundamental freedoms under attack

In the midst of all this, democracy and fundamental freedoms are under attack, as we have seen most recently in Myanmar. The distinct risk here is that politics and nationalism trump the economic development and cooperation, which have been the glue that have held the countries of the region together and lifted millions of people out of poverty.

But Asia's security architecture and regional order remains work in progress. In and around Europe, there are certainly many security challenges too. I spend a lot of my time trying to put out fires in our neighbourhood. But over time, Europeans have developed a strong institutional frameworks, such as the EU and NATO, but also the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

In Asia, we have ASEAN-centred organisations guiding security cooperation including the ASEAN Regional Forum, of which the EU is an active member. Increasingly we also see the development of other frameworks, led by China and the Quad for instance. Already in 2013, your former Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa said the region had to move from a 'trust deficit to build strategic trust'.

“*Economic growth of the Indo-Pacific rests on openness, on stable and shared rules, and shared security. The EU's interest is precisely this: that the regional order stays open and rules-based.*”

The Indo Pacific region is the future, but insecurity and tensions are rising, threatening the order and balance of this dynamic region. The key point to make here is that economic growth of this region rests on openness, on stable and shared rules, and shared security. The EU's interest is precisely this: that the regional order stays open and rules-based. We can contribute a lot, which – as I witnessed during my visit – is recognised by our regional partners who view the EU a trusted and reliable actor.

A research Institute in Singapore recently asked opinion-leaders and policy-makers in Southeast Asia who would be their most favoured and trusted strategic partner. Four in ten of the respondents picked the EU! We are perhaps not as flashy as other partners, but we also do not zig-zag. We have no hidden agenda. What you see is what you get. We are reliable and predictable. We can and do commit for the long-term.

The EU has demonstrated its credentials

The EU has demonstrated its credentials with our response to the pandemic. We are supporting our global partners to deal with the consequences with a [€40 billion 'Team Europe' package](#) ⁽³⁰⁸⁾. We favour vaccine multilateralism and believe that COVAX is the best way to ensure the access to vaccines by low and middle-income partner countries in this region.

We put our money where our mouth is, and the EU is now the second largest contributor to COVAX with over € 2.4 billion. In addition, we are world's largest exporter of vaccines. With over 240 million doses, we have exported around half of our production to 90 countries. And let me also underline that the ['EU Digital COVID Certificate'](#) ⁽³⁰⁹⁾ that the EU is working on will not be exclusive or to build barriers. It is mainly regulating and allowing inside-EU travel.

In our efforts to globally fight the pandemic, we deliberately chose a different path from others. We do not offer preferential treatment, nor do we seek political favours in return. Instead, we look for concrete cooperation, including with ASEAN. Just last week, we organised our second expert dialogue on vaccines with ASEAN on research, manufacturing and vaccine roll-out.

The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy

The EU wants to expand engagement with this region, which is why the 27 EU Foreign Ministers recently adopted a [new EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) ⁽³¹⁰⁾, after several EU member states had already done so at national

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_1701

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/eu-digital-covid-certificate_en

⁽³¹⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/indo-pacific-council-adopts-conclusions-on-eu-strategy-for-cooperation/>

level. The basic message is that the EU will work with its partners in the Indo-Pacific to respond to emerging dynamics that are affecting regional stability. Our approach is by the way very close to ASEAN's own Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

Concretely, we will advance joint work to boost, trade and investment, economic openness and a sustainable approach to connectivity. We will promote multilateral cooperation, working on global challenges, from the pandemic to climate, from ocean governance to digital. And we will deepen our security engagement, seeking to make that cooperation as concrete as possible. Our new strategy aims to deepen regional integration and is inclusive for all our partners in the region, wishing to cooperate with the EU when our interests coincide. This includes China because we know that in important areas, like climate, fisheries and biodiversity, its cooperation is essential.

“ We do not aim to create rival blocs or force countries to take sides, and want to deepen our cooperation with democratic, like-minded partners.”



We do not aim to create rival blocs or force countries to take sides, and want to deepen our cooperation with democratic, like-minded partners. The European Union's commitment to democratic rights and fundamental freedoms is very strong. Not because we see these as European or Western constructs. But because these values and principles are universal. Many countries and certainly the people in this region share our view: they want to determine their political future and have their rights protected.

ASEAN is at the heart of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy

ASEAN is at the heart of the EU's Indo Pacific strategy; while we will also develop closer relations with other regional organisations of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. We have long been ASEAN's number one development partner, but are also its third trade partner, and third investor. Our exports to ASEAN countries grew from €54 billion in 2010 to €85 billion in 2019 and imports from ASEAN countries grew even more, from €72 billion in 2019 to €125 billion. By 2050, ASEAN is set to be the world's fourth-largest economy.

Last year we finally launched ⁽³¹¹⁾ the EU–ASEAN Strategic Partnership ⁽³¹²⁾. It is a sign that both sides want to scale up and re-direct our cooperation. Not just work on trade, investment and sustainable development, although they matter. But also on strategic issues. To give just one example, let's take maritime security. First of all, the region's security is very much on top of our mind. Also because around 40 % of the EU's foreign trade passes through the South China Sea, making stability in the region a shared concern and area of cooperation. For many years, we have had a dedicated dialogue on maritime security cooperation where the EU and ASEAN share best practices and lessons learned. We are exploring options on how to enhance EU's maritime presence in the vast Indo-Pacific space. And we will extend the EU's Critical Maritime Routes project from the Indian Ocean to South East Asia.

“*The region's security is very much on top of our mind. Also because around 40 % of the EU's foreign trade passes through the South China Sea, making stability in the region a shared concern and area of cooperation.*”

⁽³¹¹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/01/co-chairs-press-release-of-the-23rd-asean-eu-ministerial-meeting/>

⁽³¹²⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46997/eu-asean-relations-30-11-2020.pdf>

Like ASEAN, the EU is committed to secure, free and open maritime supply routes in the South China Sea, in full compliance with international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas. We support the ASEAN-led process towards an effective and legally binding Code of Conduct for the South China Sea, which should not prejudice the interests of third parties. Connectivity is another major plank of our Indo Pacific strategy. We favour a sustainable and rules-based approach to connectivity, built around transparency, local ownership and fiscal and environmental sustainability.

The EU and ASEAN have worked closely on connectivity for years

We believe this is in line with what many of our regional partners want. The EU and ASEAN have worked closely on Connectivity for years, reflecting the unique experiences of two regional integration projects, and both sides jointly committed to deepen this cooperation further. The conclusion of the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement (CATA), which is imminent, is another major milestone in this and in air connectivity.

Looking at investment and financing, popular perceptions and reality are two different things. I want to recall some basic figures. The EU is the largest global investor, with a total stock of €11.6 trillion, compared to the US with €6.8 trillion, China €1.9 trillion and €1.5 trillion for Japan. Our development assistance between 2013 and 2018 EU stood at €414 billion in grants. This is broadly comparable to what China offered on Belt and Road projects €434 billion but as loans.

I know it is not always easy with this type of figures to compare like-for-like. There is often a lack of transparency and everyone tries to 'spin' their record. But the bigger point stands: the EU is an economic super-power. We have a record of economic openness and development assistance. And we are ready to continue on that path with you in ASEAN. To build a recovery that benefits our peoples.

Some of the fastest-growing economies in the world

Despite the impact of the pandemic, ASEAN has some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. ASEAN's overall GDP stands at \$3 trillion and is set to grow by 6 % this year. Indonesia should grow by an impressive 5 % this year and next year. The latest growth forecasts of the European Commission foresee growth in the EU of 4.2 % in 2021 and 4.4 % in 2022. The truth is we depend on

each other's economic success. Here we also count on Indonesia's upcoming G20 chairmanship to work together to put the global recovery on a sustainable and inclusive footing. To reduce global inequalities and to combat the climate crisis.

Dear colleagues and friends,

I have come here because I am deeply convinced of the need for the EU to engage more in and with the Indo Pacific. Working together on shared security, sustainable connectivity and global challenges. And the last days and my meetings and discussions have proven this point. The EU and ASEAN are natural partners. Let's continue to put the partnership to work, for regional and global stability and progress, and for our mutual benefit.

WHY I WENT TO JAKARTA AND WHY THE INDO-PACIFIC MATTERS FOR EUROPE

06/06/2021 – Blog – In June 2021, I visited Jakarta for talks with the leaders of Indonesia and ASEAN. A main reason of this trip was to signal EU engagement with this dynamic part of the world, towards which the global centre of gravity is shifting. My discussions proved there is clear demand in the region for more EU engagement and presence.

There is an impression sometimes that Europe is self-absorbed and mainly focused on crises in our neighbourhood. However, we have big stakes in the Indo-Pacific and have been a major player there for years. Our partners look to us to work more closely together.

“*If we want to be a geopolitical actor, we also have to be perceived as a political and security actor in the region, not just as a development cooperation, trading or investment partner.*”

To start with, some basic figures. The Indo-Pacific creates 60 % of global GDP and two-thirds of global growth. It is the second largest destination for EU exports and home to four out of the top ten EU trading partners. Around 40 % of the EU's foreign trade passes through the South China Sea, so Asian security has a direct impact on European security and prosperity. The EU is also the top investor and development assistance provider for the Indo-Pacific. But if we want to be a geopolitical actor, we also have to be perceived as a political and security actor in the region, not just as a development cooperation, trading or investment partner.

Meet with Indonesian leaders

My visit had two main components: to meet with Indonesian leaders and visit the ASEAN headquarters. The EU and Indonesia are long-standing and close partners for 30 years. We share common values and our ties are strong, but there is much untapped potential. Indonesia has 270 million people, who are rightly proud of their democratic transition. It is an enormous archipelago with some 17 000 islands and if you put it on the map of Europe, it stretches from Dublin to beyond

Moscow. It has a fast-growing economy, plays a key role in ASEAN and as global actor, and will hold the 2022 G20 Presidency and the 2023 ASEAN chairmanship.

I met President Joko Widodo, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, Minister of Defence Prabowo Subianto, and members of the Indonesian Parliament. In all my discussions, I was impressed by the clear goals leaders have for the future of Indonesia and the region – and how much they want implement them by cooperating with Europe.

Resolving the palm oil issue

Unfortunately, over the past three years, our relations stagnated because of a dispute over palm oil exports, but we cannot let these differences hijack our relationship. We are fully aware of the importance of palm oil production for Indonesia and its crucial role in lifting many Indonesian smallholders out of poverty. The EU is not anti-palm oil. We have not instituted any trade ban and the value of Indonesian palm oil exports to the EU has even increased by 26 % in 2020 compared to 2019. We remain of Indonesia's largest export market for palm oil and the recently launched Joint Working Group will help all sides to understand each other better when it comes to the sustainable production of palm oil.

Naturally, the fight against the pandemic and access to vaccines was another key topic. I was glad to point out the EU solid record on vaccine multilateralism: we have supported COVAX with €2.8 billion, exported 240 million doses to 90 countries and we are working to build new vaccine production capacities world-wide.

The EU supports Indonesia's objective of becoming a high-income country by 2045, while realising the 2030 SDG goal. Our future CEPA/Free Trade Agreement will support that goal by generating more trade, more European Foreign Direct Investment and jobs – no less than 5bn EUR of GDP could be generated annually from 2032. We will continue to build a partnership for green growth – without the EU erecting a green wall as some falsely claim.

Finally, security will be increasingly central in our cooperation. Indonesia is a force for peace and stability in the region and globally. The EU's strategy for the Indo-Pacific fits very well with Indonesia's efforts and policy aims. Indonesia, despite certain problems, can be a model in the region regarding democracy, pluralism and tolerance.

“ASEAN is the nucleus around which inclusive forms of regional cooperation are built. Regional integration is a way to safeguard our respective ‘strategic autonomy’ for both of us.”

The second element of my visit was ASEAN, a natural partner for us, given our shared commitment to rules-based multilateralism. Currently, ASEAN is a bit like the ‘swing state’ in the wider Indo-Pacific where US and China are throwing their weight around. ASEAN countries are united by their wish not to be cajoled by US–China strategic competition. They wish to diversify their partnership away from just the Quad or Sino-centric groupings. ASEAN is the nucleus around which inclusive forms of regional cooperation are built. Regional integration is a way to safeguard our respective ‘strategic autonomy’ for both of us.

Upgraded relations between the EU and ASEAN

Last year we upgraded our relations to a Strategic Partnership. This was long overdue but very welcome because in a world of power politics and generalised uncertainty, ASEAN and EU should pull together. There are many areas where our cooperation is already strong. We have long been ASEAN’s number one development partner, but are also its third trade partner, and third investor. Our exports to ASEAN countries grew from €54 billion in 2010 to €85 billion in 2019 and our imports grew even more, from €72 billion in 2019 to €125 billion.

In my discussions with ASEAN’s Secretary General and its Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) ⁽³¹³⁾, I stressed the readiness of the EU to expand cooperation especially on the green transition, sustainable connectivity and defence. I was also glad to have the opportunity to set out the EU’s new strategy on the Indo-Pacific ⁽³¹⁴⁾ at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies ⁽³¹⁵⁾. To explain what we are doing and why – and where we want to go next.

⁽³¹³⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/association-southeast-asian-nations-asean/99541/intervention-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-meeting-asean-cprs_en

⁽³¹⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/96741/EU-%20Strategy-%20for-%20Cooperation-%20in-%20the-%20Indo-Pacific

⁽³¹⁵⁾ See p. 392.



“*The Indo Pacific region is the future, but insecurity and tensions are rising, threatening the order and balance of this dynamic region.*”

The Indo Pacific region is the future, but insecurity and tensions are rising, threatening the order and balance of this dynamic region. And economic growth rests on openness, on stable and shared rules and shared security. I stressed that the EU's interest is precisely this: that the regional order stays open and rules-based – and we can contribute significantly. As I witnessed during my visit, this is recognised by our regional partners who view the EU as a trusted and reliable actor.

The EU one of the most trusted partners in the region

The ISEAS research Institute in Singapore recently asked opinion-leaders and policy-makers in Southeast Asia who would be their most favoured and trusted strategic partner amid the growing US–China rivalry. Four in ten of the respondents picked the EU! The basic message behind our Indo-Pacific strategy is that the EU wants to step up its engagement and work with partners to boost trade and investment, economic openness and a sustainable approach to connectivity. But we are also ready to do work more on strategic and security issues, in particular

maritime security. We are exploring options to enhance EU's maritime presence in the vast Indo-Pacific space. And we will extend the EU's Critical Maritime Routes project from the Indian Ocean to South East Asia.

“ On Connectivity, we have a strong record and know that our approach, namely that connectivity projects must be sustainable in environmental and fiscal terms, matches what ASEAN and other partners also want.”

To summarise, I return from the region with three main thoughts. First, the visit was a tangible way to show the EU's political will to engage with ASEAN. That is why I blocked my agenda for four days and travelled more than 22 000 km. It was useful to talk face-to-face and address misperceptions, be it on palm oil or vaccines and present concrete proposals to deepen our cooperation.

Second, I am even more convinced than before that the EU must engage more in the Indo-Pacific. Not just on trade and aid but also security. In Europe, we are often too busy with ourselves and our neighbourhood, and sometimes we have too little bandwidth left for developing relations with countries who want more from us. However, the world will not wait for us to overcome our internal problems. We need to engage now and it is refreshing and positive to hear how much the EU is wanted and welcomed. Of course cooperation must be two-way street. The more cooperation is seen as two-way, the more sustainable it will be in our respective political systems.

Respond to the ongoing 'democratic recession'

Third, we have to step up cooperation to respond to the ongoing 'democratic recession' worldwide and the growing attacks on pluralism and political freedoms. Myanmar is the most dramatic case in South-East Asia. I stressed that we expect ASEAN leadership in this situation and that we are ready to back more regional engagement. I clearly expressed to the CPR Ambassador of Myanmar what Europe expects. Given the complete refusal by the military leadership to engage in negotiations and growing repression, we are working on the adoption of a new sanctions package to defend human rights. Not because we see these as European or Western constructs. But because these values and principles are universal. Many countries and certainly the people in this region share our view: they want to determine their own political future and have their rights protected.

CENTRAL ASIA: CONNECTIVITY AND THE NEED FOR A STABLE AFGHANISTAN

20/07/2021 – Blog – *In July 2021, I visited Tashkent to take part in the Central-South Asia Connectivity Conference. This event brought together high-level participants to discuss connectivity and security issues, as well as the situation in Afghanistan, to promote stability, security and prosperity in a region of growing strategic importance for the EU.*

Naturally, the developments in and around Afghanistan were at the top of the agenda: a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is crucial for the stability and development of the whole region, and for our vision of connectivity. In fact, connectivity, stability and security not only go hand in hand, they are pre-requisites for each other.

I met with the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, but also with the Chinese and Indian Foreign Ministers, and many other partners. We discussed how we can ensure closer integration of Afghanistan into the wider regional cooperation framework.

Concerns about the Taliban offensive

I shared my concerns about the Taliban offensive, the sharp increase in civilian casualties and the growing number of Afghans fleeing their homes and their country. Lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan must be a common goal and a common responsibility, for Europe and the international community. An Afghanistan that descends into chaos would expose the region to further drug trafficking and the spread of radical ideologies, terrorism and violence. Afghanistan's neighbours, including the Central Asian countries, are particularly vulnerable to the negative repercussions, but it would also affect our security in Europe.

As EU, we are a major partner for Central Asian countries in their reform and economic transition process. I reiterated that the EU and its member states are ready to support joint efforts. I also underlined that Afghanistan's neighbours are in a key position to support the peace process, through constructive engagement and clear messaging to the Afghan parties, and by refraining from support to armed groups out of short-term concerns about narrow interests.



The EU supports an inclusive, Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process leading to a negotiated political settlement. This requires the Taliban to commit to a negotiated settlement. For this to happen, all concerned – neighbouring countries, the EU and all international partners – have to be clear and frank in our messages to the Taliban. We must spell out the consequences of their chosen course of action, including for the EU's engagement.

A military takeover by the Taliban, or attempts to restore an Islamic Emirate are unacceptable – to a majority of Afghans, to the countries in the region and to the international community. It would lead to non-recognition and isolation. Future support to Afghanistan by its international partners, including the EU, is and will remain conditional on the preservation of the democratic progress of the last twenty years. This includes the respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including the rights of women and the protection of minorities, as well as the strengthening of state institutions and the fight against corruption.

“Future support to Afghanistan by its international partners, including the EU, is and will remain conditional on the respect for fundamental rights, including the rights of women and the protection of minorities.”

I also discussed with Central Asia Ministers our wish to build strong and non-exclusive partnerships, open to cooperation with others, on shared goals, as stated by the [2019 EU Strategy on Central Asia](#) ⁽³¹⁶⁾. This means intensifying cooperation in a variety of sectors from climate, environment, health, water, human rights and capacity-building in border management. I reconfirmed the EU's readiness to engage in developing regional connectivity and overcoming joint security challenges.

The 30th anniversary of the independence of our Central Asian partners

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the independence of our Central Asian partners, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The road to closer regional cooperation has not always been easy, but it is a real achievement, which should be further developed. Indeed, regional cooperation among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and neighbouring countries can not only boost socio-economic development, but also address shared security challenges, including illegal migration, drug trafficking and terrorism threats.

Central Asia has a vast potential of young people and natural resources and it has a lot to offer to European investors. The EU is already a main trading partner; in 2020, two-way trade in goods amounted to € 22 billion, and with 114 million people the region has a significant market potential. However, to fully benefit from this potential requires the region to advance with structural reforms and a better business environment. This year's EU- Central Asia Economic Forum in November will be another opportunity to work towards sustainable and inclusive connectivity.

In short, last week's Central-South Asia Connectivity Conference proved that regional cooperation and regional dialogue are key. As EU we will do our part.

⁽³¹⁶⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/central-asia-council-adopts-a-new-eu-strategy-for-the-region/>

IRAQ, A CORNERSTONE OF REGIONAL STABILITY

11/09/2021 – Blog – *At the beginning of September, I travelled to Iraq for the first time to support the country's stability and sovereignty. The visit came ahead of the elections in October 2021. As EU, we have a big stake in helping to build a stable Iraq.*

What struck me most during my visit in Iraq is the scale of the challenges that the country is facing. Recent history is very telling. We all remember the US-led invasion in 2003 and the turmoil the country has lived through. Then came the rise of ISIS, which managed to wrest control over a large part of Iraq in 2014, condemning millions of Iraqis to either live under medieval rule, or flee their homes.

Iraq regained full sovereignty

The retaking of Mosul and other ISIS-controlled areas in 2017 allowed Iraq to regain full sovereignty. However, this was achieved at great cost. Many Iraqi perished and many cities were largely destroyed. There are still too many internally displaced people in Iraq unable to return to their homes, which simply no longer exist. Decades of harsh dictatorship under Saddam Hussein were followed by years of political turmoil and fragmentation, with a central government unable to guarantee neither security nor basic services to its population and leaving the space open for militias, who often operated with foreign support.

“Decades of dictatorship under Saddam Hussein were followed by years of political turmoil, with a central government unable to guarantee security and basic services and leaving the space open for militias.”

Since the military defeat of Da'esh, many problems still remain: communitarian tensions, a worrying level of corruption, a lack of accountability of the state apparatus, a weak economy (2020 GDP is still lower than in 1990 according to the World Bank), plus many internally displaced people and migratory pressures. These factors are undermining Iraq's stability. In addition, these internal difficulties are reinforced by regional tensions. The country has become one of the main battlefields for the Sunni – Shia rift in the region. Because of this, Iraq is still

struggling to find a proper place in the Gulf region. Iraq would benefit from de-escalation in the Gulf and a return of all parties to the JCPOA and from a peaceful political solution in Syria.

Foster regional solutions to regional tensions

Looking at these regional tensions, our visit came at an important moment. Last week, on 28 August, the Iraqi government brought together regional leaders at the 'Baghdad conference', an initiative to promote regional de-escalation and dialogue. Iraq is key for promoting security and stability among the regional powers: Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as Turkey. The conference brought them all to the same table. This is not a given and was an important diplomatic achievement by Prime Minister Khademi: the EU strongly supports these efforts to foster regional solutions to regional tensions. Improvements at regional level would help creating the conditions for Iraq to unlock its potential and to become a country able to take advantage of its generous oil revenues, to implement economic and administrative reforms, and to consolidate its federal system.

The Iraqi government is already working on much-needed socio-economic and governance reforms, which the Iraqi people clearly demand, as we saw during recent protest movements. These reforms are essential to start turning the page on bad governance, instability and foreign interference.

They are also key to ensure the financial viability of the country and provide jobs opportunities, especially for the youth. With 60 % of Iraqis below 25 years of age, it will be one of the most urgent tasks for the new Iraqi government after the elections. The EU has invested €1.4 billion in Iraq since 2014 and will continue to support these efforts to build a stable Iraq, also by providing technical assistance.

“*Iraq's vibrant civil society is a reason to be hopeful for the country's future. I have been insisting with the authorities on the importance of thoroughly prosecuting acts of violence against civil society actors.*”

I met with Iraqi President Barham Salih, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein, the Speaker of Parliament Mohammed Al Halbousi, as well as with United Nations Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.

During my visit, I was particularly glad to meet representatives from civil society, human rights organisations and protest movements to listen to their concerns and to share ideas on what the EU could do. Iraq's vibrant civil society is a reason to be hopeful for the country's future. Iraqi human rights defenders and political activists work every day for the future of their 'watan', their nation, and their efforts are key to the consolidation of Iraq's political and economic stability.

However, the continuing violence targeting civil society, political activists and journalists is of major concern and hampers the country's development. I have been insisting with the authorities, both in previous contacts and during this visit, on the importance of thoroughly investigating and prosecuting all acts of violence against civil society actors.

The challenging security situation needs to improve

As EU, what we can and want to do is accompanying and supporting efforts by the Iraqis themselves to consolidate and strengthen their country's stability, security and prosperity. However, to achieve meaningful progress, the challenging security situation needs to improve. Da'esh continues its outrageous attacks on Iraqi civilians: just last week, we saw yet another deadly attack in Kirkuk. Other rogue elements also continue to commit acts of violence. The EU is committed to the Global Coalition against Da'esh and supports Iraq's security sector reform through expertise by our [EU Advisory Mission in Iraq, EUAM](#) ⁽³¹⁷⁾.

“ On 10 October, Iraqis will go to the polls. This should be an important milestone in the country's democratic consolidation. At the request of the Iraqi government, we are deploying an Election Observation Mission”

On 10 October, Iraqis will go to the polls. It will be crucial that these elections will be free and fair, with a high level of participation across the country. Under such conditions, these elections could be an important milestone in the country's democratic consolidation. To support this process and at the request of the Iraqi government, we are deploying an Election Observation Mission (EOM). This mission will cover the whole election process and produce a public report with recommendations.

⁽³¹⁷⁾ See <https://www.euam-iraq.eu/>



During my meetings with authorities, we also discussed the important migration file. I reiterated the EU's strong appreciation for the authorities' decision to temporarily suspend flights to Belarus and asked for this suspension to become permanent. It is in our common interest to prevent the instrumentalisation of migrants by the Belarusian regime and to protect people from being exploited by criminal networks. The Iraqi authorities know that this is a very important issue for us and are ready to deepen concrete engagement.

From Baghdad to Erbil

Continuing my visit to Erbil, I conveyed the same messages to President Nechirvan Barzani and the leadership of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including Prime Minister Masrour Barzani and Former President Masoud Barzani. There too I found serious challenges, with internal divisions, the presence of foreign-armed groups and recurrent interventions by neighbouring countries. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil are vital for Iraq's stability. The EU cannot but support and encourage further efforts to improve these relations.

“ *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has shown enormous generosity by giving refuge to so many internally displaced people. Since 2019, over 237 000 people have benefitted from EU-funded camp management services.*”

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has shown enormous generosity by giving refuge to over two million displaced people, who arrived in the course of only six months. They represented 30 % of their population, which shows the size of the challenge. We tried to help them in this endeavour: since 2019, 237 000 people have benefitted from EU-funded camp management services. We will continue to support projects for the integration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in local communities.

In addition to the official meetings, I briefly visited the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, which is one of the most important in the world. It covers the 5 000-year history of Mesopotamia, and therefore plays a crucial role in safekeeping and highlighting the country's rich heritage. I am glad that the EU Advisory Mission works with the museum. It is the first EU civilian crisis management mission that has been tasked with cultural heritage protection.

In Erbil, I also visited the World Heritage site of the Qelat citadel, which is another impressive site full of beauty and history. It is considered the oldest permanently inhabited site in the world. It benefits from an EU-funded project to create jobs for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Iraqis in the cultural heritage sector.

Clear calls for a strengthened EU engagement in Iraq

My visit was welcomed by all interlocutors and we received clear calls for a strengthened EU engagement in Iraq. In recent years, Iraq has gone through very difficult times, of war, violence and strife. But I am more hopeful regarding its future. It is up to Iraq's citizens and leaders to draw on the historical roots of the country to build a state that can help bring peace to the whole region. The EU is a committed partner to help Iraqis see that happen.

THE EU'S STAKES AND OPTIONS IN A CHANGING GULF REGION

30/09/2021 – *Blog* – *A the end of September 2021, I started a four-day trip to the Gulf region to visit Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. It is a dynamic region in a geopolitically sensible environment and in the middle of a significant transformation. This gives us a chance to develop new forms of cooperation.*

Several events have affected lately the dynamics of the region: the Abraham accords that marked the reconciliation between Israel and some Arab states, the end of the rift among some of the states in the Gulf ending the isolation of Qatar, the decision of the Biden administration to return to the Iran nuclear deal, and finally the situation in Afghanistan.

In addition, antagonism with Iran has overtaken the Palestinian question as a main alignment in the region. The current rapprochement between Israel and the Gulf in some ways is a departure from history. Indeed, Iran was among the first to recognise Israel in 1948, and Israel was its main regional partner for three decades until 1979, when Iranian leader Khomeini confiscated their embassy in Tehran to give it to the PLO. Overcoming current rifts should also be seen in light of this big regional change, with divisions coming at a high price.

Divisions come at a high price

In parallel, China is increasing its role in the region. China will of course not give the Gulf states any security guarantees, but it is ready to step in where others leave space. Europe is embarking on the Green Deal, the US and other developed economies are less dependent on oil imports from the Gulf and the importance of the Chinese market is growing.

Russia is also aware of the opportunities this new situation opens up. It has also realigned its traditional alliances, improved its relations with Israel, and rebuilt its old alliance with Egypt. Foreign Minister Lavrov toured the region this spring. Russia, on the other hand, is still a competitor in the fossil fuel area, allied with Syria, and a close ally of Iran.

Also, Gulf countries are undergoing momentous domestic reforms. They all have ‘Visions’, of diversified, greener economies becoming less dependent on hydrocarbons, and more digitalised governments and societies. At stake are of course contracts and investment opportunities – both in the Gulf countries for European companies, and in Europe for the Gulf sovereign wealth funds, who already own an impressive share of the EU economy.

Throughout my mandate, I have begun to discuss these transformations of the Gulf region and the broader Middle East with my interlocutors. The transformations are important for Europe, also because they affect the positioning and involvement of Gulf states in conflicts closer to home, such as Libya and Syria. And to be able to work together, we must understand their perspective.

This brings me to the second objective of the visit, which is to see how we can build a stronger partnership with the Gulf states. Here are a few themes and ideas that I will try to explore during the trip:

Although the Gulf states remain dependent on oil and gas exports, they have understood that they will also need to transition to renewable energy production eventually. They have sun, wind and water in abundance, and the funding required. This renewable energy will need a market – and it is clear already that the EU will need to import large quantities of electricity and in due course also green hydrogen (especially if one looks at current electricity price increases).

Water security is a real issue in the Gulf, and we can help.

Climate change in the Gulf is a reality with frequent temperatures over 50 degrees, accompanied by a depletion of fresh water resources. There is every reason to encourage cooperation in research and practical mitigation and adaptation measures to tackle related problems. In addition, cooperation in the field of civil protection will be useful for both sides, as the number of disasters is likely to increase.

It is less likely that that the EU will be involved in traditional ‘strategic’ issues in the Gulf. However, there are a number of areas of ‘soft security’ that are worth exploring, which could promote de-escalation and confidence building across the region. A first such area is maritime safety, i.e. measures to facilitate safe passage of commercial vessels. The EU could offer more technical support to organise and manage the busy shipping lanes in the Strait of Hormuz. Similarly, the EU could offer help with nuclear safety, tapping into the considerable expertise that exists

within Euratom. We have for instance a CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological) hub in the United Arab Emirates, a Centre of Excellence covering the region.

The EU is world leader in international humanitarian and development assistance, and in promoting respect for human rights. We strongly support international institutions such as the United Nations and multilateral solutions. Gulf states are increasingly interested in taking on global responsibilities and are ready to engage with us. The EU now has human rights dialogues with all Gulf states and we launched such a dialogue with Saudi Arabia this week. This is an area where there is much to gain for both sides from closer cooperation.

The EU as a model of peace and regional integration

Although it may seem trivial to us Europeans sometimes, peace and stability is not something the Gulf states are necessarily used to. The conflict in Yemen has been ravaging for seven years, causing a terrible humanitarian crisis. Saudi oil facilities have been attacked by missiles repeatedly in the past years and perceived Iranian actions and manipulation are a constant source of concern in several Gulf states. The idea that this confrontation can one day be overcome may feel distant at the moment, but so did many confrontations until they were eventually resolved. The CSCE/OSCE experience may be something to look at for the Gulf region. Also, the history of European integration per se is an interesting example of how economic cooperation can build trust and gradually lead to closer political integration.

These are some of the potential areas for cooperation and EU engagement, which form the backdrop for my trip to the Gulf. In the coming days, I will discuss with my interlocutors to see how we can build a common agenda, in particular also with view to the crisis in Afghanistan and how to engage with the new leaders, which I attempt to cover in my next blog post.

AFGHANISTAN: CAN WE AVOID A DANGEROUS COLLAPSE?

03/10/2021 – Blog – *Afghanistan is experiencing a serious humanitarian crisis and a socio-economic collapse. Qatar is an influential actor when it comes to Afghanistan, with open contacts with the Taliban. While in Doha at the beginning of October 2021, I discussed how to assess the Taliban's actions and avoid a collapse of Afghanistan.*

When the Taliban took power in Afghanistan, most attention focused on the evacuation of our citizens and Afghans who felt threatened and wished to leave the country. Thus far, around 120 000 people have been brought to safety, including local staff and people we have trained, like female judges. This operation is far from over, despite the important work of EU member states, NATO allies and our cooperation with Pakistan, Qatar and others. I was able to witness first-hand the on-going efforts when visiting last Thursday a refugee shelter in Doha.

During my visit to Qatar, I discussed the situation in Afghanistan in all its dimensions with the Emir, the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister and the National Security Advisor. Their overwhelming view is that we need to engage the Taliban to influence their behaviour and choices. At the moment, the 'asks' on the Taliban side seem to revolve around recognition, the release of frozen assets and the lifting of the UN sanctions. To influence the new leaders, we need some form of roadmap, setting out our clear benchmarks and expectations and steps to take.

“ We need to have people on the ground in Afghanistan, in addition to our humanitarian workers. The question is not if we should have a minimal EU presence but when and how.”

What is also clear is that we need to have people on the ground in Afghanistan, in addition to our humanitarian workers. So, the question is not if we should have a minimal EU presence on which all member states agree, but when and how. We are working on possible options, taking into account the security situation. We had an exploratory mission by EEAS officials and will now assess the next steps.

The situation in Afghanistan is getting worse

There are many signs that the situation in the country is getting worse. For instance, we have seen the formation of an interim government that is neither inclusive nor representative. And we have reports that women and girls are excluded from schools and universities, which goes against initial assurances from the Taliban. As [the Qatari FM said during our press conference](#) ⁽³¹⁸⁾, the behaviour of the Taliban on the exclusion of girls from education has been very disappointing. As the graph below shows, the education of girls has been one of the greatest achievements of the past 20 years, which should not be lost.

The economic situation is dire, which risks worsening the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with more than one-third of the population living on less than US \$2 a day. For years, it has been heavily dependent on foreign aid: in 2020, international assistance accounted for 43 % of the country's GDP and 75 % of salaries paid in the civil service came from foreign aid. In particular, aid was used to finance a trade deficit of around 30 % of GDP. Afghanistan has to import almost all industrial products, all fossil fuels and a large part of the wheat that is necessary to feed a country that is far from self-sufficient and that has been severely affected by droughts.

“ We have increased our humanitarian aid, but, at the same time, we have stopped our development assistance.”

Since the Taliban took power, the EU has decided to increase humanitarian aid from €57 million to €200 million and together with our member states we have pledged €677 million to help the millions of Afghans that are suffering. But, at the same time, we have stopped our development assistance, as have our member states and like-minded partners.

In addition, the IMF and the World Bank have for now suspended Afghanistan's access to their programmes because of the uncertain legitimacy of the new Afghan government. Moreover, the new authorities do not have access to \$9 billion held in frozen assets in central bank reserves, which are mostly deposited outside the country, notably with the US Federal Reserve. Finally, the withdrawal of foreign forces and civilians from the country has deprived many Afghans of important sources of income.

⁽³¹⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104915/qatar-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-press-conference-deputy_en



Rapid devaluation of the Afghan currency and high inflation

This situation is leading to a rapid devaluation of the Afghan currency and to high inflation: indications are that food prices have risen by at least 50 % higher since the Taliban took power. The Afghan banking system remains largely paralysed with people unable to withdraw money from their accounts, while the health system, which was heavily dependent on NGOs and foreign aid, is on the verge of collapse.

If the situation continues and with winter approaching, this risks turning into a humanitarian catastrophe. Desperate people may flee the country, creating a mass migratory movement, affecting the neighbouring states that already host more than three million Afghan refugees.

“ We have established five benchmarks for resuming relations with the new Afghan government.”

The question is what Europe and our international partners should do. For example, what could we do in areas like health and education? Of course, this depends on the behaviour of the new Afghan regime. For our part, we have [established five benchmarks for resuming our relations with the new Afghan](#)

[government](#) ⁽³¹⁹⁾. We will need firm conditionality, in relation to these benchmarks, notably on human rights. This ‘roadmap approach’ matches what Qatar is trying to do as my interlocutors underlined.

Qatar plays a crucial role when it comes to Afghanistan

Indeed, Qatar plays a crucial role when it comes to Afghanistan. It is home to the Taliban’s political office in Doha, it maintains open contacts with the new authorities, and Qatar Airways is one of the few civilian airlines flying to Kabul. During my meetings, the Qatari side explained how their contacts with the Taliban were aimed at moderating their behaviour, for instance on girls’ access to education, which of course is not incompatible with Islam. We also discussed the need to assist people who still wish to leave Afghanistan, and I expressed our appreciation for Qatar’s help in this respect and for the efforts to re-open Kabul airport.

“ *We need to avoid a socio-economic collapse in the coming months. This requires the possibility that the international community assists the Afghan people.*”

Most importantly, we agreed on the need to avoid a socio-economic collapse in the coming months. This requires above all that the Taliban take the steps that will enable the international community to assist the Afghan people. With humanitarian flights resuming, female staff of the UN and other agencies need for instance to be able to do their job. I encouraged my Qatari interlocutors to continue to use their privileged contacts with the Taliban so that the worst scenario can be avoided, and I underlined that the EU will continue to work towards this aim.

⁽³¹⁹⁾ See p. 67.

MY TRIP TO DUSHANBE: INVESTING IN OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH CENTRAL ASIA

26/11/2021 – Blog – Central Asia plays a crucial role connecting East and West. In November 2021, I paid a three-day visit to Tajikistan to see how the EU can strengthen its cooperation with the region, from the post-pandemic recovery, to the water and security nexus and the regional fall out of the crisis in Afghanistan.

This week I travelled to Dushanbe, accompanied by my colleague Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen, to chair the 17th EU–Central Asia Ministerial meeting and meet with the Tajik leadership and civil society.

“Central Asia is an important region, sandwiched between major powers, next door to Afghanistan and connecting East and West.”

Central Asia may not be at the top of the news for most EU media but it is an important region, sandwiched between major powers, next door to Afghanistan and connecting East and West through trade, investment and other links. As EU, we have clear interests at stake – and so do the Central Asians.

Despite the distance, we are the region's largest trading partner and biggest investor: 40 % of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the last ten years comes from the EU, not from the China or Russia, as some might expect, given their geographic proximity. We are also the leading aid donor to the region, offering many grants and not primarily loans as others do.

Since thirty years, Central Asian states have come a long way

Thirty years after gaining their independence from the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan), have come a long way – and so has our cooperation. The region appreciates having an 'EU-option', alongside their relationships with their immediate neighbours. They see the EU as a factor of balance and predictability in a volatile international landscape mired in great power politics.

And there is a clear increase in engagement, meaning visits, [policy initiatives](#) ⁽³²⁰⁾ and attention. Between the EU and Central Asia, we used to have perhaps one or max two top-level meetings per year. No longer: [I visited Tashkent in July](#) for the *Central Asia-South Asia Connectivity Conference*, while Vice-President Dombrovskis chaired the first *EU–Central Asia Economic Forum* on 5 November in Bishkek. Tajik President Rahmon visited Brussels in October and Kazakh President Tokayev visited this week. In addition, Commission Vice-President Schinas travelled to Tashkent this week. Where politicians go is a sign of their political priorities, so this uptake in travel, in both directions, is a sign that things are moving in EU–Central Asian relations.

Keep the region as an open space for connectivity and cooperation

In a way, the agenda writes itself: we have a joint interest in promoting resilient and open societies; ensuring a sustainable recovery and green transition; protecting our citizens against security threats, such as terrorism, and the trafficking of drugs, arms and people. In addition, the EU wants to keep the region as an open space for connectivity and cooperation rather than an area of binary strategic choices and rivalry.

At the Ministerial meeting, we discussed three broad clusters of issues: 1. Security including the fallout of the crisis in Afghanistan; 2. Sustainable connectivity and economic links; 3. Water, climate and environment. You can read more about the outcome and my press remarks ⁽³²¹⁾.

“Naturally, the dramatic developments in Afghanistan loomed large in our discussions. the humanitarian situation in the country is deteriorating rapidly. Millions of Afghans are at risk of facing hunger.”

The tone of the discussion was very open – more than usual – and all ministers underlined their desire to deepen cooperation with the EU, given the uncertain regional context and with Russia, China and others already playing prominent roles. They clearly welcome more EU engagement and support for domestic

⁽³²⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/central-asia-council-adopts-a-new-eu-strategy-for-the-region/>

⁽³²¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/107792/central-asia-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-press_en

reforms, to make progress on environmental sustainability, develop low carbon technologies and address regional challenges.

Naturally, the dramatic developments in Afghanistan loomed large in our discussions. As we have [feared for months](#) ⁽³²²⁾, the humanitarian situation in the country is deteriorating rapidly. Millions of Afghans are at risk of facing hunger, with all the risks this entails, in terms of irregular migration and radicalisation.

The security repercussions of the crisis in Afghanistan

All Central Asian states clearly fear the security repercussions of the crisis in Afghanistan, including through infiltration of terrorist groups, as well as a negative impact on their economies. None of them has expressed any official support or recognition of the Taliban regime (with Tajikistan being the most vocal and taking the strongest position) while all are keen to promote stability and avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. To that end, some regional governments do maintain pragmatic contacts with the Taliban and deliver humanitarian aid.

On the EU side, we set out our line: no recognition and no legitimisation. But also strong support for the Afghan people, based on a 'humanitarian+ approach', i.e. complementing humanitarian aid with support to basic services (health, education, food security). I also outlined our intention to launch an inclusive regional dialogue platform, initially with Afghanistan's six immediate neighbours. For her part, Commissioner Urpilainen provided details when it comes to the financing for EU–Central Asia cooperation in the next budgetary cycle.

At the Ministerial, I also discussed with all Ministers the need to combat irregular migration and to prevent airports and territories from being misused for trafficking movements. Ministers from the whole region and especially Uzbekistan expressed their full commitments to stop the flow of migrants to Belarus where people have been instrumentalised and sent to the EU border.

“ While it does not recognise the Taliban regime, Tajikistan still provides important support through electricity supplies. This is proof that one can support the Afghan people without recognising the regime.”

⁽³²²⁾ See p. 416.



After the Ministerial, we met the Tadjik President Rahmon and the Foreign Minister Muhridin to discuss our bilateral cooperation, the recovery and especially the regional security situation, in view of the deepening crisis in Afghanistan. Tajikistan has 1 400 kilometres of border with Afghanistan and plays an active role to promote a positive regional agenda. For example, while it does not recognise the Taliban regime, it still provides important support through electricity supplies, which for the moment are not even being paid for. This is proof that one can support the Afghan people without recognising the regime.

The challenges of regional climate change, water and energy

In addition to these 'official' meetings, it is important to try getting a direct feel for a country. Fortunately, we were able to do so. On Sunday, I awarded the [EU Innovation Prize](#) to three young teams that are contributing to job creation in the country. On Monday, we visited a centre where EU is helping to train Tajik border troops. On Tuesday, we witnessed first-hand the glacier melting on the Pamir.

We also visited the Nurek Hydro-Power Station and were briefed about CASA100, a large-scale regional electricity interconnector project linking the grids of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, enabling the use of hydropower

resources in the region. It was good to learn first-hand about the potential but also the challenges of regional climate change, water and energy cooperation.

We also visited the Vahdat Art Gallery, an initiative run by two young Afghan artists, who fled Kabul eight months ago. It brings them an important respite from the uncertainties of life in a new country. We also had a long meeting with civil society representatives and human rights defenders to hear first-hand on the situation in the country and the work of civil society in a highly challenging context. Logically, our discussion turned to what the EU can do more, politically and financially, to support the dynamic Tajik civil society.

“We spend a lot of time on crisis management plus relations with the great powers. But it is also important to carve out enough time and energy for other regions where the rate of return per hour spent may be greater.”

In EU foreign policy, we spend a lot of time on crisis management: Belarus, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Sudan etc., plus relations with the great powers: US, Russia, China etc. This is natural, but it is also important to carve out enough time and energy for other regions where the rate of return per hour or euro spent may be greater than elsewhere. This includes Central Asia.

Returning from Dushanbe I am convinced that our partners want to deepen their cooperation with the EU. We have come a long way in EU–Central Asia relations in a short space of time. However, there is even more to be done: on connectivity, clean energy, security, Afghanistan. In the months ahead, I will make sure Central Asia stays high on our radar, as it should be. That is why I have put our relations with Central Asia on the agenda of the next Foreign Affairs Council in December, to discuss with EU Ministers what more we can do.



6.7 LATIN AMERICA

CHILE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: A COMMON VISION OF THE FUTURE

11/02/2021 – *Op Ed* – In this *Op Ed* for the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio*, I explained at the beginning of 2021, the interest Europe has for the constitutional process going on in Chile. And for the role that Chile could play to strengthen the relations between the EU and Latin America.

For a year now, the world has been facing its biggest crisis in peacetime. Its economic, social and political effects will mark our time. Equally, the values and principles that underpin democracy are being challenged in many parts of the world, as citizens increasingly demand more from their governments and institutions. In many countries, the delicate constitutional balance is threatened by inequalities and national-populist movements.

“ The pandemic offers us the opportunity to build a new era of democracy, closer to citizens. And a new social contract on the role of the state, political organisation and demands for greater social justice.”

But the pandemic also offers us the opportunity to rethink our political systems and build a new era of democracy, closer to citizens. And a new social contract on the role of the state, political organisation and demands for greater social justice. In this context, Europe is watching with great interest the constituent process in Chile that will define the country's future trajectory.

This process is a milestone for Chile, but it will also be considered a regional and international benchmark, as it will be the first to include a parity Convention and the participation of indigenous peoples. It is also an opportunity to incorporate into the constitutional order the rights derived from equality between women and men, and those already assumed at the international level linked to the defence of the environment. It is a historic opportunity to define a new constitutional framework for coexistence, reflecting the aspirations of several generations and the response to new challenges.

Each country has its own constitutional history

Each country has its own constitutional history. We Europeans have our own, in many cases tormented, and we are not in a position to give lessons to anyone, nor do we pretend to. But we are very close to Chile and share the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

I hope that we will soon be able to conclude the modernisation of the 2002 Association Agreement, the first we signed with a South American country. We are also committed to working together to strengthen multilateralism and to respond to global challenges such as the fight against climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic.

That is why the European Union would like to accompany Chile in this constituent process. I am pleased to see the invitation from many political, social and economic sectors in Chile to collaborate in the spaces for dialogue in order to contribute the diversity of European constitutional experiences. I hope to be able to contribute personally to this and thus be able to return to this beautiful country, which I met for the first time, many years ago, hand in hand with Ricardo Lagos, when we were both ministers of public works, and with which I have so many ties of friendship.

“ *The European model combines political freedom, economic progress and social cohesion, based on strong democratic institutions, a social market economy, respect for political minorities and strong fiscal redistribution.* ”

In Europe, the 27 member states offer many constitutional variations. But with a common denominator around the concept of a social and democratic state governed by the rule of law. Despite all its shortcomings and difficulties, the European socio-economic model combines political freedom, economic progress and social cohesion, which is what citizens are calling for, based on strong democratic institutions, a social market economy, respect for political minorities and strong fiscal redistribution to combat inequalities. European integration has made it possible to build unity while respecting differences, as Chile also intends to do.



Our Interest in Chile's future has also a geopolitical dimension

Our interest in Chile's future also has a geopolitical dimension, in the context of the need to strengthen the EU's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). I will not tire of repeating that our bi-regional EU–LAC relationship remains below its enormous potential. We share close ties, history, culture, a common vision on the organisation of our societies and economies, and what we understand the international order should look like. Let us not underestimate the potential of our political strength: together, the EU+LAC countries represent almost one third of the votes in the United Nations.

The recent incorporation of Chile into the International Contact Group on Venezuela is also very good news as it will serve to increase contacts with regional partners and join efforts to help Venezuelans restore democracy and constitutional order. In EU–LAC relations, Chile is a key player and the strengthening of its democratic institutions will be a very positive element for this relationship. I reiterate my confidence that the constituent process will make it possible to strengthen the ties that unite us and Chile's leading role in the new world that will emerge from this pandemic.

THE WORLD NEEDS TO DO MORE FOR VENEZUELAN REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

17/06/2021 – Op Ed – With Arancha González Laya, Spanish Foreign Minister at that time, Karina Gould, Canadian International Development Minister at that time, and Eduardo Stein, UNHCR–IOM Special Representative for Venezuelan Refugees, we wanted to draw the attention to the dramatic situation of these refugees and migrants and the urgent need to mobilise more resources to help them.

Can you imagine walking more than 1 000 km with your children, and one suitcase of belongings? That is the marathon journey many Venezuelan refugees and migrants have made as they flee the crisis afflicting their country to reach a safe haven in other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The world's second largest displacement crisis, after Syria

This is the world's second largest displacement crisis, after Syria. With more than 5.6 million people affected, the Venezuelan exodus is equivalent to the population of Denmark flooding into the rest of Europe. But this crisis goes largely unnoticed and unreported in the wider world.

The pandemic has added even greater hardship, increasing the many risks that Venezuelans meet as they try to reach safety. Lengthy lockdown measures cripple refugees' and migrants' attempts to find jobs. In particular, women and girls, are exposed to even greater risks of exploitation and xenophobia. And the impact of the pandemic is not just on refugees and migrants: throughout the region, local communities are suffering greatly.

“Despite the hardships currently experienced, countries in Latin America have quietly, but generously, sought to address the challenge, responding to needs, and committing to social and economic integration.”



Despite the hardships currently experienced, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have quietly, but generously, sought to address the challenge, responding to needs, and committing to social and economic integration. Host countries are doing all they can to give their Venezuelan brothers and sisters a life with dignity. Some have already given displaced persons a legal status so that they can access health and education services, housing, and legal work. Crucially, during the pandemic, many have been included in national COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. We have seen bold and courageous initiatives to give protection to millions of irregular migrants. However, these efforts are overwhelming the region, and they need help.

International support for this crisis falls short

While host countries are trying to take on this massive responsibility, international support for this crisis falls short. Last year's United Nations funding appeal received only half of the financial requirements to support those in need. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn so much of the world's attention and resources, that it has eclipsed this crisis. The international community needs to do more.

“*The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn so much of the world's attention and resources, that it has eclipsed this crisis. The cost of not acting now would be to endanger regional stability.*”

The cost of not acting now would be to endanger regional stability. In addition, large numbers of unvaccinated refugees and migrants would compound the severe public health and economic crisis in the region.

If we set the right conditions collectively, this crisis could be turned into an opportunity. Venezuelans bring skills, knowledge and an entrepreneurial spirit that can help to empower the post-COVID economic recovery of the region. That is why Canada, following in the footsteps of the European Union and Spain's 2020 Conference, is hosting a virtual high-level International Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants on June 17, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration.

Ignite a sense of urgency

We want to make people aware of the huge impact this crisis is having and the burden being shouldered mainly by host countries in the region. We must ignite nothing less than a sense of urgency for governments outside the region, multilateral organisations, international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society to demonstrate solidarity.

It is time to let Venezuelan refugees and migrants, and their hosts, know that the world cares.

THE HUGE POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES PERU HAS TO FACE

07/11/2021 – HR/VP Blog – *In November 2021, I visited Peru, during my first trip to Latin America since the beginning of my mandate. Struggling with the highest COVID-19 death rate in the world and a highly polarised political landscape, Peru illustrates the challenges that Latin America is facing, as well as the expectations the region has towards the EU.*

I started this visit in Peru and will come back later in this blog on my stay in Brazil, which was the second part of this mission. I have often stressed that Latin America has not been present enough on the EU's radar screen.

No summit with Latin America has been held since 2015 and no high-level EU visit has taken place for the last nine years. And yet, European firms have invested more in Latin America than in China, Russia, Japan and India put together and millions of our citizens live there, just as many South Americans live in Europe. Latin America is one of the regions in the world that is closest to us in terms of culture and history.

While we may not pay enough attention to Latin America, this is not the case for other powers. China in particular is now the first trade partner of many countries in the region and it has invested heavily in recent years, not only economically but also politically. The European Union must become more active and develop closer economic and political links with Latin America. I hope this trip will begin to reverse the trend, before the EU–Latin America Leaders' Meeting that we will be holding in early December.

Peru, the most affected country in the world by COVID-19

Peru has been the country most affected in the world by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of number of deaths as a percentage of the population. This is due in particular to the poor state of the Peruvian health system, with a lack of oxygen capacities and intensive care beds. The country has been indeed marked by many crises and dysfunctions within its public sphere for many years now. During the

next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), Peru will be the country for which we will increase EU support the most, particularly in the health sector.

Peruvian schools are only starting to reopen now after two years of closure; it risks to have serious consequences for the future. On the economic front, the prolonged lockdowns have had devastating effects in a country that lacks a developed social welfare system. Most economic activities are carried out in the informal sector, by people whose livelihoods depend on their ability to go out to work every day. This crisis has not only aggravated inequalities that were already very high before; it has also resulted in a spectacular increase in sexual violence against women and girls, as the human rights NGOs we met reported to us.

“*President Castillo embodies the desire to rebalance a country that is very unequal, both socially and territorially between the giant metropolitan area of Lima and the poor rural areas.*”

Our visit came also at a delicate political moment for Peru. President Pedro Castillo, candidate of the leftist party Peru Libre, has just been elected in late July. As a teacher in the outlying region of Cajamarca, he was not part of the traditional Peruvian political class and was virtually unknown at the national level until only a few months ago. President Castillo embodies the desire to rebalance a country that is very unequal, both socially and territorially between the giant metropolitan area of Lima and the poor rural areas feeling neglected.

The election result was very tight, leading to part of the opposition to challenge his legitimacy as President. These elections were however monitored by an EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM), which concluded that the elections were free and fair and Pedro Castillo's election legitimate. When we met, I had the occasion to comment on the EOM report with María del Carmen Alva, President of the Congress and member of the opposition.

Although Pedro Castillo took office on 28 July, when we were in Peru he was facing a serious social and political crisis. Deep social conflicts are linked to the negative environmental impact of mining, which plays a fundamental role in the Peruvian economy. Pedro Castillo has had also to change Prime Minister after only two months in office and the new one, Mirtha Vásquez, had to pass the vote of confidence of the Peruvian Congress on 4 November, the day after our visit. While we were in Lima, the Interior Minister also had to resign.

Despite Peru's internal crisis, a warm welcome

Despite Peru's internal crisis, we were hosted warmly by President Castillo; his Minister of Foreign Affairs Oscar Maúrtua, an experienced diplomat; his Minister of Economy and Finance Pedro Francke, a prestigious economics professor; his Minister of Trade and Tourism Roberto Sánchez Palomino; and other political leaders, including the Governors of the provinces of Ayacucho, Cajamarca, La Libertad and San Martín, all of them invited by President Castillo to meet with us.

“ I was impressed by President Castillo's determination to fight inequalities and improve the living conditions of the poor, based on his profound knowledge of the situation, due to his long-time experience on the ground.”

When I met President Castillo, I was impressed by his determination to fight inequalities and improve the living conditions of the poor. This determination is not principally based on an ideological approach, but rather on his profound knowledge of the situation, due to his long-time experience on the ground. He understands well the risk that the political polarisation is posing for the stability of the country. His decision to take on board experienced and qualified people like Ministers Maúrtua and Francke is rather reassuring in this regard.

The difficult issue of raising more tax revenues

With Pedro Francke, Peru's Economy and Finance Minister, we discussed the deep structural difficulties Peru is facing, particularly in terms of public finances: with around 15 % of GDP, Peru has the lowest ratio of public resources in Latin America. To reduce social and territorial inequalities and provide public services, Pedro Castillo's government will have to increase this share significantly. From a political point of view, it is always a difficult undertaking. In a country as polarised and divided as Peru, it will certainly be a serious challenge. I shared with Minister Francke my experience as the Treasury Secretary of State in Spain in the 1980s, establishing at that time a modern taxation system able to reduce tax avoidance drastically. I also advised him to continue supporting an open economy able to attract foreign direct investment.

“ To reduce social and territorial inequalities and provide public services, Pedro Castillo's government will have to increase tax revenues significantly. In a country as polarised as Peru, it will certainly be a serious challenge.”

Since 2013, we have a trade agreement with Peru. All our interlocutors, including the Minister of Trade and the governors of the provinces, stressed the importance of this agreement and how it has helped to increase the output and exports of many small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly the producers of quinoa, coffee and cocoa. This agreement also includes a human rights clause.

The representatives of Peruvian NGOs, whom I met, confirmed the importance of this clause and the levers it gives them to act on the ground and improve the respect for fundamental rights in a country where this issue often remains problematic. Peru is therefore a good example of how this type of agreement can be mutually beneficial, not only on a strictly economic level but also in terms of respect for people's fundamental rights.

We also discussed the issue of drugs production and trafficking, which is of major concern in Peru. The EU and Peru have established cooperation mechanisms in this regards and we discussed ways to develop them further. I was also impressed to learn that Peru, a country of 33 million inhabitants, has welcomed 1.3 million refugees from Venezuela despite its own social and economic difficulties.



Beyond the official meetings, the moment that struck me most during my Peruvian stay was the visit we paid in the suburbs of Lima, in the Chorrillos District, to a group of women who have developed a craft activity, thanks to the support of the European Union. I could see first-hand the extent of the housing and urban planning problems in the huge urban area of Lima, which has more than 10 million inhabitants and is home to a third of the country's population. In many neighbourhoods, housing remains precarious and basic services are non-existent or very limited.

The wounds left by Sendero Luminoso

I was also able to measure the depth of the wounds left by the violence that Peru has experienced over the last few decades. The women who run this project are Amerindian from the Ayacucho region on the Altiplano. They fled to Lima to avoid being caught between the terrorists of the guerrilla organisation Sendero Luminoso, of which the region was a stronghold, and the Peruvian army, which was guilty of numerous abuses during its fight against the guerrilla. Although Sendero Luminoso has been defeated for about twenty years, this painful history has left deep wounds, which contribute to explain the prevailing polarisation of the country.

To make a living, while maintaining their ancestral culture, these women produce and sell high quality traditional wood paintings known as [Sarhua tables](#) ⁽³²³⁾. COVID-19 and the lockdowns have greatly affected their activity, but thanks to their tenacity and solidarity, they held on. I am proud that the EU has contributed to enable these women to carry out this activity of great economic and cultural value.

High expectations to the EU

My first visit to Peru as High Representative illustrates both the colossal challenges that Latin America is facing after the COVID-19 crisis, to fight social and territorial inequalities and to attain political stability. It also illustrates how important it is, that we respond to the high expectations that the region has on the European Union.

⁽³²³⁾ See https://second.wiki/wiki/tablas_de_sarhua

A USEFUL VISIT TO BRAZIL

09/11/2021 – *Blog – After Peru, I went to Brazil, one of the main actors in Latin America. The discussions with Brazilian leaders were principally focused on the EU–Mercosur trade agreement and on environmental protection measures. Brazil's recent new commitments, particularly on deforestation, are welcome but need a swift implementation.*

With its 213 million inhabitants, its large and diversified economy – the 12th biggest in GDP – and its gigantic territory, Brazil is a major player in the world today. With the Amazon rainforest, it also holds one of the main keys to the future of biodiversity and the global climate. After 9 years without a high-level visit from the EU, it was high time to come to this pivotal country.

In Brazil, power is not concentrated in the hands of the President

Before summarising the exchanges with the country's main political authorities, I believe it is important to clarify the functioning of Brazilian institutions, especially for the European public, which is often not familiar with these issues. In our public debate, there is a tendency to over-identify Brazil with its President and the government he or she leads. During our visit, the think tankers we met, who are not linked to the current executive, stressed how this approach does not reflect correctly the multifaceted reality of Brazil.

Brazil is a federation in which the federated states have a large degree of autonomy and many prerogatives of their own. Moreover, federal power itself is not concentrated in the hands of the President and the executive he or she appoints. Powerful counter-powers exist both in the country's Supreme Court and the judicial system and in the Brazilian Congress. Our interlocutors, even when they were not in favour of the current President, indicated that this balance of power continued to work until now. However, they also expressed concerns for the future in the context of the Presidential election to be held next year.

This shared power is probably best illustrated by how the country has handled the COVID-19 outbreak. President Jair Bolsonaro has opposed lockdowns, but this did not prevent many state and municipal authorities from taking such measures. He

has also repeatedly expressed his opposition to vaccination against COVID-19 and remains unvaccinated himself.

However, the vaccination rate of the Brazilian population is now higher than that of the United States and the European Union, thanks in particular to their growing local vaccine production capacity, including the Chinese vaccine *Sinovac* produced by the Butantan Institute and the *AstraZeneca* vaccine produced by Fiocruz. Eurofarma Laboratorios plans also to produce 100 million doses Pfizer/BioNtech vaccines doses yearly for distribution in Latin America, starting in early 2022.

As a result, the pandemic has significantly declined in Brazil. Under the Team Europe label, the European Union, its member states and the European financial institutions have mobilised more than €650 million to help Brazil cope with the pandemic, an important support which has been welcomed by the Brazilian authorities.

The issue of climate and environmental protection

During our meetings with President Jair Bolsonaro, Vice President Hamilton Mourão, Foreign Minister Carlos Alberto França, Environment Minister Eduardo Leite and the President of the Senate Rodrigo Pacheco, our talks focused mainly on the agreement between the European Union and Mercosur on the one hand and the issue of climate and environmental protection on the other hand.

Regarding climate, due to the widespread use of ethanol in its transportation system and the importance of hydropower in its electricity production (2/3 of the total), renewable energies represent 48 % of Brazil's energy balance, compared with 20 % in the European Union in 2019. As a result, Brazil is a low emitter of greenhouse gases due to energy use, but the critical issue of deforestation remains.

“ For COP 26, the Brazilian government has taken positive initiatives. It has increased its commitment to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions, joined the Global Methane Pledge launched in Glasgow and committed itself to end illegal deforestation by 2030.”



In the context of the COP 26 in Glasgow, the Brazilian government has recently taken important initiatives. Firstly, it has increased its commitment to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions from -43 % to -50 % by 2030 compared to their 2005 level, while committing to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. This represents an effort that is broadly comparable to what we are doing in the EU. The Brazilian government has also joined the Global Methane Pledge launched by EC President Ursula Von der Leyen and US President Joe Biden in Glasgow to limit emissions of this specific gas, which is much more powerful as a greenhouse gas than CO₂. Last but not least, Brazil has committed to end illegal deforestation by 2030 and has presented an action plan in this regards.

These are important commitments for the future of the world's climate and biodiversity, of course, but also for the relationship between the European Union and Brazil, which had been clouded in the recent past by disagreements on these issues. However, I also stressed how important it is for these commitments to be fully implemented on the ground. Several non-governmental interlocutors stressed the difficulties that could arise in this area, particularly on the issue of illegal deforestation, due to the lack of resources and deep vested interests opposing actions to combat it effectively.

On the EU–Mercosur agreement important difficulties remain

When I came to Brazil as President of the European Parliament in 2006, I was told that the signing of the trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur was imminent. Fifteen years later and two years after its signature, it is still not in place. Our interlocutors recalled that they remain attached to the agreement, because it would help modernising the Brazilian economy and accelerating productivity gains. This agreement is also important to help advance the integration process of Mercosur itself. The leaders of European companies in Brazil that I met in Sao Paulo also stressed the importance and benefits of this agreement, for both the Brazilian and the European economies.

“ I confirmed in our discussions the European Commission’s desire to see the EU–Mercosur Trade Agreement succeed after a long gestation period, while clearly pointing out the difficulties that remain to be overcome.”

I confirmed in our discussions the European Commission’s desire to see this dossier succeed after a long gestation period, while clearly pointing out the difficulties that remain to be overcome. The European Parliament is opposed to the ratification of this agreement in its current state, as are some member states, because of environmental issues. It needs to be completed. Moreover, the exact nature of this agreement – is it a trade agreement or an association agreement? – remains to be clarified, and this has important implications for the ratification process. For sure, the new environmental commitments of the Brazilian government could help move this agreement forward if they are really followed up.

We also discussed Brazil’s membership application to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a move we support, and that of security cooperation, which is already effective in the Central African Republic but which could be extended to other regions, notably Mozambique.

Finally, I met with representatives of UN Women in Brazil. They gave us a detailed picture of the difficult situation of women committed to defending the rights of their communities in Brazil, as they are often threatened with their lives or physical integrity.

Operation Welcome for Venezuelan refugees

We also attended a presentation of the *Operação Acolhida (Operation Welcome)* ⁽³²⁴⁾, for the relocation within Brazil of Venezuelan refugees arriving at the country's border, carried out by the Brazilian government with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration and the support of the EU. Of the approximately 260 000 Venezuelans in the country, it has so far involved 61 000 people.

I was particularly moved by the testimonies given during our meeting by two Venezuelan refugees who have benefited from it. One had arrived at the border almost starving to death with his family and was able to be welcomed, re-housed and given a job thanks to *Operação Acolhida*. The other had to flee because her son was seriously ill and could not be treated in Venezuela. He was taken in and cared for in Brazil. It is in moments like these that one realises that human beings we are talking about are not just numbers in statistics and that our actions – or inaction – can have vital consequences for real people.

Despite recent tensions, this visit helped to re-establish direct contact with the Brazilian authorities and Brazil will participate at the EU–Latin America Leaders' Meeting that we will organise next month. In particular, the new Brazilian commitments on the environment can make a significant contribution to further progress on the trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur, provided they are implemented on the ground.

⁽³²⁴⁾ See <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/4/607e8ebe4/relocations-brazil-offer-dignity-hope-thousands-venezuelans.html>

VENEZUELA MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS AND THE EU ELECTORAL MISSION

30/11/2021 – Blog – *For years, Venezuela has been gripped by a political stalemate leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. I have decided to send an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) to follow the country's regional and municipal elections held in November 2021. To send this mission was controversial, however I am convinced that it will contribute to help find a solution to the Venezuelan crisis through political dialogue.*

Venezuela is in the midst of [a dramatic economic, social and political crisis](#) ⁽³²⁵⁾, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The mismanagement of the country by the Maduro government, which EU member states do not recognise as legitimate, and the effect of economic sanctions, have resulted in hyperinflation and a severe scarcity of essential goods in a potentially rich, oil-producing country.

It hampers the lives of a large part of the population, making Venezuela, one of the countries most affected globally by food insecurity, according to the World Food Programme. Up to 70 % of school-aged children are not attending school regularly and around 82 % of the population do not have regular access to water. The country has seen several large outbreaks of infectious diseases and homicide rates are among the highest in the world.

More than 5 million Venezuelans have fled the country since 2015 towards other Latin American countries and Spain. This mass exodus has resulted in the lack of qualified personnel, for instance of over 200 000 teachers. The situation in border areas, with the presence of armed groups and criminal gangs, is of particular concern. During my recent trip to [Peru](#) ⁽³²⁶⁾ and [Brazil](#) ⁽³²⁷⁾, I had the opportunity to listen to testimonies of some Venezuelan refugees about what they have endured in the country and I got a better idea on how much the continuing Venezuelan crisis affects the whole region.

⁽³²⁵⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/latin-america-and-caribbean/venezuela_en

⁽³²⁶⁾ See p. 432.

⁽³²⁷⁾ See p. 438.

The EU is helping to find a political solution to the crisis

In this context, working closely with the International Contact Group, the EU has been engaged for two years in helping to find a political solution to the crisis. I have been personally actively involved in these efforts, [for which I have often been criticised](#) ⁽³²⁸⁾ from both sides. While they have so far not yet delivered the intended results, we have to continue helping find a way out of the Venezuelan crisis, which can only come from the Venezuelan people themselves through political negotiations as [the ones that were taking place in Mexico](#) ⁽³²⁹⁾ recently.

“ We accepted the demand to send an EOM, once we got confirmation of the participation of the main opposition parties, which meant that these elections would be more inclusive than the previous ones.”

An important new step in this direction was the decision to send an EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the recent regional and municipal elections for the first time in 15 years. We did not send an EOM to observe last year's legislative elections because the necessary conditions were not met. This time we accepted the demand from the Venezuelan National Electoral Council to send an EOM, once we got confirmation of the participation of the main opposition parties, which meant that these elections would be more inclusive than the previous ones to which the opposition did not participate. The renewed composition of the Electoral Council was also widely seen in Venezuela as the most balanced of the last 20 years.

In addition, before taking the decision to deploy the EOM, the European External Action Service negotiated with the Venezuela authorities [an administrative agreement](#) ⁽³³⁰⁾, guaranteeing the possibility for the EU to observe the electoral process freely and in full respect of our strict observation methodology. This agreement was respected. It was however a controversial decision: some saw it as a way to legitimise the Maduro regime and to whitewash the electoral process, for other, an interference in internal affairs of Venezuela.

⁽³²⁸⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86852/venezuela-clear-urgency-political-and-democratic-solution_en

⁽³²⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/djibouti/103050/node/103050_en

⁽³³⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/104849/venezuela-eu-deploys-election-observation-mission_en



An Election Observation Mission is a complex organisation

An EOM is a complex organisation that requires much time and many resources to work properly. It was composed by almost 140 persons, under the responsibility of the Chief Observer, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Isabel Santos, accompanied by the Head of the European Parliament delegation Jordi Cañas. An EU EOM is always a strictly independent operation and its Chief Observer is in charge to protect this independence. The EOM experts were in the country well ahead of election day and remain to complete their final report, which will be made public in the coming weeks. This has nothing to do with the symbolic presence of a few personalities on the election day, lacking the capacity to assess the whole electoral process in the whole country.

On 21 November, the regional and local elections were held to choose 23 governors, 335 mayors and more than 2 700 state legislative and municipal councillors. Unsurprisingly, given the high degree of disaffection of the population, the turnout was only of 42.5 % of Venezuelans casting a vote, the lowest in the last 25 years. The fact that some 6 million people, one in seven Venezuelans, have left the country has however also affected this turnout.

According to the Venezuelan National Electoral Council, the pro-Maduro government political forces won 20 governors out of 23 and 212 mayors out of 335, although a majority of votes went to non-pro government options. The fragmentation of the opposition has limited its ability to capitalise on these votes. With 59 mayors, the opposition grouped in the unity platform has however doubled its number of mayors compared to the 2017 elections, despite the unfavourable political conditions that the EU EOM pointed out in its preliminary statement of findings.

“ *The Election Observation Mission had found some concrete improvements in the electoral process. But it also stressed that major structural problems remained affecting the fairness and transparency of the elections.*”

In this statement, presented last Tuesday, Isabel Santos and Jordi Cañas, recognised that the EOM had found some concrete improvements in the electoral process compared with recent ones. But they also stressed that major structural problems remained: lack of judicial independence and non-adherence to the rule of law; use of state resources for political campaigning; a number of arbitrary political disqualification of candidates; lack of media independence. All of that affected the level-playing field and the fairness and transparency of the elections.

EU Election Observation Missions are not ‘election cops’

At the press conference, journalists repeatedly asked if the elections were free and fair. This suggests a certain misunderstanding of the role of international election observation missions of which the EU has long experience: we are not ‘election cops’. We were not there to legitimise or de-legitimise an election and to declare whether it was free and fair. The EU EOMs are designed to provide objective findings on how an electoral process is run, based on international democratic norms that the country has signed up to. And it forms the basis of a set of recommendations that can help improving future electoral processes.

“ *The EU Election Observation Mission was useful for the Venezuelan people and allows the EU and the international community to better assess the facts in the country.*”

Although Nicolas Maduro has declared recently that the EU EOM members were ‘spies’ who had come to discredit the elections, the fact that the mission was well-received by a vast majority of Venezuelans on the ground and that they

responded positively to its preliminary statement, suggests that the decision to go and observe was the right one. It was useful for the Venezuelan people and allows the EU and the international community to better assess the facts in the country.

Helping bringing reconciliation in Venezuela

However, the most important contribution of this mission will be its final recommendations for future elections, which will be shared in early 2022. How to organise free and fair elections is indeed one of the key issues for any politically negotiated solution to the Venezuelan crisis. In any case, the EU will continue its efforts in helping bringing about reconciliation and 're-institutionalisation' in Venezuela to alleviate the pain suffered by the Venezuelans.

ANNEX

GLOBAL EVENTS AND KEY ACTIVITIES DURING 2021

Grouped by month and by topic, region or country, this timeline presents a selection of key global events that were of relevance to European foreign and security policy. It also features key meetings that I attended and visits or missions that took place.

JANUARY 2021

CHINA/HONG KONG – The EU condemns the mass arrest of people involved in the July 2020 pro-democracy primary elections.

ETHIOPIA – We welcome the expected resumption of talks between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Exchange with Ethiopia Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen on the situation in Tigray.

INDO-PACIFIC – EU Foreign Ministers discuss the Indo-Pacific region with Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi at the Foreign Affairs Council.

RUSSIA – Alexei Navalny was arrested and detained upon arrival in Moscow airport. The European Court of Human Rights issues a judgement concluding that Russia has violated the European Convention on Human Rights following the 12 August 2008 war in Georgia.

SAHEL – I exchange with Transition Prime Minister Bah Ndaw of Mali.

TURKEY – We witness an outbreak of student protests following the appointment of a new rector at Istanbul University. European Commission President von der Leyen and President Erdogan exchange focusing on European Council conclusions on Turkey. I meet with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu in Brussels. Foreign affairs council takes note of the change on tone and gestures of Turkey, and encourages talks on Cyprus to start promptly.

UNITED KINGDOM – UK Withdrawal agreement and provisional application of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement enters into force. Media report about EU-UK diplomatic row with Foreign Office not recognising the diplomatic status of the EU delegation in London.

UNITED STATES – Violent assault on the US Capitol building (5 people died and dozens injured). Joe Biden is inaugurated as the 46th President and returns the US to the Paris Agreement. I exchange with the new Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, on various topics including China.

VENEZUELA – The EU does not recognise the Venezuelan National Assembly elections results.

WESTERN BALKANS – I exchange with Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency Chairman Milorad Dodik regarding the situation of migrants in the country.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – I announce that the Council will use the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime for the first time.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EU Council identifies the Gulf of Guinea as a *Maritime Area of Interest* and launches the first pilot case of the Coordinated Maritime Presence.

FEBRUARY 2021

BELARUS – Foreign affairs Council discusses Belarus and agrees to adopt additional sanctions.

CHINA – I exchange with State Councillor/Foreign Minister Wang Yi on bilateral relations, COVID-19 response, international issues – particularly Myanmar and Iran. China bans the BBC. The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses the situation in Hong Kong, with an agreement for a two-step process of actions.

MYANMAR – I condemn the Myanmar military for detaining State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other democratic politicians. The EU Foreign Affairs Council decides of sanctions against the military and their economic interests.

IRAN – I am asked to coordinate US–Iran negotiations for a US return to the JCPOA deal.

LIBYA – The EU welcomes the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's agreement on a transitional unified executive authority for Libya.

MAGHREB/SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – The Joint Communication I have issued with the European Commission on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood is adopted.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – Following the war in Nagorno Karabakh, the General Staff of the Armenian Armed Forces calls for Prime Minister

Pashinyan to resign. He refuses and denounces this statement as an attempted coup.

RUSSIA – European Court of Human Rights declares arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable the 2017 sentence of imprisonment against Alexei Navalny. I visit Moscow and hold a bilateral exchange with Foreign Minister Lavrov. During this exchange, I learn through social media that Russia plans to expel 3 EU (Germany, Sweden, Poland) diplomats for allegedly participating in protests around Alexei Navalny's sentencing. A hostile press conference follows the meeting. The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses EU–Russia relations and gives its political agreement to use the EU's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime against those responsible for the illegal detention, prosecution and sentencing of Alexei Navalny.

UKRAINE – I exchanged with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba.

UNITED STATES – Secretary of State Blinken joins the Foreign Affairs Council via VTC.

VENEZUELA – Council adds 19 individuals to EU sanctions list for human rights violations in Venezuela; Venezuela declares EU Ambassador persona non grata in response to EU sanctions and consequently EU Council declares Venezuelan ambassador persona non grata.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – With the European Commission, I present a new strategy on how to strengthen multilateralism.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – European Commission doubles its contribution to the COVAX Facility reaching €1 billion, and €2.2 billion together with member states (Team Europe)

MARCH 2021

BELARUS – The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses the targeting of the Polish community in Belarus. Ryanair Flight from Athens to Vilnius is forced to land in Minsk by a Belarusian military aircraft. Upon landing, independent journalist Raman Pratasevich and Sofia Sopega are detained by the authorities. The European Council decides to adopt further listings of persons and entities, as well as targeted economic sanctions. The European Commission presents an Economic Support Plan for a (future) Democratic Belarus, with a promise of €3 billion in grants and loans once Belarus embarks on a democratic transition.

CHINA/HONG KONG – The EU reacts to National People's Congress decision to impose a regressive electoral reform on Hong Kong. G7 Foreign

Ministers' express grave concerns on China's move to erode democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong. The National People's Congress formally adopts the changes to Hong Kong's Basic Law, enshrining the changes to the electoral system.

CHINA – EU imposes sanctions under its EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime on four Chinese individuals and one entity for serious human rights violations against the Uighurs in Xinjiang. China retaliates by imposing sanctions against EU entities and individuals, including Members of the European Parliament. US Secretary of State Blinken and I re-launch the bilateral dialogue on China.

CYPRUS – I visit Cyprus where I meet the two leaders to discuss settlement talks; European Council welcomes the resumption of negotiations in which the EU will participate as an observer.

GULF REGION – I [exchange with Yemen Foreign Minister](#) Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak to discuss the peace process, humanitarian issues and economic revival in the country. The EU welcomes the announcement by Saudi Arabia to 'end the Yemeni crisis and reach a comprehensive political solution'.

GEORGIA – I exchange with the European Parliament on the inner-political escalation in Georgia following the 2020 Parliamentary elections. I chair the EU–Georgia Association Council with Prime Minister Garibashvili.

MYANMAR – I exchange with Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei (ASEAN Chair) Foreign Ministers to stress that UN Security Council must take action on Myanmar. At the EU Foreign Affairs Council, we adopt sanctions against 11 individuals responsible for the coup and the subsequent repression in the country; The EU condemns the escalation of violence in Myanmar, with over 100 civilians killed by the military on Armed Forces Day.

IRAN – I exchange with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif on JCPOA and other bilateral matters.

LIBYA – The EU welcomes the new Government of National Unity. I exchange with the new Libyan Prime Minister Abdulhamid Al-Debaiba.

RUSSIA – The EU imposes sanctions on 4 Russian individuals responsible for serious human rights violations in Navalny case and the repression of peaceful protests. G7 Foreign Ministers condemn Russia's continued actions to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses EU–Russia relations and imposes sanctions under its EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime on 2 Russian individuals for serious human rights violations against LGBTI people in Chechnya. I attend the NATO Ministerial discussion on Russia. US Secretary

Blinken and I agree to further address, in a coordinated manner, Russia's challenging behaviour.

SUDAN – I exchange with Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

SYRIA – I address European Plenary debate on 10 years of the conflict. Donors raise a total of €5.3 billion (of which €3.7 billion from the EU and member states) on the Fifth Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the Region.

TURKEY – With Commissioner Várhelyi, we condemn the actions regarding the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Turkey announces its withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. The Joint Communication on EU–Turkey relations that I prepared with the European Commission is endorsed by the European Council.

UNITED KINGDOM – I exchange with UK Foreign Secretary Raab.

UNITED STATES – Exchange between President von der Leyen and President Biden results in an agreement to suspend tariffs linked to the Airbus-Boeing disputes for an initial 4 months, an invitation to the Global Health Summit in Rome on 21 May, cooperation on climate action, a ministerial-level Trade and Technology Council, and cooperation as like-minded partners on foreign policy challenges. Secretary of State Blinken visits Brussels for the NATO Ministerial and holds bilateral exchanges with EC President von der Leyen and me. US President Biden participates in the European Council through video conference.

VENEZUELA – The [International Contact Group condemns the expulsion of the EU Head of Delegation to Venezuela](#). The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses situation in Venezuela. The US Secretary of State and I agree to coordinate closely on Venezuela.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – European Commission adopts a [Communication on the EU's humanitarian action in light of COVID-19](#).

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – EU [imposes sanctions](#) on 11 individuals and 4 entities from 6 countries (China, DPRK, Libya, Eritrea, South Sudan and Russia) under the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – I visit EUNAVFOR MED Irini in Rome for the first anniversary of the mission. EU Council establishes the [European Peace Facility](#).

APRIL 2021

CHINA/HONG KONG – The EU fails to adopt Council Conclusions on Hong Kong due to the negative vote of Hungary. Hong Kong passes a controversial immigration law.

CHINA – The EU regret the forced departure of the BBC's China correspondent and the surveillance, legal threats, obstruction, harassment and intimidation against foreign journalists in China.

CYPRUS – I exchange with UN Secretary General Guterres on upcoming informal 5+1 talks in Geneva. Three days of informal talks in Geneva fail to find common ground for Cyprus talks (the EU was not invited to participate).

ETHIOPIA – G7 Foreign Ministers issue a statement on the situation in Tigray. The Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs Haavisto undertakes a second mission to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) following my mandate to try to find a way toward peace and negotiations.

INDO-PACIFIC – The EU Foreign Affairs Council adopts the Indo-Pacific strategy and EU sanctions on 10+ individuals and two military-controlled conglomerates for the military coup in Myanmar and the ensuing repression. ASEAN Leaders' Summit reach a 'Five-Point Consensus' on Myanmar.

IRAN – Meetings of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA take place in Vienna throughout 3-weeks.

ISRAEL – Israel arrests Spanish aid worker Juana Ruiz Sanchez.

GEORGIA – EU regret the shortcomings in the selection process of Supreme Court Judges; President Michel announces agreement between the parties on a proposal to resolve the internal crisis in Georgia.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – Several days & nights of clashes between Palestinians and right wing Israelis in Jerusalem. Exchange with Palestinian Foreign Minister Al Malki in Brussels. I express my disappointment over the postponement of the election planned for 22 May.

RUSSIA – G7 Foreign Ministers condemn the large-scale build-up of Russian military forces on Ukraine's borders and in illegally-annexed Crimea. I exchange with US Secretary of State Blinken on this subject. The EU Foreign Affairs Council. The EU expresses solidarity with the Czech Republic over Russia's criminal activities on its territory, which breach international law. Russia imposes sanctions on 8 EU Nationals, including EP President and Commission Vice-President Vera Jourova. The Foreign Affairs Council discusses Alexei Navalny's deteriorating health and Russia's military build-up at the border with Ukraine and in Crimea, together with Ukrainian FM Kuleba,

SAHEL – I visit Mauritania, Tchad and Mali and have exchanges with Mauritania President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El-Ghazouani, Niger President Mohamed Bazoum and Malian partners.

TURKEY – President of the European Council Michel and European Commission President von der Leyen visit Ankara to meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

UNITED KINGDOM – European Parliament votes overwhelmingly in favour of the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

UNITED STATES – Exchange with US Secretary of States Blinken on Russia/Ukraine, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and the JCPOA. The EU express solidarity with the United States on the impact of the SolarWinds cyber operation, which, according to the US, was conducted by Russia.

MAY 2021

CHINA/HONG KONG – G7 Foreign Ministers recall their grave concern for the erosion of democratic elements of the electoral system in Hong Kong. EEAS Secretary General Sannino and US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman hold inaugural EU–US Dialogue on China.

ETHIOPIA – Due to the ongoing civil war, we cancel the previously foreseen Election Observation Mission.

INDO-PACIFIC – I issue a joint statement with Foreign Minister of India Jaishankar on Afghanistan. During the EU–India Leaders' Meeting we agree on a connectivity partnership, the re-launch of Free Trade Agreement, investment agreement and geographical indications negotiations. EU–Japan virtual summit agrees on a Green Alliance for joint climate ambition and action, and cover cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. EU Foreign Ministers discuss the Indo-Pacific at the informal Foreign Affairs Council in Lisbon.

IRAN – Joint Commission of JCPOA moves forward with further rounds of negotiations in Vienna. EEAS Deputy Secretary General Mora announces that 'an agreement is shaping'. I meet Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Zarif during the Antalya Diplomatic Forum. He underlines Iran's commitment to the negotiations in Vienna. Hard-liner Ebrahim Raisi wins Iran Presidential elections with lowest turnout since 1979.

LEBANON – I exchange with Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Charbel Wehbe to express my concern on the situation of the country. France imposes sanctions on Lebanese political elites responsible for blocking the new government.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Polisario Front leader Mr. Ghali is hospitalised in Spanish hospital upon the request of Algeria opening a diplomatic crisis with Morocco. More than 9 000 people cross the Morocco-Spanish border to Ceuta after Moroccan authorities relax border controls. Exchange with Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Bourita in an attempt to appease tensions and overcome diplomatic crisis.

MIDDLE EAST – The violent 11-day conflict between Hamas and Israel marks the worst confrontation since 2014. We have held an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council to coordinate an EU response. Israel and Hamas announce a ceasefire after more than 200 deaths on Palestinian side, and 10 on Israeli side.

RUSSIA – G7 Foreign Ministers condemn Russia's destabilising behaviour, breaches of international law, cyberspace threat, treatment of Alexei Navalny and human rights violations. The EU Foreign Affairs Council discussed Russia's military build-up around Ukraine and expressed solidarity with the Czech Republic and Bulgaria in light of diplomatic row with Moscow. We regret the publication by Russia of a list of so-called 'unfriendly States', on which the United States and the Czech Republic feature. The European Council reaffirm the EU's unity and solidarity in front of hostile Russian activities, and invites me and the European Commission to present a report with policy options at the European Council in June.

SYRIA – Presidential elections give officially victory to Assad by 95 %. The EU does not recognise the legitimacy of these results.

TURKEY – Turkey applies to join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

UNITED KINGDOM – Exchange with Foreign Secretary Raab and agreement on the establishment of the EU Delegation to the UK with full diplomatic status.

UNITED STATES – Exchange with Secretary of States Blinken during the G7 Ministerial to discuss Iran/JCPOA, Russia/Ukraine/Navalny, Afghanistan, China and Colombia. The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses transatlantic relations with the virtual presence of US Presidential Envoy on Climate, Kerry. The first EU-US consultations on China take place between EEAS Secretary General Sannino and US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman.

WESTERN BALKANS – The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses the difficult situation in the Western Balkans. I exchange with Macedonian Prime Minister Zaev. I revive the tradition of holding an informal dinner with Western Balkan leaders.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – The European Council invites the US, Canada and Norway to participate in the PESCO military mobility project.

JUNE 2021

AFGHANISTAN – I meet with the Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar in Antalya to discuss the situation in the country and the Taliban offensive.

BELARUS – EU Council bans Belarusian carriers from its airspace and airports. I address the UN Security Council meeting on this issue. Canada, the EU, UK, US issue a joint statement on Lukashenko regime's continuing attacks on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and international law. EU Council adopts fourth package of EU sanctions over enduring repression and the forced landing of a Ryanair flight.

CHINA/HONG KONG – We condemn the closure of Apple Daily's Hong Kong operations.

CYPRUS – UN Informal meeting in Geneva. At European Council, leaders recall their full commitment to a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus based on UN recommendations.

YEMEN – I meet with Yemeni Foreign Minister Bin Mubarak in Brussels to discuss the situation in the country and the prospect of returning to peace.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP – I meet with Foreign Ministers of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

ETHIOPIA – General elections take place, in spite of civil war going on in Tigray.

IRAQ – Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs Fuad Hussein participates to the EU Foreign Affairs Council. Prime Minister Khadimi meets with Commission President von der Leyen and European Parliament President Sassoli.

ISRAEL – Knesset votes for a Coalition Government putting an end to 12 year-old Netanyahu era. Naftali Bennet becomes Prime Minister for the first two years, and then Yair Lapid should take over the Prime Minister role. I exchange with [Minister of Foreign Affairs Lapid](#) after the vote.

BELGRADE/PRISTINA – A [high level meeting of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue](#) has been held in Brussels. Leaders agreed to reconvene before end of July.

LEBANON – The EU Foreign Affairs Council discusses the situation in Lebanon. I visit to Lebanon to try to unblock the internal political deadlock.

LIBYA – I participate to the Berlin Conference on the future of Libya. The Conference agrees on the organisation of the parliamentary and presidential elections on 24 December 2021 and the implementation of the ceasefire, including the withdrawal of foreign forces.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Morocco announces that it would readmit non-accompanied minor that entered Europe irregularly. Legislative elections in Algeria take place with a record-low turnout (23 %) after calls to boycott by the Hirak movement. National Liberation Front wins the election and Ayman Benabderrahmane is named new Prime Minister. I speak to the Moroccan Foreign Minister Bourita at the Global Coalitions against Daesh about the migrant crisis in Ceuta.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – Foreign Affairs Ministers of Austria, Lithuania and Romania visit South Caucasus under my mandate to assess the situation.

RUSSIA – I present the Joint Communication on EU–Russia relations. The Russian Federation announces its withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty.

TURKEY – At European Council, leaders take stock of the progress made since March on EU–Turkey relations. The Commission proposes additional €5.7 billion for cooperation on migration, of which €3 additional billion will go to Turkey.

UKRAINE – The EU and Ukraine [launch](#) dialogue on cyber security. I address the UN Security Council on Ukraine, the Crimea Platform Summit and the need to implement the Minsk Agreements.

VENEZUELA I issue a joint Statement on Venezuela with US Secretary of State Blinken and Canadian Foreign Minister Champagne.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – I meet with UN Secretary General António Guterres.

JULY 2021

BELARUS – We condemn the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees by the regime

CENTRAL ASIA – I travelled to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to attend the Central and South Asia Regional Connectivity Conference.

CHINA/MACAO – We condemn the disqualification of candidates for the Legislative Assembly elections in Macao.

CHINA – I meet with the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss bilateral relations.

CYPRUS – Turkey President Erdogan visits Northern Cyprus on the 47th anniversary of the invasion. We condemn the unacceptable unilateral decision to change the status of Varosha by Turkey.

ETHIOPIA – Ethiopia announces the second filling of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. We ask for a negotiation with Sudan and Egypt on that matter.

GEORGIA – Statement on controversial appointments of Supreme Court judges.

IRAQ – Exchange with the Iraqi Foreign Minister Hussein on the migrant issue in the Lithuanian-Belarusian border.

IRAN – Supreme National Security Council rejects the draft agreement negotiated in the past three months in Vienna. I exchange with Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif on the developments in Afghanistan and the JCPOA. Protests spread around Iran due to water shortages and blackouts of electricity.

ISRAEL – I meet with Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs Lapid ahead of his informal participation to the EU Foreign Affairs Council.

BELGRADE/PRISTINA – I take part in the new round of Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue.

LEBANON – A new Lebanese government is formed after the nomination of Najib Mikati as Prime Minister-designate. We [announces](#) a new sanctions regime after agreement in the Foreign Affairs Council.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Tunisian President Kais Saied sacks government and suspends parliament. We ask the Tunisian authorities to return quickly to the constitutional order.

MOLDOVA – Pro-European forces win parliamentary elections. I welcome this move with Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi.

LATIN AMERICA – I address the European Parliament Plenary on the political crisis in Nicaragua. The Haitian President Jovenel Moïse is assassinated. We condemn the crackdown on civil unrest in Cuba.

WESTERN BALKANS – The Stabilisation and Association Council takes places.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EU sets up a military training mission to help Mozambique address the crisis in Cabo Delgado. We urge Chinese authorities to take action against malicious cyber activities undertaken from its territory.

AUGUST 2021

AFGHANISTAN – The Taliban take over Kabul and rule over the country. Ministers hold an extraordinary EU Foreign Affairs Council

BELARUS – We convene an extraordinary meeting of Interior Ministers on the situation at the EU's external borders with Belarus.

INDO-PACIFIC – I co-chair the Post-Ministerial Conference ahead of the ASEAN Regional Forum Ministerial.

IRAQ – I exchange with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hussein to welcome the fact that Iraq suspended flights to Belarus.

IRAN – Parliament approves new President's hard-liner cabinet. I Exchange with the new Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian.

LEBANON – I urge the Lebanese authorities to deliver results on investigation of the causes of the blast at the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the Beirut port explosion. I participate to the Conference in support of the Lebanese people. The EU mobilises €5.5 million for coronavirus response to Lebanon.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Algeria cuts diplomatic relations with Morocco after accusing its neighbour of 'hostile actions'. I exchange with Algerian Foreign Minister Lamamra to try to help calm down tensions.

MOLDOVA – I exchange with new Prime Minister Gavrilița.

LATIN AMERICA – EU imposes sanctions on eight more individuals in Nicaragua. I announce, along with US Secretary of State Blinken and Canadian Foreign Minister Champagne, that Venezuelan-led, comprehensive negotiations will soon begin in Mexico.

WESTERN BALKANS – Christian Schmidt takes over as new Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian Serbs announce a boycott of state institutions over genocide denial ban.

SEPTEMBER 2021

AFGHANISTAN – During an informal meeting in Slovenia, EU Foreign Ministers and Ministers of Defence agree on the rules of engagement with Afghanistan and diplomatic presence in Kabul. Taliban appoints interim government, which is not inclusive. Informal Foreign Affairs Council in New York discusses EU position towards Afghanistan. I discussed also EU's engagement with Afghanistan during my visit to Qatar.

CENTRAL ASIA – I meet with Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Kazakbaev in Brussels.

CHINA – I hold the EU China Strategic Dialogue with Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

GULF – I meet with the Gulf Cooperation Council in New York. The EU and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hold the 1st Human Rights Dialogue. I visit Qatar to discuss bilateral issues and relations with Afghanistan.

IRAQ – I visit Iraq, covering Baghdad and Erbil. The EU deploys an Electoral Observation Mission ahead of October parliamentary elections.

IRAN – I meet with the new Iranian Foreign Minister in New York to discuss principally the JCPOA.

BELGRADE/PRISTINA – EU deploys an Electoral Observation Mission for Kosovo local elections. An agreement was reached to solve tensions in Northern Kosovo regarding car license plates.

LEBANON – The new Lebanese government receive a successful vote of confidence.

LIBYA – I travel to Tripoli to assess the progress of the peace process.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – I visit Tunisia for the first time to assess the political situation with the authorities and express our concerns.

MOLDOVA – I meet with new Prime Minister of Moldova Gavrilita in Brussels to ensure her of our full support to the independence and territorial integrity of Moldova.

RUSSIA – Duma and local elections take places in Russia without any independent observation. I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov at the UN General Assembly in New York.

SAHEL – I met the Foreign Minister of the transitional authorities in Mali at the UNGA in New York.

UNITED STATES – EU and US initiate the Global Methane Pledge. I met US Secretary of State Blinken in New York.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – Political talks between the Venezuela regime and opposition start in Mexico. The EU Electoral Observation Mission in Venezuela is deployed. EEAS denies Bolivian President's allegations against the former Head of Delegation for meddling in political crisis.

WESTERN BALKANS – I meet with Western Balkans leaders at the UN General Assembly in New York.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – During its State of the Union address, EC President von der Leyen announces the new EU Global Gateway initiative on connectivity.

OCTOBER 2021

CENTRAL ASIA – I meet the Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmonov.

CHINA/HONG KONG – China expels democratically elected district councillors from Hong Kong's assembly, further shrinking the space for civil society in the city.

GULF – I travel to the United Arab Emirates. I held talks in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and visited EXPO Dubai. I met with Yemeni President Mansour Hadi in Riyadh as part of my visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

IRAQ – Parliamentary elections take place with competitive polling despite underlying difficulties as reported by the EU Election Observation Mission.

IRAN – The new Iranian chief negotiator for the JCPOA and EEAS Deputy Secretary General Mora met in Brussels.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Exchange with Tunisian President Saied about the political and institutional situation in Tunisia.

MOLDOVA – EU–Moldova Association Council takes place and underlies EU's full support to Moldova in the gas row with Russia.

PALESTINE – I meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh in Brussels. We condemn the listing of six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organisations.

AFRICA – I address the European Parliament Plenary on the human rights situation in Rwanda. I visit Rwanda at the occasion of the EU–AU Ministerial Conference.

SYRIA – The sixth round of talks of the Syria Constitutional Committee in Geneva start.

SUDAN – A Coup d'État takes place in Sudan, the EU condemns this Coup.

UKRAINE – I attend EU–Ukraine summit in Kyiv.

UNITED STATES – The EU and the US launch the Global Methane Pledge. I met with US secretary of State Blinken in Washington.

LATIN AMERICA – I meet with Bolivian Foreign Minister Mayta and Paraguayan Foreign Minister Acevedo in Brussels. I exchange with Costa Rican Minister of Foreign Affairs Solano Quirós.

WESTERN BALKANS – The EU–Western Balkans Summit takes place in Brdo. The 2021 Enlargement Package is published. I issue a joint statement with US Secretary of State Blinken on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – The EU’s Arctic Strategy is adopted.

NOVEMBER 2021

AFGHANISTAN – EU holds talks with Taliban interim government in Doha (Qatar).

BELARUS – Council suspends visa facilitation provisions for officials of the Belarus regime. I address the European Parliament and issue a [EU27 Declaration](#) on the situation at the borders. I talk with Belarus Foreign Minister Makei twice. The EU Foreign Affairs Council broadens scope for sanctions to tackle instrumentalisation of migrants. With the European Commission I issue a joint Communication on Belarus which includes a legislative proposal to blacklist airlines, travel agencies and other intermediaries active in human trafficking.

CENTRAL ASIA – The EU–Central Asia Economic Forum takes place in Dushanbe (Tajikistan). I chair the EU–Central Asia Ministerial meeting.

CYPRUS – At the Foreign Affairs Council, EU Ministers agree to initiate an Option Paper on Varosha.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP – I chair an EU Ministerial meeting to prepare Eastern Partnership Summit

ETHIOPIA – The state of emergency is declared in Ethiopia. The EU expresses deep concern for the worsening situation in the country.

IRAQ – I strongly condemn the attack against the Prime Minister.

IRAN – Vienna talks on JCPOA resume after 5 months break.

LEBANON – Diplomatic tensions escalate with Gulf countries after Information Minister Kordahi criticised Saudi Arabia’s role in Yemen. Minister Kordahi steps down.

LIBYA – Libyan Council Presidency suspends Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush. I participate in the Paris International Libya Conference. I meet the Libyan Vice President Al Koni in Brussels and announce the deployment of an Electoral Expert Mission for the then foreseen 24 December presidential elections.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The EU urges Armenia and Azerbaijan to exercise utmost restraint in the new outbreak of violence.

PALESTINE – EEAS and Directorate General NEAR have several meetings with Palestinian NGOs (including some listed as terrorist by Israel) as well as Israel Government representatives. EU and UN General Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees mark 50 years of Strategic Partnership.

RUSSIA – The EU strongly condemns Russian anti-satellite test.

SUDAN – The EU urgently calls upon the military power to immediately release all detainees as result of the arbitrary arrests in the country. The return of Abdalla Hamdok as Prime Minister of a civilian-led transitional government is welcomed by the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the European Union, Switzerland and Canada.

UKRAINE – I met with Prime Minister Shmyhal to discuss Russian military build-up at the borders.

UNITED STATES – President Biden, EC President von der Leyen and UK Prime Minister Johnson announce the Commitment to address climate crisis through infrastructure development. President von der Leyen meets President Biden in Washington.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – Visit to Peru and Brazil. We declare that the EU does not recognise the elections held on 7th November in Nicaragua. I issue a statement after the regional and local elections in Venezuela took place.

WESTERN BALKANS – A joint EU–US mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina aims to solve the situation created by the unilateral decisions and secessionist rhetoric of Milorad Dodik and Republika Srpska.

GENERAL, MULTILATERAL – At the COP 26 in Glasgow, the EU takes a decisive part to the discussions. EU announces €1 billion pledge to protect world forests and an additional contribution of €100 million to the Adaptation Fund.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EU Training Mission Mozambique is officially launched on the ground. I formally present the draft of the Strategic Compass to the Foreign Affairs Ministers and Defence Ministers Council.

DECEMBER 2021

BELARUS – A [fifth package of sanctions](#) against the Belarus regime is adopted, targeting 28 Belarusian individuals and entities, involved in

facilitating irregular crossings of EU external borders and the continuing repression against the Belarusian people. A [joint statement](#) on similar measures is issued by EU, Canada, UK and the US. Belarus Foreign Ministry announces counter measures. I meet representatives of democratic Belarus, with the participation of President of the European Council Michel. European Commission President von der Leyen announces an additional [€30 million](#) to further strengthen its support to the people of Belarus. The EU condemns the sentencing against Siarhei Tsikhanouski and five other prominent Belarusians political prisoners.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA – The Parliament of Bosnia's Republika Srpska voted to pull out of the country's armed forces and tax system in a non-binding recommendation, prompting the reaction of the Quint and the EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

CHILE – The second round of presidential elections leads to the victory of Gabriel Boric.

CHINA/HONG KONG – Hong Kong holds Legislative Council elections, the first since the imposition of the National Security Law and the implementation of sweeping changes in the electoral system violating democratic principles and political pluralism.

CHINA – The second round of EU–US dialogue on China is held in Washington between EEAS Secretary General Sannino and US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman. The US announces a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter 2022 Olympics. China starts to block Lithuanian products at customs, following the announcement that Lithuania will open an embassy in Taipei back in November. With Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis, I expressed full EU solidarity with Lithuania. Deputy secretary General Mora holds the Political Directors' Dialogue with China.

CUBA – I address the European Parliament Plenary on the human rights situation in Cuba.

CYPRUS – At Foreign Affairs Council, an Option Paper on Varosha is presented to EU Ministers with several possibilities including the creation of a specific sanctions regime. Coreper will evaluate the different proposals.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP – The Eastern Partnership Summit takes place in Brussels.

EGYPT – Italian Parliamentary Commission report concludes that Giulio Regeni was abducted, tortured and killed by Egypt's security apparatus. Egyptian court releases researcher Patrick George Zaki after two years in pre-trial detention (trial foreseen on 1 February 2022). Egyptian Court

sentences Alaa Abdel Fattah, lawyer Mohamed El-Baqer, and blogger Mohamed 'Oxygen' Ibrahim to five and four years in prison respectively. I meet with [Foreign Minister Shoukry](#) at the Union for the Mediterranean meeting and discuss the Human Rights situation in Egypt.

GEORGIA – Continued appointment of Supreme Court judges further undermines credibility of judiciary. Under the European Peace Facility, assistance measures are adopted in support of Georgia.

IRAN – The International Atomic Energy Agency reports that Iran has started enriching uranium to 20 % purity at its Fordow facility. I exchange with Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian. JCPOA talks resume in Vienna. Delegations agree on basic elements to advance negotiations, after the restart of talks with the new Iranian delegates.

LATIN AMERICA – EU–Latin America & Caribbean Leaders' Meeting decides to join forces for a sustainable post-COVID recovery. The EU launches the Digital Development Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean.

LIBYA – EU Electoral Expert Mission arrives to Tripoli. [The EU Council imposes sanctions](#) to the Wagner Group present in Libya. The first round of Presidential elections scheduled is postponed.

SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – Celebration of the First Day of the Mediterranean. I co-chairs the 6th Union for the Mediterranean Regional Forum in Barcelona, and then the EU–Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial meeting.

MOLDOVA – Under the European Peace Facility, assistance measures are adopted in support of Moldova.

MYANMAR – Aung San Suu Kyi receives a four-year jail term on charges of incitement and violations of a law on natural disasters.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – A trilateral meeting between President of the European Council Michel with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan takes place. As a concrete follow-up of this meeting, Azerbaijan releases ten Armenian detainees, the EU Special Representative facilitated their transfer to Yerevan.

NICARAGUA – I address the European Parliament Plenary on the developments in the country.

PAKISTAN – I co-host, along with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Qureshi, the sixth round of the EU–Pakistan Strategic Dialogue.

QATAR – I meet with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar during Foreign Affairs Council to discuss matters on Afghanistan.

RUSSIA – I meet Foreign Minister Lavrov in Stockholm during the OSCE Ministerial to discuss military build-up around Ukraine. The EU imposes [sanctions](#) against the Wagner Group. European Council declares that ‘any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response, including restrictive measures coordinated with partners’. I address the European Parliament plenary on the continuous crackdown on civil society and human rights defenders.

SYRIA – The EU Council imposes sanctions to the Wagner Group present in Syria.

TUNISIA – President Kais Saied announces a referendum on constitutional reform on July 25 and new parliamentary elections on December 17, 2022. The [EU welcomes this](#) timeline.

TURKEY – Turkey announces steps towards the normalisation of relations with Armenia. EU continues supporting education of refugees and addressing migration in Turkey with additional €560 million (as part of an additional €3 billion announced by EC President von der Leyen in June 2021)

UKRAINE – I meet Foreign Minister Kuleba in Riga during the NATO Ministerial. Under the European Peace Facility, new assistance measures are adopted in support of Ukraine. G7 Foreign Ministers issue a joint statement condemning the Russian military build-up near the border with Ukraine. European Council states that any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response, including restrictive measures coordinated with partners.

UNITED STATES – With US Secretary of State Blinken, we announce a new Dialogue on security and defence, and also a Dialogue on China, Indo-Pacific. The United States holds the Summit of Democracies. I met again with US secretary of State Blinken at NATO Ministerial to discuss Ukraine.

WESTERN BALKANS – EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs takes place in Slovenia. EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Council takes place. I rule out possibility of a third high level meeting of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in 2021. Serbia opens talks with the European Union on a series of environmental policies and moves a step closer to joining the EU.

YEMEN – Conflict escalates and cross-border attacks occur in Saudi Arabia.

MULTILATERALISM – 28th OSCE Ministerial Council takes place in Stockholm.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – I participate in the NATO Ministerial Meeting in Riga. I announce with US secretary of State Blinken, that the first EU–US dialogue on security and defence will take place in early 2022. I deliver a speech on innovation in defence at the Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency. EU leaders provide guidance on the Strategic Compass during the European Council. EU launches a new program on peace, security and conflict resolution worth €900 million under Global Europe NDICI.

GENERAL – European Commission President von der Leyen presents the new EU initiative Global Gateway on connectivity.

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STAYING ON COURSE IN TROUBLED WATERS

EU foreign policy in 2021

The year 2021 was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and marked by various geopolitical crises. In this book, which contains a collection of articles, blog posts, op-eds and speeches, HR/VP Josep Borrell Fontelles addresses the main questions facing the EU's foreign and security policy.

How can the EU become a more credible global security actor and deal with a more competitive strategic environment? How should the EU act in the face of 'new empires' that try to destabilise our neighbourhood? And in what concrete ways can we reinforce the transatlantic partnership and strengthen our engagement with Africa, the Indo-Pacific and Latin America? What can the EU do to revitalise multilateralism and help build global rules that are fit for purpose in the 21st century? What policies are needed to tackle climate change and increase the EU's strategic autonomy?

Josep Borrell Fontelles is EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission.



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