



EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES



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INTRODUCTION

2020, EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Since I took up my duties as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) in December 2019, much has happened and I could not have imagined the extraordinary circumstances the EU and its foreign policy certainly would face.

Political battles are won or lost depending on how issues are framed. It therefore matters how we describe and analyse our changing world and what this means for Europeans collectively. This has been the wider rationale for writing regularly a blog ⁽¹⁾ and other articles, now collected here. With this book, I would like to present an account of the key milestones that marked this exceptional year as seen through my HR/VP glasses.

'Mission impossible'?

During my hearing as Commissioner designate in the European Parliament (EP) in October 2019, a Member of Parliament asked me if I realised that I was a candidate for a 'mission impossible'. A meaningful question. The HR/VP position has existed since 2009, when the Lisbon Treaty came into force, and this year we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the specific service created then to support the High Representative and the EU's external action.

(1) The texts collected in this book are also available on my personal blog, *A window on the World* (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77199/window-world-personal-blog-hrvp-josep-borrell_en).

Although it is not a ‘mission impossible’, it is certainly a difficult one. I was well aware of the complexities associated with the HR/VP position, since I was a member of the Convention on the Future of the EU, which proposed this new post in 2003. To promote synergies between the High Representative, reporting to the Council, and the Commissioner for External Relations, the Convention decided to merge the two posts. That is the reason why the HR/VP has a ‘double hat’: he or she is appointed by the European Council with the agreement of the President of the Commission. As member of the Commission, he or she is also subject to a European Parliament hearing and the EP’s vote of approval of the College of Commissioners.

The High Representative chairs the monthly council meetings of foreign affairs ministers, striving for consensus on foreign policy priorities, and on security and defence issues, when the defence ministers meet. Within the Commission, the HR/VP is in charge of coordinating the different aspects of the EU’s external action that are fully or partially community policies (e.g. trade, development, neighbourhood policy and humanitarian aid). In addition to the EEAS, the HR/VP is supported also by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), responsible for managing the budget of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and other specific financial instruments, including the recently created European Peace Facility.

Therefore, being HR/VP involves almost as much ‘internal diplomacy’ as external one. Europe has been built from the outset on a dual approach, both intergovernmental and supranational, and the HR/VP is at the heart of this duality, complexity and ambiguity.

A geopolitical Commission

The structurally high level of expectations for the HR/VP position has been increased by the specific ambition articulated by President von der Leyen for our Commission. ‘We must be aware that our internal and external work are two sides of the same coin. What we do at home will affect our place in the world and will shape relations with our strategic partners and competitors. This is why we must be a Geopolitical Commission,’ she wrote in my mission letter. I am very pleased to work under the leadership of a President who has this level of ambition and this clear understanding of the role of the European Union in the world.

An abrupt start

My experience as former President of the European Parliament and Spanish foreign minister had given me a good knowledge of most of the issues at stake and ideas about how to deal with them. Luckily, because I had no such thing as an adjustment period: on 2 December 2019, the day after I took office, I attended the UN Climate Conference in Madrid in the morning and then had to travel to Paris in the afternoon to pay tribute to 13 French soldiers fallen in Mali. This immediately gave a glimpse of the scale and complexity of the task that lay ahead.

Together with the rest of the world, we were also not expecting at all what followed in the course of this first year: the COVID-19 pandemic. A health crisis in its early days, the pandemic soon triggered an unprecedented economic and social crisis as well. Nobody could have imagined this sudden halt in economic activity, with several billion people locked down in their homes: the consequences of this crisis will go far beyond what we saw in 2008.

Many have considered this pandemic what Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls a 'black swan': a rare and difficult to predict event, which has major global consequences. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic took the world largely unprepared, but the virus was not really a 'black swan'. Specialists in infectious diseases have been warning us for years now about the growing risks of pandemics breaking out. In the past 20 years, COVID-19 is the third coronavirus disease able to jump the species barrier. It is necessary to ask ourselves why the international community was not better prepared and how it can prepare for the future. The COVID-19 virus will not be the last one.

The COVID-19 pandemic is changing diplomacy

This pandemic has disrupted our ways of living and working, as well as the way we conduct foreign policy. At the hearing prior to my appointment before the European Parliament, I had undertaken not to travel incessantly, so that I could devote sufficient time to the in-depth work to be carried out in Brussels. However, I had no idea at that time of the extent to which I would be able to keep this commitment in 2020. Having said that, videoconferences have definite advantages over traditional meetings in environmental terms and in terms of saving time and money. However, videoconferencing seriously complicates the task of diplomacy: in many situations, there is no substitute for face-to-face discussions, and direct human contact, to find mutually acceptable solutions.

Repatriation and humanitarian aid with ‘Team Europe’

Indeed the pandemic has shaped our work in 2020. First, we had to undertake emergency action to repatriate 600 000 EU citizens stranded around the world. It was a formidable challenge. We provided vital assistance to our Member States through the mobilisation of the EEAS consular team and EU delegations, as well as the Commission’s Emergency Response Mechanism. We also had to set up a large-scale humanitarian and assistance operation to help our partners in emerging and developing countries. They were fighting the pandemic with far fewer resources than us, so we needed to help them even though we were encountering enormous difficulties in Europe ourselves.

In both cases, we successfully implemented a close cooperation between Member States and European institutions: an approach we have called ‘Team Europe’. We were able to demonstrate just how powerful and effective such synergies are. And it will be a priority in the coming months to generalise this approach beyond the emergency situation we have experienced. We have also been very active in supporting international efforts through the COVAX initiative to make vaccines against COVID-19 available to all countries.

To help emerging and developing countries deal with the current crisis is not only a question of solidarity but also in our own interest. Despite our significant internal difficulties, the way we deal with them will have a decisive influence on Europe’s place in the world: the most proactive powers in this area will have scored points for the post-crisis period.

The pandemic gave rise to a major ‘battle of narratives’, with ‘mask diplomacy’ and disinformation operations that we have had to combat. When a humble mask became a rare and precious object, it shaped the fight for power and influence on the global stage. The same thing is happening now with vaccines.

With Next Generation EU, strengthened internal cohesion

The European reaction to the pandemic has also demonstrated our commitment to strengthening our internal cohesion, with the adoption of the Next Generation EU initiative last July. After profound debates, this initiative broke two important taboos. First, it opens up the possibility for the Union to issue debt securities on a large scale to prepare our future by accelerating the environmental and digital transition and, second, it allows significant financial transfers to the most affected

countries. This solidarity is not only relevant for EU internal matters. It is also a condition for the success of our external policy: everything that strengthens our internal cohesion also strengthens Europe's position in the world.

In any serious crisis, there is indeed a risk of turning inward and stopping to care for or worry about the outside world. It was a key challenge for EU foreign policy to ensure that Europe avoided falling into this trap. I believe we achieved this in 2020, and I am convinced that we will continue to avoid it in the coming years. Clearly, the very nature of the pandemic has made an isolationist stance futile.

The success of the EU global human rights sanctions regime

In the following chapters, we are going to detail the different issues that occupied us during the year 2020, but I would like to highlight here an achievement of which I am particularly proud. At my first Foreign Affairs Council, in December 2019, I presented a proposal to establish a new universal European sanctions regime on human rights issues.

At our last meeting in 2020, this text was adopted, giving the EU an important tool to respond to human rights abuses all around the world. Given the institutional complexity, this was not an easy process, but I am pleased we managed to bring this to a successful conclusion. The test for 2021 and beyond will be how we use this tool to enhance global respect for human rights. A tool is just a tool – you can use it or not – but if you need one, it is better to have it.

We have made progress on learning to speak the 'language of power'

Finally, Europeans have to deal with the world as it is, not as they want it to be. Therefore, we have 'to learn to speak the language of power'. I used this expression, because this learning process will decide what kind of global actor the EU will be. The COVID-19 pandemic has made our environment more challenging and this learning process more necessary and urgent.

In an uncertain and often hostile world, we need a strong EU, able to act and to protect citizens' values and our interests. Opinion polls show that the European public understands this well and is ready for it. The overall record of this extraordinary year shows that we are making progress. Together with my fellow

Commissioners, we have worked in this direction during this first year of our mandate, notably within the Commissioners' Group for a Stronger Europe (CGSE).

With the launch of operation IRINI to help enforce the UN embargo on arms to Libya, expansion of our military and police training missions in the Sahel, broadening our Eastern African naval operation Atalanta to enhance overall maritime security beyond the combat against piracy, launching a first EU maritime coordinated security initiative in the Gulf of Guinea, creating a European Peace Facility to enhance our capacity to assist our partners militarily and the first cyber sanctions to counter the actors who threaten us in cyberspace, we are demonstrating that we can be that Union that acts and protects.

We are less naïve and we think and act ever more in geo-political terms. Sometimes this has involved small steps but there has been a greater strategic awareness and determination. Indeed, ongoing work on identifying strategic challenges and the response the EU should provide, what we call the EU Strategic Compass, will strengthen our common strategic culture and provide a stronger sense of direction to our defence capability development initiatives, notably through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

EU showed leadership in 2020

In spite of all difficulties, the EU as a whole showed leadership in 2020. In the face of the COVID-19 economic crisis, we reacted much quicker and better than during the financial and euro crisis during the last decade. We strengthened European solidarity, showed a remarkable unity during the Brexit process, exercised global leadership in the search for a vaccine and strengthened our partnerships with many around the world.

With this book, I want to bear witness to what I have seen and done, and above all to what European foreign policy choices are. For if there is one lesson that stands out from 2020 it is that political choices matter. We can choose Europe, solidarity, multilateralism and global partnerships, or we can follow the path of nationalism and everyone fending for themselves. I am clear what my choice is, and I hope that this book will explain why and maybe encourage others to join in that effort.

Brussels, 15 February 2021

1

THE CASE FOR A STRONG EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY

The first chapter of this book focuses on what European foreign policy can and should be and what means we have to implement it. The treaties have provided us with more powerful tools than many people think.

EU foreign and security policy aims to enable the EU to play the role of a global actor and have the Member States carry more weight on the world stage than if they were to act alone. It also aims to defend our values and interests globally: preserve peace and bolster international security and a rules-based global order; promote democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights; push for a fair and open trade agenda; and ensure the highest standards of climate, environmental and labour protection.

To achieve these aims and to play an active role in the world, the EU has a wide array of policies at its disposal: from the common foreign and security policy, our crisis management operations; our development aid, the European neighbourhood policy and trade policy. As the world's biggest internal market, we can also use our huge regulatory power as a foreign policy instrument.

To be a global leader and to develop our strategic autonomy – a concept that has been widely discussed in the past year – we need to be able to use both hard and soft power. However, the diversity of our histories and geographical situations often makes it difficult to build consensus in a context in which unanimity of the 27 Member States is required. This is becoming increasingly problematic.

IS EUROPE TOO DIVIDED TO HAVE A FOREIGN POLICY?

29/10/2020. *Europe is indeed very diverse, and this does not always facilitate the definition of a common external policy. However, one can be reasonably optimistic in the light of recent trends, and in particular the increased solidarity shown in the face of the crisis (²).*

I have insisted since the beginning of my mandate on the idea that Europe must “learn to speak the language of power”. I am often asked if Europe is not too divided to achieve this goal.

What does “Learning to speak the language of power” mean in concrete terms? It is about combining the variety of the European Union’s resources in a way that maximizes their geopolitical impact. To reach our political goals, we must use the full range of our capacities, to capitalize on Europe’s trade and investment policy, financial power, diplomatic presence, rule-making capacities, and growing security and defence instruments.

Europe has plenty of levers of influence

We have plenty of levers of influence, and Europe’s problem is not a lack of power. The problem is the lack of political will for the aggregation of its powers to ensure their coherence and maximize their impact. Diplomacy cannot succeed unless it is backed by action. But let’s be clear, our might is not the military component. The EU is not a military alliance and it was even built against the very idea of power politics. But it was done so in a very different world.

“*Europe’s problem is not a lack of power; it is the lack of political will for the aggregation of its powers to maximize their impact*”

(²) Published in the *European Journal of International Law*.

Europe and the EU are constantly changing and evolving. I am engaged with the integration process and active in European politics for quite some years now. Actually, I received my first scholarship when I was 17 years old with an essay about the prospects of Spain, then under Franco's dictatorship, to become a member of what then was the Common Market. Since, I witnessed the growth from a small number of Member States to 28, and now 27, with the crucially important eastern enlargement; but also other fundamental changes, such as the changing role of the European Parliament, the establishment of the single market and of the Eurozone - and quite some related crises.

Europe of 27 is very different to a Europe of 12

And of course the Europe of 12 is very different to a Europe of 27. Has Europe therefore become more fractured as it is often said? Not sure, but certainly more diverse. For example: the "fracture" on the issue of migration is not purely west-east; and the north-south "fracture" between debtors and creditors affects mainly countries that were members before the "big bang" eastern enlargement. There are many more similar examples, but here is what I deem most important: reflecting the EU's motto 'United in diversity', we should look positively on how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages.

“*We Europeans, from North and South, East and West, often do not have the same vision of the world, the same understanding of the world.*”

From my position, I have to insist on the fact that due to this diversity, we Europeans, from north and south, east and west, often do not have the same vision of the world, the same understanding of the world. Let me give a personal example on this that I use often to illustrate what I mean by this. For my Polish friends, they tend to say that they owe their freedom to the United States and the Pope: “Pope Wojtyla, John Paul II, told us to be free, and the United States won the Cold War, and therefore it's Reagan and John Paul II who gave us our freedom.”

And they are right. However, for my personal background, things are very different. I was born in 1947, and I believe, as many Spaniards do, that we also owe 40 years of Franco's dictatorship to the United States and the Pope. Franco was able to stay in power for 40 years because he had from the beginning, and for many years, the support of the Catholic Church and later, based on the 1953 Pact of Madrid between Eisenhower and Franco, from the United States.

The need to overcome differences

This is just one personal example to demonstrate that different national histories give rise to different views of the world in many ways. At the same time, this is what the unique success of the European integration process is about: to overcome these differences, to have them even enrich us, and to focus instead on what brings us together and to jointly work on prosperity, stability and benefits that go beyond the national angle. This is a permanent and delicate, but also enriching and constructive, equilibrium.

“*Europeans are more aware today that in a 21st century world faced with challenges such as climate change and dominated by major powers such as China, India or the United States, they can only survive if they join forces.*”

This very diverse Europe is indeed difficult to bring together, particularly in terms of foreign policy, but things have progressed in recent years: Europeans are more aware today that in a 21st century world faced with challenges such as climate change and dominated by major powers such as China, India or the United States, they can only survive if they join forces. And I am convinced that the COVID-19 pandemic will have greatly reinforced the idea that we need more Europe, as we have begun to see with the approval of the Next Generation Europe initiative.

We have seen recently a rise of significant Euroscepticism in many Member States. It is important to remember that it is driven by various factors across Europe. In some countries, economic and social issues are the key drivers, while in other countries it is mainly about “identity”. Identity is a key concept of current times as Francis Fukuyama rightly pointed out in his recent works, and paraphrasing Bill Clinton’s advisor James Carville, one could say “it is the identity, stupid”.

The difficulty to fight identity politics

One reason precisely why the populists and Eurosceptics gain ground is that we fight identity politics with material and factual counterpoints. It is again the battle of emotions and reason. We have overcome the big confrontation between Germany and France, whose historic identities steered the development of our continent for one century. And this is not a small success! However, we have not yet consolidated a European political identity that could be accepted as something additional, and not as an alternative to national identities. At the same time, we witness similar struggles in some Member States, for instance, that is happening in my home country, Spain.

“*It is often difficult for “us” – academics, serene politicians, etc. – to do what populists often do: to simplify and to speak to pure emotions.*”

It is often difficult for “us” – academics, serene politicians, etc. – to do what populists often do: to simplify and to speak to pure emotions. This might be against our excessively rational nature, especially for an engineer by training like me! Referring to Aristotle, we are sometimes too obsessed with the power of reason, ‘logos’. However, as Aristotle rightly argues, all successful arguing and debate need not only ‘logos’, but ‘ethos’ and ‘pathos’ are equally important components to convince our audiences and voters.

Complex and balanced arguments less sexy

It will always be easier to shout “America first!” or “Take back control!” than to call for an international rules-based order. Complex and balanced arguments are certainly less sexy, that’s why we need to be able also to talk the language of positive emotions. But, when we wanted to give the EU elements that could produce feelings of belonging as an anthem or a flag, it was refused. They exist but without legal bases.

“*We Europeans can be proud of what we achieved. We built a system that combines enduring peace, political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion as nowhere else.*”

The details of the work of the Commission, our Treaties, and our institutional dynamics are difficult to translate in emotions, but we Europeans can be proud of what we achieved. We built a system that combines enduring peace, political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion as probably nowhere else in the world. From this point of view, I think we can say that Europe is nowadays a civilization, which can be a strong identitarian narrative and story – but indeed we all have to get better in telling this story.

The objective reasons behind Euroscepticism

However, there are also some other more objective reasons behind the rise of Euroscepticism. After the crises of 2001 and 2008, it took us a long time before we decided to show solidarity at levels sufficient to redress the situation. So much so that these crises, both of which had their origin in the malfunctioning of American finance, ultimately had heavier and more lasting consequences in Europe than in the United States. Europe also took a long time before deciding to act to limit social dumping within Europe, particularly on the issue of posted labour, or tax dumping. And there is still a lot of work to do in that regard. We complain about social and fiscal dumping from third countries, but also between European countries, we still face such problems. The good news is that the Union has started to fight more actively against internal social and fiscal dumping, in particular with the initiatives taken by my colleague Margrethe Vestager.

Finally, as we have seen in the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also not been able to limit deindustrialisation and off-shoring, which leave us highly dependent in many sectors, nor have we been able to make Europe a significant power in the area of the digital economy, essential for the future. The importance of a more active industrial policy is now better recognized, as is the need to better safeguard our companies and to have more balanced and reciprocal trade relations with our external partners. The need of “strategic autonomy” for Europe has a strong economic dimension.

“The current crisis has shown that we have learnt from our previous difficulties: Member States and European institutions have reacted quickly and strongly to the crisis this time.”

The current crisis has finally shown that we have learnt the lessons of our previous difficulties: the Member States, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Council have reacted quickly and strongly to the crisis this time. This has been shown in particular by the adoption last July of the Next Generation Europe initiative, which breaks important taboos by allowing the Union to take on a substantial common debt and to make significant transfers to the most affected countries. Until now the European solidarity was based on “back to back loans”, now it is also “to issue debt to give grants”.

The aggravation of external threats has shown everyone that, each Member State on its own, without exception, is nothing more than a dwarf incapable of protecting its sovereignty and security. For all these reasons, I am rather optimistic about our ability to overcome Euroscepticism in the near future.



EUROPE'S HARD AND SOFT POWER

29/10/2020. In a world of geostrategic competition, economic and other instruments are weaponized and we see increasingly the use of force in different ways. We must strengthen our traditional levers, look for new ones and take new and visible initiatives to enhance our global posture⁽³⁾.

In a world of geostrategic competition, in which we see increasingly the use of force in different ways and in which economic and other instruments are weaponised, we must relearn the language of power and conceive of Europe as a top-tier geostrategic actor. This is certainly not the case yet and it is a difficult learning process, and in the area of European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) we still punch below our declared ambitions.

The geopolitical upheavals we are witnessing underline the urgency with which the EU must find its way in a world increasingly characterized by raw power politics. We Europeans must adjust our mental maps to deal with the world as it is, not as we hoped it would be.

“*The geopolitical upheavals we are witnessing underline the urgency: we Europeans must adjust our mental maps to deal with the world as it is, not as we hoped it would be.*”

And this brings us back again to our history: the EU was established to abolish power politics. It built peace and the rule of law by separating hard power from economics, rule-making and soft power. We are convinced that multilateralism, openness and reciprocity should rule the global order and how states interact. But how does Europe deal with this new world?

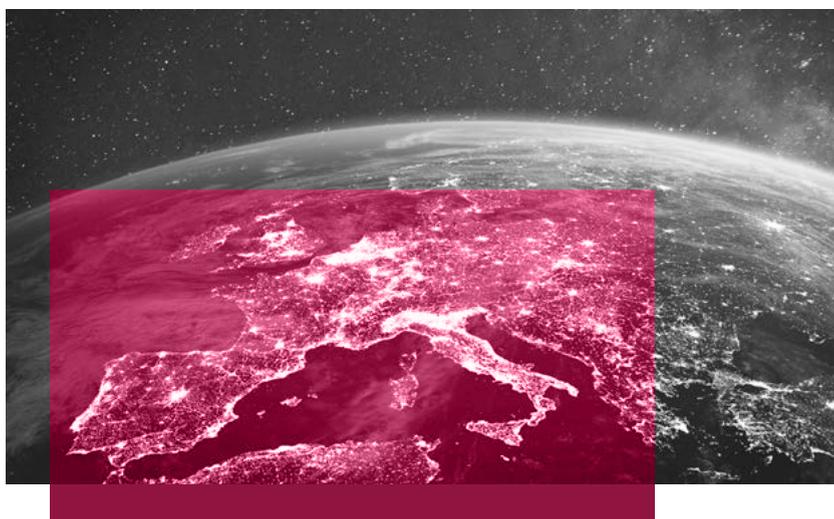
⁽³⁾ Published in the *European Journal of International Law*.

The need to avoid resignation and dispersion

Europe needs to avoid both resignation and dispersion. Resignation means thinking that the world's problems are too numerous or too distant for all Europeans to feel concerned about. It is essential for a common strategic culture that all Europeans see security threats as indivisible, as the US citizens from Alaska to Florida see them. Dispersion would mean we want to get involved everywhere, expressing concerns or goodwill, combined with humanitarian funding or aid for reconstruction.

“We have more levers of influence than we ourselves are often aware of. Our internal market is still one of the most important in the world and no external player can neglect it.”

We have more levers of influence than we ourselves are often aware of. Our internal market is still one of the most important in the world and no external player can afford to neglect it. The European Union has one of the strongest “soft power” toolboxes, with powerful trade and competition policies, significant aid volumes and the new possibilities offered by our investment-screening mechanisms. We must use all this to its full potential, taking a holistic approach and overcoming silos.



The most important norm setter worldwide

We are the most important norm setter worldwide – as Anu Bradford convincingly sketches in her recent book *The Brussels Effect*⁽⁴⁾ – but we cannot maintain this position if we are not also a technological leader: we need to close the gap between our regulatory capacity and our technological ambitions.

“*We must stop seeing Europe as a collection of national interests and instead define, and defend together the common European interest.*”

Europe must strengthen its traditional levers, look for new ones and take new and visible initiatives to enhance its global posture. Europe also needs to act in a more united way. And frankly, the EU is the only platform enabling European democracies to promote and defend their interests effectively. In the past, we have sometimes allowed others to paralyze us by dividing us, for example with regard to our relations with China or Russia. We must stop seeing Europe as a collection of national interests and instead define and defend together the common European interest. Easier said than done for sure, and sometimes the problem is not to speak with a single voice, but to say the same thing. I would be happy if in this sense we would at least make sure to always be a good choir.

The security challenges we face are numerous and complex. Tensions and violence are rising in our neighbourhood, notably in Libya, the Sahel and elsewhere. The call for Europe to act and engage is rising in lockstep. If we want Europe's voice to be taken seriously, we need to be ready to act. To combine our soft power and diplomatic outreach with concrete action on the ground. Otherwise the big decisions affecting our own security will be taken by others.

“*If we want Europe's voice to be taken seriously, we need to be ready to act and combine our soft power with concrete action on the ground.*”

(4) *The Brussels Effect. How the European Union Rules the World*, by Anu Bradford, Oxford University Press, 2018.

But we are not idle. Around 5 000 women and men are deployed in three continents at the operational edge of our common security and defence policy (CSDP) in our military and civilian missions. They are acting and delivering security to our citizens. In recent years, Europe has come a long way in strengthening its security and defence policy and capabilities. I am thinking for example of the new command structures created over the past years. These steps were driven by an awareness that our security environment is deteriorating and that we have to be ready to take on greater responsibilities as Europeans. In many ways, the most tangible work that can be seen with our eyes and touched with our hands are our CSDP missions and operations.

“*In recent years, Europe has come a long way in strengthening its security and defence policy and capabilities.*”

Soldiers, police officers, policy advisers, legal experts and many others are working on the ground with our partners to make our neighbourhood more secure and stable. They train, they advise, they mentor and they monitor. Their work is not just technical, but part of a comprehensive approach, or the European way of building security. They are often based on a UN mandates and are faithful to the EU's values of peace, stability, multilateralism and human rights.

The need to provide missions and operations with adequate means

But if we want our CSDP missions and operations to be effective, we need to provide them with the necessary personnel and assets. When we collectively decide to launch an operation or mission, we should make sure it has the right mandate and resources. We must listen to the advice from commanders on the ground on what they need to succeed.

There are always reasons for not doing more: resource constraints, difficult security situations, etc. But the question is: can we afford it? And the clear answer is: no. Our security depends on the security of our partners.

“*In the framework of our current alliances, we must strengthen our strategic autonomy around common and interoperable capabilities, critical technologies and infrastructures.*”

In the framework of our current security and defence alliances, we must strengthen our strategic autonomy around common and interoperable capabilities, critical technologies and infrastructures (such as cyber security, drones, secure networks, quantum technology). Europe has the capabilities to do this.

The budgetary pressure in the defence field

In the wake of the crisis, Member States may feel the budgetary pressure in the defence field, as they did during the previous crisis. That will make it more necessary than ever to spend better together, rationalise and strengthen our common capabilities. This requires an ambitious budget for the European Defence Fund and its industrial and innovation capacities, as well as for the European Peace Facility for stronger and more operational cooperation. Unfortunately, however, I also have to recognise that the multiannual budget that has been approved by the European Council in July 2020 is not at the level of this ambition.

Europe must also equip itself with the means to protect itself against disinformation, the “infodemic” which has grown dangerously worse during the coronavirus crisis, to counter attempts of manipulation by foreign powers. With its strong democratic values and principles, Europe can and must serve as a reference point in striking the fine balance between freedom of expression and the fight against disinformation.

HOW DO WE ENSURE EUROPE IS ABLE TO ACT?

02/10/2020. *The EU sometimes struggles to take decisions on foreign policy due to divisions among Member States. And yet, we should be able to play a stronger, geo-political role in a dangerous world. We need a debate without taboos on how best to achieve this* ⁽⁵⁾.

At the European Council, leaders gave their strategic guidance on many key foreign policy issues, from our relations with China, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the poisoning of Aleksei Navalny ⁽⁶⁾. On the eastern Mediterranean, we will pursue dialogue with Turkey on outstanding issues. And European leaders tasked me to organise a multilateral conference which could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed, including maritime delimitation, security, energy, migration and economic cooperation. We clearly prefer the path of constructive relations but the political line is clear: in case of renewed actions by Turkey that breach international law, the EU will use options at its disposal.

The long way to sanctions on Belarus

One big decision that leaders took was to finally impose sanctions on Belarus. There is no point denying that this decision took a long time: almost two months have passed since the rigged presidential elections. Many observers and commentators have pointed out ⁽⁷⁾ that divisions among Member States were hampering our collective ability to take a stand, even on issues that are core to the EU's founding principles. In short, our credibility was at stake.

⁽⁵⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽⁶⁾ See European Council Conclusions from 1 October 2020: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/01/european-council-conclusions-on-external-relations-1-october-2020>

⁽⁷⁾ See, for example, S. Erlanger, 'E.U. failure to impose sanctions on Belarus lays bare its weakness', *New York Times*, 24 September 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/24/world/europe/eu-ropes-sanctions-belarus-cyprus.html>).

“As long as the EU has been developing a common foreign policy, it has had to deal with splits. From the breakup of Yugoslavia, to the Middle East Peace process, the war against Iraq in 2003 or the independence of Kosovo..”

This is of course not the first time that we experience divisions. As long as the EU has been working on developing a common foreign policy, it has had to deal with this kind of splits. From the breakup of Yugoslavia to the Middle East peace process, the war against Iraq in 2003, the independence of Kosovo or Chinese actions in the South China Sea: there have been many examples where divisions among Member States have slowed down or paralysed EU decision-making, or emptied it of substance.

Member States look at the world through different prisms

The underlying reasons are not hard to state: history, geography, identity. Member States look at the world through different prisms and it's not easy to blend these 27 different ways of defining their national interests into a united, common European interest.

Having been Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain I have sat at both sides of the table. And I know all too well that in the Council we discuss a common EU line, but as soon as we get home, ministers focus above all on conducting their national foreign policy, with their own priorities and red lines.

The real question is what to do about this. For me it is clear that the main long-term answer lies in the creation of a common strategic culture: the more Europeans agree on how they see the world and its problems, the more they will agree on what to do about them. That is in part what we intend to do with the work on a Strategic Compass. But all this is a long-term process. And in the meantime, we have to be able to take collective decisions, on tough issues, in real time.

The rule of unanimity for European Foreign and Security Policy

And this brings us to the question of **how** we take decisions on foreign policy. For decades, we have agreed that foreign and security policy must be decided by unanimity, with every country holding a veto. In foreign policy we work a lot with so-called discrete instead of continuous variables. This means many of our decisions are binary in nature: either you recognise a government or not, you launch a crisis management operation or not. And this leads to a lot of blockages and paralysis. In the same way, there are other important policy fields such as taxation or the multiannual EU budget where the unanimity requirement has also created serious difficulties to find adequate solutions.

The contrast here is with those areas of the EU, from the single market to climate to migration, where the EU can take decisions by qualified majority voting (QMV) (55% of Member States and 65% of population). And crucially, market rules or climate targets are not secondary issues of lesser sensitivity. Indeed, big national interests at stake, which often clash just as much as in foreign policy.

“*What matters in the EU is not how a discussion begins; what matters is how it ends.*”

Moreover, it is striking that even in the areas where the EU can take decisions by qualified majority voting, it mostly doesn't. Why? Because the ethos of the club is to work for compromises, something everyone can buy into. But, for this, all Member States need to move and invest in unity. Simply sitting on one's position creates blockages. And in this specific sense, having the QMV option is important: not to use it but to create an incentive for Member States to move and search for common ground. This is how, outside foreign policy, the EU can take decisions on important topics with big interests at stake, even if Member States are divided. What matters in the EU is not how a discussion begins; what matters is how it ends.

The need to take some decisions without unanimity

Right at the start of my mandate I argued that if, in foreign policy, we want to escape the paralysis and delays of the unanimity rule, we ought to think about taking some decisions without requiring the full unanimity of 27. And in February when we were blocked on the launch of Operation IRINI to police the arms embargo on Libya, I raised the question at the Munich Security

Conference⁽⁸⁾ how reasonable it is for one country, which would anyway not participate in the naval operation because it lacks a navy, to prevent the other 26 from moving forward.

Let's be clear: we will not have majority voting across the board. But one could limit it to aspects where we have been frequently blocked in the past - sometimes for completely unrelated reasons - such as human rights statements or sanctions. In her State of the Union⁽⁹⁾, President von der Leyen repeated this proposal (it was actually the line in her speech that attracted the largest amount of applause).

Since then, there has been renewed debate on the merits and risks associated with this idea. For instance, the President of the European Council⁽¹⁰⁾ has warned that dropping the unanimity requirement would risk losing the legitimacy and buy-in that is needed when it comes to implementing any decisions. This is without any doubt, an important issue. Others have pointed to the fact that the national veto is an 'insurance policy or emergency brake' to protect especially the ability of small countries to defend their core national interests (larger Member States may not even need the veto to protect their core national interests).

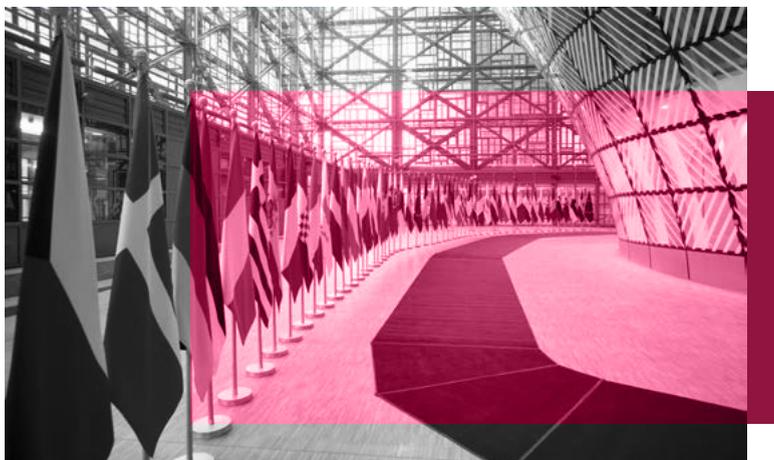
“*Abandoning the unanimity rule would not be a silver bullet. But we need to create the right incentives for Member States to come together. Just appealing to the need for unity is not enough.*”

I welcome this debate. I am clear that abandoning the unanimity rule would not be a silver bullet. But we need a discussion on how to create the right incentives for Member States to come together. Just appealing to the need for unity is not enough. Which decisions we make and how credible they are, depend crucially on how we make them.

⁽⁸⁾ See <https://securityconference.org/mediathek/asset/panel-discussion-eurovision-contest-a-europe-that-projects-20200216-1225/>

⁽⁹⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/state-union-addresses/state-union-2020_en

⁽¹⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/28/l-autonomie-strategique-europeenne-est-l-objectif-de-notre-generation-discours-du-president-charles-michel-au-groupe-de-reflexion-bruegel/>



Some possibilities to be discussed

Going forward, some possibilities seem pertinent to me, to be evaluated and discussed. Maybe it could be better, sometimes, to accept to issue a quick statement at 25 with good substance than wait for several days and come with a lowest common denominator statement at 27?

Maybe it is also better to think not mainly in terms of introducing qualified majority voting but also of 'constructive abstention'? This was a possibility introduced to enable a country to abstain without blocking the Union from moving forward. For example, this was how the EULEX European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo⁽¹⁾ was launched in 2008.

And finally, as we are certainly not going to abandon unanimity across the board, could we define areas and tools and instruments where it could make more sense to experiment (for example sanctions, statements, demarches) and, if so, with what kind of safeguards?

I hope that in the weeks and months ahead, for example in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, we can debate the pros and cons of these options, knowing that there is a great and urgent need for the EU to protect its capacity to act in a dangerous world.

⁽¹⁾ See <https://www.eulex-kosovo.eu/>

THE WAY TO GO FOR A UNITED, RESILIENT AND SOVEREIGN EUROPE

08/06/2020. *With my colleague Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton, I have reflected on the lessons to be learned from the COVID-19 crisis on how to build a more united, resilient and sovereign Europe*⁽¹²⁾.

Beyond the health tragedy, the coronavirus crisis will have an accelerating effect on the major trends at work on our planet. It invites us to take a fresh look at the world, and at Europe's place in the world. It forcefully revives the central question of our autonomy, our sovereignty and our position as a player in world geopolitics, particularly in the face of growing tensions between the United States and China.

“*The coronavirus crisis revives the central question of our autonomy, and our position as a player in world geopolitics. The era of a conciliatory, if not naïve, Europe has come of age.*”

The era of a conciliatory, if not naïve, Europe has come of age. Virtuous “soft power” is no longer enough in today's world. We need to complement it with a “hard power” dimension, and not just in terms of military power and the badly needed Europe of defence. Time has come for Europe to be able to use its levers of influence to enforce its vision of the world and defend its own interests.

The urgent need for a resilient and autonomous Europe

Faced with the sudden and devastating effects of the crisis, our fellow citizens are fully aware of the need for a resilient and autonomous Europe, assertive of its values, strong in its convictions, firm in its ambitions and confident of its means. A Europe ready to contribute to the great balances of tomorrow's world.

⁽¹²⁾ Op-ed with Commissioner Breton published in several outlets.

In order to come out stronger out of the crisis, the European Union must be equipped with a recovery plan that is commensurate to the needs of its industrial ecosystems. That is the goal of the von der Leyen Commission's proposal for a €750 billion recovery instrument, including direct grants and long-term loans. The magnitude of these resources will allow the EU to strengthen and modernise its internal market by taking solidarity, the basis of European integration, to a new level. This is a historic step.

The need to prevent future shocks

The crisis has revealed areas where Europe needs to be more resilient to prevent and better withstand future shocks. These include health protective equipment and medicines of course, but also more broadly key technologies, certain critical raw materials (such as rare earths), security and defence industries and the media. Without isolating ourselves from our partners, without engaging in protectionism, everything calls for increasing our collective capacity to protect our own values and interests.

“*Without isolating ourselves from our partners, without engaging in protectionism, everything calls for increasing our collective capacity to protect our own values and interests.*”

How would we justify our lack of ability to protect, where necessary, our strategic activities weakened by the crisis from predation by non-European players? We also clearly need to diversify and reduce our economic and industrial dependencies, as the pandemic has brutally revealed.

And in the framework of our current security and defence alliances, we must also strengthen our strategic autonomy around common and interoperable capabilities, critical technologies and infrastructures (such as cyber security, drones, secure networks, quantum technology). Europe has the capabilities to do this. Does it give itself the means to do so?

Budgetary pressure and necessity to spend better together

In the wake of the crisis, Member States may feel the budgetary pressure in the defence field. That will make it more necessary than ever to spend better together, rationalise and strengthen our common capabilities, including in the field of EU external action. This requires an ambitious budget for the European Defence Fund and its industrial and innovation capacities, as well as for the European Peace Facility for stronger and more operational cooperation.

Europe must also equip itself with the means to protect itself against disinformation, the “infodemic” which has grown dangerously worse during the coronavirus crisis, to counter attempts of manipulation by foreign powers. With its strong democratic values and principles, Europe can and must serve as a reference point in striking the fine balance between freedom of expression and the fight against disinformation.

Solidarity between EU Member States will be the keystone of tomorrow’s Europe – a more autonomous and sovereign Europe. Solidarity between generations through the Green Deal. Solidarity between Member States to preserve and develop our internal market. Solidarity to consolidate our economic and monetary union and strengthen our social cohesion. Solidarity in the field of security and defence. Solidarity, in sum, to protect our shared values that underpin our common project.



EUROPEAN STRATEGIC COMPLACENCY IS NOT AN OPTION

13/11/2020. *It is now clearer than ever that Europe must take its security, broadly understood, into its own hands. Doing so will not only secure the European Union's proper place on the world stage, but will also ensure a healthy transatlantic partnership in the years ahead* ⁽¹³⁾.

Joe Biden's election as the next president of the United States has raised hopes in Europe of putting the transatlantic relationship back on track. But there can be no simple return to the past. Facing so many domestic and international challenges, the US will value the transatlantic relationship only insofar as that relationship delivers actual value. A stronger Europe that shoulders a greater share of global responsibilities can ensure that it does.

What "European strategic autonomy" means in practice

There has been much talk of achieving "European strategic autonomy," but what does that mean in practice? Autonomy should not imply total independence or isolation from the rest of the world. Rather, it refers to an ability to think for oneself and to act according to one's own values and interests. The European Union needs to achieve this kind of autonomy, while at the same time strengthening our alliances and preserving our commitments to multilateralism and openness.

“Autonomy should not imply isolation from the rest of the world. Rather, it refers to an ability to think for oneself and to act according to one's own values and interests.”

⁽¹³⁾ Op-ed published via Project Syndicate in several outlets

The EU is facing serious strategic challenges in today's antagonistic international environment, where geopolitical rivalries and great-power competition are on the rise. That is why, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel once bluntly put it ⁽¹⁴⁾, "We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands." We must stand on our own feet.

A long-time focus on security and defence

For a long time, the debate about strategic autonomy focused mainly on security and defence. Some saw the discussion as an attempt to create alternatives to defence cooperation within the North Atlantic Alliance; and some even took it to mean that America's commitment to Europe had been called into question, and that a greater decoupling might be on the way.

But there is no question that NATO has played an indispensable role in European security. Any consolidation of Europe's security capacity should be pursued within the alliance. As successive US leaders have emphasized, Europe needs to increase its own contribution to defence, to militate against the perception that America alone is paying for transatlantic security. Although the Biden administration will bring a change in tone and a less confrontational approach, on the question of defence spending it will expect the same from Europe as its predecessors. America's core geopolitical interests will not change.

“*Europe needs to increase its own contribution to defence, to militate against the perception that America alone is paying for transatlantic security.*”

Fortunately, the EU is already working on several tracks to strengthen the transatlantic partnership. Under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) efforts, European NATO members are helping to address gaps in the alliance's capabilities, and are working toward fulfilling by 2024 their commitment to spend 2% of Gross Domestic Product on defence. Equally important, the creation of a new European Defence Fund (EDF) represents an important step toward improving the capabilities of Europe's military industry.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-europe-cdu-must-take-its-fate-into-its-own-hands-elections-2017/>

But Europe's security challenges go beyond NATO's traditional remit. From the Sahel and Libya to the eastern Mediterranean, there is no shortage of crises that demand a strong European response. The task for the EU is to define a common position from which it can act in the interest of maintaining regional stability.

“*Europe's security challenges go beyond NATO's traditional remit. From the Sahel and Libya to the Eastern Mediterranean, there is no shortage of crises demanding a strong European response.*”

To succeed, Europe must develop its own framework for monitoring and analysing threats, so that it can move quickly from threat assessment to operationalization and response. That is why we are now developing a Strategic Compass¹⁵.

Strategic autonomy goes far beyond defence and security

It is crucial for the strategic autonomy discussion to expand far beyond the issues of defence and security. As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, issues such as public health and economic interdependence are no less important.

Strategic autonomy is the conceptual framework that Europe needs to understand these issues and how they relate to one another. Viewed in isolation, facemasks and medicines are not strategic products. But the strategic calculus changes when the production of such items is concentrated in just a few countries. The same applies to the sourcing of rare metals, social-media and other digital platforms, and technologies such as 5G.

“*Strategic autonomy will require intensive leveraging of Europe's single market. With its size, it offers many instruments with respect to critical infrastructure, foreign investment, state subsidies, or dual-use (military and commercial) exports.*”

⁽¹⁵⁾ See: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/node/89047_en

To help Member States navigate these and many other issues, the European Commission has proposed a series of new instruments, such as the mechanism that went into force last month to screen foreign investments in the EU. But achieving strategic autonomy also will require intensive leveraging of the power of Europe's single market.

With its vast size and scope, the single market offers many instruments for safeguarding European interests with respect to critical infrastructure, foreign investment, state subsidies (from which certain foreign investors benefit), or dual-use (military and commercial) exports.

For example, we have become increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities introduced by an increasingly unbalanced economic relationship with China, so we have made reciprocity a core objective in our negotiations on an investment agreement. Europe has no problem with China's own economic development and the benefits this has delivered to its citizens. But we cannot allow China's international expansion to occur at the expense of our own interests and values. That is why we have settled on a dual approach, treating China as an important partner, but also as a competitor and a systemic rival.

“*Europe has no problem with China's own economic development and the benefits this has delivered to its citizens. But we cannot allow China's international expansion to occur at the expense of our own interests and values.*”

Overall, the EU's overarching objective must be to strengthen its role and influence in the world, so that it is the partner of choice for every other country and world power. The concept of strategic autonomy is essential to this ambition. Strategic complacency is not an option.

THE EEAS AT 10: FOR EUROPE, WORLDWIDE

02/12/2020. *1 December 2020 was a very special day. It marked my first year as HR/VP and also the launch of the 10th anniversary of the European External Action Service. This was a good opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved and where we go from here* ⁽¹⁶⁾.

That was precisely the idea behind the debate ‘The EU in a changing world – Staying on course in troubled waters’ ⁽¹⁷⁾ that we organised, bringing together, for the first time, three High Representatives (of course we had invited Cathy Ashton as well, but regrettably she was not available). For me it was a true pleasure to discuss the progress made in the past years and what role the EEAS played in this respect with Federica Mogherini and Javier Solana, who are both not only my predecessors but also good friends.

“*It was moving to hear voices such as Antonio Guterres, Madeleine Albright and Juan Manuel Santos presenting their appreciation for EEAS being a reliable and trusted partner in ending conflicts and solving problems together.*”

It was also moving to hear non-EU voices such as Antonio Guterres, Madeleine Albright and Juan Manuel Santos. They presented how they have worked with the EEAS and their appreciation for it being a reliable and trusted partner in ending conflicts and solving common problems together. From time to time, one needs to hear from outsiders how they see us and what we have done for them. And also how we can improve things. It’s called perspective; it can help to correct mistakes but also act as encouragement.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹⁷⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88991/save-date-1st-december-eu-changing-world-%E2%80%93-staying-course-troubled-waters_en

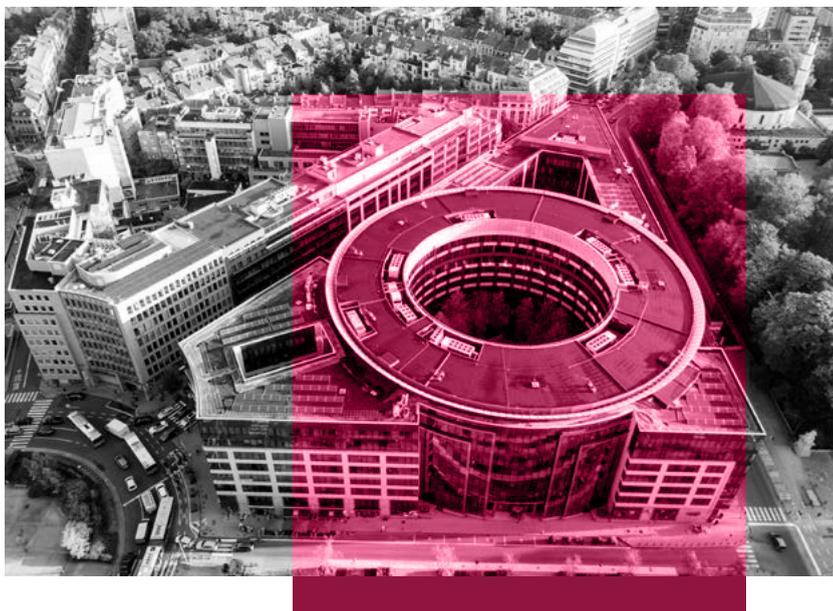
Ten tumultuous years

In a conversation moderated by Christine Ockrent, we reviewed the past tumultuous years. Asked what our choice for the most memorable moment or decision was, Javier Solana said, for him, it was the development of crisis management capabilities to enable the EU to be a security actor on the ground. Federica Mogherini highlighted the conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal and the launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which gave a major boost to European defence integration. I mentioned my second day in office when I attended the ceremony in Paris to pay respect to the French soldiers who lost their lives in Mali fighting terrorism. Their engagement serves as a reminder of the need for Europeans to be engaged to work for security and peace, sometimes far away from Europe.

Further elaborating on the changes of the past years, Javier Solana reminded us that we constantly need to learn lessons. And in the EU we have learned many. For instance, our response to the economic consequences of the pandemic has been far more rapid and effective than the one we gave to the financial crisis. Federica Mogherini stressed the growing complexity of today's problems, which call for integrated approaches and the need for scale, which only the EU can provide. For my part, I highlighted the importance that narratives play in today's world and for the EU to be proactive in this field, setting out what we do and why. If we don't, others will.

“*Mixing personal memories and analytical reflections, we covered the progress in turning the EU into a credible security actor and the EU's role in ‘making multilateralism great again.’*”

Mixing personal memories and analytical reflections, we covered the progress in turning the EU into a credible security actor and the EU's role in ‘making multilateralism great again’. Naturally, given the central role of the EEAS in delivering the Iran nuclear deal, we spent quite some time discussing what the key ingredients were for this diplomatic success; how Europeans managed to keep the deal alive after the withdrawal of the current US administration; and what we should do now, with a new US president coming into office, to ensure full compliance by all parties.



All in all, it was a memorable event with great questions from the online audience and a lot of engagement on social media. It reinforced my belief that the EEAS plays a unique role in being the interface between Europe and the wider world. It is full of committed and professional staff. And I'm very proud of their work, as also President von der Leyen expressed. In the end, any organisation is only as strong as the women and men working for it.

Above all, the EEAS is called a service for a reason. It is a privilege to serve the EU and its citizens and to help create a better world. To work for Europe, worldwide ⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For some of the highlights of the debate, see 'A decade of the European External Action Service (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89515/decade-european-external-action-service_en). To watch the full debate, see '1st December – the EU in a changing world – Staying on course in troubled waters' (https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88991/save-date-1st-december-eu-changing-world-%E2%80%93-staying-course-troubled-waters_en).

2.

EU RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This first year of the new Commission's mandate has been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and our response to it. This outbreak not only caused a fundamental health and economic crisis but also triggered a 'battle of narratives', and there were questions whether authoritarian regimes would fare better than democracies.

The pandemic hit Europe very hard on the health front, and European authorities reacted strongly and quickly on the economic front. In particular, this crisis has led us to break important taboos, with the EU recovery plan launched in July 2020, which is relevant not only to the internal cohesion of the European Union but also to its foreign policy.

The crisis has also profoundly affected the rest of the world. In particular, it has put a stop to the long-time trend of a reduction in extreme poverty and made many poor countries more fragile. We have had to help our global partners and we have done so through our 'Team Europe' approach, bringing together the EU institutions and our Member States. We have also stressed the need for debt restructuring at the global level, and we have invested a great deal of effort to ensure that all countries have access to vaccines against COVID-19.

A GLOBAL “BATTLE OF NARRATIVES”

23/03/2020. From the start of the pandemic, it was clear that COVID-19 will reshape our world. We do not know yet when the crisis will end, however we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different. How different will depend on the choices we make today ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The COVID-19 crisis is not a war but it is ‘war-like’ in that it requires the mobilisation and direction of resources at unprecedented levels. Solidarity between countries and a readiness to make sacrifices for the common good are decisive. Only by pulling together and cooperating across borders can we beat the virus and contain its consequences – and the EU has a central role to play. This was the clear and united position of EU foreign ministers when we discussed the crisis on 23 March via video-link.

“*Only by pulling together and cooperating across borders can we beat the virus and contain its consequences – and the EU has a central role to play.*”

It is sometimes said that wars are won not by tactics or even strategy, but by logistics and communications. This seems true for COVID-19 as well: whoever is best at organising the response, quickly drawing on lessons learnt from around the world and communicating successfully towards citizens and the wider world, will come out strongest.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*

A global battle of narratives

There is a global battle of narratives going on in which timing is a crucial factor. In January, the dominant framing was of this being a local crisis in Hubei province, aggravated by the cover up of crucial information by Chinese party officials. Europe was sending a lot of medical equipment to help Chinese authorities that were overwhelmed at the time. Since then, China has brought down local new infections to single figures – and it is now sending equipment and doctors to Europe, as others do as well. China is aggressively pushing the message that, unlike the US, it is a responsible and reliable partner. In the battle of narratives we have also seen attempts to discredit the EU as such and some instances where Europeans have been stigmatised as if all were carriers of the virus.

“*There is a geo-political struggle for influence through spinning and the ‘politics of generosity’. Armed with facts, we need to defend Europe against its detractors.*”

The point for Europe is this: we can be sure that perceptions will change again as the outbreak and our response to it evolve. But we must be aware there is a geopolitical component including a struggle for influence through spinning and the ‘politics of generosity’. Armed with facts, we need to defend Europe against its detractors.

There is also a battle of narratives within Europe. It is vital that the EU shows it is a Union that protects and that solidarity is not an empty phrase. After the first wave in which national authorities took centre stage, now the EU is coming to the fore with joint actions on all tracks where Member States have empowered it to act: with joint procurement of vital medical equipment, with a joint economic stimulus and a necessary relaxation of fiscal and state aid rules.

“*It is vital that the EU shows it is a Union that protects and that solidarity is not an empty phrase.*”

In addition, the EU’s role contains a big external component. We are assisting Member States with their consular efforts, helping to bring stranded Europeans back home. For example, in the past week, joint efforts in Morocco enabled the repatriation of around 30 000 EU citizens. This shows that we can deliver together.

Helping to bring stranded Europeans back home

Much more remains to be done. Worldwide, around 100,000 European travellers have registered at local embassies or consulates but the true figure of those that need to come home lies much higher.

A global pandemic needs global solutions and the EU has to be at the centre of the fight. I am in touch with partners around the world, from Asia, Latin America and Africa, to help build a coordinated international response. In a crisis, the human instinct is often to turn inwards, to close borders and fend for yourself. While understandable, this stance is self-defeating. The COVID-19 emergency cannot be solved within one country, or by going it alone. Doing so simply means all of us will struggle longer, with higher human and economic costs.

“*In a crisis, the human instinct is often to turn inwards and fend for yourself. While understandable, this stance is self-defeating. The COVID-19 emergency cannot be solved by going it alone.*”

What we should work for instead is a radical scaling up of international cooperation among scientists, economists and policymakers. At the United Nations, the World Health Organisation and the International Monetary Fund. Within the G7 and G20 and other international fora. Pooling resources to work on treatments and a vaccine. Limiting the economic damage by coordinating fiscal and monetary stimulus measures and keeping trade in goods open. Collaborating on reopening borders when scientists tell us that we can. And fighting on-line disinformation campaigns. This is a time for solidarity and cooperation, not blame games which will not heal a single infected person.

While the needs are great at home, the EU should also be ready to assist others in fragile situations who risk being overwhelmed. Just think of the refugee camps in Syria and what would happen, if COVID-19 broke out there, to people who have already suffered so much. In this respect, Africa is a major concern. With Ebola it may have built more recent experience with handling pandemics than Europe, but health systems overall are very weak and a full outbreak would wreak havoc.

“*This is a time for solidarity and cooperation, not blame games which will not heal a single infected person.*”



Social distancing and living in confinement is exponentially more difficult in densely populated urban areas of Africa. Millions in Africa make their living in the informal economy and will have to handle the outbreak without any social safety net. Even before the virus has hit the continent, Africans, with other emerging economies, have to deal with a massive level of capital withdrawal.

Elsewhere countries like Venezuela or Iran may well collapse without our support. This means we should ensure they have access to IMF assistance. And with Iran, we need to make sure that legitimate humanitarian trade can proceed despite US sanctions.

“None of the other problems that we focused on before the corona-crisis, has gone away. In fact, they may get worse.”

We should also remember that none of the other problems that we focused on before the corona-crisis, has gone away. In fact, they may get worse. COVID-19 may well deepen some of the longer running conflicts in the neighbourhood. As Europe we already had to navigate a world of growing geo-political tensions, especially between the US and China. Here too, the risk is that COVID-19 will compound pre-existing trends.

Overall the task for the EU is to defy the critics and demonstrate in very concrete terms that it is effective and responsible in times of crisis. Jean Monnet wrote in his memoirs that “Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.” Let that be our guiding philosophy as we battle this crisis and prepare for what comes after.

A “HAMILTONIAN MOMENT” FOR EUROPE?

25/06/2020. *The €750 billion Next Generation EU recovery plan has sparked a debate on whether it was a “Hamiltonian” moment for Europe in reference to the mutualisation of States debts in the United States in 1790. However, this comparison does not make much sense ⁽²⁰⁾.*

In Europe, discussions are under way on an ambitious recovery plan to deal with the consequences of the major economic crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic. Following the joint proposal by Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, the €750 billion of additional expenditure proposed by the Commission should be financed through the issuing of debt instruments on the financial markets.

The plan is still being debated by the heads of state or government, but it has also sparked debate among experts as to whether or not this is a ‘Hamiltonian moment’ for Europe, in reference to the mutualisation of debt in the United States in 1790.

“*The temptation to model European integration on the process followed by the United States is nothing new. More often than not, it is unhelpful, however. Let us stop always looking to the past and instead chart our own course.*”

The plan currently under discussion undoubtedly marks a turning point for the European project. However, the situations are so different that such a comparison is of little value. The temptation to try to model European integration on the process followed by the United States of America is nothing new. More often than not, it is unhelpful, however. Let us stop always looking to the past and instead chart our own course.

⁽²⁰⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*

Alexander Hamilton and US debt

Alexander Hamilton (1757-1804) was one of the heroes of the American War of Independence. He was a federalist and thus opposed those such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson who were in favour of autonomy for the federated states. The American states had taken on heavy debts during the war, but the southern states had done so to a lesser degree than those in the north, and so were against the idea of mutualising debt.

Alexander Hamilton became the United States' first Secretary of the Treasury. It was in this role that in 1790 he managed to secure an agreement on the mutualisation of the debts incurred during the war, as a result increasing the powers and means granted to the federal Treasury, particularly those of a fiscal nature. Hence the use of the term 'Hamiltonian moment' to refer to this turning point in US history. Thomas Jefferson subsequently wrote that *'of all the errors of my political life, this has occasioned me the deepest regret'*.

Next Generation EU: a turning point for Europe

It is with reference to this period that some are arguing that the plan put forward by the Commission would constitute a 'Hamiltonian moment' for Europe. There is no doubt that the Next Generation EU proposal is a key turning point for the European Union. Faced with the challenge posed by the deep economic crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic, it is essential that we put in place unprecedented means, not only to limit the social impact, in solidarity with one another, but also, despite the current difficulties, to prepare for our common future amid the challenges posed by climate change and the digital revolution.

“*It is essential that we put in place unprecedented means, not only to limit the social impact of the crisis, but also, despite the current difficulties, to prepare for our common future amid the challenges posed by climate change and the digital revolution.*”

The joint issuing of debt instruments that is now envisaged would give the EU the capacity to act by allowing it to finance the necessary investment. Such a development might at first glance resemble the events in America in 1790. But as others have already pointed out ⁽²¹⁾, there are major differences which make the comparison unjustified.

The Commission's plan is not 'Hamiltonian'

Under this plan, there is no question of mutualising pre-existing debt. That accumulated debt is the result not of a war waged together against a common enemy, but of a variety of national policies. Mutualisation of that kind – ruled out *a priori* by the Treaties – is not envisaged by the EU Member States. Rather, it is a case of limiting the additional debt incurred by the Member States as a result of the crisis triggered by the coronavirus epidemic. To a certain extent, we can view the virus as an external enemy attacking the people of the European Union, but the analogy with 1790 remains limited and unsuited to describing the direction the EU is taking today.

“*Mutualisation of debts is not envisaged by the EU Member States. Rather, it is a case of limiting the additional debt incurred by the Member States as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.*”

More generally, the parallel that has for decades been drawn between the various stages in the formation of the United States of America and the milestones of European integration is, in fact, almost meaningless. The United States brought together former British colonies which were culturally fairly similar and had existed for only a few decades. European integration involves the coming together of countries – many of them centuries old – which, despite a common background, have diverse linguistic and cultural heritage, and which have spent a considerable proportion of their history at war with one another. Particularly, and especially brutally, in the last century.

⁽²¹⁾ See for example: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/european-union-recovery-effort-is-new-deal-moment-by-daniel-gros-2020-06>

Europe and the United States: times change and so do customs

Moreover, the United States were formed at a time when multinational companies, communication technologies and internationalised finance were still in their infancy and when there was, as yet, little interconnection of national markets. European integration, on the other hand, has on the whole taken place concurrently with the intense globalisation of economies that we have seen over the last decades. Today Europe also faces challenges of an entirely different nature from those faced by the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. These include the ecological crisis in particular, but the geopolitical context is also completely different, featuring in particular the emergence of China as a world power.

“*European integration has taken place concurrently with the intense globalisation of economies over the last decades. Europe faces challenges of an entirely different nature from those faced by the United States in the 18th century.*”

So let us stop constantly looking to an American past and instead turn resolutely towards the European future. As Jacques Delors used to point out, the European project is one of a kind, with no equivalent thus far. It is only by regarding it as such, and refraining from trying to impose on Europe this or that experience from the history of another continent, that we can really take it forward.

Let us therefore chart our own course. Clearly, given the serious crisis we are currently going through, together we must seek innovative and ambitious solutions such as those proposed by the Commission

COVID-19, ITS CONSEQUENCES AND THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE

29/10/2020. *Our legacy will depend on our ability to ensure the socio-economic recovery of the COVID-19 crisis. The EU must also mobilise the wealthiest countries to help the developing countries to overcome this crisis* ⁽²²⁾.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed radically the way we work in foreign policy: I have to admit that I am very tired of the endless video conferences and the many difficulties this brings. The technical ones of course (“Can you hear me...?”, “Please unmute your microphone...”, “Sorry, the connection has been lost”,...), as well as more seriously of course the substantial lack of what is a core element of diplomacy and of negotiating, reflecting and debating: to sit together in a room and around a table, and to look each other in the eye when we debate serious issues, and to find space for discussion and not to talk with everybody at the same time.

Plenty “take-aways” from the COVID-19 crisis

More seriously, there are plenty of ‘take-aways’ from the COVID crisis and the geopolitical scene. With some being clear, and others still being open. In general, there is no doubt that COVID-19 is reshaping our world. We don’t yet know when the crisis will end, but we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different, and probably not for the better.

“We don’t yet know when the COVID-19 crisis will end, but we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different, and probably not for the better.”

⁽²²⁾ Published in the *European Journal of International Law*.

This global crisis creates waves that affects all aspects of life, with consequences for health, economics, security, social stress and political unrest. The impact will be very much asymmetric and the crisis accelerates and magnifies what we already saw happening before, and it does so on mainly three levels.

First, the western-led order in crisis. As said, this US administration has mostly withdrawn from the global order that the US has contributed to build. This is the first major global crisis where the US is not in the lead, and China for its part is increasingly assertive but also nationalistic. A real factor of global power for sure, but transactional and short on genuine soft power.

“*This is the first major global crisis where the US is not in the lead, and China for its part is increasingly assertive but also nationalistic.*”

Second, we have this real crisis of multilateralism: the G7 and G20 are absent; the UN Security Council is paralyzed and many ‘technical’ organizations are turned into arenas where countries compete for influence. The result? A world that is more multipolar than multilateral, we see growing inequality and divergences both within Europe and globally.

A very different capacity of countries to cope with pandemic

Third, there is a very different capacity of countries to cope with the challenges the pandemic brings. Around the world, we see tensions between respect for science and evidence-based policy-making and the continued appeal of nationalism and authoritarian politics.

None of these trends is new per se. It is the combination that makes the situation so challenging. Any diagnosis must be sober and realistic. But we must also avoid fatalism and paralysis. Our legacy will depend on our ability to ensure the socio-economic recovery of the actual COVID-19 crisis and to project a more effective role for Europe in the world.

I am pursuing this goal by helping to harness the power of the instruments of the Commission and EEAS with the actions of the Member States acting together in the Council.

The European Union has been very much affected by the COVID-19 crisis. At the outset, it encountered serious difficulties in coordinating the health responses of its Member States. Several of them, Italy and Spain in particular, are among the most affected in the world. Nevertheless, the strong measures subsequently taken in the EU framework have increased its resilience and provided it with new tools, even if we have experienced a second wave of the pandemic.

The European social model has shown that it is quite well adapted to deal with this type of shock in both health and economic terms. Thanks to its social security systems, which are the most developed in the world, it has made it possible to treat the entire European population on the health side while preserving the income and jobs of most Europeans on the economic side. In terms of monetary and budgetary policy, Europe has reacted much more quickly and strongly than in previous crises.

“*The European social model has shown that it is quite well adapted to deal with this type of shock in both health and economic terms.*”

Nevertheless, the health and economic crisis has affected the different countries of the Union in very different ways. And many of those most affected were also among the countries that had already been hardest hit during the 2008 crisis and its aftermath. In many cases, they had not yet fully recovered and in particular had accumulated a large public debt, limiting their ability to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Monetary policy by its very nature does not allow for differentiated treatment of the different countries in the euro area. The current crisis therefore risked further widening the gaps within the EU.

The need for transfers to the most affected countries

This is why it was essential to set up transfers to support the most affected countries in particular. This is what, following the proposal made by Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron in May 2020, the Commission proposed with the Next Generation EU initiative, approved by the European Council in July 2020.

Admittedly, the volume of these transfers has been somewhat reduced in the wake of difficult negotiations. The European budget has been cut back on certain important items for the future and to come into force and this agreement still

has to be approved by the European Parliament and ratified by the 27 national parliaments. In particular, the question of conditionality associated with respect for the rule of law and the question of own resources to enable the repayment of joint loans still remain to be settled.

The breaking of important taboos

Nonetheless, even if imperfect, this recovery plan breaks some important taboos. First of all, it allows the Union to take on significant levels of debt on the financial markets (€750 billion, 6 points of percentage of the Union's GDP) and organizes significant financial transfers between countries (€390 billion). It is thus beginning to close what were still dangerous gaps in the architecture of European construction, even though some had already been plugged following the 2008–2010 crisis.

If Europe goes through with the dynamic of strengthening its solidarity and internal cohesion initiated with this recovery plan, it could in particular find itself for the first time in a better position than the United States at the end of a crisis. The social and economic effects of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic risk, however, obliging us to add additional support and recovery measures.

Europe's responsibility towards the rest of the world

Be that as it may, Europe also has a strong responsibility towards the rest of the world as a result of this crisis. First, it must help to mobilize the wealthiest countries to help the countries of the South, who have fewer means, to overcome this crisis. This is not only a question of solidarity; it is also a matter of a well-understood self-interest: if Europeans manage to find the means to deal with the crisis internally but the surrounding countries are seriously destabilized by it, Europe will inevitably end up being destabilized too.

“Europe must mobilize the wealthiest countries to help the countries of the South to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. This is not only a question of solidarity: if surrounding countries are destabilized, Europe will end up being destabilized too.”

This would involve in particular managing the external debts of those countries and stepping up the restructuring and cancellation efforts that are already under way. Between China, the United States and Europe, those who will have been the most proactive in this area in the current circumstances will have scored points for the post-crisis period.

It is also up to Europe to mobilize fellow democracies to defend and promote fundamental human rights and democratic values in the international arena. Whether in Hong Kong, Sudan or Belarus, the events of the last few months have confirmed, if there was any need, how universal these aspirations remain and how much people of all continents who are deprived of their rights aspire to them as soon as they succeed in lifting the weight of repression. This implies of course seeking dialogue with the United States to reduce the temptations of isolationism, and it should be much easier with Joe Biden than it was with Donald Trump, but also working more closely with Japan, South Korea, Canada, Mexico or Australia.

“*The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that we need multilateralism more than ever. We need to remobilize democracies to promote a renewed multilateralism, adapted to the world of the 21st century and its challenges.*”

This remobilisation of democracies must aim to defend and promote a renewed multilateralism, adapted to the world of the 21st century and its challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that we need such multilateralism more than ever: as long as we do not have a vaccine, we will only be able to control this disease if it is controlled everywhere. Otherwise we will always be threatened with a return of the pandemic.

This crisis has also demonstrated how we have become totally interdependent. We also urgently need to rebuild multilateralism in that area by reforming the World Trade Organization.

“*The current crisis should not make us forget the seriousness of the threat to the future of humanity posed by the environmental crises. As regards climate change there is not going to be a vaccine to protect us.*”

Finally, the current crisis should not make us forget the seriousness of the threat to the future of humanity posed by the environmental crises, be it climate change or the loss of biodiversity. And we can be sure that as regards climate change there is not going to be a vaccine to protect us against the rise in temperature. We have to flatten the curve of infections, but also the curve of emissions.

For that, we need strong and closely coordinated global action decided in a multilateral framework. Even if the EU manages to fully stop emitting, the problem would remain unsolved, since the European Union is responsible for only 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions.



HOW COVID-19 IS RESHAPING THE WORLD

17/10/2020. *In times of crisis, we logically tend to focus on our own difficulties. After a trip to Africa, I wanted to emphasise how much COVID-19 is reshaping the entire world economy and changing the balance of wealth and power* ⁽²³⁾.

COVID-19 has pushed the world into the worst and most global economic crisis since the Second World War. The advanced economies, and in particular Europe, are badly hit but many developing and emerging economies are going through very difficult times too. The world risks becoming even more unequal and faces a major setback on reduction of poverty.

“*Many developing and emerging economies are going through very difficult times. The world risks becoming more unequal and face a major setback on reduction of poverty.*”

China was the starting point of the epidemic, but also the first country to contain COVID-19. According to the OECD ⁽²⁴⁾, China is expected to be the only G20 economy not to fall into recession this year. However, its growth rate will be the lowest since 1976, at the end of the Maoist era.

This relative success is at the core of the growing confidence displayed by the Chinese leadership. However, the reinforced authoritarianism is increasingly at odds with the evolution of Chinese society, and not just in Hong Kong. The concentration of power in the hands of President Xi Jinping calls into question the system of checks and balances within the ruling group that had enabled China to successfully emerge in the last 40 years. The Chinese economy is also deeply affected by the trade war with the United States. In particular, it is not certain whether it can keep its high-tech trajectory without access to American technology.

⁽²³⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*

⁽²⁴⁾ See: <http://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/>

China probably no longer spared from financial crises

China had accumulated a very large amount of public and private debt during the last decade. This indebtedness has increased massively with the current crisis. In the future, China may no longer be spared from the financial crises that regularly shake Western economies.

Finally, China is facing also an accelerated ageing of its population, which is a formidable challenge for a country that still lacks a developed system of social security. In addition, the country will have to address the environmental damage that has built up over the years, aggravated by climate change, which is likely to be very negative for China.

Japan and Korea have contained the epidemic well so far. However they are expected to be in recession this year, due to the decline in exports and the interruption of supply chains. In Japan, public debt should approach 250% of GDP, the highest level among developed economies.

India and South Asia badly affected

South Asia is badly affected. India has implemented the most drastic lockdown in the world. The lifting of this containment has led to a resurgence of the epidemic and the number of deaths now exceeds 100,000 even if, relative to its population, mortality remains limited.

Economically, India is expected to be one of the worst affected G20 countries with a 10.2% decline in GDP this year: the impact of the strict lockdown could not be compensated for, as it has been in Europe, by a massive increase in public spending.

“COVID-19 risks creating a massive increase in poverty: in some parts of the world, the pandemic is likely to cause more deaths from hunger than from the disease itself.”

Reversing the trends of recent years, COVID-19 risks creating a massive increase in poverty: in some parts of the world, the constraints imposed by the pandemic are likely to be linked to more deaths from hunger than from the disease itself.

According to the World Bank ⁽²⁵⁾, some 50 million people in South Asia will fall below the \$1.9 a day income threshold, defining extreme poverty. The halt to economic growth in South Asia is set to accentuate the tensions dividing India and other countries in the region.

The US less affected economically than Europe in 2020

Coming back to the developed world, the United States has actually the highest number of victims of COVID-19. The mortality rate exceeds that in the European Union. Still, the American economy is expected to decline significantly less than in Europe this year, with GDP falling by 3.8% (versus 7.9% in the euro area).

Even if the American health response has been largely deficient, the economic response has been vigorous with a public deficit of 16.8% of GDP (compared to 10.9% in Europe). The crisis have also further strengthened the dominance of the American digital industry.

“*In the US, the effects of this crisis are likely to be more lasting than in previous ones and confidence in the dollar and US debt could be shaken.*”

Nevertheless, the effects of this crisis are likely to be more lasting than in previous crises and ultimately, confidence in the dollar and US debt could also be shaken. These difficulties are reinforcing internal tensions, which may become the main weakness of the United States.

Regardless of who wins the US elections, the underlying trends will probably continue. Whether it is the rivalry with China or the growing withdrawal into domestic affairs. The mismanagement of the epidemic is also likely to have accelerated the decline in US leadership.

⁽²⁵⁾ See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity>

Latin America, the new epicentre of the pandemic

Further south, with 11 of the 20 most affected countries, Latin America became this summer the epicentre of the epidemic. Among the G20 countries, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil are also among those most affected economically.

Brazil in particular has increased its public deficit to 15.1% of GDP, the highest level in the G20 behind the United States. Likewise, Argentina has had to default on its debt for the third time in 18 years. Here too, COVID-19 is aggravating social and political tensions.

Africa, for its part, has so far escaped the dire predictions regarding the health aspects of the pandemic. Having a young population has protected it but also its management of COVID-19, drawing on the lessons of the Ebola outbreak. Nonetheless, it is still severely hit economically. Africa suffers from the effects of the sanitary measures, particularly in agriculture, the drop in exports of raw materials, the collapse of tourism and the drop in remittances from emigrants.

The first recession in Sub Saharan Africa since 25 years

The International Monetary Fund predicts a 3% recession in sub-Saharan Africa, the first in 25 years. South Africa is expected to be the most affected G20 country in 2020. As a result, some 30 million Africans will swell the ranks of the very poor who earn less than \$1.9 a day.

In this context, Europe is one of the most affected regions in the world, both in terms of health and economy. The decline in GDP is expected to be double that of the United States. A deeper recession also than in Japan or Korea, not to mention China.

In Europe, the pandemic is far from over

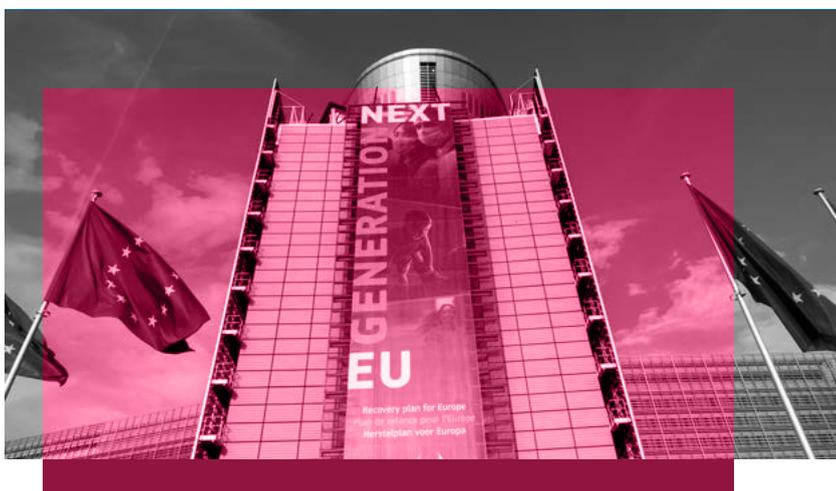
During the past summer we believed often, that the pandemic was almost over in Europe but now we see that we are very far from that. Resources are limited and there is a delicate balance between health restrictions and their effect on economic activity. This creates political tensions between different levels of governments and European coordination is more needed than ever.

“*The crisis has shown how much Europe is dependent from China because of deindustrialisation and from the United States in the digital economy.*”

In a first phase, short-time working helped to preserve jobs and incomes of most Europeans. However, this does not solve the question of more structural adjustments in sectors that will probably never return to the pre-crisis situation. The crisis has also shown the extent of Europe’s dependence on China because of deindustrialisation and how much we are lagging behind the United States in a digital economy that will become even more crucial after the crisis. The decline in GDP in Europe is also coupled with strong internal disparities.

For all these reasons, it is essential that we “go all out” to revive our economy. Last July, the Council approved the Next Generation EU plan and we must now implement it without delay. With the hundreds of billions foreseen, we must prepare our societies for the green transition and the digital revolution, while limiting the internal gaps through transfers to the most affected countries.

“*With Next Generation Europe, we must “go all out” for the green transition and the digital revolution, while limiting the internal gaps through transfers to the most affected countries.*”



However, in spite of all our internal difficulties, we must also step up our efforts to support the developing and emerging countries. We must first help our partners on the health side, because as far as the virus will remain somewhere, all of us will remain vulnerable. The question in particular of the availability of vaccines for developing countries is central and that is why we are strongly engaged in the international COVAX initiative ⁽²⁶⁾.

The necessity to support developing and emerging countries

But it is necessary also on the economic side. The G20 countries have extended this week for six months in 2021 the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), launched in the spring to help 73 countries. However, it is obviously not sufficient: the devastating impact of the COVID-19 put debt restructuring back on the agenda as G7 finance ministers recognized last September. We will push in that direction in order to embark all relevant actors, and in particular China.

“*I am deeply convinced that the future of Europe’s global role will depend on our capacity to successfully lead the fight against the crisis at home but also abroad.*”

The ability to increase our help to developing countries is especially relevant to Africa, which is of strategic importance for our future ⁽²⁷⁾. One of the African leaders told me earlier this year: “you said that you wanted to be our best partner, now you can prove it”.

I am deeply convinced that the future of Europe’s global role will depend on our capacity to successfully lead the fight against the crisis at home but also abroad.

⁽²⁶⁾ See <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility#what>

⁽²⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86560/lets-strengthen-our-ties-africa_en

DEBT: THE URGENT NEED FOR A GLOBAL RECOVERY INITIATIVE

27/11/2020. During the November 2020 Foreign Affairs Council with development ministers, we focused on the growing levels of debt that emerging and developing countries are facing due to the pandemic. We must tackle this problem to avoid a rise in global poverty and inequality⁽²⁸⁾.

The growing indebtedness of many poor and middle-income countries is worrying. Developed countries have been hit very hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the developing and emerging world have much less fiscal space to deal with its consequences and a much more difficult access to funding. Some of them have already defaulted on their external debt. If we are not able to deal rapidly with this debt issue, poverty and global instability are likely to increase. It could even fuel a new global financial crisis.

For our discussion with Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen and development ministers on the debt issue, we were joined by Ms Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mr Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Ms Odile Renaud-Basso, the new President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and Mr Emmanuel Moulin, the Paris Club Chair (the Paris Club is in charge of coordinating the treatment of the debt of over-indebted countries). We benefited also from the insights of Paolo Gentiloni, Commissioner for Economy, who represents the EU at the G20 finance ministers meetings.

A dire global economic outlook

Kristalina Georgieva presented us with a dire global economic outlook: we now know for sure that we are facing the worst recession since the great depression. The IMF projects⁽²⁹⁾ global GDP to contract by 4.4% in 2020. A partial recovery is expected in 2021, assuming that the prospects of the vaccine will materialise. But

⁽²⁸⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽²⁹⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/09/30/world-economic-outlook-october-2020>

this recovery will be uneven, prone to setbacks, and probably particularly harsh for developing countries.

“*We are experiencing a reversal in the decline in poverty for the first time in decades, with 90 million people falling back into extreme poverty.*”

GDP in low-income developing countries (LIDCs) is estimated to shrink by more than 1% this year, whereas average growth in this group has been above 5.5% per year in the last twenty years. The impact will be a reversal in the decline in poverty for the first time in decades, with 90 million people falling back into extreme poverty. In terms of fiscal support to the economy, advanced economies have deployed 20% of GDP this year, including loans and guaranties, emerging markets 6% of GDP, and poor countries only 2% of GDP.

Throughout this year 2020, the IMF has provided financial support to 82 countries, 47 of those being LIDCs. The Fund has in particular increased by 10 what it lends on average to Africa. However, according to IMF estimates, Africa will still face a \$345 billion financing needs gap, of which \$295 billion for sub-Saharan Africa. We need to close this gap with the support from institutions but also to create conditions for the private sector to step up.

“*Africa will face a \$345 billion financing needs gap, of which \$295 billion for sub-Saharan Africa*”

The IMF will expand its lending capacity. The EU has contributed €183 million to the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust ⁽³⁰⁾, which provides debt relief for the 29 poorest and most vulnerable countries, However the IMF still counts on EU Member States to give more resources to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Fund ⁽³¹⁾. The IMF has limited capacity to lend to countries that are most in need. In such cases, capacity development matters as much as financial assistance and Kristalina Georgieva suggested that the EU prioritises this particular aspect. The EU and its associated development banks are committed to work closely on this issue with the IMF.

⁽³⁰⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/16/49/Catastrophe-Containment-and-Relief-Trust>

⁽³¹⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/IMF-Support-for-Low-Income-Countries>

Breathing space for the poorest countries

The pre-pandemic debt levels for many low-income developing countries were already worrying. The G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) ⁽³²⁾, launched last April, has provided some breathing space to the poorest countries. The DSSI was initially foreseen to run until the end of the year. As of November, 46 countries have requested to participate, resulting in about \$5.7 billion in deferred payments this year.

“Argentina has again defaulted on its external debt last May and Zambia on 13 November, aggravating the risks of a spiral of sovereign defaults, especially in Africa.”

However, it is obviously not sufficient and there has been so far no significant participation by the private sector. Argentina again defaulted on its external debt last May and Zambia on 13 November, aggravating the risks of a spiral of sovereign defaults, especially in Africa. This could eventually lead to another global financial crisis.

The G20 has taken additional action

Therefore, the G20 has taken additional action at the request in particular of the Union and its Member States. First, by extending the DSSI until June 2021, with a possibility to extend it by another six months – something to be decided at the IMF’s next spring meeting. Second, the G20 and the Paris Club have agreed on a ‘Common framework for debt treatment beyond DSSI’ ⁽³³⁾, enabling the debt-restructuring process to be initiated.

“China agreed to the new G20 debt treatment principles, an important step forward. We count now on the same motivation and level of commitment from all partners in this area.”

⁽³²⁾ See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>

⁽³³⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/11/16/vc111620-current-sovereign-debt-challenges-and-priorities-in-the-period-ahead>

In recent years, China has become a very important creditor for many developing countries, particularly in Africa. However, it is not a Paris Club member and has not been very proactive on the debt issue until now. China agreed to the new G20 debt treatment principles: this is an important step forward. We count now on the same motivation and level of commitment from all partners in this area.

The EU wants to go further globally

However, we would like to go further: the EU is advocating to extend the G20 debt treatment framework to middle-income countries in need. We also support a new general Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) allocation ⁽³⁴⁾, an international money issued by the IMF, to cope with the needs generated by the crisis.

To increase Europe's global weight on this crucial issue, we need also to act more as Team Europe ⁽³⁵⁾ that can harness the strengths of our Member States and of the Union. EU Member States cannot have any real influence if they choose to go alone. In Senegal for example, Team Europe as a whole owns 9% of external debt, similar to the share of China alone.

“*While we need to prioritise low-income countries, especially in Africa, some middle-income countries that face serious challenges also deserve close attention.*”

All Member States have agreed in our meeting that these issues are of high priority. Several highlighted the need to move fast from providing ‘breathing space’ through the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, to deeper restructuring for some countries, and further financial support in many cases. While we need to prioritise low-income countries, especially in Africa, some middle-income countries that face serious challenges also deserve close attention, particularly in Latin America.

⁽³⁴⁾ See <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2016/08/01/14/51/Special-Drawing-Right-SDR>

⁽³⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77470/%E2%80%9Cteam-eu-rope%E2%80%9D-global-eu-response-covid-19-supporting-partner-countries-and-fragile-populations_en

As I have said often before ⁽³⁶⁾, I am deeply convinced of the urgent need for a debt relief initiative at multilateral level (mainly through the G20/Paris Club), accompanied by a concerted diplomatic and economic push to prevent a full-fledged debt crisis. However, debt relief alone is not enough: it has to be part of a renewed model of sustainable financing, especially in Africa.

“*Debt relief has to be part of a renewed model of sustainable financing. The EU’s call for a Global Recovery Initiative that links debt relief with investments is key.*”

To avoid expanding the gap between those who are ahead and those falling behind, it is crucial to ensure that the future will be green and inclusive, and that everyone can surf on the digital wave. The EU’s earlier call for a Global Recovery Initiative³⁷ that links debt relief with investments is key here.

The debt problem is here to stay

The subject of debt sustainability for many low and middle-income countries will probably continue to be on our agenda for months. Despite our important internal difficulties, the way we handle this matter, in close coordination with our Member States, will have a decisive influence on Europe’s future role in the world and in particular on its relations with Africa.

⁽³⁶⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87128/how-covid-19-reshaping-world_en

³⁷ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_963

“TEAM EUROPE”: HOW THE EU IS SUPPORTING PARTNER COUNTRIES

11/04/2020. *In developing countries, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic risk often being devastating. To avoid it, we have launched with the European Commission, the European External Action Service, EU Member States and financial institutions, a package to support our partners* ⁽³⁸⁾.

The coronavirus has not only Europe but the entire global community in its grip and is the world's common enemy. An enemy we can only defeat with a global approach and cross-border coordination. And while we have to mobilise all our resources to fight the virus at home, now is also the time to look beyond our borders, most specifically at our sister continent Africa and the southern neighbourhood, as well as at the western Balkans, the Middle East, and parts of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Because solidarity cannot be an empty word and also because for as long as the virus is not eradicated everywhere, it will remain a threat to all of us.



⁽³⁸⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

Manifest EU's global solidarity

The first priority to manifest the EU's global solidarity is to assist the most vulnerable in developing countries and conflict zones. Such as the 70 million forcibly displaced people around the world, many of whom find themselves caught between war and the pandemic. Or countries with weak health care systems, without access to clean water for all, without functioning safety nets and where conflicts have destroyed infrastructure. In such environments, the consequences of the pandemic risk being devastating. This is particularly the case in Africa.

“*The first priority to manifest EU's global solidarity is to assist the most vulnerable in developing countries and conflict zones. In such environments, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic risk being devastating.*”

Think about what it means to practise social distancing or to stay at home in the slums around the world. When you have to make your living every day in an informal economy, staying at home can mean starving. As Ricardo Hausmann, economist at the Kennedy School, ⁽³⁹⁾ said: if you have a 10% chance of getting infected when going out to look for your daily income or a 100% chance of starving if you stay at home, the answer is not hard to find.

Workers in the informal economy represent between 50% and 80% of the working population in some developing countries. That's why the third of the world's population, living in overcrowded shantytowns, is most threatened by the pandemic. In such conditions, the urgency of the economic response to the health crisis is vital.

“*Workers in the informal economy represent between 50 and 80% of the working population in developing countries, living in overcrowded shantytowns. In such conditions, an urgent economic response to the crisis is vital.*”

⁽³⁹⁾ See: <https://voxeu.org/article/horrible-trade-offs-pandemic>

Let us look at some data to underline the fragility of the health systems of certain countries. In Europe, we have on average 35 times more doctors per head than in Africa, where public hospitals have on average only 1.8 beds per 1,000 inhabitants (in Europe it is ca. three times as much). Not to mention intensive care units, or equipment like respirators.

While in developed countries the health crisis precedes the economic crisis, for many developing countries the order is reversed. According to a report published by the World Bank two days ago, the pandemic has set off the first recession in sub-Saharan Africa in 25 years. Some countries already face a massive flight of capital, a fall in income from tourism or raw materials, in particular oil, and a fall in remittances. Foreign capital withdrawals from emerging countries are already exceeding \$60 billion this year, which is double the level of the 2008–2009 financial crisis. In sum, the combined effect of the health and the economic crisis is already a reality and risks becoming even more catastrophic.

“*While in developed countries the health crisis precedes the economic crisis, for many developing countries the order is reversed.*”

For all these reasons, we have been working this week at the European Commission and the European External Action Service to launch, together with EU Member States and financial institutions, a €20 billion package to support our partner countries to combat the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences. The “Team Europe” package has the aim of supporting the most vulnerable countries and people most at risk, in the EU’s neighbourhood, with special emphasis on Africa, and in the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Combining existing programmes and support from financial institutions

Unfortunately, we are at the end of the EU’s seven-year budget cycle and this meant that we had to reorient existing resources. The package combines resources from existing programmes (some €11 billion), plus support from financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (€5 billion), and from EU Member States (€4 billion).

Let me give some examples of this financial support: €50 million will go to Nigeria to contain the spread of the virus; €240 million will go for Jordan and Lebanon to support vulnerable local households and Syrian refugees; €10 million to help Ethiopia increase the number of diagnostic laboratories, test kits and treatment centres. We have foreseen €8 million for protective equipment, lab material, staff treatment and vaccines for the Caribbean, and the EU has already mobilised funds amounting to €38 million for immediate support to the health sector in the western Balkans.

“*The pandemic highlights gender inequality. Women and girls are exposed to an increase in domestic violence and many women’s jobs are disproportionately at risk: women do far more care work than men.*”

The effects of the coronavirus crisis will be uneven, often hitting those already below the poverty line the hardest. Furthermore, the pandemic highlights gender inequality in all its forms. Women and girls are particularly exposed with some countries reporting that domestic violence has doubled since the crisis began. At the same time, many women’s jobs and businesses – already precarious at the outset of the crisis – are disproportionately at risk. Moreover, women do far more care work than men. According to some estimates, women constitute almost 70% of the healthcare workforce, putting their lives at risk when treating corona patients.

Together with the UN, we are alerting governments and civil society to the spike in violence against women. We are also offering concrete help to scale-up existing hotlines and equipping teams in the health, police, justice and social protection sectors for women and girls.

Children, the hidden victims of the pandemic

Too often, children are the hidden victims of this pandemic, facing a heightened risk of exploitation, violence and abuse. The closure of schools is not only limiting their access to learning, but also to school nutrition programmes and clean water. UNICEF has warned that the risk of abuse of girls and boys is greater than ever before. Through our longstanding partnership with UNICEF, we have enabled assistance in over 60 countries to work on child protection, education in emergencies and psycho-social support.

“COVID-19 risks increasing hate speech and incitement of violence against already vulnerable groups and minorities. We must combat increased stigmatisation and xenophobia.”

COVID-19 also risks increasing the risk of hate speech and incitement of violence against already vulnerable groups and minorities. We must prepare to combat increased stigmatisation, hate speech and xenophobia. That is also why our efforts to tackle disinformation around the pandemic are so important.

The EU, a forceful defender of a multilateral response

The EU, together with its 27 Member States, is a forceful defender of a coordinated multilateral response. We have wholeheartedly embraced the UN Secretary General's call for a global cease-fire and we are actively helping to prevent escalation of violence during the pandemic. This week's Team Europe package, to assist our partners and protect the vulnerable, forms part of this continued effort. Next week we will bring this message to the G20.



WE NEED A STRONGER WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

10/06/2020. *In June 2020, Dr. Tedros, Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), participated in our EU Development Ministers Council. An effective response to the pandemic can only be global and for this, we need to strengthen the WHO* ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

With 130 600 new cases detected worldwide on 5 June this year, a new record was set that very day. The situation continues to deteriorate on the American continent, and especially in South America, Dr. Tedros told us. This worrying situation reminds us of one essential thing: this pandemic is a global affair and we can only beat it through a global solution.

The need to fight COVID-19 everywhere

If we do not succeed in fighting COVID-19 effectively everywhere, the virus will eventually return to our shores again. Some people will claim that this increased risk is due to the acceleration of movement of goods and people - an unwanted side effect of globalisation. But this is not new: people and goods have always moved and viruses with them. Without going back as far as the great plague epidemics of the Middle Ages, we need only recall the so-called “Spanish” flu of 1918 and its millions of victims to remember it.

“*In the face of this pandemic, we can measure to which extent health is what economists call a “global public good”. As long as the most vulnerable in poorer countries are not properly treated, the prosperous in richer countries will be affected.*”

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.



In the face of this pandemic, we can measure the extent to which health is by its very nature what economists call a “global public good”. As long as the most vulnerable in poorer countries are not properly treated, the prosperous in richer countries will be equally affected. That is why, in the spirit of solidarity with our partners outside Europe, the support for better preparedness and stronger health systems is for a long time now key for the EU.

The “Team Europe” package

This is also why, in front of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union and its Member States have mobilised a €36 billion Team Europe package to help our partner countries and the populations most at risk to cope with the pandemic both from a health perspective and from its acute socio-economic effects. At our videoconference on Monday, we discussed ways to better coordinate our efforts in order to accelerate the rolling-out of this package on the ground and ensure tangible results.

“*The EU and its Member States are already the biggest financial contributors to the World Health Organisation, but we need a WHO with more resources and capacity for action.*”

In this context, we need to coordinate our responses at global level more than ever. The EU and its Member States are already the biggest financial contributors to the World Health Organisation, but we need a WHO with more resources and capacity for action. This is why it is regrettable that some countries, like the United States of America, are choosing this very moment to question the necessity of multilateral action in the field of public health by breaking ties with the WHO altogether.

The need to assess WHO performance

It will be necessary in due course to assess the WHO's performance during this crisis as well as the suitability of its current governance to respond to this type of pandemics. Whatever the problems that this organization may have, there is an urgent necessity of multilateral action in public health and the WHO is without question the best actor to make it happen.

“*What is true for health is also true for many of the major challenges: whether it is the fight against climate change, biodiversity loss, terrorism, or financial regulation and tax avoidance, we need a reinforced global multilateral system.*”

What is true for health is also true for many of the major challenges facing Europe today: whether it is the fight against climate change, biodiversity loss, terrorism, or financial regulation and tax avoidance, we need a reinforced global multilateral system. The post-war multilateral system needs to be reformed to take better account of major changes that have occurred and current challenges. As the European Union we will continue, to work towards the strengthening of this system and to convince our partners of the compelling need for multilateral solutions to global problems.

NO TO VACCINE NATIONALISM, YES TO VACCINE MULTILATERALISM

13/11/2020. *With the BioNTech vaccine announcement in November 2020, we were beginning to see light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel. However, with this progress comes the risk of “vaccine nationalism”. From the start, we, as the EU, have clearly chosen a multilateral approach ⁽⁴¹⁾.*

After several difficult months trying to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and 1,3 million dead around the world, we are finally beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. On 9 November the German company BioNTech and its US partner Pfizer announced important progress in the development of a vaccine.

A vaccine project supported by the European Union

This particular project has been carried out with significant support from the European Fund for Strategic Investments and the EU research framework programme Horizon 2020. So we Europeans can be especially proud of this success. The BioNTech vaccine uses an innovative approach based on the genetic code of the virus. Other potential vaccines are also entering the final stages of the testing and certification procedures.

“*What we see is the success of the scientific community and the close collaboration between public universities and institutes as well as the private sector.*”

These developments would not have been possible without the enormous efforts by scientists around the world who have worked flat out to develop a vaccine against a virus nobody knew less than a year ago. What we see is the success of the scientific community and the close collaboration between public universities and institutes as well as the private sector.

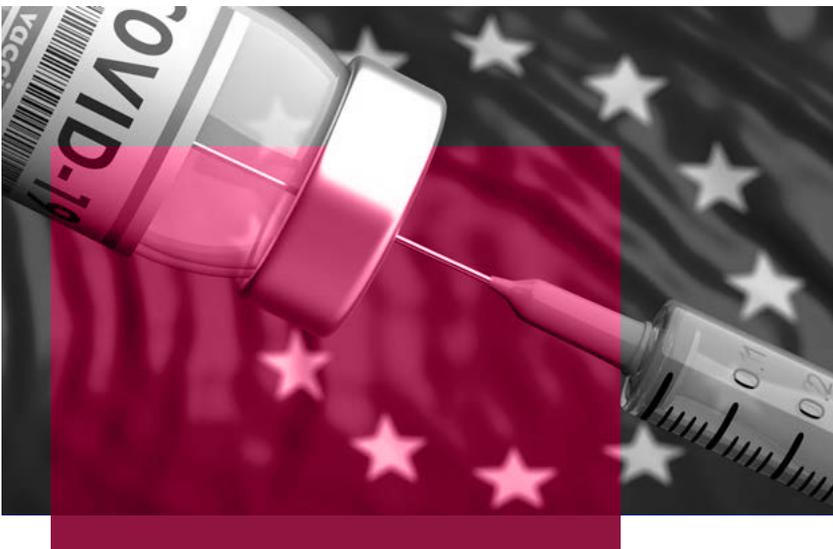
⁽⁴¹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

While the results of the clinical trials are still preliminary, they inspire hope that this and other vaccines will be available in the near future. This is unreservedly good news, but this hope will only materialise if we get the whole world vaccinated rapidly. No one is really safe until everybody is safe. And a restart of the global economy hinges on all countries having access to vaccines, regardless of their level of income.

“*This hope will only materialise if we get the whole world vaccinated rapidly. No one is really safe until everybody is safe.*”

We do not know yet which vaccines will ultimately make it over the finish line, in which order and when. Developing a vaccine is one thing, producing and distributing it is another. In the case of the BioNTech/Pfizer candidate, for example, two shots will be needed to achieve immunisation. Multiplied by 8 billion people on the planet, this means at least 16 billion doses are required. No single company has such a production capacity.

In addition, this new type of vaccine must be kept at temperatures below -70°C : this is well beyond the capabilities of a household fridge such as you would usually find in the offices of general practitioners. This is a challenge for the EU, but even more so for distributing such a vaccine to remote villages in Niger, Peru or Kiribati. Other potential vaccines may have different requirements.



“We need to build now the plans, resources and infrastructure for the deployment of vaccines worldwide. We cannot afford to wait and risk losing more time and lives.”

This is why we need to prepare in advance, to build now the necessary plans, resources and infrastructure for the rapid and safe deployment of vaccines in Europe and in our partner countries as soon as they become available. We cannot afford to wait until a vaccine is ready and risk losing more time and lives.

We must avoid “vaccine nationalism”

However, we will only benefit from these ground-breaking achievements if we avoid ‘vaccine nationalism’, where countries unduly restrict access to vaccines. Indeed, the risk is that, as usual, the strongest and richest wrestle themselves to the front of the queue.

Another risk we run is ‘vaccine diplomacy’. Like the ‘mask diplomacy’ of early 2020, some countries may link access to much-needed medical treatments to political compliance or obedience. The EU stands for the exact opposite: vaccines should not be ‘bargaining chips’ or the preserve of the rich. They should be treated as global public goods and distributed without discrimination, based on medical needs.

“Since the very start of this pandemic, the European Union has chosen multilateralism and cooperation over nationalism and competition.”

Since the very start of this pandemic, the European Union has chosen multilateralism and cooperation over nationalism and competition. European Commission President von der Leyen organised a global pledging event ⁽⁴²⁾, which collected almost €16 billion for responding to combat the disease and the EU initiated the resolution ⁽⁴³⁾ on COVID-19 adopted at the World Health Assembly last May.

⁽⁴²⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/events/coronavirus-global-reponse-pledging-conference_en

⁽⁴³⁾ See <https://www.who.int/news/item/19-05-2020-historic-health-assembly-ends-with-global-commitment-to-covid-19-response>

EU and its Member States support COVAX with €870 million

While entering into advance purchase agreements with different vaccine manufacturers to cater for Europe's own needs, the EU has also pledged €400 million to support the COVAX facility ⁽⁴⁴⁾, through which low- and middle-income countries can get access to COVID-19 vaccines. At the virtual Paris Peace Forum, President Ursula von der Leyen, announced this week that we will add €100 million in support ⁽⁴⁵⁾ to COVAX.

Several EU Member States are contributing as well, highlighting another example of the power of Team Europe: the EU and its Member States are mobilising together €870 million for COVAX. As my colleague Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner for International Partnerships, said: “The EU is demonstrating we are serious about our commitments to leave no one behind and make the COVID-19 vaccine a global public good”.

COVAX needs still additional support

COVAX has been set up by the WHO, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). It aims to provide 2 billion doses of vaccine to the most vulnerable people and to health-care workers. To date, 186 countries have already signed up for COVAX. As my colleague Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said this week: “More support will be required next year to produce and distribute a safe and efficacious vaccine across the world as soon as it becomes available”. So I call on more countries to join the EU in supporting COVAX in its vital mission.

We need to team up with partners around the world

It is essential that we team up with partners around the world, including business and civil society organizations, to arrange the global roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines and ensure the reliability of global supply chains.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2075

Each country and region has particular strengths. Some, like India, have a lot of experience in vaccine production or distribution under difficult climatic conditions. We also have to work closely with Africa to tap their experience in handling infectious diseases on the ground, supporting Africans public health institutions and partnering with Africa's nascent vaccine industry.

The European External Action Service with its delegations and the European Commission are already forging these partnerships. We plan to discuss this issue in the coming weeks with the ASEAN countries and India. It will be also an important part of our discussion on December 9 with African Union leaders.

We need to improve our preparedness for pandemics

Finally, we should use the crisis to improve our preparedness for pandemics at the global level. Scientists have warned for years that the destruction of habitats increases the likelihood of zoonotic transfers, in turn leading to pandemics. We need to prevent this destruction but also to develop protocols to better detect emerging diseases. We also need to understand why some in our populations are sceptical and hesitant about vaccines and develop strategies to make sure they are seen as safe and reliable.

“We should equip the WHO to manage the health challenges of the 21st century. We will discuss this urgently with the new US administration and our G20 partners.”

For all these reasons, we need to keep working in a collaborative and multilateral manner, bringing researchers, companies and countries all together. We should in particular equip the WHO with the tools to manage the health challenges of the 21st century. All this and more we will discuss urgently with the new US administration and our other G20 partners.

The EU for its part will continue to support the global effort for vaccine research and the mass production and distribution of safe COVID-19 vaccines. Leaving no one behind.

EDUCATION MUST NOT FALL VICTIM TO COVID-19

29/09/2020. In September 2020, I took part with my colleague Vice-President Dubravka Šuica in an event organised jointly with UNICEF to send an SOS to policy-makers around the world, asking them to give highest priority to schools in their plans to reopen their economies ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

I have always believed that education is the basis of equality and freedom and the best social uplifting tool. Therefore, I am deeply convinced the issue of education in times of COVID-19 is central to the future of all of us, in developed, emerging and developing countries alike. This is why it was important for me to participate in this SOS education event, carried out on the occasion of the annual United Nations General Assembly.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns earlier this year, schools were closed for more than 90 per cent of the world's student population, leaving at least a third of children completely cut off from their education. Today, hundreds of millions of students remain affected by school closures. The consequences for their education, protection and well-being are considerable.

“*The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated deep inequalities in access to education and digital connectivity.*”

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated deep inequalities in access to education, quality learning and above all digital connectivity. This is true in developed countries, where the closure of schools and universities has highlighted the persistence of the digital divide, between those who can afford computers and fast internet access for everyone in the family and those who only have smartphones or no access at all. Between those who live in bigger houses with gardens and those living in small flats.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

But obviously these inequalities are even more important in developing countries. If these difficulties continue, the future of an entire generation is at risk. This would call into question one of the most positive trends we have seen over the past half-century: the great progresses made regarding access to education.

“*The COVID-19 pandemic could call into question one of the most positive trends seen over the past half-century: the great progresses made in access to education.*”

According to World Bank data, in 1970 68% of children in low- and middle-income countries attended primary school; this proportion reached 89% in 2018. It is striking that the gap in school enrolment rates between girls and boys, which was 18 percentage points in 1970 in these countries, is only three points today. Moreover, this gap is nil at secondary level and the reverse is true at tertiary level: there are now more women than men in the universities of low- and middle-income countries.

All economists agree that a rise in the level of education is a necessary precondition for the economic take-off of countries, even if not a sufficient one. However, many challenges remain: teaching conditions are often difficult and



teaching quality insufficient. Already before COVID-19, more than half of all 10-year-old children in low- and middle-income countries were unable to read a simple story. And millions of adolescents are not learning the transferable, digital and entrepreneurial skills to prepare them for the future. We see also a worrying rise in unemployment among young graduates in many countries.

“*What has been achieved in education over the last 50 years has made a tremendous contribution to reducing gender inequalities worldwide.*”

Still, widespread education favours the establishment of democratic societies that respect human rights, preparing people to exercise an enlightened citizenship. It enables societies in particular to move towards the empowerment of women and girls. What has been achieved in the field of education over the last 50 years has already made a tremendous contribution to reducing gender inequalities worldwide, even if much remains to be done and not just in the developing countries.

Progresses in education in danger

However, all of this is in danger if education is not prioritised in plans to reopen economies. When children miss out on education they are at increased risk of exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect. Children from troubled families face the double burden of losing their education and losing out on the safety that school provides. And girls are at a greater risk of forced marriage and early pregnancy.

As ever, the most vulnerable are paying the heaviest price: those living in poverty or conflict, from ethnic minority groups, with disabilities, and internally displaced or refugee children. As schools remain closed, they fall deeper into deprivation and fall further behind their peers.

We know from recent data that an additional 150 million children could be plunged into poverty due to COVID-19. In July, the World Bank estimated a \$10 trillion loss in global earnings due to the time in school that children have already missed, highlighting that economic losses will stretch far beyond own families.

“Governments around the globe must prioritise their children when it comes to decisions on re-opening and funding.”

Governments around the globe must prioritise their children – who are the future earners of any society – when it comes to decisions on reopening and education funding. Helping to popularise this idea was the aim of the event organised with UNICEF.

European Union at the forefront of supporting education worldwide

The European Union has been and will remain at the forefront of supporting education worldwide. It is also the leading international donor when it comes to child support. Through the € 36 billion of the Team Europe initiative ⁽⁴⁷⁾ the EU and its Member States are supporting our external partners to fight COVID-19 and its socio-economic consequences. A significant part of that effort goes to children and schools. In our upcoming Comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the Child Guarantee, we intend also to strengthen our support to digital education and the protection of the most vulnerable children.

I will pay a lot of attention to make sure that all EU external policies continue to attach high priority to education and that we help ensure that all children have an equal start in life. Even in times as difficult as those of COVID-19.



⁽⁴⁷⁾ See: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77470/%E2%80%9Cteam-europe%E2%80%9D-global-eu-response-covid-19-supporting-partner-countries-and-fragile-populations_en

3.

THE EU, GLOBAL POWERS, NEW EMPIRES AND MULTILATERALISM

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated pre-existing trends, in particular the strategic rivalry between China and the United States. In this context, we have reaffirmed Europe's position: we are historically close to the United States and share many values, while China's political system is based on values that are very different from ours.

We need to defend universal human rights and democratic values on the global stage, and China is also an economic competitor, with which we need to rebalance our economic relations. However, China is still also an indispensable partner in solving global problems such as climate change, and we do not want to engage in a new Cold War.

The year 2020 was marked by the elections in the United States and the tensions in American society that accompanied them. After four difficult years, we want to rebuild the transatlantic relationship with the Biden administration. We are very pleased that our American friends return to our shared convictions - for instance by joining our efforts when it comes to multilateralism and the fight against climate change.

European integration has been closely linked to multilateralism and a rules-based international order. However, in recent years, we have been left somewhat alone in supporting this. With the new US administration and other like-minded partners, we want to revitalise multilateralism and global cooperation on global public goods.

In our immediate neighbourhood, Europe has been increasingly confronted with powers that tend to behave increasingly like "new empires". Throughout the past year, the situation has been especially tense in the Eastern Mediterranean and concerning our relations with Turkey. While firmly defending international law and the rights of our Member States, we should try to find common ground with this great neighbour and partner. However, we can only succeed if Turkey also wants this and acts accordingly.

LET'S MAKE THE MOST OF THE NEW CHAPTER IN EU-US RELATIONS

09/11/2020. *The victory of Joe Biden in US presidential elections has been warmly welcomed in Europe. We need to seize the opportunities this offers to rebuild EU-US cooperation. The world needs a US ready to listen and a Europe able to act* ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Great scenes of celebration in the United States have marked the election victory of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. This is not surprising as these were no 'normal elections'. There was a lot at stake, for the country, its role and standing in the world, and even for the fate of democratic politics worldwide. For four days, people held their breath as the votes were counted in a very narrow race. Like so many millions around the world, I followed the latest news, hour by hour.

“*Despite enormous societal challenges and divisions at home, one of America’s strongest qualities has been its capacity of democratic renewal. And that is precisely what we have seen unfold: the system worked.*”

This tells you something about the unique role of the US. It is a very powerful country but it also embodies a powerful narrative: a democratic republic founded by immigrants escaping persecution and those searching for a better life. Despite enormous societal challenges and divisions at home, one of America’s strongest qualities has been its capacity for democratic renewal. And that is precisely what we have seen unfold this past week: the system worked.

It is standard diplomatic practice to avoid expressions of political preference. However, according to opinion polls, many Europeans welcome that the majority of Americans have voted for change. It is no secret that the past four years have been complicated in terms of EU-US relations. They were marked by numerous policy disagreements. And we even saw some of the principles that we considered as the bedrock of the transatlantic partnership being eroded, and sometimes even emptied of their substance.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

“*President-elect Biden has clearly stated his commitment to restore unity and respect for democratic norms and institutions, at home and abroad. This is as welcome as his assurances to work with allies based on true partnership.*”

President-elect Biden has clearly stated his commitment to restore unity and respect for democratic norms and institutions, at home and abroad. This is as welcome as his assurances to work with allies based on true partnership. For the EU, the US is our most important ally and partner and we believe the same is true in reverse. We have a long history of working together based on shared values. So, we welcome the chance to work once again with a US President who doesn't consider us a 'foe' or believe the EU has been 'set up to take advantage of the US'.

We are ready to do our part to improve cooperation. To restore EU–US cooperation, we need to kick-start the 'engine'. More specifically, we need to get back to real dialogue, establish again a commitment to formulate joint strategies wherever possible and be willing to put resources behind them.

“*The one thing we should avoid is a sterile debate whether we go either 'Transatlantic' or 'European'. Investing in a strong and capable Europe also means investing in a revitalised transatlantic partnership.*”

The one thing we should avoid is a sterile debate, premised on a false choice: whether we go either 'transatlantic' or 'European'. For me, investing in a strong and capable Europe also means investing in a revitalised transatlantic partnership. With a Biden administration, the two are flip sides of the same coin.

There are many areas where EU–US cooperation has to be very close. We can already welcome the stated intention of the President-elect to re-join key multilateral efforts such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Iran nuclear deal and the World Health Organization. The same goes for his stated intention to pursue a constructive stance on bilateral trade issues, but also in the World Trade Organization including the all-important dispute settlement system. In each of these areas, Europe should support and facilitate a smooth 'return to the table' and use it as a springboard for joint action.

We can also foresee an interest by the incoming Biden administration in close cooperation on China and the challenges it poses in terms of unfair trade practices, security and other issues where we both have concerns. Formulating a coherent and robust China stance is at the top of the agenda in Washington and something on which there is bipartisan agreement. We are ready for that and we can expect the EU–US dialogue on China that we launched only last month to continue, with renewed energy, under the next administration.

“*A capable and strategically aware Europe is the best partner for the US - and also what Europe itself needs.*”

When it comes to NATO and the transatlantic security ‘bargain’, we hope to count on the new President to be solid in its commitment to the Alliance, as per his decade-long track record. However, as many US administrations have stressed, this will be coupled with an emphasis on Europe needing to up its game and take more responsibility for its own security. A European common security and defence policy that is adequately resourced and geared towards enabling Europe to tackle security threats especially in our neighbourhood will be welcomed by the US. This is also very much in our own interest.

In essence, a capable and strategically aware Europe is the best partner for the US – and also what Europe itself needs. It is for this reason that we have to proceed with our work to enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy, i.e. its ability to act and defend itself effectively on its own. The last four years have opened our eyes and COVID-19 has further accentuated the need to look after our security and address other vulnerabilities, under the banner of strengthening our strategic autonomy.

There are many more areas where the EU and US have an interest in many areas to work together in foreign policy: Russia and the eastern neighbourhood, Libya and the Middle East and North Africa region, the Balkans and Turkey/eastern Mediterranean. But also, further afield: from Afghanistan to the South and East China seas; to Venezuela and beyond. Plus the not-so-new challenges like hybrid threats, disinformation or the security aspects of artificial intelligence and 5G. The list is long, growing and the needs are becoming urgent.

In the coming days and weeks, we as the EU will reach out to the incoming administration to see how we can best work together. We should of course be mindful that their first priority will be internal, to handle the pandemic, plus

the economic consequences and to heal the country's enormous divisions. To illustrate the latter point: at the time of writing there has still been no concession speech by President Trump. In any event, President-elect Biden may have to work with a Republican controlled Senate . This would have an impact on his freedom of manoeuvre, especially in foreign policy.

“*While our American partners focus on the transition, we should focus on what the EU expects and on what it can offer.*”

The bottom line is this: I welcome that the US will have a new leadership elected on a platform of change and a desire to work with democratic allies. While our American partners focus on the transition, we should focus on what the EU expects and on what it can offer. EU leaders and foreign ministers will discuss how we can make the most of the new chapter that is now opening up. Let's get to work.



THE EVENTS IN WASHINGTON ON 6 JANUARY 2021 AND WHAT THEY MEAN FOR EUROPE

10/01/2021. *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 against disinformation and inequalities and renew global cooperation to promote democratic values* ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

I was shocked, like all democracy advocates and friends of the United States worldwide, by the scenes we witnessed in Washington: a mob assaulting 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 American society is after four years of the 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 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 6 January in Washington was only the climax of very worrying developments happening globally. It must be a wake-up call for all democracy advocates.*”

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

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.

“*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.*”

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 outburst 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 adopted last December a new European democracy action plan ⁽⁵⁰⁾.

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 weakening the legitimacy of representative democracy, particularly among the ones at the lower scale of income and wealth.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250

“*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.*”

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 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 ⁽⁵⁾, 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, like a car engine that uses an unappropriated fuel.

Unlike classic propaganda, aimed at persuading political ideas, disinformation does not operate on 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 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.*”

⁽⁵⁾ <https://elpais.com/opinion/2021-01-07/y-la-desinformacion-asalto-la-democracia.html>



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 ⁽⁵²⁾ 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 ⁽⁵³⁾, notably to remedy precisely this problem.

⁽⁵²⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91038/essential-fight-against-disinformation-and-manipulation_en

⁽⁵³⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-services-act-package>

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.

“*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.

TRUST AND RECIPROCITY: THE NECESSARY INGREDIENTS FOR EU-CHINA COOPERATION

14/05/2020. *The EU's relations with a more assertive China are necessarily diverse. Our own approach to these relations has become more realistic. Like in other fields, unity is a pre-condition for influence: not even the biggest Member State acting alone can influence a superpower* ⁽⁵⁴⁾.

As China's rise went global in recent years, the EU's relationship with it has been changing – and now the corona crisis is affecting that change. From an essentially bilateral relationship focused on economic cooperation, it has turned into a global relationship where deep cooperation co-exists with elements of sometimes open competition.

Overall, the EU's stance has become more realistic and assertive. In parallel, we have also strengthened EU cooperation with other major Asian partners, notably Japan, South Korea, India and others. For its part, China has proceeded with a truly impressive transformation that is having geopolitical consequences.

The multifaceted EU-China relations

The EU's relation with China is so multi-faceted that our approach cannot be reduced to one simple prism. Our 2019 Strategic Outlook⁵⁵, endorsed by all EU Member States, underlines that China is simultaneously a partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives; a negotiating partner, with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests; an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership; and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Op-ed published in several outlets.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>

“China is simultaneously a partner with aligned objectives; a negotiating partner, with whom we need to find a balance; an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership; and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.”

These four elements need to blend into a coherent policy. Developing a joint EU approach to superpowers is never easy, as each member state has its own viewpoints and sensitivities. And the China case is no exception. What's more, China is not shy about sometimes playing on these differences. But surely it is up to us Europeans to maintain the necessary collective discipline. Unity is a pre-condition for influence, since not even the biggest member state acting alone can influence a superpower.

“It is up to us Europeans to maintain the necessary collective discipline. Unity is a pre-condition for influence: not even the biggest member state acting alone can influence a superpower.”

The changes in the EU-China relationship have been accelerating since the outbreak of the coronavirus. There have been different phases. In the beginning, when Chinese hospitals were overwhelmed, the EU offered extensive support, without much publicity. Later on, when Europe became the centre of the pandemic, China sent large supplies of medical equipment – and it made sure the world knew about it. The key point is that we should all demonstrate mutual support and international solidarity - and the European Union has always proven how strong its commitment is - while avoiding the politicization of emergency medical assistance.

The need for a global response to the COVID-19 crisis

It has become a bit of a mantra to say that the global corona crisis requires a global response. But it happens to be true. We clearly need a multilateral response across all dimensions of the crisis: limiting the spread of the virus, boosting research on treatment and vaccines, addressing the consequences in developing countries and working on the economic recovery. In all this, we count on China to play its full role, in line with its global weight and responsibilities.

“*To fight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries, we know more will be needed, including sizeable debt relief and we call on China to play its part.*”

For instance, we have a shared interest in helping the vulnerable in Africa and elsewhere cope with the pandemic. As the EU, together with the EIB, EBRD and Member States, we have mobilised a €20 billion package to assist our partners to deal with the health emergency and the longer-term consequences. We know more will be needed, including sizeable debt relief and we call on China to play its part. I am eager to identify ways that the EU and China could work together on this.

Another obvious joint priority must be to ensure a ‘green recovery’ strategy, using the emergency rescue packages to accelerate our energy transition and underpin our climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. To strengthen our defences against future pandemics, we also need a thorough, independent scientific inquiry into the origins of the crisis.

“*To strengthen our defences against future pandemics, we also need a thorough, independent scientific inquiry into the origins of the crisis.*”

In the bilateral sphere, a successful conclusion of the long-running negotiations on an EU-China comprehensive agreement on investment would send an important signal of our mutual commitment to a rules-based economic partnership. In the same vein, we need follow-up to Chinese commitments on industrial subsidies and forced technology transfers.



Promoting multilateralism

Both the EU and China often state their commitment to promoting multilateralism and the UN system. That common language and common stance is crucial, especially at a time when the multilateral system is openly challenged. But we also need to acknowledge that our approaches on multilateralism differ, for instance on the universality and indivisibility of human rights or when it comes to UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the tensions in the South China Sea.

“*We need to acknowledge that our approaches on multilateralism differ, for instance on the universality and indivisibility of human rights or when it comes to the tensions in the South China Sea.*”

In the cyber area, both sides emphasise the need for a multilateral approach, but China's state-centric stance contrasts with the EU's multi-stakeholder approach based on respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. And when it comes to the WTO, China is extremely supportive formally and defends the WTO in its current form, including the dispute settlement system, but in practice it has shown little readiness to engage in the meaningful reform of the WTO that is clearly needed.

Europe's need to shorten and diversify supply chains

When it comes to Europe itself, there are also lessons to be learnt from the crisis – some of which will play into our relations with our international partners including China. We should avoid excessive dependence in strategic sectors by building stockpiles of critical materials. We also need to shorten and diversify our supply chains.

Since diplomacy is best grounded in clear principles, the watchwords for EU-China should be trust, transparency and reciprocity. We should move forward together, based on a realistic assessment of China's strategic intent and the EU's common interests.

CHINA CARBON NEUTRALITY IN 2060: A POSSIBLE GAME CHANGER FOR CLIMATE

22/10/2020. *In September 2020, President Xi Jinping pledged that China would become carbon neutral by 2060. This announcement could be a tipping point in the global fight against climate change ⁽⁵⁶⁾.*

While we in Europe are currently facing a fast worsening ‘second wave’ of the pandemic, we should not lose sight of the climate crisis that threatens humanity. I have witnessed recently the damage it is already causing in Africa, and the storms Alex and Barbara that have hit Europe are another reminder - if any reminder is needed - of the danger we face.

Europe is at the forefront on climate change

The European Green Deal is a central focus of this Commission’s mandate. We have already decided to aim for climate neutrality in 2050 and we are currently discussing raising the level of our ambition for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The Next Generation EU recovery plan has also been built around this priority.

“*We can only tackle climate change effectively with a global approach in a multilateral framework.*”

However, we must be aware of our limits in this area as the European Union is responsible for only 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions. We can only tackle climate change effectively with a global approach in a multilateral framework.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

The role of developing countries

Since the Rio Summit in 1992, one of the main difficulties in reaching global agreements has been around the question of which role developing countries, in particular China, should play. Originally, developing countries considered, in a way that had merit, that the main responsibility for climate change lay with the developed countries and that therefore they should make the necessary efforts. However, this exclusion of developing countries also led the United States to refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

Economic developments and global changes over the past 30 years have profoundly modified the situation. Given China's technological prowess (space exploration, cutting-edge military technology, artificial intelligence), its continued self-definition as a 'developing country' looks more and more anachronistic and self-serving: China is an international player ready to step up on its responsibilities. However, by 2014, China agreed to make commitments on the limitation of its greenhouse gas emissions, paving the way for the Paris Agreement in 2015.

The Paris agreement breakthrough

While the Paris Agreement was a true breakthrough, the scientists are clear that, for the time being the commitments made by the different countries under that agreement are still insufficient to achieve the goal of keeping global temperature rise to below 2 °C by the end of the century. Given that China accounts now for 27% of global greenhouse gas emissions (while the US emits 14 %, and the EU-27 and India 7% each), its reduction efforts are absolutely critical. In addition to that, its economy is expected to continue growing and it plays a leadership role vis-à-vis emerging and developing economies on their climate stance.

“*The commitments actually made under the Paris Agreement are insufficient to achieve the goal of keeping temperature rise to below 2°C by the end of the century.*”

During his speech to the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2020, the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced two elements in the fight against climate change: ‘We aim to have CO₂ emissions peak before 2030 and achieve

carbon neutrality before 2060. The ‘peaking before 2030’ goal was anticipated but not the carbon neutrality before 2060: the announcement was made without prior trailing. Under current policies, the world would be about 2.7 °C warmer by 2100 (we are now at 1.1 °C) according to climate modellers. If China were to achieve its new goal, it would lop off 0.3 °C off that trajectory. This is a major step.

This year, parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to issue mid-century targets. By doing this announcement, China wants to position itself vis-à-vis the United States as a defender of multilateralism and follower of global rules. The reality is more complex – I have spoken in the past about “selective multilateralism” or a “pick-and-choose” approach. We will watch whether this announcement was tailored for international consumption or whether carbon neutrality becomes really a key feature in the upcoming Five Years Plan to be discussed at the end of the month.

“*The simple fact that China acknowledges the dramatic threat of climate change and that we need more action is of paramount importance.*”

However, the simple fact that China acknowledges the dramatic threat of climate change and that we need more action is of paramount importance. From a domestic viewpoint, the set of challenges to address on the climate and environmental front is such that there is a sense of social urgency inside the country. In spite of this, reaching the new target will be a tremendous challenge: in China fossil fuels represent 90% of all energy supplies, and coal, the most carbon-intensive of all, generates two thirds of electricity. In 2018, China released 590 kg of CO₂ equivalent per \$1000 of Gross Domestic Product, compared to 370 for the US and 230 for the EU.

Given China’s traditional penchant for caution in making international commitments, the announcement also suggests that the leadership is confident that technological progress in energy efficiency and the cost of renewable energy can make carbon neutrality attainable, without hampering China’s economic development.

China wants to become an “electro state”

There are also immense opportunities linked to the new green technologies where China has taken a leading position. Today, Chinese firms produce more than 70% of the world's solar modules, 69% of lithium-ion batteries and 45% of wind turbines. They also control much of the refining of minerals critical to clean energy, such as cobalt and lithium. An ambitious long-term goal will provide a further spur for the development of these technologies. Instead of a petro-state, the People's Republic may become an “electro-state”. This will have huge geopolitical consequences.

“Setting an ambitious objective is important. However, what matters is delivering results and China has so far not detailed how it will achieve its 2060 target.”

During the last months, the EU urged China to step up its climate ambition and we are happy to hear the announcement going in this direction. Setting an ambitious objective is important. However, what matters is delivering results and China has so far not detailed how it will achieve its 2060 target.

On 14 September in the latest VTC between the EU and Chinese leadership, it was agreed to set up a climate and environment dialogue to go further in this field. This dialogue could focus on the pathways to get to net-zero emissions. Prominent topics should be the phasing out of coal, the role of carbon pricing, the rollout of hydrogen. In addition, the dialogue could prepare the ground for global action on methane emissions.

“China should cease its financing of fossil-fuel based energy supply in third countries, starting with coal.”

It is also not just about China's domestic energy choices: 44% of China's investment support in the framework of the Belt and Road initiative relates to energy. This has resulted in the construction of many fossil-fuelled power plants. In keeping up with its domestic aspirations, China should cease its financing of fossil-fuel based energy supply in third countries, starting with coal. This question should also be high on the agenda of the EU–China dialogue and for our preparation of COP 26.

The need for high ambition coalitions

We seek high-ambition coalitions with countries that share our determination to live up to the objectives of the Paris Agreement. We have always said that we need to deploy a climate diplomacy to share our efforts with the rest of the world, especially with great emitters, and, naturally, we want to work closely with China on that issue.

“We need to deploy a climate diplomacy to share our efforts with the rest of the world especially and, naturally, we want to work closely with China on that issue.”

It could exert strong pressure on other emitters to increase their ambitions, notably in Asia, a continent accounting for more than half of global emissions, but also in the Americas. It could turn 2021 into a successful year for climate action, culminating in COP-26 in November in Glasgow.

It is obvious that China's promising announcement on climate change comes at a time when there are also significant and in fact growing differences between us, be it the situation in Hong Kong, the treatment of the Uighurs, or the lack of reciprocity in our trade and investment relations. This reminds us of the complexity of our relationship with China: it is both an economic competitor and systemic rival, whose political system is built on values that are different from ours; but also a partner for tackling the colossal challenges of the 21st century in a multilateral framework.

“China is both an economic competitor and systemic rival and an essential partner for tackling the colossal challenges of the 21st century in a multilateral framework.”

I have argued previously that we cannot reduce the complexities of the EU-China relationship to a binary choice⁽⁵⁷⁾. It is not either/or, but both/and. We can and should push back strongly in areas where China's behaviour goes against our interest or universal values and develop our 'strategic autonomy', while at the same time also working closely with China to deal with global challenges and deliver global public goods – the fight against climate change being perhaps the single clearest example of this.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84484/sinatra-doctrine-how-e-u-should-deal-us%E2%80%93china-competition_en

THE SINATRA DOCTRINE: HOW THE EU SHOULD DEAL WITH THE US-CHINA COMPETITION

27/08/2020. Confronted with the rise of China and its growing competition with the United States, the EU should look at the world from its own point of view, defending its values and interests, and using the instruments of power available to it ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

Everything in the relationship between the United States and China changed when, at the beginning of this year, they signed an agreement in Washington that was meant to pave the way to eventually end the trade war that had started in 2018. That promise has remained unfulfilled, however. Today, the rivalry between the two extends to everything, involving closures of consulates and mutual recriminations, reflecting the struggle for world geopolitical supremacy between the two big superpowers, as if we were in a new Cold War.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the tensions

Was it the coronavirus that led to this change? While this unexpected, exogenous factor has nothing to do with ideologies, it has certainly acted as a catalyst for exacerbating an underlying rivalry that will become the predominant geopolitical trend in the post-virus era.

The role of the European Union in such a scenario and the question of how it should deal with a China increasingly pursuing a strategy of global influence are issues of fundamental importance for our future. We can only answer this question positively if Member States present a united front and make use of our Community instruments, in particular the power of our single market. Unity is vital in every area of our relationship with Beijing because no European country is capable on its own of defending its interests and values against a country the size and might of China. A balanced EU-China relationship is essential to address and eventually resolve major world problems, from pandemics to climate change, including the building of effective multilateralism.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Op-ed published in several outlets

“*A balanced EU–China relationship is essential to address major world problems, from pandemics to climate change, including the building of effective multilateralism.*”

In this new geo-political scenario, 2020 could go down in history as a key year in EU–China relations. Despite the difficulties created by the coronavirus pandemic, high-level meetings have never been so intense. The 22nd EU–China Summit took place on 22 June, by videoconference, lasting much longer than the scheduled time. Discussions are ongoing to schedule a possible leaders’ level video conference, bringing together the presidents of the European Council and Commission, as well as Chancellor Angela Merkel, representing Germany, which holds the six-month presidency of the EU, and President Xi Jinping. Before the end of the year, COVID-19 permitting, a summit is to be held in Leipzig (Germany), which should be attended by the Chinese president and the presidents of the European Council and Commission, plus the 27 European Heads of State or Government.

The aim is to conclude by the end of 2020 the EU–China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which we have been negotiating since 2013. At the June summit with China, the EU expressed its disappointment to Beijing about the lack of progress in implementing the agreements reached at the previous meeting in 2019. The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, made it clear that Beijing had not honoured its commitments to ensure access to the Chinese market on a reciprocal basis and reduce aid to state-owned companies, and had thus placed European companies at a clear competitive disadvantage.

For us Europeans, the coronavirus crisis has accelerated trends observed in recent years and has brought to light some of our weaknesses in the relationship with China, which has become gradually more assertive, expansionist and authoritarian.

A more assertive China

China is reclaiming what it regards as its rightful place in international politics. For eighteen centuries, up to the first Industrial Revolution, China was the richest country in the world. Angus Maddison has pointed out that, in 1820, it still produced 30 per cent of the world’s GDP: more than Europe and the US combined.

China has always regarded itself as the Middle Empire, the great civilisation based on the concept of “everything under the heavens”. This concept of centrality was reflected in kowtow, the act of prostrating oneself before the emperor. Still, China did not necessarily try to export its values.

“*The “Made in China 2025” initiative has revealed the ambition to make China a global technological power.*”

There has, however, been a significant change in the attitude of the current Chinese leaders who, with the “Made in China 2025” initiative, have revealed the ambition to make China a global technological power. The “China Dream” proposed by President Xi would be the means of achieving this. This ambition for leadership is the main difference compared with past eras.

China is seeking to fill the political vacuum that the US is leaving following its gradual withdrawal from the international scene. China’s aim is to transform the international order into a selective multilateral system with Chinese characteristics, in which economic and social rights would take precedence over political and civil rights.

“*China’s aim is to transform the international order into a selective multilateral system in which economic and social rights would take precedence over political and civil rights.*”

This strategy is deployed on several fronts. For instance, undermining international rules, such as the failure to implement the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea; promoting Chinese language and ideals as a “community of shared destiny”; the Chinese vision of international relations based on cooperation, interests and shared responsibilities, and cooperation in the fight against transnational threats, plus political inclusiveness, according to the premise that no political model can be applied universally; occupying senior positions in the United Nations system (in which China was, admittedly, underrepresented): in a short time it has become the chair of four of the 15 UN agencies and the deputy chair of six; and reducing the financing of multilateral initiatives in the field of human rights.

“Gone are the days of the Chinese foreign policy inspired by Deng Xiaoping’s speech in 1974, when he said that “China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to become one.”

Gone are the days of the Chinese foreign policy inspired by Deng Xiaoping’s speech to the UN General Assembly in 1974, when he said that “China is not a superpower, nor will she ever seek to become one. What is a superpower? A superpower is an imperialist country which everywhere subjects other countries to its aggression, interference, control, subversion or plunder and strives for world hegemony”.

The new-style Chinese foreign policy is known as “wolf warrior diplomacy”, a name taken from a series of blockbusters based on a Chinese version of Rambo. In this new method of communication, high-level Chinese diplomats respond aggressively to any criticism of the regime on social media that are generally prohibited in China. In this new approach, China’s increasingly important role in the world involves safeguarding its main interests in an unambiguous and unconditional manner.

“With the “wolf warrior diplomacy”, high-level Chinese diplomats respond aggressively to any criticism of the regime on social media that are generally prohibited in China.”

Australia, for instance, which is heavily reliant on trade with China (accounting for 32.6 per cent of Australian exports), has directly suffered from China’s growing assertiveness. After Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison requested an investigation by the World Health Organisation (WHO) into the origins of the coronavirus, China responded by imposing tariffs of 80.5 per cent on Australian barley and suspending licences that affected 35 per cent of Australian beef exports to China. If these measures are extended to other sectors, it is estimated that the disagreement is likely to cost Australia 1 per cent of its GDP.

A more expansionist approach

From a historical standpoint, China’s attitude to the rest of the world has changed significantly. China dominated nautical technology under the Song dynasty (960--1279). However, it did not use it to occupy territories and establish an overseas colonial empire. Between 1405 and 1433, before Europeans launched their maritime campaigns, Admiral Zheng He sailed to Java, India, the Horn of Africa and the Strait of Hormuz with a fleet that far outmatched the Spanish

Armada of 150 years later in size and sophistication, yet the voyages did not lead to any plans for permanent occupation and exploitation of overseas countries. Unlike then, China is now prepared to use its technological and military advantage to enhance its political influence.

“*Unlike before, China is now prepared to use its technological and military advantage to enhance its political influence worldwide.*”

In the last 30 years, China's military spending rose from just over 1 per cent to 14 per cent worldwide, and this year it will increase by 6.6 per cent, according to figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). It is clear that President Xi wants to make the People's Liberation Army the main military technology force by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic. At the commemoration of the 70th anniversary in 2019, China proudly displayed its nuclear arsenal, which is land-, air- and sea-based.

The EU's embargo on the sale of arms, imposed on China after the Tiananmen Square events in 1989, is still in force, but China is no longer dependent on imports of military equipment. It has developed a first-rate arms industry, particularly naval weaponry and ballistic missiles, and its exports are increasing every year. Although Chinese military capabilities still fall far short of those of the US, the distance is much smaller than a few decades ago, and in some areas there are hardly any differences at all. Within a year, China will have four operational aircraft carriers. Several US reports point out that China is now a major challenge to US naval domination and control of the western Pacific.

“*China's expansionism is more visible in the South China Sea, where Beijing has increased its presence by creating artificial, militarised islands, in breach of the 2016 arbitration ruling.*”

China's expansionism is more visible in the South China Sea, where Beijing has increased its presence by creating artificial, militarised islands, in breach of the 2016 arbitration ruling in favour of its South-East Asian neighbours. Its growing presence is also visible in Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, which are all countries which are important to India. The tension between Beijing and New Delhi has been exacerbated recently, as evidenced by skirmishes between their armies on the disputed Himalayan border.

“*Chinese realpolitik is based on creating faits accomplis: the patient, discreet accumulation of advantages on the ground.*”

Chinese realpolitik is based on creating *faits accomplis*: the patient, discreet accumulation of advantages on the ground. Board games are a clear example of how the Chinese think and how they differ from Europeans. While in Europe we are fond of chess, which ends in total victory (checkmate), in China they prefer go, where the aim is to occupy empty spaces on the board to surround the opponent's stones and undermine his/her ability to respond. As the famous Chinese strategist Sun Tzu said in *The Art of War*, the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting, creating situations on the ground that reinforce one's position and place one's opponent in a weak position.

An authoritarian regime

In 2001 the West welcomed China into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), convinced that the liberalisation of trade would go hand in hand with political openness - “*Wandel durch Handel*” (change through trade). The French also believed that “*le doux commerce*” would appease tensions and bring the political systems closer together. This belief has for some time been shown to be wrong. There has been no convergence: on the contrary, there has been greater divergence in recent years. China is the paradigm that has disproven the theory that economic and political openness are two sides of the same coin. The new technological possibilities for information and monitoring of the population have had a significant influence in this respect. This trend looks set to increase.

“*In 2001 the West welcomed China into the WTO, convinced that the liberalisation of trade would go hand in hand with political openness. This belief has been shown to be wrong.*”

Any signs of dissidence can be easily suppressed by means of powerful mass surveillance tools and the sway which the Communist Party holds over the State. In recent years, we have witnessed with concern a rise in human rights abuses in China, increased repression of human rights defenders, journalists and intellectuals, and the violation of basic rights of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

The deterioration of the situation in Hong Kong is a clear example of this wave of repression. Recently, speaking on behalf of the 27 Member States, I expressed the EU's serious concern over the adoption of the new Hong Kong National Security Act, which is contrary to the principle of "one country, two systems" and to China's commitments to the international community.

“*In recent years, we have witnessed with concern an increased repression of human rights defenders, journalists and intellectuals, the violation of basic rights of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang and the deterioration of the situation in Hong Kong.*”

At the request of the European foreign ministers, I presented a set of measures to address this violation of Hong Kong's autonomy. The measures include a limitation on surveillance technology exports, a review of the extradition agreements that various Member States have with Hong Kong and an increase in scholarship and visas for Hong Kong students.



The European response

If the EU does not want to remain entrenched in the dispute between the US and China, it must look at the world from its own point of view and act to defend its values and interests, which do not always coincide with those of the US. In short, as I said on one occasion, the EU has to do things “its own way”. This led to some commentators calling my approach the “Sinatra doctrine”, a reference to his song ‘My Way’. I do not mind this, as long as it makes it easier to get my message across. I could have said that Europe must increase its strategic autonomy or its sovereignty, but this would probably not have aroused as much interest.

“*Our doctrine should be based on two pillars: continuing the cooperation with Beijing in order to address global challenges, while at the same time strengthening the EU’s strategic sovereignty by protecting technological sectors of our economy.*”

This doctrine would be based on two pillars: continuing the cooperation with Beijing in order to address global challenges such as climate change, combating the coronavirus, regional conflicts and development in Africa, while at the same time strengthening the EU’s strategic sovereignty by protecting technological sectors of our economy which are key to ensuring the necessary autonomy and promoting international European values and interests.

Within the boundaries of the 2019 China strategy

This is not a change in policy, but rather a development within the boundaries of the 2019 EU strategy on Beijing, which already identified China as a strategic partner with which the EU cooperates, as well as a competitor and a systemic rival. Let us not fall into the trap of seeing things in black and white: our relationship with China is and will inevitably be complicated because it is our second biggest trading partner, and which is in fact a necessary interlocutor if we are to solve global problems. At the same time, it is, inevitably, a technological and economic competitor. The problem with our relationship with China also lies in the difference between our political systems.

“*Let us not fall into the trap of seeing things in black and white: our relationship with China is and will inevitably be complicated because it is our second biggest trading partner, and a necessary interlocutor if we are to solve global problems.*”

Following the emergence of a “battle of narratives” since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the controversies over China’s “politics of generosity” (a term which I was one of the first to use, attracting considerable criticism), subsequently renamed “mask diplomacy”, the EU must base its strategy on three pillars: combating Chinese disinformation operations, opposing “cherry-picking” multilateralism (where China only defends multilateralism when this suits it), and ensuring that China complies with its commitments so that European companies have reciprocal access to its markets and innovation and research programmes. It is vital that we ensure a balance in our economic relationship and dispense with some of the naivety of the past.

“*Independence from two competitors/rivals does not mean being at equal distance from them. Our lengthy common history and shared values with the US mean that we are closer to Washington than we are to Beijing.*”

Independence from two competitors/rivals does not mean being at equal distance from them. Our lengthy common history and shared values with the US mean that we are closer to Washington than we are to Beijing. Cooperation with the US within NATO is still crucial for European defence, for instance.

However, to be able to continue taking political decisions autonomously as Europeans, we need to invest in strategic sovereignty.

“*The EU recently adopted measures to protect our interests, such as trade defence instruments, the Regulation on scrutiny of foreign investment and the White Paper on subsidies to foreign companies that distort competition in the Single Market.*”

Thus, the EU recently adopted measures to protect our interests, such as trade defence instruments, the regulation on scrutiny of foreign investment and the White Paper on subsidies to foreign companies that distort competition in the single market. The International Procurement Instrument is currently being adopted. While these measures are not aimed at any country in particular, their effects will redress the imbalance in our trade relationship with China.

The means of a united European front

The whole point of the EU is to defend European values and interests by means of a united front. Our founding Treaties refer explicitly to both of these things. But I do not think that we should have to choose between protecting our economy and protecting our fundamental values. The figures show that we are not, on the whole, as dependent on China as many think. However, some individual companies in specific sectors are indeed dependent on China. For instance, only 7 per cent of German exports of goods go to China. And Germany is the biggest European exporter to China. In terms of added value, German exports to China in 2015 represented 2.8 per cent of the total added value of its exports, according to a study by Jürgen Matthes in the German Economic Institute's report.

We tend to think of the importance of third countries to our economies, ignoring our trade with our European partners. In fact, 60 per cent of German exports go to EU countries. This does not detract from the major role played by Asian demand, in particular Chinese demand, in key sectors of German industry. Dependence on China in specific sectors such as the car industry is clear. Of the 10 million cars sold by the Volkswagen group in 2018, four million were sold to the Chinese market, in other words 40 per cent of its sales.

It is becoming increasingly clear that China is taking advantage of our economic relationship: its decision to call itself a developing country when joining the WTO enabled it, for instance, to avoid trade concessions and significant commitments to reducing polluting gas emissions. Moreover, China subsidises its state-owned enterprises and has the largest series of trade and investment barriers recorded, as documented in a 2019 European Commission report.

“*Our relationship with China is too asymmetric for the current level of Chinese development. This needs to be redressed. If we do not do this now, in a few years' time it will be too late.*”

European companies suffer discrimination as regards access to its market, in particular for public tenders. Keeping things as they stand (lack of reciprocity and unequal conditions) is not an option. Our relationship is too asymmetric for the current level of Chinese development. This needs to be redressed.

If we do not do this now, in a few years' time it will be too late. Chinese products will continue to rise in the value chain and our economic and technological dependence will increase. The EU's technological power must rise in line with our strategic autonomy. We must avoid arriving at the point where, as my friend Enrico Letta says, we Europeans have to choose between being a Chinese colony or an American colony. As I said at the beginning of this article, the key to our success will depend to a large extent on our ability to exploit the potential of the European single market, maintain unity between Member States and assert our international standards.

Cooperation is also essential

Cooperation is an equally central component of the Sinatra doctrine. I cannot stress enough the fact that cooperating with Beijing is essential to addressing global challenges effectively. The most obvious example is combating climate change. The EU accounts for 9 per cent of worldwide emissions, while China is responsible for 28 per cent. Even if we Europeans could, by some miracle, stop emitting CO₂ tomorrow, this would not change things very much. We will succeed in effectively tackling climate change only if we manage to ensure that, together with our efforts on the climate, the big polluters such as China, the US and India follow suit and Africa takes a different development route from the one we took.

“*We are too interdependent to decouple economically from China. Coronavirus will change globalisation, but it will not stop it.*”

We are too interdependent to decouple economically from China, as the Trump administration is preaching. Coronavirus will change globalisation, but it will not stop it. Although some analysts speak of a new Cold War, this reading is misleading because the US and the Soviet Union were never as economically interconnected as the US and China are now. As I have pointed out on a number of occasions, the stability of the dollar, and with it the stability of the entire capitalist system,

is paradoxically highly dependent on the Communist Party of China – the term US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo uses to refer to China – as it is the second biggest owner of US Treasury bonds after Japan. Interdependence is just as extensive in Europe: EU–China trade amounts to well over €1 billion per day.

Moreover, the strategy of open confrontation with China has proven costly for the US. According to a Federal Reserve report, US tariffs did not increase employment or manufacturing output in the US, but they did increase production costs. Moody's Analytics estimates that the trade war has cost Washington roughly 300 000 jobs and 0.3 per cent of the country's GDP. US economists calculate that the trade war will cost each US family \$800 per year.

“*In response to those who wrongly advocate a new Cold War, the EU should promote its interests, but it should do so in close cooperation with countries that champion effective multilateralism and the primacy of international law.*”

In response to those who wrongly advocate a new Cold War with a world divided into two blocs, the EU should promote its interests, but it should do so in close cooperation with countries that champion effective multilateralism and the primacy of international law.

If we want to use musical references to describe the state of EU–China relations, we could perhaps turn to the legendary song by Serge Gainsbourg, *Je t'aime ... moi non plus*, a song which marked my generation's youth, and which plays down the feelings and contradictions that form part of the eternally difficult relations between couples. Because, in strategic relations as in love, actions speak louder than words. Therefore, to put it in practical, specific terms, it is essential for Beijing to comply with its commitment to move towards a more balanced economic relationship between the EU and China by the end of 2020.

EUROPE IN THE FACE OF THE “NEW EMPIRES”

30/08/2020. *In recent years, we have been increasingly confronted with tensions in our relations with China, Russia or Turkey. To be able to negotiate and settle peacefully our conflicts with these “new empires”, we need to learn the “language of power”* ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

This summer has not been a restful one. From the explosion in the port of Beirut to the seizure of power by the army in Mali, the war in Libya, the tensions caused by Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean, the presidential elections in Belarus, and the alleged poisoning of a Russian opposition leader, our neighbourhood has been constantly on the brink of conflagration. But what is the relationship between these events? At first glance, there is none. On closer inspection, however, they all bear witness to the emergence of powers intent on reviving memories of great empires of the past.

“*Russia, China and Turkey share common characteristics: they are sovereignist vis-à-vis the outside world and authoritarian internally; they want to have their zones of influence recognised and to shield them from outside eyes.*”

Over and above their specificities, Russia, China and Turkey share three common characteristics: they are sovereignist vis-à-vis the outside world and authoritarian within their own borders; they are intent on having their zones of influence recognised and are determined to shield them from all outside eyes; they want to change the rules of the global game because the distribution of power in the world today bears no relation to that of the era in which they arose. On this point, it must be acknowledged that they are not completely devoid of arguments.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Op-ed published in *Le Journal du Dimanche*.

Sovereignty and sovereignism

Unlike the principle of sovereignty, which is based on the will of the people, sovereignism places its sole emphasis on the sovereignty of the State, which is a very different matter.

Sovereignist states are thus increasingly opposed to respect for fundamental human rights. They seek to block all international support for civil societies that demand more freedom, as in Belarus, and they have no qualms about undermining the freedoms of their own citizens in defiance of their international commitments, as China has shown in Hong Kong and in Xinjiang. Sovereignists view international society as a collection of colliding billiard balls, while we Europeans see the world as a dynamic interplay of interdependent fluids regulated by norms.

“*Sovereignty is based on the will of the people. Sovereignism places its sole emphasis on the sovereignty of the State. Sovereignist states are increasingly opposed to respect for fundamental human rights.*”

After thirty years in which the European vision seemed to gain ground, the sovereignist vision is regaining the upper hand with these new empires. Moscow believes that it has a right of oversight in Belarus and intends to prevent Europeans from supporting protests by civil society against the rigged presidential elections.

Nobody has an interest in converting Belarus into another Ukraine. Moreover, this conflict is not between Europe and Russia, but between the people of Belarus and their leaders. The demonstrators contesting the election result are not waving European flags but rather the former flag of their country. And since there is a dispute, the best solution would be to ‘replay the match’ under OSCE supervision. In the meantime, it is not sufficient for us to merely express our concern. We must impose sanctions on those responsible if the EU is to act in accordance with its principles.

Turkey's actions in the Mediterranean are different

Turkey's action in the Mediterranean area is of a different nature. It aims to have Ankara acknowledged as a major regional player which cannot be excluded either from the sharing of the proceeds from gas resources or from a political settlement in Libya, mirroring its past influence in the Mediterranean which its leaders seek to restore.

It is obviously no coincidence that the first religious ceremony at Hagia Sophia, which has become a mosque again, coincided with the anniversary of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which marked the re-establishment of Turkish sovereignty after the humiliation of the Treaty of Sèvres. Turkey, Russia and China all appeal to history to advance their interests, even it entails imposing what they consider to be their rights in the face of international law.

“*Turkey, Russia and China all appeal to history to advance their interests, even it entails imposing what they consider to be their rights in the face of international law.*”

We are not going to change geography and Turkey will continue to be an important partner on a number of issues. This should enable us to emerge from a dynamic of dangerous confrontation with this great neighbour. But is that what Turkey wants?

Certain European countries have also been empires. Thankfully, they have stepped back from the imperial temptation by creating Europe. But to be able to negotiate and settle peacefully our conflicts with these new empires, which are built on values that we do not share, we also need to learn what I have called the language of power.

This is the price to be paid to give birth to a geopolitical Europe.

THE WAY AHEAD AFTER A DIFFICULT YEAR 2020 FOR EU–TURKEY RELATIONS

18/12/2020. *Tensions in the eastern Mediterranean and relations with Turkey have been one of the greatest EU challenges in 2020. It is not surprising that EU–Turkey relations were one of the main foreign policy issues discussed during the last European Council of the year.* ⁽⁶⁰⁾

European integration has been driven by the aim of overcoming the dynamics of conflicts between states, which have characterised European history, under evolving social and political formats, for many centuries. Since their creation, the Ottoman and Russian Empires have been part of this equation. And today still, it is clear that the European Union will not be able to achieve stability on the continent unless it finds the right balance in its relations with Turkey and the Russian Federation.

Turning dynamics of mistrust into relationships based on cooperation

Defensive attitudes based on deterrence do not provide long-term solutions. At most they offer some breathing space. Our challenge and mutual interest – and my responsibility as High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission – is to turn dynamics of mistrust, rivalry or confrontation into relationships based on common interests and on cooperation.

“*It is clear that the European Union will not be able to achieve stability on the continent unless it finds the right balance in its relations with Turkey.*”

Some may read these lines with scepticism. But those that do so often think from purely national standpoints, rather than from the broader pan-European outlook that the EU offers. It is important to recall the political essence of the European

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

project. Indeed, in less than thirteen years after the end of the Second World War, one of the bloodiest conflicts ever, the European Communities, followed by the European Union, brought together former enemies around a common agenda of cooperation and integration. A lesson that still drives our ambitions and foreign policy to date.

A year of trouble and constant activities and dialogue

When I assumed my responsibilities as HR/VP a year ago, the EU's relationship with Turkey was already on a downward slope. I knew from the outset that redressing this situation was going to be one of the biggest challenges of my mandate. Mutual expectations from the 2016 EU–Turkey joint statement ⁽⁶⁾, which followed the outbreak of the migration crisis of 2015, had not borne fruit even though it did help control migration flows towards Europe. From June 2016 onwards, there had been little to no progress on the accession negotiations.

Confrontation over exploitation of resources in the eastern Mediterranean was gathering speed, coupled with long-standing disagreements on control over maritime spaces among concerned coastal states. The efforts in Crans Montana to find a final solution to the reunification of Cyprus had failed in 2017. Turkey's regional engagement from eastern and northern Africa to the western Balkans continued to gather strength. In particular, Turkey's active and unilateral involvement in both Syria and Libya has been increasingly perceived as not aligned with the security interests of the EU itself or with the understandings reached amongst all Member States.

“*Mutual expectations from the 2016 EU–Turkey joint statement, which followed the outbreak of the migration crisis of 2015, had not borne fruit.*”

The November 2019 memorandum of understanding between Turkey and the Government of National Accord in Libya, which identified respective exclusive economic zones fuelled serious concerns and elicited a strong response from the EU. The agreement also contained clauses on military support that were in contradiction with the UN arms embargo on Libya. This was soon accompanied by the continuous deployment of Turkish exploration or drilling vessels in the eastern Mediterranean, challenging directly Greece and Cyprus.

⁽⁶⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

These activities had already started earlier and had led to the development of a specific regime of EU restrictive measures aimed at protecting Cypriot waters. Unfortunately, Turkish Navtex notifications and vessels, such as the 'Oruc Reiss' and the evocative 'Barbaross', had become household names in Brussels.

The March 2020 crisis

In March 2020, we had a major crisis. Also through powerful media mobilisation, Turkey's highest authorities encouraged migrants and refugees to advance towards the Greek borders and try to enter into the European Union. Greek authorities responded with determination, repelling the push, and the European Union responded with full political solidarity. The President of the European Council and the President of the Commission, joined by the President of the European Parliament, travelled immediately to the Greek northern border in those difficult moments. I joined President Michel shortly thereafter in Ankara and we had intense exchanges with President Erdogan and other Turkish authorities. This was followed a few days later by a visit from President Erdogan to Brussels.

Stability at the border was re-established. At Turkey's request, the EU provided clarifications on the implementation of support measures to refugees hosted by Turkey. We also pursued discussions on how to return to a positive agenda. While Turkey seemed to be looking for a strong political recommitment, I was keener to advance on the practical implementation of the 2016 joint statement. We reviewed the state of play including the effective disbursement of our support to the Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey and agreed that further efforts were required on both sides to bring all these efforts back on track.

Drilling vessels and anachronisms of vestiges of war

Nevertheless, the continuous deployment of Turkish drilling and exploratory vessels, be it in waters adjoining Cyprus or Greece, created a very negative environment that impeded the development of a positive agenda. This led me to travel to Greece, Cyprus and Turkey in late June. My goal was clear: I wanted to explore with the main protagonists the possibilities of launching a real dialogue that would help address the outstanding issues. In addition to the strong support by both the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission, I also want to highlight here the notable diplomatic energy invested by Germany, starting with Chancellor Merkel and my good friend and colleague Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

“*I wanted to explore with the main protagonists the possibilities of launching a real dialogue that would help address the outstanding issues.*”

I visited the northern border of Greece and flew as close as possible to the drilling platforms deployed by Turkey in an area close to the coast of Cyprus. I also had a night walk across the green line in Nicosia and saw the abandoned town of Varosha from a helicopter within Cypriot-controlled territory. The anachronism of these vestiges of war, frozen in the past, and testimony of a still unsolved conflict in the midst of the European Union were profoundly disturbing and revealing. There had been no progress whatsoever since I last visited Varosha in 2005 as President of the European Parliament. If anything, this visit further strengthened my determination to look for solutions.

While the relationship with Turkey is very complex and has many dimensions, I reached the conclusion that disagreements with Greece and the non-resolution of the Cyprus issue are centrepieces. My July trip to Ankara confirmed this, with foreign minister Çavusoglu underlining the role of Turkey in the protection of the rights of Turkish Cypriots and explaining Turkish views on the exploitation of resources in Cypriot waters. On his side, the Minister of Defence, Hulusi Akar, offered me a detailed presentation, from the Turkish perspective, of the incident a few weeks earlier between a French frigate and a group of Turkish naval units.

Minister Çavusoglu bid me farewell in a joint press conference where he criticised harshly some Member States, as well as the EU itself, denouncing biased and unfriendly attitudes vis-a-vis Turkey. I preferred to respond with the language of diplomacy, although the tone and formulations used by my Turkish host raised questions of whether this would be enough.

Create space for a healthy EU–Turkey relationship

I do not want to continue with a blow-by-blow account of my various efforts trying to help find space for renewed bilateral dialogue between Greece and Turkey on maritime disputes and confidence building measures, or on discussing how to support UN efforts in relaunching the Cyprus settlement talks. Suffice it to say here that channelling both issues through appropriate diplomatic and technical processes is essential to create space for a healthy EU–Turkey relationship. These are questions that can no longer be postponed.

My trip to Malta in mid-August to meet with Minister Çavusoglu turned short due to the signature of a maritime delimitation agreement between Greece and Egypt. Turkey's response was to suspend a foreseen renewal of exploratory talks with Greece aimed at addressing maritime differences accompanied by the relaunch of Turkish provocative maritime activity. This has only confirmed my conviction regarding the centrality these two issues have gained in the EU-Turkey relationship.

Turkey's international agenda

The relationship with Turkey has deep historical roots. Its present direction of travel, however, seems to take it further away from the EU. This concerns not only its internal developments, notably regarding fundamental freedoms, but also Turkey's external engagement. The latter has gained further relevance in 2020, be it in Syria and Iraq, in Libya, where it has turned the tables in very difficult moments for the Government of National Accord, or in Nagorno-Karabakh, where its support has resulted in a major victory for Azerbaijan.

I could go on and mention its projection in eastern Africa, in the Sahel or in the western Balkans. Turkey has become a regional power to be reckoned with and has scored undeniable successes. Unfortunately, in quite a few cases, Turkey's international agenda is not well aligned with the EU's and its methods are not those of the EU. Strong Turkish resistance to / and criticism of EU naval operation Irini, reveals fundamental differences in our understanding of UN Security Council resolution imposing an arms embargo on Libya.

“Turkey has become a regional power to be reckoned with, but its international agenda is not well aligned with the EU's and its methods are not those of the EU.

All this raises fundamental questions regarding Turkey's objectives. And the fact that Turkey is a candidate to EU accession, places the EU in a position where it is entitled to ask those questions. There is no doubt that we have much progress to make in conducting an honest and profound dialogue with Turkey on these matters, and Turkey in providing responses.

While I truly welcome statements by Turkish officials, even at the highest level, proclaiming the strategic interest of Turkey in joining the EU, it is important

that those statements are followed by actions that confirm such intentions. At the same time, relations cannot be a one-way street. The EU also has to show Turkey that it would be welcomed as a family member if it meets its side of the bargain. This is where the positive agenda agreed in the joint statement of 2016 plays a vital role.

Cooperation and trust to get out of this negative trend

We have to find a way out of tit-for-tat dynamics and get back to cooperation and trust. This was the main message of the October European Council and this message was repeated last week ⁽⁶²⁾. I believe there is greater understanding of this on Turkey's side today than in October.

Still, the situation has not fundamentally improved. Hence, our overall assessment of the year must be negative. But we do also have a chance to redress things and this is what we must do.

There is a high probability that, if we continue in this downward spiral, the EU will have to adopt strong measures, to convince Turkey that it is serious and determined to ensure respect for our interests. I will report on this to European leaders in March 2021.

A strong cooperative relationship with Turkey would constitute a major contribution to European stability. Likewise, it will be difficult for Turkey to find a better partner than the EU.

Difficult for Turkey to find a better partner than the EU

As I said, a strong cooperative relationship with Turkey would constitute a major contribution to European stability. Likewise, it will be difficult for Turkey to find a better partner than the EU. Our economies are tied, the EU is by far Turkey's number one import and export partner, as well as a source of investments. EU goods exports to Turkey in 2019 stood at €68 billion, while imports from Turkey were €70 billion, and so are our societies, with many citizens living, working and travelling across our borders.

⁽⁶²⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47296/1011-12-20-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

Turkey's prosperity and security, as a NATO ally, requires a strong relationship with the EU. There are no sustainable alternatives to this. And a great part of its society, according to most recent polls, still looks towards the EU as a useful example for further development.

We have a chance still to redirect our relations. The EU extends an open hand to Turkey hoping it will seize it, and the agenda presented by EU leaders is clear. I am ready, working together with the Commission and Member States, to discuss our proposals for a positive agenda with Turkey and explore ways of bringing our relations forward. This could also include enhancing regional cooperation through an eastern Mediterranean conference. But for all this to happen, actions that may be considered aggressive or contrary to EU interests have to stop.

We need to ensure the renewal of dialogue with Greece and the relaunch of the Cyprus settlement talks, on the understanding that they too must reach a satisfactory conclusion and cannot go on endlessly. Time is not our friend in this case. And yes, we must have a strong and frank dialogue on the regional conflicts and develop a greater common understanding of how to address them in a manner that will respect mutual interests.

“*We have a chance still to redirect our relations. The EU extends an open hand to Turkey hoping it will seize it.*”

Some may think that I am a dreamer and that this agenda simply cannot materialise. It will certainly not happen unless we try. Beyond clear steps from Turkey and a change in its negative actions and rhetoric of the last months, we need to find a way to get back to honest and effective dialogues and efforts, and strong engagement and commitment from all sides, including from the most-affected EU Member States. We need to bring back the energy in our talks with each other, not about each other.

Frankly speaking, we can either move towards a mutually beneficial agenda or suffer the consequences of our reciprocal misunderstandings. I have no hesitation regarding my own choice.

THE URGENCY TO REVIVE MULTILATERALISM

29/10/2020. *Never has the demand for multilateralism been so high with global problems, especially the climate crisis or health issues, and the offer so scarce. Europe has a leading role to play in reviving multilateralism* ⁽⁶³⁾.

With the growing strategic rivalry between the US and China, a world where interdependence in general is becoming more and more conflictual, and a broader trend towards competition between countries and systems (especially with some of our neighbours such as Russia and Turkey, who seem to want to return to a logic of empires) – we have to play a leading role to revive multilateralism. We are asked to. And for that, unity is more necessary than ever.

“*While the world has become more multipolar, multilateralism has weakened. Never has the demand for multilateralism been so high, and the offer so scarce.*”

While the world has become more multipolar, multilateralism has weakened. Never has the demand for multilateralism been so high, and the offer so scarce. We see the growing paralysis of the United Nations Security Council, the deep crisis of the World Trade Organization, or more recently that of the World Health Organization. Precisely at a time when global problems, especially the climate crisis or health issues, are becoming more and more critical.

Europe, somewhat lonely to hold the multilateral ring

One could say that Europe is somewhat lonely trying to hold the multilateral ring. And indeed many citizens – in Europe, but also around the globe – are looking towards Europe as the solid leader in defending multilateralism. The EU has a strong stake in maintaining and developing a rules-based international order within the framework of an effective multilateralism – even if others are clearly trying to weaken it.

⁽⁶³⁾ Published in the *European Journal of International Law*.

“*The EU has a strong stake in maintaining and developing a rules-based international order within the framework of an effective multilateralism.*”

Europeans feel they live in an increasingly dangerous and unpredictable world. They need to be reassured that we can provide a meaningful and robust European answer, also given the rise of authoritarian powers. We as Europeans have to do it ‘My Way’ as Frank Sinatra sang it, with all the challenges this brings. The European way for sure includes working with like-minded partners (and there are many) to keep the multilateral system stable, as a needed space for cooperation.

Establish a level playing field

For us, the role of multilateralism is still the same: to establish a level playing field between states regardless of their position in the international system. The most important interest of multilateralism is to set up stable norms and standards, applicable to all actors. Multilateralism is needed to guarantee protection of global public goods, against the risk of pure market-driven or national approaches. The coronavirus is a good occasion to test the international solidarity and the capacity to act in a multilateral way. And we, Europeans, have done a lot from the point of view of avoiding vaccine nationalism and to consider the vaccine as a public good that can only be provided through a multilateral approach.

“*Multilateralism is needed to guarantee protection of global public goods, against the risk of pure market-driven or national approaches.*”

The European answer to the challenges we currently face is still multilateral by essence. We are multilateralist by essence and have always considered multilateralism as a way of tempering power politics. In fact, as I said earlier, the European Union was based on the refusal of the very idea of power, from which we suffered too much. And our financial contribution to the multilateral system is considerable. Maybe we punch below our weight sometimes, but in terms of multilateral engagement, we certainly finance above our might.

“*Maybe we punch below our weight sometimes on the global stage, but in terms of multilateral engagement, we certainly finance above our might.*”

We have to continue with the affirmation of universal principles and rules. We must continue defending them in the face of the rise of cultural or political relativism. Witnessing the attempt by a good number of countries to re-establish a relativism of rights under the excuse of respect for diversity, we need to invest politically in all forums related to human rights, including when these rights are challenged through new technologies, and you know what I am talking about.

Putting like-minded states together

And when putting together like-minded states, those who share common interests and preferences in the way to organize the international system, we cannot bring together everyone for everything, so we have to start bringing together those who, on the geostrategic level, are today worried about the Sino-American rivalry and the risk it poses to third countries and especially to us. It is important that we join forces and formulate common proposals in all sectors where there is no solid multilateral agreement: artificial intelligence, cyber, disinformation or internet data. In all these areas of the future, whether it be cyber or artificial intelligence, there is a regulatory vacuum and this vacuum has to be filled; otherwise, everyone will defend its narrow interests, imposing its standards.

“*In all the areas of the future, whether it be cyber or artificial intelligence, there is a regulatory vacuum and this vacuum has to be filled.*”

Finally, to rehabilitate multilateralism, we need to organize global regulation subject by subject. In all relevant issues, it is necessary to create ad hoc coalitions on a basis that is not multilateral, but plurilateral. It is the case today in the framework of the World Trade Organization. And it is clear that these new modalities of multilateralism presuppose political commitment and good faith, which is not always the case.



“We have to promote multilateralism, develop new partnerships, and at the same time increase our strategic autonomy. These are the two sides of the same coin.”

Europeans have to work in two tracks. We have to develop our leadership, promoting multilateralism, developing new partnerships, and at the same time increase our strategic autonomy. These are the two sides of the same coin.

A profoundly changed world

The creation of most multilateral institutions as they exist today dates back to the post-World War II period. Since then, the world has changed profoundly, geopolitical, economic and political balances have shifted, and China and others are right when they consider that the post-WWII institutions do not reflect the current geopolitical balances. In addition, very new global challenges have emerged, such as the ecological crisis and the digital revolution.

“Economic and political balances have shifted, and China and other are right when they consider that the post-World War II institutions do not reflect the current geopolitical balances.”

The effectiveness of the multilateral system and its institutions is currently often contested. From climate change and arms control to maritime security, human rights, and beyond, global cooperation has been weakened, international agreements abandoned, and international law undermined or selectively applied. Much of what we have built in the last decades needs to be reviewed and reformed.

No clean sweep of the past

Does this mean making a clean sweep of the past in order to start afresh? I don't think so. Post-war multilateralism has produced many significant results in terms of peace, the fight against hunger and poverty, stability and overall progress, despite its many weaknesses. We need to build on its achievements in order to move on to the next stage.

“*We need to build on the achievements of the existing multilateral system in order to move on to the next stage.*”

A world governed by agreed rules is the very basis of our shared security, freedoms and prosperity. A rules-based international order makes states secure, keeps people free and companies willing to invest, and ensures that the Earth's environment is protected.

And I am convinced that Europe has a central role to play in reshaping and improving our rules-based international order. Our bottom line is that reform should take place by design, not by destruction. We must revitalize the system, not abandon it. In this, we will uphold the spirit of the United Nations. A world without the UN would endanger us all.

THE EU STANDS WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

22/09/2020. *The multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is being challenged like never before – and just when we need it the most. The EU will stay on course of finding common solutions. We must revitalize the system, not abandon it. A world without the UN would endanger us all* ⁽⁶⁴⁾.

In any normal year, I would be in New York City now for the annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The event represents the greatest concentration of global policymakers in one place and is the high point on the diplomatic calendar. But this year is far from normal, and “UNGA week” is going virtual with events held online – a familiar format for us all in recent months.

The UN’s 75th anniversary

This is unfortunate for several reasons. It is the UN’s 75th anniversary, and one would have wished for a better way to mark the occasion. Moreover, the state of the world is such that the multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is being challenged like never before – and just when we need it the most.

“*The state of the world is such that the multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is being challenged like never before – and just when we need it the most.*”

Indeed, never has the supply of multilateral solutions been so scarce, and demand for them so high. Every day we see how narrow nationalism and strategic rivalries, especially between the United States and China, are paralyzing the UN Security Council and the wider international system. From climate change and arms control to maritime security, human rights and beyond, global cooperation has been weakened, international agreements abandoned, and international law undermined or selectively applied.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Op-ed published via Project Syndicate in several outlets.



Everyone's security and rights are in jeopardy

For Europeans, this is deeply unsettling. But the unfolding crisis of multilateralism is not a problem only for Europeans: everyone's security and rights are in jeopardy. Phrases like the “multilateral system” and “the rules-based international order” seem vague and lack the ring of ‘America First’ or “Take Back Control’. But they stand for something very concrete and real: the choice between peace and war, free societies and closed ones, and an economy built on sustainable development and one that fuels widening inequalities and runaway climate change.

“*“The rules-based international order” seem vague but it stands for something very concrete: the choice between peace and war, free societies and closed ones, and an economy built on sustainable development and one that fuels inequalities and climate change.*”

A world governed by agreed rules is the very basis of our shared security, freedoms and prosperity. A rules-based international order makes states secure, keeps people free and companies willing to invest, and ensures that the Earth's environment is protected. The alternative – “might makes right” – has been tried

for most of human history, and its horrific record is the best argument for the multilateral system. Unfortunately, it is increasingly being tried again, with the results everyone can see.

“*The alternative to the multilateral order – “might makes right” – has been tried for most of human history, and its horrific record is the best argument for the multilateral system.*”

This is not the approach of the EU. We will continue to believe in and support the UN. We do so not just rhetorically, but also politically and financially, as well as diplomatically, by trying to act as a bridge-builder in the Security Council.

When others were trying to pull apart the World Health Organization at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the EU that led the negotiations resulting in an agreement to set up an independent inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus. We are also the biggest donor to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX), established to ensure that the world gets a reliable vaccine as soon as possible and that it's treated as a global public good ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

The EU pays one-quarter of the UN budget. It is often said that Europe punches below its weight geopolitically. But in terms of multilateral engagement, it finances well above its weight.

“*We operate hand in hand with the UN from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, and from to the Balkans to the Middle East. In the toughest war zones and humanitarian crises, you will find the EU and the UN working together.*”

With our crisis management operations, we operate hand in hand with the UN on stabilization and reconstruction in many conflict zones, from the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, and from to the Balkans to the Middle East. In the toughest war zones and humanitarian crises, you will find the EU and the UN working together.

Europeans have pushed hard for an international climate agreement and do our best to keep it alive. We are relentless in trying to protect biodiversity, access to clean water, and other natural resources.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/covax-vaccine-global-access-binding-commitments-by-seth-berkeley-et-al-2020-09?barrier=accesspaylog>

“Europeans have pushed hard for an international climate agreement and do our best to keep it alive. We are relentless in trying to protect biodiversity, access to clean water, and other natural resources.”

For us, these contributions are investments in global security and prosperity – and thus in our own security and prosperity. We know that we can be safe, healthy, and secure only if our neighbours are, too. What is true of individuals is also true of countries.

The EU will stay on course of finding common solutions

Even if we face strong headwinds, the EU will stay the course in support of finding common solutions. This is often difficult and tiring, but we are always ready to discuss how to make the system more effective, more legitimate, more fit for purpose; both with like-minded partners and those with whom we disagree. Multilateralism today must be different from that of the twentieth century: power has shifted and the challenges are no longer the same.

Much of what will shape our future – cyberspace data, artificial intelligence, biogenetics, autonomous vehicles and much else – is emerging in a regulatory vacuum. We must fill it with agreed rules, norms, and standards, and ensure they are applied – including in contexts where the major stakeholders are not governments.

The EU's bottom line is this: reform should take place by design, not by destruction. We must revitalize the system, not abandon it. So, this week and beyond, we will uphold the spirit of the UNGA and defend multilateralism, which all countries so badly need. A world without the UN would endanger us all.

WE NEED STRAIGHT-TALK AND DETERMINED ACTION ON DEMOCRACY

24/11/2020. *With a 'democratic recession' underway, we need to step up the defence of democracy, both at home and abroad. We should deepen our cooperation with fellow democracies to counter the rise of authoritarianism* ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

I enjoyed Michael Meyer-Resende's recent opinion piece ⁽⁶⁷⁾, notably because of his plea to the EU to step up our role supporting democracy worldwide. He also sets me a challenge: "The EU's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell has used refreshingly clear language to explain European foreign policies. He should now give us straight-talk on democracy." I hope he will consider what follows as some straight talking.

Across the world, democracy is facing challenges and threats on a scale we have not seen for decades. According to the V-Dem Institute's Democracy Report 2020 ⁽⁶⁸⁾, this is the first year since 2001 that the majority of the world's countries are autocracies: 92 countries, home to 54% of the global population. In addition, challenges to democracy are present in a number of the relatively prosperous and stable countries that could lay some claim to having re-invented Athenian democracy for the modern world. When a US President refuses to concede an election and armed demonstrators supporting him have roamed the streets with his tacit blessing, we cannot ignore the alarm bells.

“*Within Europe too, anti-democratic political forces have gained a level of support that used to be unthinkable.*”

Within Europe too, anti-democratic political forces have gained a level of support that used to be unthinkable. EU Member States are today arguing about the meaning and scope of the application of the rule of law. There is a formal

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ See: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/149941>

⁽⁶⁸⁾ See: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/publications/democracy-reports/>

procedure underway for breaches of the rule of law in two Member States and the launch of the EU recovery package is blocked precisely because of objections to the proposed rule of law safeguards.

We need to act on these challenges urgently. Not only because democracy is a foundational principle of the Union and because democracy is embedded in the norms and standards of the rules-based multilateral order that we cherish. But also because, fundamentally, it is in our strategic interest to do so. The greater the number and strength of democracies in the world, the more allies we will find to strengthen the rules-based and accountable multilateral system that we foster.

In the competition of great powers, Europe's support for democracy is an important source of our power of attraction. Global polling clearly demonstrates that majorities throughout the world, also in authoritarian countries, support democracy. Democracy is associated with reduced inequality and, consequently, reduced levels of grievance and conflict. It can act both to prevent the emergence of war and conflict and to help to reduce the push factors for irregular migration.

A system of checks and balances and a solid legal framework attracts external investors and thus future growth by reducing fears over abuses of power or the arbitrary application of the law.

Concrete EU action in support of democracy

Overall, the EU has done a lot to support democracy globally, both through programmes and projects. But also in our immediate neighbourhood, through the accession process and the Copenhagen criteria that are a precondition for starting accession negotiations.

The EU offers its closest partners, a privileged relationship, under the condition that it builds on a mutual commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. And we assist our partners in adhering to these principles, including through financial and technical assistance to support institutional reforms, civil society organisations and people-to-people contacts.

“Following the “Heisenberg principle”, we know that the mere act of observing reality alters it. So the fact that the EU has been present has helped to ensure elections were fair; or exposed the shortcomings, if they weren’t.”

Since 1995, we link our trade policy to respect for human rights. This includes the trade incentives we offer to developing countries committing to respect fundamental human rights standards - through the GSP and GSP+ instruments ⁽⁶⁹⁾ -, but also the “human rights clauses” we include in bilateral and regional trade agreements.

For years now, we have been active, in partnership with the European Parliament, with electoral observation missions. Following the “Heisenberg principle”, we know that the mere act of observing reality alters it. So the fact that the EU has been present has helped to ensure elections were fair; or exposed the shortcomings if they weren’t.

We take action when democratic rights are taken away

This year we have demonstrated in several critical cases that we take action when elections are stolen or democratic rights are taken away. In Belarus, we are supporting the democratic opposition and have sanctioned those responsible for the fraudulent elections ⁽⁷⁰⁾ and the subsequent repression, and we are now working on a third round of sanctions. In Hong Kong, we have condemned the imposition of the new security law and proposed a package of measures ⁽⁷¹⁾ related to visas, expanding scholarships and restrictions on the export of specific sensitive equipment and technologies, to prevent these from being used for cyber-surveillance and repression. In Venezuela, we have worked hard to find a democratic and political solution to the crisis ⁽⁷²⁾, and extended the sanctions ⁽⁷³⁾

⁽⁶⁹⁾ See <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/generalised-scheme-of-preferences/>

⁽⁷⁰⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/06/belarus-alexander-lukashenko-and-14-other-officials-sanctioned-over-ongoing-repression/#>

⁽⁷¹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45225/st09872-1e01-en20.pdf>

⁽⁷²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/venezuela/86852/venezuela-clear-urgency-political-and-democratic-solution_en

⁽⁷³⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/12/council-extends-sanctions-on-venezuela-until-14-november-2021/>

applied to 36 listed individuals responsible for human rights violations and/or for undermining democracy and the rule of law.

We have also just adopted a new Action plan on human rights and democracy ⁽⁷⁴⁾ for the next four years, which will have a greater emphasis on actions to support democracy than previous ones, and our programmes under the new financial framework in this area, will also have a greater focus on democracy support. The new EU human rights sanctions regime ⁽⁷⁵⁾, when adopted, will also give us more leverage to support democracy worldwide.

“*There is a lot of potential for the EU to team up with democratic allies in Asia, Africa, the Americas... to forge joint responses to the rise in authoritarianism worldwide.*”

Of course, one can easily point out that in all the aforementioned cases the EU has not (yet) succeeded in its goals. This is a reason to be modest in our rhetoric and mindful just how difficult the problems are. But surely it is not a reason to give up. It underlines the need to re-double our efforts and work even more together with like-minded, democratic partners. There is a lot of potential for the EU to team up more systematically with democratic allies in Asia, Africa, the Americas and elsewhere to forge joint responses to the rise in authoritarianism worldwide.

Two broader challenges to democracy

More specifically, I see two ‘horizontal’ challenges to democracy, which we need to tackle head-on. The first is that of online interference in democratic processes, whether it is by foreign powers or by politicians working with dubious digital consultancies. These new ways of doing politics have been operating all over the democratic world, and, importantly, outside the framework of norms, laws and practices that democracy is based on.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/19/council-approves-conclusions-on-the-eu-action-plan-on-human-rights-and-democracy-2020-2024/>

⁽⁷⁵⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87884/long-and-complex-road-towards-eu-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime_en

Because corporate community standards of social media platforms are not sufficient to protect democracy, the Commission is addressing different aspects of this within the EU: the European democracy action plan and the proposal for a Digital Services Act ⁽⁷⁶⁾ that we will adopt in December will mark a step-change in this work.

However, the nature of the online challenge to democracy is that the internet does not recognise borders. That's why we will be investing similar efforts in cooperating with democratic partners, governments and civil society, across the world, to strengthen our collective ability to ensure that what is illegal offline can also be prevented from happening online. This includes hate speech and incitement to violence, the systematic violations of privacy rights and data protection in micro-targeted campaigning, or the undermining of financing ceilings for political advertising and electoral campaign expenditure.

“*We need to work with like-minded supporters of democracy wherever they are, inside and outside of our Union.*”

The second horizontal challenge is the one I referred to earlier: threats to democracy inside the EU. Just as the US can no longer refer to the shining city on the hill, we can no longer act as though we have the secret recipe for a resilient democracy and as though the rest of the world should just follow our example.

This means that we need to work with like-minded supporters of democracy wherever they are, inside and outside our Union, with governments and with civil society organisations. In this context, I believe, like Michael Meyer, that we should positively engage with President-elect Joe Biden's proposal to host a global Summit for Democracy.

It would be a sign of strategic autonomy, not strategic complacency, to do so.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ See <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-services-act-package>

THE COMPLEX ROAD TOWARDS AN EU GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONS REGIME

31/10/2020. Since the beginning of my mandate, I have been working on a new EU global human rights sanctions regime. This regime will allow us to go swiftly after perpetrators, wherever violations occur. Let me explain what this new regime is about and how the EU institutional machinery works (77).

On my fourth day in office in December 2019, I attended the joint meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) of the European Parliament and of the national parliaments to discuss policy priorities I hoped to pursue during my mandate. The venue was the same room where I passed my hearing (78) as HR/VP designate.

MEP's and MP's made numerous suggestions for where and how the EU could strengthen its foreign policy. I remember above all the question from Mr Rihards Kols, MP from Latvia. He asked me whether I was in favour of a 'European Magnitsky Act'. I said that in general, I was all in favour of strong EU action on human rights but I also had to confess that I was not fully aware what exactly his question meant.

The Magnitsky Act model

For those who don't know this act, the so called Magnitsky Act, formally known as the Russia and Moldova Jackson–Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act, is a bipartisan bill passed by the US Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama in December 2012. It intends to punish Russian officials responsible for the death of the Russian tax lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison in 2009.

(77) Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

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

“*I was convinced by the idea of a global sanctions regime to tackle human rights abuses, instead of having to go case by case as we do now.*”

As soon as I studied the file properly, I was convinced by the idea of a global sanctions regime to tackle human rights abuses, instead of having to go case by case as we do now. Just a few days later, at my very first Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), we found political agreement among all Member States to begin the work on such a regime, an initiative first floated by the Netherlands. I concluded the press conference saying that ‘there was a strong consensus to launch the preparatory work’, adding that ‘this will be a tangible step re-affirming the EU’s global lead on human rights.’⁽⁷⁹⁾

A long discussion about the scope of the new regime

In the months that followed, Member States discussed intensively the parameters and scope of the new sanctions regime: what actions would be covered and what sanctions could be applied. As soon as they reached an overall political agreement, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission services prepared the relevant legal documents for Council approval to bring this new regime to life. In fact, legally, the final decision about sanctions belongs to the Council, but it was very important to have the political support of the Commission on that issue. It was in particular helpful that President von der Leyen made an explicit reference to the new sanctions regime during her first State of the Union speech.

“*The support of the Commission on the new sanctions regime was very important and in particular the reference made by President von der Leyen during her State of the Union speech.*”

The approval process has not been easy nor fast. Although a political priority, it was important not to rush discussions to ensure that everyone involved has a common understanding and a united sense of purpose and build the necessary consensus. The EU is based on agreed procedures and institutional rules, which we have to follow, even if this takes time. In that particular case, the Commission and the Council have also to agree on their respective competences regarding the implementation of that sanction regime in accordance with the Treaties.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2019/12/09/>

A very complex procedure

To understand the complexity of the procedure, we now have two proposals brought to the Council for its approval: a Council Decision and a Council Regulation. The Council Decision, proposed by myself as High Representative after discussion with my foreign minister colleagues, is setting out the political and legal basis for the new regime. The Council Regulation is a joint proposal by the High Representative and the European Commission that complements the Council Decision to ensure uniform application of sanctions across the EU.

After the Commission's approval of the joint proposal for a Council Regulation, this package has been sent to the Council on 19 October ⁽⁸⁰⁾, for discussion and adoption by Member States. And keep in mind that unanimity is required and therefore changes could still be made.

As you see, the adoption procedures are complex, but once adopted, what will the regime do and how is that different and better than what we have now?

We were inspired by a growing global movement among like-minded countries to put in place regimes similar to the US' Global Magnitsky Act ⁽⁸¹⁾. However, although the general purpose is very similar, the scope is different. The European regime focuses only on serious human right violations, while the American one covers also the fight against corruption.

“Too many human rights perpetrators believe they can get away with their crimes. So changing their calculus is the main goal of the new sanctions regime.”

Too many human rights offenses perpetrators believe they can get away with their crimes. So changing the calculus of those that commit these crimes is the main goal of the new sanctions regime.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1939

⁽⁸¹⁾ See <https://www.state.gov/global-magnitsky-act/>

Sanctions today: on a country specific basis

Right now, the EU does use sanctions as part of its wider range of instruments to promote respect for human rights besides trade, dialogue, financial support etc. We decide financial sanctions and travel bans plus sometimes other sectoral restrictions, for example on the sale of weapons or other equipment used for internal repression. But when we do so, it is only on a country-specific basis. Well-known cases are Syria, Libya, Venezuela, Belarus and Myanmar.

“We need a global regime to gain more flexibility and dispenses us from having to set up a specific legal framework each time for each specific case.”

We need a global regime to gain more flexibility to go after the perpetrators regardless of where they are and dispenses us from having to set up a specific legal framework each time for each specific case. With the new sanctions regime, we will be able to proceed quicker and to be more efficient.

Next step: adoption by the Council

As said, the next step in the process belongs to Member States, who have to adopt the package in the Council by unanimity. I hope that this will be possible by the time of the Foreign Affairs Council in December ⁽⁸²⁾. This would be one year since foreign ministers first decided to work on the creation of such a regime. And it would be a fitting way to mark 10 December, Human Rights Day, the day in 1948 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁽⁸²⁾ It has been done. See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/07/eu-adopts-a-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/>

4

BUILDING SECURITY THE EUROPEAN WAY

To ‘learn to speak the language of power’ implies strengthening our capacity for action in the defence and wider security field. This is not the simplest part of European foreign policy, in an EU in which decisions on security and defence are often seen as a closely held national prerogative.

However, existing threats are becoming increasingly pressing at our borders, and new ones are constantly emerging, particularly for instance when it comes to disinformation and in cyberspace. In 2020, we adopted our first ever sanctions in this area. We also launched new operations, such as IRINI in the Mediterranean to enforce the Libya arms embargo, and strengthened our mission in the Sahel.

We are using the necessary tools to strengthen our capacities, especially when it comes to fighting disinformation, in the field of the defence, to develop a common strategic culture and to better coordinate the work of the armed forces of our Member States in close cooperation with NATO.

OPERATION IRINI TO ENFORCE LIBYA ARMS EMBARGO

01/04/2020. *Even in times of the pandemic, the EU has been able to bolster its defence and security engagement in the world. EU Member States have launched in April 2020 a new naval operation in the Mediterranean, called IRINI* ⁽⁸³⁾.

Operation Irini is the EU's latest military operation that has the key aim to contribute to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on Libya and to promoting peace in our neighbourhood. This is a tangible way in which the EU is helping to end the long-running conflict in Libya, right on the EU's doorstep.

Libya, a priority for the EU

Libya is a priority for the EU and we have consistently called for a permanent ceasefire and an effective enforcement of the UN arms embargo. Last January, we gathered with world leaders for the Berlin Conference and took an important step in the efforts for a political solution in Libya and for ending the conflict. Since then, the situation in Libya continues to be very critical and calls for urgent action.

Unfortunately, the fighting in Libya has even increased over the last days, despite the international calls for a truce to help contain the coronavirus pandemic. We know that none of the problems we were focused on before the coronavirus outbreak, including the Libya conflict, has gone away. Indeed the risk is that crises in our neighbourhood get worse.

“We have been saying repeatedly that only political solutions and respect of the UN arms embargo can solve the Libyan crisis. But diplomacy cannot succeed unless it is backed by action.”

⁽⁸³⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

We have been saying repeatedly that only political solutions and respect of the UN arms embargo can solve the Libyan crisis. But diplomacy cannot succeed unless it is backed by action. The EU is now stepping up its commitment and is demonstrating its determination to support the Berlin process. This operation can't be the solution, but it is an important part of the solution and will contribute to a permanent ceasefire.

Turn out statements in actions

That is why, six weeks after a first political agreement was reached between EU Member States, a new military operation is launched in the Mediterranean to turn our statements into action. As we grapple with the coronavirus crisis and its consequences, the EU continues to play its role in promoting peace on our doorstep.

“*As we grapple with the coronavirus crisis and its consequences, the EU continues to play its role in promoting peace on our doorstep.*”

The main goal of EUNAVFOR MED IRINI – the formal name of the new operation – is to support the implementation of the arms embargo imposed by the UN Security Council. It will do so by using maritime, aerial and satellite means. It will work closely with the relevant authorities in our Member States and with the relevant EU agencies.

A series of secondary tasks

Alongside this main objective, Operation IRINI has a series of secondary tasks. It will provide monitoring and surveillance to prevent illicit oil exports from Libya. It will carry out capacity building and training for the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy. And it will support the fight against human smuggling and trafficking networks.

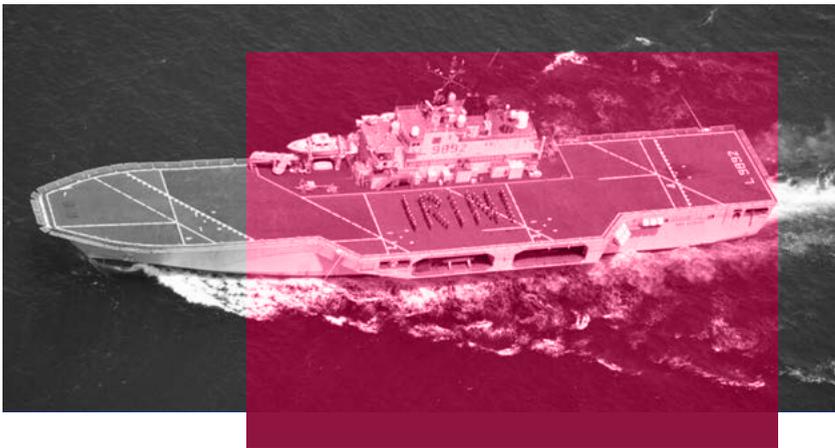
On the same day that EUNAVFOR MED IRINI begins its operations, EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA comes to the end. During almost five years, Operation SOPHIA has worked in an often challenging environment to counter migrant smuggling and human trafficking. It is also thanks to its action that migratory flows in the Central Mediterranean have been drastically reduced since the peak of the migratory crisis.

“I am proud and thankful of our thousands of women and men deployed in the 16 – soon 17 – EU military and civilian missions and operations. They work every day beyond our borders to help create a stable environment for our partners and provide security for Europeans.”

I want to salute the dedicated and outstanding work of the European women and men who have served under EU flag in Operation Sophia. I am proud and thankful whenever I see the daily impact of our thousands of women and men deployed in the 16 – soon 17 – EU military and civilian missions and operations. They work every day beyond our borders, on the ground, in all conditions, to help create a stable environment for our partners in the neighbourhood and provide security for Europeans at home.

EU's commitment to the return of peace in Libya

I am sure that Operation IRINI will be vivid proof of the EU's commitment to contribute to the return to peace and stability in Libya. After all, it is named after Eirene, the ancient Greek goddess of peace. No doubt, the weeks ahead will be very challenging, for Libyans and Europeans. Nobody can afford to wage two wars at the same time. It is therefore crucial that we do all we can to end the conflict in Libya and Operation IRINI will help do just that.



TOGETHER FOR THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE SAHEL

08/05/2020. *Since it weakens the stability of poor countries, COVID-19 is an aggravating factor in the security field. We must therefore strengthen our engagement with our partners, particularly in the Sahel region where terrorist forces are very active* ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

The world's attention is legitimately focused on the global response to the coronavirus crisis. Despite its historic scale and intensity, COVID-19 does not rid us of the many other regional and global challenges we face. Quite the contrary: since it weakens the stability and development efforts of some countries, COVID-19 is an aggravating factor. We must therefore not only maintain our engagement with our partners but strengthen it.

The G5 Sahel, the most at risk

The five countries of the G5 Sahel (a group comprising Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad), which together cover an area equivalent to the size of western Europe, are among those most at risk. Threatened by the effects of climate change, food insecurity and weak state structures, these countries – some of the poorest in the world – are facing multiple crises. Terrorism is taking a severe toll in the region, with a growing number of attacks carried out in a climate of persistent indifference. In 2019 alone, they claimed the lives of more than 4 000 people! Almost 800 000 people have been displaced in Burkina Faso, seven times more than in February 2019. Seventeen million people in the Sahel and West Africa are now in need of food aid, double the number last year. Estimates suggest that the combined effect of insecurity and COVID could plunge some 50 million people into a food and nutrition crisis.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

“Estimates suggest that the combined effect of insecurity and COVID -19 could plunge some 50 million people into a food and nutrition crisis.”

The Sahel may seem remote to many European citizens. That is not the case, however: the EU's southern border extends to the countries of this vast region, which has Morocco, Algeria and Libya as immediate neighbours.

Recent history has taught us that terrorism does not respect borders and that instability is a powerful driver for population displacement and all kinds of trafficking. Instability and terrorism in the Sahel thus directly threaten our security. It is therefore our duty of solidarity, and also in our interest, to stand by the people and countries of the Sahel.

“Terrorism does not respect borders and instability is a powerful driver for population displacement and all kinds of trafficking. Instability and terrorism in the Sahel thus directly threaten our security.”

Last week, together with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, we held a video conference with the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel, the President of the African Union Commission and the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. Our objective was simple: keeping the Sahel at the heart of our agenda and speeding up efforts on both sides.

Concrete support and launch of the Coalition for the Sahel

Last week's video conference also gave us the opportunity to formally launch the Coalition for the Sahel. The aim is to extend this Coalition to other international partners, as the Sahel cannot be Europe's business alone.

We announced additional support of €194 million: €112 million to strengthen the internal security forces of the countries of the region and to help with the redeployment of the presence of the state and justice in the most vulnerable areas, and €82 million for resilience and development programmes. This new contribution is in addition to the €4.5 billion that the European Union has invested in the region since 2014.



Moreover, in order to support the fight against coronavirus and to cover the economic and social consequences of COVID-19, we have decided to adjust our existing programmes by refocusing them on the emergency response to the health crisis, strengthening health, water and sanitation systems in particular. In the Sahel, almost €450 million is thus being redirected.

“*We support the request for a moratorium on debt servicing to international financial institutions. We are prepared to go further, by reflecting together with these institutions on cancelling or restructuring the debt.*”

In parallel, we support the request of our African partners for a moratorium on debt servicing to international financial institutions. We are prepared to go further, by reflecting together with these institutions on cancelling or restructuring the debt that drains the budgets of so many of our partners.

A significant security component

On the security side, we support the Joint Force to cover expenditure on equipment, infrastructure, advice and training. In addition, the EU supports the strengthening of the capacity of the G5 Sahel countries in the areas of internal security and justice.

“Since 2012, we have deployed three common security and defence policy missions. 900 experts are deployed in the region to help strengthen the defence forces and the police.”

Since 2012, we have also deployed three Common Security and Defence Policy missions. In practical terms, this means that 900 experts are deployed in the region to help strengthen the defence forces, the gendarmerie and the police through various actions: advice, training, and support for equipment and infrastructure.

In order to better address the current security situation, we recently strengthened and broadened the mandate of our mission in Mali. The mission will now be able to act outside Mali. On the one hand, the mission will now also be able to accompany the Malian army during its deployments on the ground, without being engaged in combat operations. On the other, it will be able to train other national contingents of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

Speeding up efforts

All these efforts, unprecedented in their scale, have admittedly not been as successful as hoped. It is time to step up our engagement. Of course, the primary responsibility lies first and foremost with our Sahel partners. But they will not succeed on their own, as they are facing many challenges at the same time. Governments in the Sahel spend up to a third of their budgets on security. These efforts are not sustainable in the long term.

In the Sahel, as elsewhere, we cannot afford to put our efforts into quarantine.

WE NEED TO FIGHT ISLAMIST TERRORISM TOGETHER

03/11/2020. *There is never any justification for callous killings such as those that have taken place in autumn 2020 in France and Austria. The EU appeals to all our partners in the world to work closely together to fight terror, hate speech and disinformation* ⁽⁸⁵⁾.

Last Thursday, the Members of the European Council expressed their solidarity with France ⁽⁸⁶⁾ and condemned the hideous terrorist attacks that the French people have suffered. Today, European Council members would have done the same with Austria and the Austrian people after yesterday's attack in Vienna. European leaders also called on leaders around the world to work towards dialogue and understanding among communities and religions rather than division. All world leaders need to join forces in clearly condemning all violence in the name of any religion. We need a sense of shared responsibility to combat hate and terror.

The EU will fight this threat with unity and determination

The recent terror attacks targeted the foundations of our secular and democratic societies. The wave of terrorism we face today is far from the first time that terrorists have sought to tear our societies apart. As we have done in the past, we will continue to fight this threat, defending our core values, with unity and determination. Murder can never be justified, no matter how seriously one might feel offended or disagree with somebody else's views. Free speech is a cornerstone of the EU's values and, I dare to say, a key contribution towards a better world. We must protect and uphold it, while of course also rejecting hate speech.

We have to identify precisely the kind of terrorism we are facing. We usually call it Islamist terrorism because the perpetrators and supporters claim to carry out these acts of terror in the name of Islam. However, we must avoid identifying this terrorism with Islam. It would be as incorrect as to identify the terrorism of ETA,

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/29/joint-statement-by-the-members-of-european-council/>

fortunately defeated in Spain, with the whole Basque people as “Basque terrorism”. Quite on the contrary, this terrorism only refers to the extremism of few people, seeking false justifications for their folly in one of the great religions of the world.

“*The EU respects all religions. It protects the freedom of everybody to believe and practice religion, or choose not to, and it will continue to do so.*”

In the past, Europe has suffered enormously from different forms of violent extremism and we have lived through wars of religion for centuries. Today, the EU respects all religions. It protects the freedom of everybody to believe and practise religion, or choose not to, and it will continue to do so. We, as most in the Muslim world, categorically refuse to be drawn into a logic of a “clash of civilisations” between Islam and “the West”. This would precisely take us back to dark times, instead of building on lessons from the past and overcoming very dangerous divisions.

Identity politics create antagonisms

We live in a world in which identity politics is often creating antagonisms between groups and communities, including inside the Islamic world itself. We have also seen that social networks play an important role in increasing such tensions. The terrorist wave we are currently facing in Europe is obviously strongly linked to the spread of disinformation and hate speech on the internet. This, in fact, led to the assassination of the French teacher Samuel Paty.

“*We must find ways to address the fact that the internet can be a powerful tool for radicalisation and recruitment purposes, while at the same time respecting its openness.*”

The recent attacks do not seem to be the work of highly organised terrorist networks, as was the case in the past. The international fight against Al Qaeda or Da’esh has certainly made important progress. The current terrorist wave is more the acts of individuals, who become radicalised in social networks. That is why we must find ways to address the fact that the internet can be a powerful tool for radicalisation and recruitment purposes, while at the same time respecting its openness. We also have to fight against those that manipulate from outside, especially in social networks, aiming to mislead or polarise our societies. We know how difficult it is when you are engaged in fighting disinformation.

False information and hate speech

Recently a great deal of false information and hate speech has also been disseminated around the globe about the situation of Muslims in Europe. In some countries, we have seen manipulative social media campaigns in particular against France and its leaders, calling for a boycott of French products. Some political leaders, for example in Turkey, have supported this. Some political groups have even called for, or expressed their understanding of, violence and the killing of French citizens, for example in Malaysia.

This is unacceptable. It will only fuel further violence and hate – in Europe and globally. Let us be very clear: the clash is not between Islam, a faith shared by millions of European citizens, and other beliefs. It is not a “clash of civilisations”, but a clash between civilisation and barbarism, between the respect for life and nihilistic terrorism.

“*The clash is not between Islam and other beliefs. It is a clash between civilisation and barbarism, between the respect for life and nihilistic terrorism.*”

We have to make a pedagogical effort to explain the terms of our social model and the place of the religion in it. However, to meet this deadly challenge we cannot succeed alone. We need to work hand in hand with our partners around the globe of all faiths and none.

Working with our partners worldwide

We are already working with our partners worldwide to fight against these terror networks and their supporters, but we surely need to intensify this cooperation against hate speech and online manipulation that nurture terror.

We need all leaders to take a strong stance. Everywhere. In that respect, I thank governments, political and religious leaders, particularly in Islamic societies, who have spoken out in condemning these murderous terrorist attacks and supporting peaceful coexistence.

SAVING THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

14/07/2020. *Five years after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was concluded, it is on life support, following the US reinstatement of sanctions and Iran's return to enrichment activities. We hope to be able to enter into a more positive dynamic in 2021* ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

Five years ago this week in Vienna, the E3/EU+3 (China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, along with the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Iran agreed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). To mark the fifth anniversary of that occasion, we should acknowledge a simple reality: without this deal, Iran could have developed nuclear weapons by now, adding yet another source of instability to a volatile region.

“We should acknowledge a simple reality: without the JCPOA deal, Iran could have developed nuclear weapons by now, adding another source of instability to a volatile region.”

Today, the JCPOA is under great pressure on multiple fronts. I am convinced that action to preserve it is not just necessary but urgent, for at least two reasons. First, it took more than 12 years for the international community and Iran to bridge their differences and conclude a deal. If the JCPOA is lost, no other comprehensive or effective alternative will be waiting around the corner.

The JCPOA, a long story

The international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear programme go way back. Discussions to lay the groundwork for a negotiated solution began in 2003 at the initiative of the French, German, and British foreign ministers, and were soon joined by then-EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Javier Solana. He and his successors, Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini – all of whom were

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Op-ed published in several outlets.

supported by the European External Action Service – always kept the door open for a diplomatic solution. And, after many ups and downs, the JCPOA eventually became a reality.

“*The final agreement was solid. It set out all of the details for a clear quid pro quo: Iran would abide by strict limitations on its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions.*”

The deal would have not been possible without diplomatic persistence. It required the full buy-in not just of the United States, but also of Russia, China, and of course Iran. The final agreement was solid. At more than 100 pages, and with several annexes, it set out all of the details for a clear *quid pro quo*: Iran would abide by strict limitations on its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions.

The JCPOA enshrined in international law

The JCPOA is enshrined in international law through UN Security Council 2231⁽⁸⁸⁾ (which needs to be fully implemented). It stands as a prime example of what European diplomacy and effective multilateralism can achieve within the rules-based international order. But the process leading up to it was lengthy and difficult, all but ruling out another chance at a deal.

“*The JCPOA is not merely a symbolic success. It delivered on its promises, and proved effective.*”

Second, the JCPOA is not merely a symbolic success. It delivered on its promises, and proved effective. Owing to the unprecedented level of access that it provided for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the IAEA was able to confirm in 15 consecutive monitoring reports between January 2016 and June 2019 that Iran had met all its obligations under the deal.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ See <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/2231/background>

Europe lifted sanctions

As such, Europe and other partners lifted sanctions, as specified in the agreement. Iran's international isolation was coming to an end, setting the stage for a restoration of normal economic and trade relations with the rest of the world. In May 2018, however, the US decided to withdraw from the JCPOA and reinstate sanctions in pursuit of a new strategy of 'maximum pressure'.

Although the restoration of US sanctions clearly had negative effects on Iran's economy and people, Iran continued to adhere to the deal for another 14 months. But now, Iran is once again accumulating worrying levels of enriched uranium and acquiring new nuclear know-how. The JCPOA is being further eroded, and fears from the past are resurfacing.

In January, France, Germany and the UK formally expressed ⁽⁸⁹⁾ their concerns about Iran's renewed enrichment activities, and urged it to return to full compliance. Iran, similarly, has voiced its own concerns, arguing that it has not received the expected economic benefits from the lifting of sanctions.

“As the current coordinator of the JCPOA, I will do everything possible to preserve what we achieved five years ago, and to ensure that the deal remains effective.”

As the current coordinator of the JCPOA, I will continue to work with all remaining parties to the deal, as well as with the entire international community. We will do everything possible to preserve what we achieved five years ago, and to ensure that the deal remains effective.

The Iranian nuclear programme remains under tight scrutiny

It is important to remember that the Iranian nuclear program remains under tight scrutiny, with its peaceful nature being constantly verified. Thanks to the IAEA inspections regime, we continue to know a great deal about the Iranian nuclear programme, even under the current circumstances. If the agreement were to be lost, however, we would lose these insights and be set back by two decades.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/14/world/europe/iran-nuclear-deal.html>

“*The JCPOA has become a key component of the global non-proliferation architecture, which is why I continue to call for all parties to remain committed to its full implementation.*”

I firmly believe that the JCPOA has become a key component of the global non-proliferation architecture, which is why I continue to call for all parties to remain committed to its full implementation. Iran, for its part, must return to full compliance with its nuclear obligations; but it also needs to be able to reap the economic benefits envisioned in the agreement. Having already established measures to protect our companies against extraterritorial US sanctions, we in Europe can do more to satisfy Iranian expectations for legitimate trade.

The EU will intensify efforts to build bridges

The EU will intensify its efforts to build bridges and narrow the gaps among all concerned parties. I am convinced that if we do manage to preserve the JCPOA and ensure its full implementation, it can become a stepping-stone toward addressing other shared concerns, including those related to regional security.

We need to return to a more positive dynamic. When the moment is ripe, we must be ready to build on the deal. The EU is willing to do so. But the first step is to protect the Iran nuclear deal as it is, in its entirety, and for all parties to comply fully with their obligations.

SPACE, THE NEW FRONTIER OF GLOBAL POLITICS

21/01/2020. Space is, quite literally, the new frontier of global politics. The rise in geo-political tensions we see on earth is projected into space. I will do my utmost to help bring about a coherent EU approach to space⁽⁹⁰⁾.

I am very happy to be here and deliver the opening remarks at this European space conference. It is not the usual rhetoric, saying that I am very happy to be here. In this case it is really true. *Dans ce cas, c'est vrai, c'est vraiment vrai, c'est pour moi un grand plaisir d'être présent à cette conférence.*

It brings me back to my previous life

It brings me back to my previous life because I am an aeronautical engineer by training and now my school, the school of aeronautical engineering in Madrid Polytechnical University, has changed its name, it is now called 'aeronautical and space engineering' which shows how important the word 'space' is.

I remember also when I was Minister of Transport in 1992 when Spain launched the first telecom satellite Hispasat from French Guyana, with an Ariane. I remember at that time the opposition was saying that it was a waste of money. *'Why do you want this satellite, it is a waste of money. C'est une façon absurde de dépenser de l'argent, cela ne va servir à rien.'* C'était Hispasat 1992, things have changed a lot since then.

So thank you for inviting me and taking me out of the everyday fight about Libya war, about the nuclear deal with Iran, what is happening in the world, which is a very troublesome world, and have a look at the future that the space conference represents.

⁽⁹⁰⁾ Speech at the European space conference 2020.

Space policy from the geo-political point of view

I would like to make some observations on space policy from the geo-political point of view because from the technological point of view I completely forgot what I learnt many years ago and you know much more than I about it. But from the geopolitical point of view let me say some words.

“*Space is, quite literally, the new frontier of global politics, Kennedy said, now it is really true.*”

First, space is, quite literally, the new frontier of global politics, *la nouvelle frontière*, former President of the United States of America, John Fitzgerald Kennedy said, now it is really true. In the foreign policy world we tend to overuse the term ‘strategic’. When we do not know what to say about something, we say it is a strategic issue. But in this case, using the word strategic is fully justified, as space is really a strategic issue.

Space exploration is crucial for our understanding of the universe and it has triggered many technological innovations – you know that better than I do. Today, satellites and other space-based assets are essential for the functioning of our economy. It is estimated that the global economy depends for 60% directly or indirectly on space-based tools.

“*Today, satellites and other space-based assets are essential for our economy. It is estimated that the global economy depends for 60% directly or indirectly on space-based tools.*”

Space is increasingly a key component of the global security equation. The rise in geo-political tensions we see on earth is being extended and projected into space. Let me give some examples to illustrate the increasingly geo-competitive nature of space:

Russia has developed several counter-space capabilities, from ground-launched anti-satellite missiles to inspection satellites and lasers able to blind satellites or interfere with their communication systems.

China’s military is setting up specialised units and has begun operational training with counter-space capabilities, such as ground-launched anti-satellite missiles.

India – I was in India last week at the Raisina dialogue ⁽⁹⁾ – India conducted an anti-satellite test in March 2019 and is setting up a Defence Space Agency that is expected to command all space assets of India's army, navy and air force.

We know that the US has created a formal Space Force as its sixth branch of the US military. Last June, NATO defence ministers adopted a formal space policy in recognition that while space can be used for peaceful purposes, it is also an arena for security competition. And just yesterday, Japanese Prime Minister Abe announced the creation of a space defence unit too.

“*Space is also a place for cooperation on ambitious goals. Just think of the inspiring joint work of the International Space Station. We need to maintain this collaborative approach.*”

Let us remember that in the past, space enabled people, including former enemies, to work together. It is also a place for cooperation on ambitious and transformative goals. Just think of the inspiring joint work of the International Space Station. I think that we need to maintain this collaborative approach in space.

Space is increasingly congested, contested and competitive

Like life on Earth, “space” is changing its nature. “Space” is increasingly congested, contested and competitive; it is three C: congested, contested and competitive. What do I mean by that?

Space is congested as more and more countries and actors are launching an ever increasing number of civilian and military satellites. People would not believe that there are around 5000 satellites in orbit of which less than 2000 are operational, so there are 3000 satellites turning around the earth doing nothing.

“*From the 5000 satellites in orbit, less than 2000 are operational. This has created a real problem of how to handle the debris.*”

⁽⁹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73129/raisina-dialogue-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-addressed-raisina-dialogue_en

This has created a real problem of how to handle the debris. This is aggravated by the trend of launching ever larger constellations with shorter lifespans. The circular economy that we talk about for the things we buy in our everyday life should also be implemented in the space programmes.

Space is contested. We are seeing unilateral moves, and the risk of a growing weaponisation or arms races in space. This is happening with the legal regime and the normative framework for space only partially developed and where the principle of peaceful uses of outer space is being eroded.

“*We are seeing the risk of a growing arms races in space. The legal regime for space is only partially developed and the principle of peaceful uses of outer space is being eroded.*”

Finally, space is competitive. It is vital for multiple sectors. It becomes a rare resource. Not ‘just’ for science and exploration but also for the digital economy and the fourth industrial revolution and the broad security domain.

Europe has a massive stake in the future of space

In this framework, let’s talk about Europe. Europe has a massive stake in the future of space. Our future prosperity and security depend on that. Thankfully, Europe – when I say Europe I mean the European Union, but also the EU Member States and the European Space Agency more particularly – has a solid track record of acting together over many years which has led to concrete successes.

“*Europe – when I say Europe I mean the European Union, but also the EU Member States and the European Space Agency – has a solid track record over many years which have led to concrete successes.*”

Everybody knows Copernicus is the world’s largest provider of Earth observation data. The European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) and Galileo are the two components of the EU system providing position, navigation and timing services.

In December Galileo reached the milestone of having 1 billion users, which is a major sign of success. It is very interesting for me to remember when I was in Guyana launching a telecommunications satellite.

The key role of the European Union's Satellite Centre

On security-related matters, the European Union's Satellite Centre (SATCEN) in Torrejón, Madrid, has helped to deliver key geostrategic intelligence analysis to the European Union and Member States, contributing to monitoring the crisis of conflict areas and supporting the EU advisory operations. When we are planning what to do in Libya, it immediately comes to our mind that we have a powerful tool observing what is happening there and guiding the operations on the ground.

I think the future European Defence Fund could offer further support through the Permanent Structured Cooperation, PESCO, in the field of security, defence and space.

Space is also a catalyst for the development of critical technologies for many strategic sectors: digital, artificial intelligence, energy and so on. Europe has to face a fiercely competition in a global environment. It will strengthen our capacity to act. And it will enable us to develop new partnerships and extend Europe's connectivity networks.

“*Making these connections between different work strands lies precisely at the heart of my role as High Representative and Vice President of a Commission that wants to be a “geopolitical Commission.”*”

I think that making these connections between different work strands lies precisely at the heart of my role as High Representative and Vice President of a Commission that wants to be a “geopolitical Commission”. In fact, what has to be geopolitical is the European Union as a whole. Not only the Commission, but the merge of the European Commission and the Member States joining their strength and resources to be present and winning the global competition.

As High Representative for both of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union, I will do my utmost to help bring about a coherent European Union approach to space.

Space is really a strategic issue

To conclude, space is a strategic issue – I am going to use the word ‘strategic’, although at the beginning I said we were overusing it . Yes, it is. It is a strategic issue and we need to treat it as such. As the European Union, we must be fully aware of what is at stake and act accordingly.

I wish you a great conference and, believe me, it has been a big pleasure to have the opportunity of participating in the opening session, because here lies the future. You are the actors of the future. We have to deal with everyday problems, but the future is being built by people like you, having the chance of working in such an interesting technological, security, defence and geopolitical issue as is the satellite and space future.



CYBER SANCTIONS: TIME TO ACT

30/07/2020. *The internet plays a vital role in our lives, which is why we need to protect ourselves against cyber-attacks. In July 2020, the EU imposed its first-ever cyber sanctions, to defend its citizens from cyber threats* ⁽⁹²⁾.

Not many inventions have changed the lives of people as much as the internet. It removes geographical barriers, connects billions of people with multiple devices and allows for communication and commerce at a global scale. People all over the world benefit from it. If I compare the opportunities that the internet offers to me today with those I had when I was 20 years old, the gap is staggering.

“*States and non-state actors alike have realised that cyberspace is a powerful tool to pursue malicious activities, including fraud, extortion, data theft or money-laundering.*”

However, the open, accessible and interconnected internet that brings freedom, enhances our well-being and spurs economic growth, is being misused. States and non-state actors alike have realised that cyberspace and the internet in particular are powerful tools to pursue malicious activities, including fraud, extortion, data theft or money laundering.

Many will remember cyber-attacks like WannaCry and NotPetya, which affected computers worldwide. Or they have heard about the problem of cyber-enabled theft of commercially sensitive data of companies. The internet has also become an arena for ideological battles, the spread of disinformation and the theft of intellectual property, with some states increasingly using it to curtail liberties and advance their geopolitical goals.

“*A cyber-attack can leave a country crippled within seconds, causing electricity blackouts or disruptions for international air and maritime transport, harming millions of people and putting the security and stability of our societies at risk.*”

⁽⁹²⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

So cyber threats are on the rise and in permanent evolution. A cyber-attack can leave a country crippled within seconds, causing electricity blackouts or navigational disruptions for international air and maritime transport. We see governments and political systems being destabilised through cyber-attacks and electoral interference.

Its effects can be significant and irreversible, harming millions of people and putting the security and stability of our societies at risk. This unfortunately is today's reality. And we have even seen this happening during the coronavirus pandemic, with attacks against hospitals and data centres, putting peoples' lives at risk.

“*As the EU we prioritise international cooperation and dialogue to tackle these malicious activities.*”

As the EU we prioritise international cooperation and dialogue to tackle these malicious activities. In particular, we believe that respect for international law and the continued work in the United Nations on norms of responsible state behaviour is essential to maintaining international security and stability in cyberspace. However, some actors seem to undermine this important work and the achievements of the international community to date. This is unacceptable. We have repeatedly signalled our concerns and condemned these malicious cyber activities, warning those that undertake these activities, both publicly and privately.

“*The EU has put in place a comprehensive toolbox to prevent, deter and respond to malicious behaviour in cyberspace. One of its tools is the EU cyber-sanctions regime, adopted in 2019.*”

Since 2017, the EU has put in place a comprehensive cyber diplomacy toolbox to prevent, deter and respond to malicious behaviour in cyberspace. One of its tools is the EU autonomous cyber-sanctions regime, adopted in 2019, which makes it possible to apply restrictive measures to persons and entities involved in significant cyberattacks threatening the EU or its Member States, regardless of nationality or the location of the perpetrator.

Listings are also possible for attempted cyber-attacks, as well as for cyberattacks against third states or international organisations. The restrictive measures are a travel ban and/or asset freeze. Moreover, EU persons and entities are forbidden from making funds available to those listed.

“*For the first time, we have made use of the cyber sanctions regime by imposing travel bans and assets freezes against six individuals as well as assets freezes against three entities.*”

Today, for the first time, we have decided to make use of this sanctions regime by imposing travel bans and assets freezes against six individuals as well as assets freezes against three entities or bodies. They were involved in significant cyber-attacks, or attempted cyber-attacks against the EU and its Member States.

These individuals and entities have been involved in cyber-attacks against companies located in the EU, such as those known as WannaCry, NotPetya, Operation Cloud Hopper or the attempted cyber-attack against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

“*These targeted measures send a strong message to the world that we will not tolerate such cyberattacks.*”

These targeted measures will ensure that those individuals and entities are held accountable for their actions. They send a strong message to the world that we will not tolerate such cyber-attacks: we have the tools to protect ourselves and the determination to use them.

We will continue to push for international cooperation

We will of course continue to push for international cooperation to build a global, open, stable, peaceful and secure cyberspace, including by reducing the ability of potential perpetrators to misuse cyberspace. For decades, the EU has invested significantly in increasing global cyber resilience and tackle cybercrime through our capacity building programmes - and we will continue to do so. Advancing international security and stability will remain our priority so that everyone can reap the benefits that the internet and the use of technologies provide.

Everyone has a responsibility and we call on all actors to step up efforts to prevent cyber-attacks from happening. With today's decision, the EU has shown it is ready to do its part and the wider efforts continue.

THE ESSENTIAL FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION AND MANIPULATION

28/12/2020. *During the COVID-19 ‘infodemic’, we have seen how widespread and damaging foreign interference and disinformation can be for our security, our democracy and our societies. Addressing disinformation is an urgent necessity* ⁽⁹³⁾.

In a recent blog post ⁽⁹⁴⁾, I discussed the threats that our democracies are facing in cyberspace. I have also spoken often about the ongoing ‘battles of narratives’ ⁽⁹⁵⁾. Countries and political leaders are trying to explain their positions and to portray themselves in a favourable light. This is a normal way of acting: in democracies, political leaders have an obligation to communicate about objectives and values. This is why the EU put a lot of effort into explaining our policy approaches and the thinking behind our actions and proposals.

Beyond legitimate ‘public diplomacy’

However, some go much further than conducting legitimate ‘public diplomacy’. They present their way of addressing global challenges as the only effective one while attempting to discredit others. Some foreign actors, be they state or non-state, even engage in disinformation campaigns, deliberately spreading false or misleading information. They do so to weaken us and to harm our ability to respond to crisis effectively.

“Some foreign actors, be they state or non-state, even engage in disinformation campaigns, deliberately spreading false or misleading information.

⁽⁹³⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89243/we-need-straight-talk-and-determined-action-democracy_en

⁽⁹⁵⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76379/coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en

For example, the Western vaccine developers are openly mocked on multi-lingual Russian state-controlled media, which has in some cases led to absurd claims that vaccines will turn people into monkeys. Such narratives are apparently directed at countries where Russia wants to sell its own vaccine, Sputnik V. In the current pandemic, any attempt to instigate such unfounded doubts threatens public health.

Disinformation has been with us for a long time

This is not a new challenge: disinformation has been with us for a long time. However, with the possibilities offered by the internet, it now spreads faster than ever, reaching citizens in their homes every day. Some state actors, like Russia and China, are actively involved in these activities, trying to undermine and delegitimise our democratic systems and the values of freedom, pluralism and checks and balances they are built upon.

“*The EU has been working on tackling disinformation for many years now, and the EEAS has been a pioneer in monitoring pro-Kremlin disinformation.*”

The EU has been working on tackling disinformation for many years now ⁽⁹⁶⁾. The European External Actions Service (EEAS) has been a pioneer in monitoring pro-Kremlin disinformation and has then expanded its focus and toolbox. Today, EEAS task forces focus on three different regions: the East, the southern neighbourhood and the western Balkans. We have recently published our fifth Special Report on COVID-19 disinformation ⁽⁹⁷⁾, which shows again how much these activities can cause considerable damage during a global health crisis.

The intentional spread of false or misleading information is only part of the challenge ⁽⁹⁸⁾. During the pandemic, the fight against mis- and disinformation has been also used by authoritarian regimes as a pretext to limit fundamental rights and especially freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>

⁽⁹⁷⁾ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-of-narratives-and-disinformation-around-the-covid-19-pandemic-update-may-november/>

⁽⁹⁸⁾ <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/what-happened-in-2020/>

“*We have seen attempts during the pandemic to use the fight against mis- and disinformation as a pretext to limit fundamental rights and freedoms.*”

Measures range from the expulsion of foreign correspondents to online harassment and in some cases even threatening physical harm. We cannot accept this: freedom of speech and media freedom are a vital pillar of our democracies, and we also rely on independent reporting from around the world. If the work of journalists is restricted, we need to take a strong stance.

The EU will protect these principles and respond effectively to disinformation. We often talk about silos that inhibit an effective approach to tackling problems in Europe. In the field of disinformation, we are working every day to increase cooperation across different EU institutions and Member States and develop the EU's Rapid Alert System (RAS) against disinformation. A network of officials in EU institutions and EU Member States are dealing with disinformation related issues to enable common situational awareness and threat assessment and to strengthen coordination with researchers, civil society organisations and our international partners.

Thanks to cooperation with our international partners, like the G7 and NATO, we can also track global trends and prepare for them. Fact-checkers, journalists, nongovernmental organisations and think tanks are also contributing immensely to curbing the spread of disinformation.



A ‘whole-of-society’ response

On 2 December, the European Commission presented the European democracy action plan ⁽⁹⁹⁾, focusing on election integrity and media pluralism and tackling disinformation. In all of this, we must use a ‘whole-of-society’ response, including civil society, media, academia and the private sector (most importantly online platforms and advertisers), to protect our democracies from foreign interference.

We must also increase international cooperation. Europe is not an island: there are no borders in cyberspace. Our attempts to protect ourselves from these threats internally risk being undermined by manipulative interference launched from countries with weaker regulatory and monitoring capacities.

“*Europe is not an island: there are no borders in cyberspace. Our attempts to protect ourselves internally risk being undermined by manipulative interference launched from countries with weaker regulatory capacities.*”

The EU is offering technical support to authorities and civil society all over the world to build the capacities and oversight that we are developing inside the EU. We are providing assistance for election-related matters, for example helping others monitor online electoral campaigns and promoting initiatives on digital media literacy.

The EU is also implementing a project to address COVID-19 disinformation in African countries and the Middle East. We are building partnerships with fact-checkers across Eastern Partnership countries and the western Balkans, and we keep supporting independent journalism via the European Endowment for Democracy ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ in our neighbourhood and beyond.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ <https://www.democracyendowment.eu/en>

The role of the EU's normative and regulatory power

As the world's largest trade bloc, the EU's normative and regulatory power extends globally. The rules and responses that we put in place within Europe to deal with interference in our democratic life and elections will play an important role in setting global standards. This is especially true for the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA) ⁽¹⁰⁾, proposed by the European Commission on 15 December 2020.

In the fight against disinformation and foreign interference, an appropriate and transparent risk management by large platforms is a crucial step to curbing the spread of false or misleading information and safeguarding civic discourse from manipulative behaviour. In full respect of fundamental rights and freedoms, the DSA and DMA would provide the EU with necessary instruments for better accountability, transparency and auditability of platforms' actions.

“*The Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA) package will bring us closer to better accountability, transparency and auditability of platforms' actions.*”

We still need to do more in the area of disinformation to prevent our adversaries from employing low-cost, low-risk and high-reward tactics to attack our societies and democracies. We must ensure that actors who intentionally disrupt and divide our societies with manipulative tactics will face appropriate consequences. Spreading disinformation must come at a price.

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-services-act-package>

DEFENCE COOPERATION: HOW STRATEGIC PERSEVERANCE WILL PAY OFF

20/11/2020. *In November 2020, EU Defence Ministers discussed how the EU can become a stronger security actor. The Permanent Structured Cooperation, the Strategic Compass and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence are key to achieve this objective* ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

I have said repeatedly in this blog and elsewhere that rising threats to EU's interests and security call for stronger EU defence. This is not an ideological statement, it is common sense. And it urges us to take our collective security into our own hands, to shape a world order that respects our values and interests, to protect our prosperity and our citizens.

This year we made some important steps forward towards enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy and becoming a stronger global actor. In our meeting with EU Defence Ministers today, we focused in particular on three major defence initiatives.

The central role of the Permanent Structured Cooperation

In 2017, 25 EU Member States decided to make use of a possibility foreseen in the EU Treaty to step up their engagement on defence cooperation. By establishing the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) ⁽¹⁰³⁾, they signed up to a set of defence commitments and launched collaborative projects – currently 46 in total – to develop capabilities together and be ready to deploy them together.

They decided to do so because they had realised that cooperation is the most effective and efficient way to generate the defence capabilities that Europe needs, overcome fragmentation and make economies of scale.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹⁰³⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/34226/permanent-structured-cooperation-pesco-factsheet_en

“Member States decided Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) because they had realised that cooperation is the most efficient way to generate the defence capabilities that Europe needs, and make economies of scale.”

Three years later, defence ministers approved the first “PESCO Strategic Review”, assessing the results achieved so far and setting out objectives for the next phase, including a list of 26 projects that will be operational by 2025. This includes very concrete projects such as the *Cyber Rapid Response Teams*, which will enable several deployable teams to respond to cyber incidents across Europe, or the *European Medical Command*, a multinational medical structure that will coordinate medical resources for CSDP missions and operations as well as for NATO. Or a more conventional weapon system: the *EU Beyond line of sight Land Battlefield Missile*, which will enable operators to deliver precision strikes beyond direct sight with the use of drones.

Too often, I hear people saying that PESCO is not delivering or is not concrete enough. The reality is that developing certain types of capabilities takes time – you do not produce a European drone, air defence systems, missiles, patrol planes or a corvette overnight. Still, this is exactly what PESCO is about and is making important contributions to: bringing European defence cooperation to a new level and making full use of the industrial and technological base.

“Developing certain types of capabilities takes time – you do not produce a European drone, air defence systems, missiles, patrol planes or a corvette overnight.”

The decision on the conditions for the participation of third states in PESCO projects, adopted earlier this month, is another important step forward. It sends an important message to partners and allies: PESCO projects are open to third states when they meet certain conditions and bring added value. And this in turn strengthens PESCO itself as a framework for cooperation at EU level, as it opens new opportunities.

The need for a Strategic Compass and threat analysis

Another important development this year is the launch of the “Strategic Compass”. I have already written about it earlier ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾. What is new today is that we have completed the first step: the threat analysis. Over the last few months our EU intelligence service has compiled an analysis of the threats and challenges affecting Europe’s security, based on inputs from the 27 Member States’ civilian and military intelligence services. It is the first time we undertake such an exercise at EU level. And this is a very important step forward towards the consolidation of a common strategic culture: the more we develop a common understanding of threats and challenges we are facing, the better we can prepare to tackle them.

“*The more we develop a common understanding of threats, the better we can prepare to tackle them.*”

This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the threats and challenges Europe is facing and will face in the next 5 to 10 years, ranging from global risks like weakening multilateralism, globalisation slowing down, growing rivalries between global powers and environmental security impacts to risks associated with use of disruptive technologies, cyber attacks, (dis)information operations or terrorism. It analyses also more specific threats related to an increasing number of regional powers seeking influence, or emanating from failing states and inter-state tensions.

One message comes out from this analysis loud and clear: strengthening the EU’s security and defence policy is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The challenges are truly daunting and they can only be addressed by providing a collective European answer. Therefore, we need to further increase our operational effectiveness, our resilience as well as our civilian and military capabilities, while also working even closer with our partners.

“*One message comes out from this analysis loud and clear: the challenges are truly daunting and they can only be addressed by providing a collective European answer.*”

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81247/europe-security-and-defence-way-forward_en

This is precisely what we intend to do through the Strategic Compass and ministers reiterated today their determination and commitment to do so. In the coming months, intensive work will be conducted to shape concrete objectives across the entire spectrum of our security and policy agenda. Drawing out all the conclusions from this consultative process, EU Member States will adopt the Strategic Compass in early 2022. This is a major endeavour that will chart the way ahead for European security and defence for the next years.

The mapping of the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

Lastly, as Head of the European Defence Agency, I presented to Defence Ministers the 2020 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) report.

“*The CARD report provides the first comprehensive overview of the European defence landscape, including defence industry. This mapping clearly highlights that our defence sector is still way too fragmented.*”

The report provides the first comprehensive overview of the European defence landscape, including capability development, R&D efforts and defence industry. This mapping clearly highlights that our defence sector is still way too fragmented and needs convergence. Just a couple of illustrative examples: while the US



has one main battle tank, in Europe we currently operate 16 different types. In the maritime domain, we operate 30 different types of corvettes, frigates and destroyers – compared to four surface battle ships in the US. On the operational side, CSDP engagement in terms of personnel and expenditure barely represents 7% of the total operational commitments of Member States. So yes, much more needs to be done.

Six very concrete focus areas for cooperation

But what the CARD report also tells us is that there are ways to think and plan European defence capabilities to make Europe stronger and more autonomous. In fact, the CARD report identifies six very concrete focus areas for joint investment and cooperation – from main battle tank and patrol ships to countering drones, defence in space and military mobility. It further identifies over 100 concrete collaborative opportunities in capability development and research and technology. These are opportunities for cooperation that can be further pursued in the framework of PESCO and could potentially benefit from the European Defence Fund.

All three defence initiatives have huge potential. Just like other European policies, European security and defence will *'not be made all at once or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity'* ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. 2020 brought compelling evidence that we are making steady progress on European defence, step by step, with strategic perseverance.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ Excerpt from the Schuman declaration. See: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en

5.

EU FOREIGN POLICY AROUND THE GLOBE

In a globalised world, we must be engaged in every part of it, from our neighbourhood to Africa, Asia and the Americas.

In 2020, we devoted a lot of time and effort to handling the Libyan crisis, and I hope we will see some improvement there in 2021. In Syria and neighbouring countries, the situation of migrants and refugees remains very difficult. Lebanon, in particular, finds itself confronted with very serious problems of governance after the explosion at the port of Beirut.

In our eastern neighbourhood, we have continued to support the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine while calling on its leaders to speed up reforms and strengthen the fight against corruption. We have also supported the courageous struggle of the people of Belarus for their right to choose their president in a free and fair election. In the western Balkans, we have relaunched the difficult dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and helped heal wounds in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A focus of our work in 2020 was on Africa, revamping and modernising our partnership. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 crisis meant we could not achieve all we wanted to, but deepening EU–Africa relations remains a top priority.

Latin America has been neglected by Europe for too long, but in 2020 we put a lot of effort into changing this lack of attention. Much focus was on trying to find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Venezuelan crisis. There has been no result so far, but it is necessary that we continue to try, not least in view of the extreme gravity of the humanitarian situation.

We have deepened our overall engagement in and ties with Asia as well. I am particularly pleased that we have succeeded in establishing a strategic partnership with ASEAN after many years of negotiations. We have also built further bridges with Pakistan and India.

In a world where demographic and economic balances are rapidly changing, it is also imperative that Europe continuously develops its links with emerging and developing countries.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

27/10/2020. The western Mediterranean always has been, and always will be, a key region for Europe. However, to develop mutually beneficial relations across the Mediterranean, we will have to bridge the divide growing between its two shores ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾.

Last week, I was invited to attend the meeting of foreign ministers of the '5+5 of the western Mediterranean' group. For thirty years, this forum has brought together five EU countries (Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal) and five southern Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia).

Despite its informal structure, the forum allows the countries to present their viewpoints and develop partnerships within the western Mediterranean. This region has played, and still plays, an essential role for the European Union, and will continue to do so in the future.

The growing divide between the EU and the Maghreb

Throughout this meeting, I was overwhelmed by my colleagues' descriptions of the difficulties currently being faced by the countries of the southern Mediterranean. The already significant wealth gap between the two shores of our shared waters is widening. The five southern Mediterranean countries have a total population of 102 million, equal to just under a quarter of the population of the European Union, and yet their combined GDP is 60 times lower than that of the EU.

In other words, in the southern Mediterranean, the wealth generated by each member of the population is 13 times lower than in Europe. Even if the considerably lower living costs on the other side of Mediterranean are taken into account, living standards there are around one fifth of those in Europe.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

More importantly, the progress towards closing this gap that we saw up until the mid-2000s has since been reversed: in 2005, average living standards in the five southern Mediterranean countries were three times lower than in Europe. Today, they are almost five times worse.

Dynamic demographics

The stagnating living standards are not simply down to the economic difficulties in the southern Mediterranean, they are also due to the region's dynamic demographics: from 1990 to 2019, the population of the five Maghreb countries increased by 57 %, while the population of the EU grew only 6 %. Their economies just could not keep up at the same pace.

Moreover, these figures refer to the year 2019. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the economies of Morocco and Tunisia, which are heavily dependent on tourism and automotive and textile manufacturing. Meanwhile, Algeria is being hit hard by drops in prices and sales volumes of hydrocarbons. As a result of the crisis, all the countries in the region are suffering from the sharp decrease in remittances arriving from emigrants in Europe.

“COVID-19 has played with the concepts of north and south. In the north, the worst affected countries are in the south of Europe. In the south, the worst affected are in the north of Africa”.

Nasser Bourita, Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs

As my colleague Nasser Bourita, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, rightly pointed out during our meeting: ‘COVID-19 has hit the western Mediterranean hard. It has played with the concepts of north and south: in the north, the worst affected countries are in the south of Europe. In the south, the worst affected are in the north of Africa.

It will be difficult to prevent political instability and migration towards Europe in the southern Mediterranean while the living standards there stagnate and the gap between the two shores widens. Therefore, it is in the interest of European citizens to actively contribute to reversing this trend, while of course respecting each party's sovereignty.

“*The region’s profound difficulties are particularly visible in the “non-Maghreb”, which is actually still one of the least integrated regions in the world, in economic terms.*”

There are numerous reasons behind these profound difficulties. However, some of the most important can be seen in the ‘non-Maghreb’. In economic terms, this region is still one of the least integrated in the world: trade between the Maghreb countries is estimated to be at only a quarter of its potential. In 2012, we proposed a wide range of measures to support regional integration and to encourage closer cooperation with the EU ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾.

Persisting conflicts

Eight years later, bilateral relations have indeed matured and cooperation has expanded to include key issues such as climate change. Nonetheless, the impact of these efforts has been limited. Persisting conflicts and diverging interests between the countries of the region have prevailed over cooperation efforts to address common challenges. This has failed, in particular, to meet the expectations of a growing, young and educated population.

To make matters worse, trade relations with Europe have not developed as hoped. On the contrary, they have noticeably declined since the end of the 2000s. Today, external trade with these countries accounts for only 3% of the EU’s total trade. EU exports to the Maghreb are eight times lower than exports to the United States, for example.

Reversing this trend as a matter of urgency

Together, we absolutely must reverse this trend, so that both sides of the Mediterranean can come out of the COVID-19 crisis in a way that is digital, green and fair. Our cooperation with the Maghreb is developing in an international environment that is harbouring more and more uncertainty – as well as conflict: relocation and economic sovereignty have now become important topics all over the world.

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52012JC0036>

“Europe does not intend to shy away now. Our wish to regain greater economic sovereignty could benefit development in the the Maghreb.”

However, our wish to regain greater economic sovereignty for Europe could really benefit development in the Maghreb. Indeed, Europe does not intend to shy away now: we must take advantage of our partnership to generate wealth in close connection with our immediate neighbours, and together improve our living standards and increase employment. However, there is still a long way to go, especially in terms of political and economic reform, which is necessary if the Maghreb wants to attract foreign investment.

Growing insecurity and political instability

These persistent economic and social difficulties have gone hand in hand with the political instability reflected, in particular, in the internal conflicts in Libya and the expansion of Islamic terrorism throughout the Sahel. This has led the EU to develop its cooperation with the region in matters of security.

Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco are participating in several European initiatives aiming to combat terrorism. There is also continued cooperation in terms of fighting organised crime. Together with the countries of this region, the EU is finally actively involved in the Berlin process on Libya, led by the United Nations, to help restore peace and stability in the country. Last March, the EU launched Operation IRINI to help enforce the UN arms embargo, but also to combat smuggling and human trafficking.

“Thanks in particular to the efforts of the Maghreb countries, negotiation seems to become the prevailing means of conflict resolution in Libya.”

We can be proud of recent developments in Libya: thanks in particular to the efforts of the Maghreb countries, negotiation seems to be the prevailing means of conflict resolution. Negotiation will continue to prevail if Libyans are able to find solutions by themselves. The United Nations and the European Union will provide all the necessary support for Libya's efforts to reach compromises. However, we

are obviously well aware that long-term solutions to these challenges to security will only be possible if we are also addressing their structural causes by means of deep political and socio-economic reform.

Migration must be orderly

Our people and our societies are closely linked; millions of citizens of the Maghreb countries are legally living in EU countries. These countries also face migratory pressures from sub-Saharan Africa. We must further strengthen our cooperation with the migratory countries of origin and transit countries to ensure that migration movements are orderly. This is the aim of the migration dialogues that we are trying to develop with the Maghreb countries, which is made possible by the strong cooperation that already exists in this area.

This informal meeting allowed me to better understand the serious difficulties currently being faced by our southern Mediterranean neighbours, and the enormous challenges associated with developing our relations. However, this meeting was only an initial step preceding another important event: the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Forum will be taking place on 27 November.

27 November: the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process

This year, our partners from all Mediterranean countries will come together to take stock of the 25 years of regional cooperation facilitated by the Barcelona Process. To mark this occasion, the Union will reaffirm its commitment to making the Mediterranean a safer, wealthier and more stable region. I am well aware that the actions taken to this end for the past quarter of a century have only had limited results, and that the task will be particularly tough in the coming months...

LIBYA: A GLIMMER OF HOPE?

04/09/2020. *In September 2020, I visited Libya, meeting the authorities of the war-torn country to explore further support the EU can provide to help resolve the conflict shortly after a ceasefire announced in August ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾.*

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, Libya – a country of 6.7 million inhabitants, potentially very rich with immense oil reserves – has been beset by violent conflicts between different factions and militias, as well as outside players and actors.

Ten years of violent conflicts

The Libyan people have suffered enormously and the instability in the country has had negative spill over effects on regional security, affecting neighbouring countries and the whole Sahel region. The country also served as a major route for people trafficking and irregular migration to Europe. Only a few kilometres away from the European coast, this chronic instability has long been a major concern for the EU.

“*Only a few kilometres away from the European coast, the Libyan chronic instability has long been a major concern for the EU.*”

In April 2019, when General Khalifa Haftar of the so-called Libyan National Army, controlling the eastern part of the country, started a military offensive, the armed conflict saw another culmination point. Shortly after, Ghassan Salame, then UN Special Representative for Libya and head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, proposed an elaborated peace plan. The plan called for a ceasefire and an internal dialogue between the warring Libyan parties. This plan was accepted by General Haftar and the Government of National Accord led by President Faiez Serraj and based in Tripoli.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.



The “Berlin process” to forge international unity for peace

To actively support the UN-led mediation process and since any solution depended on the buy-in of the international actors involved, Germany initiated the “Berlin process” to forge the necessary international unity in favour of peace in Libya. The process led to a conference in Berlin at the beginning of 2020, which adopted a 55-point declaration specifying the different elements of a possible agreement and establishing an internationally supported process to contribute to ending the conflict. It created three parallel tracks: a military track with a 5+5 group tasked to elaborate modalities for a ceasefire, a political track with a group of representatives from both the East and West and civil society to work on a political solution, as well as an economic track with experts working on the economic challenges to be addressed.

“Foreign interference has multiplied in recent months: the conflict parties continue to receive arms, mercenaries and financial support, and some countries even sent troops.”

Unfortunately, these processes have not yet led to sustainable agreements and peace. Foreign interference on the ground has multiplied in recent months, including notably by Turkey, Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, backing different sides of the conflict. In violation of the United Nations arms embargo, the conflict parties continue to receive arms, mercenaries and financial support, and some countries even sent troops or threatened to do so.

“*The Libyan people, faced with very difficult living conditions aggravated by the COVID-19 outbreak, are exasperated by the continuing civil war.*”

Fighting also led to a prolonged freeze on the Libyan oil production and exports, which is the main source of revenue for the country. The Libyan people, faced with very difficult living conditions aggravated by the COVID-19 outbreak, are exasperated by the continuing civil war.

A rare piece of good news

In August of this year, a rare piece of good news came when President Faiez Serraj and Aguila Saleh, Speaker of the House of Representatives, based in eastern Libya, agreed to call for a ceasefire and unblock the oil production. We immediately welcomed this initiative. However, it remains unclear to what extent this agreement will be implemented in practice by the two sides, and the understanding has not yet found the support of General Haftar.

This is the context in which I visited Libya to observe first-hand the situation, to discuss the possible way forward for an effective implementation of the ceasefire, and to help to put the Berlin process back on track.

In my meetings with President Faiez Serraj, Speaker Aguila Saleh and the National Oil Corporation Chairman Mustafa Sanalla, we discussed ways for making the political efforts successful, and for lifting the blockade on oil production and exports.

The critical importance of oil production and exports

The latter is highly relevant: in 2019, Libya produced 1,2 million barrels of oil per day, but currently the production has almost fully stopped. If Libya were to return to its normal production level, this would enable it to earn at least €10 billion each year.

“As EU, we want Libya to preserve its territorial integrity and Libyans to decide their own future, free from external interference.”

I underlined the EU's commitment to help rebuilding Libya, which is also in our very own interest. As the EU, we want Libya to preserve its territorial integrity and Libyans to decide their own future, free from external interference. A stable and peaceful Libya could be a solid partner for the EU and the region to collaborate effectively on economic development, energy, trade, security, education and migration.

EU Operation IRINI has proven its utility

We also discussed EU naval Operation IRINI, which monitors the arms embargo in the Mediterranean in line with a UNSC mandate. So far, IRINI has conducted more than 600 hailings of vessels to control the arms embargo and related to oil smuggling. It has shown its ability to document and monitor violations on both sides and has proven its deterrence effect, preventing attempts to smuggle Libyan oil outside of the National Oil Corporation's control from terminals in the Tobruk region.

“I was encouraged by all my interlocutors' commitment to the Berlin process as the way out of the stalemate, and the shared desire to ensure that foreign fighters leave the country.”

The situation in Libya remains very complex and difficult. However, we see a glimmer of hope and I was encouraged by all interlocutors' commitment to the Berlin process as the way out of the Libyan stalemate, and the shared desire to ensure that foreign fighters leave the country.

Even though we are well aware of the magnitude of the task ahead, I return from this trip more optimistic for Libya's future. Let's get to work now, in close connection with the UN and all relevant players, so that this time the chance for peace becomes real.

SYRIA: WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO OUR PART

02/07/2020. *For ten years, 12 million Syrians have had to flee their homes. Over half a million have lost their lives. Syria's economy is in freefall. We would much prefer to help reconstruct Syria than to support people in desperate situations* ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

In the almost ten years since civil war began in Syria, I have followed closely its appalling developments and the horrors that the Syrian people have gone through. I come from a country that went through a civil war and perfectly know how it divides and destroys a society.

More than 12 million Syrians, half of the pre-war population, had to flee their homes. Over half a million have lost their lives. An entire generation of Syrian children has only known war.

As Europeans, we have collectively been unable to stop these massacres at the gates of our continent. When we pursue our efforts to build a stronger common foreign and security policy for the EU, I often think of Syria and what we could have done there.

“*When we pursue our efforts to build a stronger Common Foreign and Security Policy for the EU, I often think of Syria and what we could have done there.*”

But that's the past. Today's Syria is far from being fixed; on the contrary, it is heading in fact towards lasting instability. Its economy is in freefall, a result of chronic mismanagement by the regime, widespread corruption and the banking crisis in Lebanon – formerly Syria's financial gateway. The consequences of the global coronavirus crisis are making the already dire living conditions of the Syrians even worse. They really have endured enough – and they all deserve so much better. First and foremost a perspective towards a better, dignified, more peaceful future. It is our duty as Europeans, it is my duty, to do everything we can to help achieve this.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

“*Syria is far from being fixed; its economy is in freefall, a result of chronic mismanagement by the regime, widespread corruption and the banking crisis in Lebanon.*”

The Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria and the Region, held on 30 June, was the most important event this year to address the most critical needs generated by the Syria crisis. A unique occasion to show our support, both political and financial, for Syria’s civil society of course but also for Syria’s neighbours and their people particularly in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. They have shown extraordinary solidarity towards the 5.6 million Syrians who found refuge outside their country.

We raised an additional €6.9 billion

Despite the coronavirus, despite the risk of “donor fatigue” that applies to any long-running conflict, thanks to the continued mobilization of the international community and of our co-chair the United Nations, we raised an additional €6.9 billion. I know that is not enough; it can probably never be enough, seen from the eyes of people having endured ten years of war. Still, we are proud of this result, and particularly that nearly three quarters of these funds come from the EU and its Member States.

For me, one of the most enlightening moments of the conference was my direct exchange with members of Syria’s civil society. Syria’s civil society was close to non-existent ten years ago. It grew at lightning speed during the conflict, delivering services to people, advocating for the rights and the needs of the Syrians. The commitment of Syria’s civil society and non-governmental organizations, their determination to build a better country so that they have not gone through ten years of hell for nothing, is a lesson of dignity.

“*The commitment of Syria’s civil society, its determination to build a better country so that they have not gone through ten years of hell for nothing, is a lesson of dignity.*”

I spoke to women and men who have lost family members; who still have loved ones missing or detained in unknown circumstances. One quarter of the Syrians have a missing person among their close friends or relatives and wonder every day what has become of them. That is one of the many ways in

which the Syrian society has been broken, and is still held hostage. Despite the odds, I left my exchange with them with a certain sense of hope, or at least with a chunk of their impressive determination. They hold the key to their country's future: they can build a better Syria.

“*One quarter of the Syrians have a missing person among their friends or relatives. That is one of the many ways in which the Syrian society has been broken, and is still held hostage.*”

But the aims of the Brussels Conferences went far beyond a mere donor conference. We also put the political spotlight on Syria. This is not just about the EU: Europe as a whole, Syria's neighbours, the Gulf, the whole international community from Brazil to Japan, from Canada to Australia reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the efforts of the UN to broker intra-Syria talks and work towards a lasting political solution to the conflict.

I opened the conference by saying that the country is not doing better. In fact, things are getting worse than they have ever been during the war. I know that the regime and its supporters blame Western sanctions. As we have now said many times, EU sanctions have nothing to do with the actual difficulties inside Syria. The truth is that Syria continues to undergo organised economic exploitation, at the hands of the very people who blame us.



“EU sanctions have nothing to do with the actual difficulties in Syria. Syria continues to undergo an organised economic exploitation, at the hands of the very people who blame us.”

Our sanctions are precisely targeted at these individuals and at economic entities under their control. They were put in place since 2011, as the consequence of potential war crimes and crimes against humanity, which must be accounted for. They are designed not to impede the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance: we have never placed Syria under any kind of embargo. On the contrary, it is mostly thanks to international assistance that healthcare, food or education can still be delivered to people in need inside Syria.

I know also that full and complete reconciliation is not only possible but also extremely rewarding. And we Europeans are ready to do more to help. In fact, we would much prefer to spend money helping to reconstruct Syria than supporting people in desperate situations. However, reconstruction is not simply about rebuilding infrastructure and housing.

“It is about restoring Syria’s social fabric. It requires public accountability and representativeness of the governing authorities. Syria currently fulfils none of these criteria.”

It is about restoring Syria’s social fabric, rebuilding trust and creating conditions that will prevent the recurrence of violence. It requires minimal conditions in terms of governance, public accountability, and representativeness of the governing authorities. Syria currently fulfils none of these criteria. We are ready to play our part in Syria’s reconstruction and reconciliation, as soon as a genuine political transition is firmly underway.

The future of Syria is for the Syrians to decide.

The future of Syria is for the Syrians to decide. The political negotiations on Syria’s future must be Syrian-owned and Syrian-led. How Syria will look like a year from now will depend on the commitment of the regime to the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2254. Not for our benefit, not for theirs or their supporters’, but for the benefit of all Syrians.

LET US NURTURE THE EU-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP, NOT GAMBLE IT

30/06/2020. *The Israeli government had announced its intention to annex part of the occupied territories in the West Bank. We had taken a firm stand against this project. Fortunately, the Israeli authorities have, for the time being, given up on implementing it* ⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

For many of us in Europe, the relationship with Israel and Palestine is quite personal. For me, for instance, it is a longstanding one. After I finished university in 1969, I worked in a Kibbutz when the State of Israel was still building itself. I travelled all over Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, from Galilee to Eilat, and met my first wife in Gal On. This was my first contact with the still lasting Israel–Palestinian conflict.

As a European, it reminded me of the often tragic nature of human history and to look for peaceful solutions to conflicts. My family and I came back many times, and in 2005, I spoke before the Knesset as President of the European Parliament, recalling the EU's commitment to Israel's security following the second Intifada. At that time, there was still a widely shared sense of hope that, despite the setbacks, a two-state solution was still within reach.

“*In 2005, when I spoke before the Knesset as President of the European Parliament, there was still a widely shared sense of hope that a two-state solution was still within reach.*”

The EU and its Member States have been consistently very active in supporting the two parties towards this goal. We helped build the Palestinian institutions in preparation for statehood, with financial support now reaching more than €600 million a year.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Op-ed published in several outlets.

We understand Israeli security concerns

We also understand Israeli concerns and are committed to Israel's security, which is non-negotiable for us. The EU invests in cooperation that benefits both sides, on issues from counter terrorism to research, from tourism to the environment. We should be looking at ways to nurture this and develop our relations still further.

“*The current status quo is no sustainable situation. The hard truth is that only a return to real negotiations can give Israelis and Palestinians sustainable peace and security.*”

Once the political process stopped, conflict and entrenching occupation became daily life. In the last years, there has been little progress. But the current status quo does not provide satisfying answers and is no sustainable situation. The hard truth is that only a return to real negotiations can give Israelis and Palestinians what they rightly crave: sustainable peace and security.

For us in Europe, it is painful to see the prospect of the two-state solution, the only realistic and sustainable way to end this conflict, at risk. The project of annexation as announced by the government would mean the end of this solution. EU Member States think that the annexation would violate international law and we are using every opportunity with the Israeli government to explain this, in a spirit of friendship.

“*For us in Europe, it is painful to see the two-state solution, the only sustainable way to end this conflict, at risk.*”

Annexation affects people. It affects not only Palestinians, but also Israelis, the neighbourhood and even us in Europe. Any violation of international law, particularly when involving the annexation of territories, has implications for the rules-based international order; it can therefore also affect negatively other conflict zones.

Annexation is not the way to create peace with the Palestinians and to improve Israel's security. It will not strengthen the negotiations process as some have suggested. Negotiations should begin from the international parameters, and build from there. Ultimately, neither Palestinians nor Israelis are going anywhere,

so you must find a way to make peace between you. And there are examples of cooperation between the two sides; these should be commended and expanded not undermined.

Damaging the international system by eroding one of the fundamental post-war norms that has made the world a safer place and legitimizing the acquisition of territory by force will always be unacceptable for the European Union. Unilateral annexation will have negative consequences for the security and stability of the region.

“*Eroding one of the fundamental post-war norms that has made the world safer and legitimizing the acquisition of territory by force will always be unacceptable for EU.*”

It would endanger Israeli peace agreements with its neighbours; it would seriously damage the Palestinian Authority, and any prospect of a two-state solution. Can Israel take responsibility for millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank with all political and social consequences? In sum, it would not solve any problems, but create more, including for security. In the international debate on the issue, this view has also been expressed by a growing number of important Jewish personalities and organisations.

Europe and Israel are very close

Europe and Israel are very close not only geographically, but also culturally and economically. There is a strong bond between Israel and Europe and we want to strengthen this bond and further deepen our relations, not see them retract. However, this is what will inevitably happen if unilateral annexation goes ahead.

“*Peace cannot be imposed, it has to be negotiated, regardless of how difficult this can be.*”

Peace cannot be imposed, it has to be negotiated, regardless of how difficult this can be. Peace can also bring new possibilities for EU-Israel relations to further grow - which is a priority for the EU and which should be at the centre of our efforts.

HELPING REBUILD BEIRUT AND LEBANON

10/08/2020. *In August 2020, a devastating explosion destroyed major parts of Beirut. We swiftly offered European support. However, Lebanon needs also fundamental changes to solve the problems the country is facing since years ^(m).*

The devastating explosions that hit Beirut last week killed and injured numerous people and have destroyed major parts of the city and the livelihood of many of its inhabitants. The international community, and in the first place the European Union and its Member States, has reacted quickly to mitigate the immense damage and suffering caused.

However, as it is often the case when such disasters happen, the most important and difficult steps lie ahead: what thousands of Lebanese citizens are asking for is to tackle deeper-rooted problems. As a long-time friend of Lebanon, the EU will stand by their sides in their efforts to build a more prosperous and democratic Lebanon. We owe it to the victims of 4 August.

A terrible tragedy

All of us having seen what happened in Beirut were deeply shocked and felt with the people affected by this terrible tragedy: 159 people killed, dozens missing, thousands injured, entire neighbourhoods destroyed and a quarter of a million left homeless. And all of this happened at a time when the Lebanese people were already facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and going through a deep economic downturn.

What is needed right now – and what the Lebanese people rightly expect – is to shed light on the causes of this catastrophe and to mitigate the immediate consequences of the damages caused. For all of this we have swiftly offered European support and expertise. The EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is coordinating EU and Member States support. More than 250

^(m) Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

rescuers from European countries are on the ground, working around the clock with local teams. Tons of emergency supplies have been made available and more will follow. In addition, the ERCC has triggered the satellite mapping capacities of the European Copernicus Emergency Management Service ⁽¹¹²⁾.

The virtual donor conference hosted by President Macron and UN Secretary-General Guterres that took place yesterday was an important step to gather the entire international community around the cause of supporting Lebanon and make sure emergency assistance is coordinated. An amount of around €250 million has been mobilized to cover first urgent needs, including €66 million from the EU.

“*Lebanese citizens want fundamental changes to resolve the structural problems the country is facing since years.*”

This is a robust signal of international solidarity, but Lebanese citizens want more than solidarity. People in the streets of Beirut have clearly expressed their exasperation. They want transparent governance to ensure that all aid is directly channelled to the people in need via the nongovernmental organisations and teams helping on the ground. And they also want fundamental change to resolve the structural problems the country is facing since years.



⁽¹¹²⁾ See: <https://emergency.copernicus.eu/mapping/#zoom=2&lat=16.98802&lon=42.99361&layers=ooBoT>

Protests are a warning call for everybody

I salute the protesters call for a more prosperous and democratic Lebanon. This is a warning call for all of us, the Lebanese authorities and international community alike, that we must listen to. We need to follow up by quick, concrete and brave steps. If we don't, it will be impossible to restore trust, a prerequisite for any meaningful reform process. Instead, anger might well turn into violence, causing further disunity and instability. We cannot afford that to happen, neither for the country and its people nor for the region.

“*The Lebanese population want to see the fight against impunity and corruption becoming a top priority.*”

Beyond efforts to tackle immediate needs, we now have to work on the long-term reconstruction and the profound stabilisation and development of Lebanon. Lebanese want to see substantial reforms of their political and financial system. They want to see the fights against impunity and corruption becoming a top priority. This is also key to unlock EU macro-financial assistance and to conclude an agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

Following the explosions of August 4th, the port of Beirut - the economic lung of the country – has become inoperable. The only alternative is the Tripoli port, which has a lower capacity, while the use of land trade routes via Syria is not feasible. A post-disaster needs assessment will give further information but it seems clear the EU could help mobilize concessional lending and guarantees and play a major role in the reconstruction of the port.

The Lebanese economy was already in a deep crisis

Before last week's tragedy, the Lebanese economy was already in a deep crisis. Lebanon has been living for too long with a huge current account deficit associated with a tremendous need of capital inflows (ca. 20% of GDP per year), and a very high public debt (exceeding 150% of GDP). These long-standing difficulties have been significantly aggravated in recent years by the aftermath of the civil war in Syria and in particular, by a large influx of refugees which Lebanon has been (generously) hosting despite its difficulties.

As a result, Lebanon has been suffering from high interest rates, GDP growth has been close to zero since 2011, imports have collapsed by nearly half since 2018, unemployment has grown above 30 %, and the poverty rate has risen to 50 %. Now both the State and the banks lack liquidity and are unable to borrow, the middle class and human capital are disappearing and many businesses had to shut down. A fundamental economic-reform plan to address those weaknesses is needed.

“Reforms to improve governance, accountability and transparency have to materialise rapidly.”

In addition, the political system as a whole has been facing a severe crisis of legitimacy. People long for a deep political transformation: reforms to improve governance, accountability and transparency have to materialise rapidly.

Change has to come from the Lebanese society itself

In the coming months, the EU will engage with the government and civil society to push all stakeholders to renovate the country's economic and political system. Change cannot be imposed from outside; it has to come from the Lebanese society itself.

It is time for Lebanon's political elites to work with and for the people to build a more stable and transparent political system and a fairer society. If they are ready to do so, they can count on our full support. When this homework is done in a meaningful, fair and democratic way, and when all actors take their responsibilities, there is hope that last week's tragedy could be the turning point for Lebanon.

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IS AT THE HEART OF EU FOREIGN POLICY

12/06/2020. *The EU has a strategic interest in having stable neighbours: we can only be secure if our neighbours do. With the COVID-19 crisis, it has become more urgent than ever to support our Eastern partners to build more resilient and democratic societies* ⁽¹³⁾.

Since eleven years, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) has played an important role in strengthening cooperation between the EU and our six partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). This is one of the most important aspects of the external relations of the European Union.

Reform agenda and territorial conflicts

The EaP countries are pursuing their reform agenda with different pace and our relations with them vary in quality and intensity. And they certainly constitute, with their 72 million inhabitants, an important geopolitical factor for the EU. A majority of EaP countries have issues with territorial integrity or host conflicts on their territory.

“*The EU has a key security interest in a peaceful neighbourhood, helps solving related issues, and facilitates peaceful conflict resolution.*”

Particularly when we have the worrisome situation in Ukraine in mind, which has been going through a major crisis for several years now, fuelled by foreign interference, and whose territorial integrity has been undermined. The EU has a key security interest in a peaceful neighbourhood, helps solving related issues, and facilitates peaceful conflict resolution.

⁽¹³⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

Citizens' support and trust

EaP is our neighbourhood and we belong together culturally and historically. People in those countries care about Europe and our cooperation has had a tangible impact on the lives of EaP country citizens. The EU's power of attraction is confirmed by a growing interest of citizens in travelling, studying and legally working in the EU and vice versa.

“*The EU's power of attraction is confirmed by a growing interest of citizens in travelling, studying and legally working in the EU and vice-versa.*”

Our policies strive to facilitate people-to-people contacts and bringing people closer to us, especially by creating opportunities for young people to study in Europe, but also by studying together in EaP countries. As a result, a majority of citizens in the Eastern Partnership countries now have a positive perception of the EU ⁽¹¹⁴⁾. The European Union is the most trusted international institution, and the only one trusted by the majority of EaP citizens.

Yesterday, we held a virtual meeting ⁽¹¹⁵⁾ together with Commissioner Oliver Varhélyi and the foreign ministers of the EU-27 and their counterparts from Eastern Partnership countries. The videoconference took place in the difficult context of the serious health, economic and social crisis triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The EU and its Member States have been severely hit by this crisis and had to take measures of an unprecedented nature to deal with it.

€1 billion to support EaP countries in handling coronavirus pandemic

Although the direct health impact has been so far lower in the EaP countries, the pandemic has put serious pressure on health systems. The situation is aggravated by conflict zones, ageing populations and ongoing problems related to governance and the state of the economies. Like everywhere else, countries in the region are set for a recession, which can bring additional risks related to social stability and security, with possible spill over to the region and beyond.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ See <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/publications/opinion-survey-2019-regional-overview>

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2020/06/11/>

“*The pandemic has put serious pressure on health systems. The situation is aggravated by conflict zones, ageing populations and ongoing problems related to governance.*”

To mitigate this risk, we have mobilised, together with Member States, close to €1 billion to support EaP countries covering immediate needs but also the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. Yesterday we have delivered a clear message to our eastern partners: even in difficult times and mainly because times are difficult, you can count on us. We are standing by you and we support you.

Disinformation and fake news

This context has also encouraged another virus, the virus of disinformation, with fake news undermining the role of the EU. EaP countries have been an important target for those campaigns. We widely denounced such developments and announced measures to combat them⁽¹¹⁶⁾. We will also continue the dialogue with our EaP partners on the fundamental issues of democracy and the rule of law. This is of crucial importance and deserves special attention in the context of the current pandemic.

The Council Conclusions of 11 May have outlined⁽¹¹⁷⁾ future policy objectives for the Eastern Partnership under the framework of resilience. We had yesterday very good feedback from our partners. Next week the leaders of the EU Member States and our partner countries will meet to develop a new set of tangible, operational and concrete deliverables for the years to come.

At a time when Europeans might, for understandable reasons, be tempted to turn inward to deal with the problems resulting from the current crisis, it is important to realise how much the future of the Union, and in particular that of our common security, depends on what is happening outside our borders, notably in our eastern neighbourhood. The coronavirus pandemic has reminded us how interconnected we are and how much we need to cooperate.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ See: https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/countering-disinformation/80688/response-disinformation-around-covid-19-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep_en

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43905/st07510-re01-en20.pdf>

BELARUSIANS COURAGEOUSLY DEMAND DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

22/09/2020. For months, people in Belarus have taken to the streets to contest the fraudulent Presidential elections and the wave of repression that followed. During the September EU Foreign ministers meeting we underlined our full support ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Before our Foreign Affairs Council, we had an informal breakfast with Ms Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, one of the key leaders of the Belarusian pro-democracy Coordination Council. Tsikhanouskaya was the principal opponent of Aleksandr Lukashenko in the presidential elections of 9 August. To a certain extent, she is an “accidental” hero. She ran instead of her husband, a well-known blogger who was jailed in May 2020.

She was the only true opposition figure allowed to take part in the elections, following the exclusion on technical grounds of the former Deputy Foreign Minister Tsepkalo and the former head of Belgazprom-bank Babariko. Lukashenko miscalculated, thinking that a 37-year old woman, a former teacher and a housewife would not pose a challenge. Together with the wife of Tsepkalo and head of Babriko’s campaign Maryja Kaliesnikava, the female trio managed to mobilise the Belarusian population to vote against Lukashenko.

Tikhanovskaya forced to leave the country

Following the election, Tikhanovskaya was forced to leave the country on 11 August and remains in exile in Lithuania since then. It was important to hear her assessment of the latest developments, including on the prospects for an inclusive national dialogue and how the EU can support this and the people of Belarus in their fight for democracy.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.



“It is impressive and moving, to see hundreds of thousands of Belarusians who every weekend have come out to protest peacefully, with courage and dignity.”

Six weeks after the elections, the situation remains grim. But it is also inspirational. It is impressive and may I say, moving, to see hundreds of thousands of Belarusians who every weekend have come out to protest peacefully, with courage and dignity. For their part, the authorities have responded with ever larger waves of arrests, violence and intimidation.

From the start of this crisis, the European Union has been clear⁽¹⁹⁾: we do not recognise the results of the presidential elections and we consider Lukashenko an illegitimate President; we reject his use of violence and the repression of fundamental and democratic rights; and we see an inclusive political dialogue with new elections that must be free and fair, as the only way forward.

⁽¹⁹⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84053/belarus-violence-must-stop-and-regime-must-change_en

The EU's four lines of action

Unfortunately, the regime has continued on its course of defiance. So today, the discussion among ministers was all about lines of action that the EU could pursue to give substance to our political stance. We agreed to pursue four basic tracks.

“A package of around 40 names and entities has been prepared, which targets those responsible for the electoral fraud, the repression of peaceful protests and state-run brutality.”

First, sanctions. A package of around 40 names and entities has been prepared, which targets those responsible for the electoral fraud, the repression of peaceful protests and state-run brutality. In concrete terms, it would mean these people and entities will have any assets inside the EU frozen; they will not be able to receive any kind of funding or finance from within the EU; and they will be banned from entering the EU.

Unfortunately, the sanctions have not been adopted yet, because it requires unanimity and one EU Member State was not ready to join the consensus. I will present the outcome of the discussions we had in the Foreign Affairs Council to the next European Council where we will discuss the relationship with Turkey. European leaders will have to provide further guidance on how to proceed. In the meantime, we will continue to re-evaluate the list of 40 names on a permanent basis, in light of events. I made clear today that we have a duty to adopt these sanctions. It is a matter of our credibility.

“The time has come for the EU to call things by their name: Mr Lukashenko has lost all legitimacy.”

The second line of action focuses on the need for national dialogue and the role of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). With the imminent, attempt by Mr Lukashenko to organise a pseudo “inauguration” (possibly already this week), the time has come for the EU to call things by their name: Mr Lukashenko has lost all legitimacy.

It is clear that the Coordination Council must be included in a forthcoming national dialogue. They are clearly calling for the holding of new, free and fair elections under international observation. The best way out of a crisis of political

legitimacy such as in Belarus is to organise credible elections so that the people can freely choose their President and hence the future of their country.

The Belarusian authorities refused any engagement with the pro-democracy movement

For weeks, the Belarusian authorities have refused any engagement with the pro-democracy movement or international mediation through the OSCE, of which Belarus is a participating state. Despite this regrettable stance, we need to continue exploring any possibilities. For this reason, I welcome and support the activation of the “OSCE Moscow Mechanism” to carry out a fact-finding expert mission focusing on alleged human rights violations.

We also support the proposal by the current and future OSCE Chairmen in Office, Albania and Sweden, to go to Minsk. I am ready to go to Minsk if this could contribute to progress. Until now, Lukashenko has refused to engage with the European Union at any level.

“*There should be no third party interference; the destiny of Belarus should be decided by its people and them alone.*”

We have said all along that as the EU we don't have a hidden agenda and that we simply want Belarusians to shape their own future, free from external interference. What's happening in Belarus is not a geopolitical issue; it is not about choosing a side, between the EU and Russia. There should be no third party interference; the destiny of Belarus should be decided by its people and them alone. When we support the democratic choice and fundamental rights of the Belarusian people, it is not because we are eager to influence the outcome of any elections, or push the country in a certain direction. I repeat: this choice belongs to the Belarusian people.

We know of course about Belarus's historical, political and cultural ties with Russia. That's why in my regular contacts with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov I have underlined the EU's principled position of respecting Belarus's sovereignty and independence – we are not imposing anything on anyone. I urged Russia to adopt the same stance, to avoid external interference. At the same time, they can be helpful in convincing the Belarusian authorities to enter into dialogue with the pro-democracy groups. I will continue to discuss these issues with the Russian authorities in the coming days and weeks.

Review of EU-Belarus relations

The third line of action is to do a full review of EU-Belarus relations. As the EU, we must be able to react in a strategic and decisive manner to various possible scenarios that are developing in Minsk. We want to use all instruments and levels of engagement bilaterally, but also regionally including in the Eastern Partnership framework.

This review will of course be done together with Member States. Important elements that foreign ministers flagged were ensuring that we must look to further support the Belarusian people - in particular the civil society and independent media. Perhaps we can also look at increased contacts between students, facilitating exchanges to the EU.

EU support to the Belarussian population

And indeed, the fourth and final line of action is about EU support to the Belarusian population. The European Commission is mobilising €53 million of immediate support to the Belarusian people in these challenging times. It covers legal assistance, medical support and other emergency assistance to those most in need. It also includes support for civil society and independent media.

We are looking, also with Member States, how we can scale up our support in that crucial area. Several of our Member States are already very active when it comes to civil society support and, as elsewhere, a Team Europe approach, where we pool resources and expertise, will deliver the greatest impact.

The EU will stand by the Belarusian people, who so clearly insist that this choice must be a democratic one.

THE EU CONTINUES TO STAND WITH THE PEOPLE OF BELARUS

22/12/2020. Months after the rigged presidential elections of 9 August, the European Union continues to stand with the people of Belarus. In December 2020, I met Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, leader of the democratic Belarus opposition ⁽¹²⁰⁾.

Since August, I have been, week after week, deeply impressed by the Belarusian people's perseverance and by their courageous struggle for respect of fundamental rights and free and fair elections in Belarus. Courage and commitment to which the regime has reacted with brutality and lawlessness.

Since the rigged presidential election, more than 31 000 people have been arrested for peaceful assemblies, including 370 journalists. There are hundreds of political prisoners and more than 900 individuals targeted by criminal cases. The EU delegation in Minsk has repeatedly asked the authorities for access to political prisoners, to verify reports of deplorable prison conditions and inhumane treatment of detainees. So far, access has been denied.

A very timely Sakharov prize

Last week, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya was in Brussels, together with other representatives of the opposition, to receive the European Parliament's Sakharov prize awarded to 'the democratic opposition in Belarus represented by the Coordination Council, an initiative of brave women and other political and civil society figures'. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya has become the symbol of hope for a democratic Belarus, and awarding this prize was without doubt very timely.

“*The EU stands ready to support any credible mediation efforts, in particular within the OSCE framework.*”

⁽¹²⁰⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

Since August, Belarus has been high on the EU's agenda ⁽¹²¹⁾ and we have been united in our support ⁽¹²²⁾ to the democratic rights of the Belarusian people. A genuine inclusive national dialogue, end to violence and release of all political prisoners is the only way forward to ensure a peaceful solution to the current crisis.

The EU stands ready to support any credible mediation efforts, in particular within the OSCE framework. Until now, Minsk did not accept the OSCE Chairmanship offer to visit the country. However, we will continue to plead for the full implementation of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report recommendations ⁽¹²³⁾.

“By now, the EU has imposed sanctions against 88 individuals, including Aleksandr Lukashenko, and 7 entities responsible for the violence and falsification of election results.”

To help find a peaceful solution, the Union had to resort to restrictive measures. A third sanctions package with 36 listings was adopted last week. By now, the EU has imposed sanctions against 88 individuals, including Aleksandr Lukashenko, and seven entities responsible for the violence, unjustified arrests and falsification of election results.

In line with our gradual approach, EU Member States have expressed readiness and willingness to work on further listings in January if needed. The EU and Member States will also continue to address human rights abuses in the international fora of the UN, OSCE and the Council of Europe. Meanwhile, Lithuanian prosecutors launched a pre-trial investigation into a criminal case on crimes against humanity under the universal jurisdiction.

⁽¹²¹⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/84053/belarus-violence-must-stop-and-regime-must-change_en

⁽¹²²⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85548/belarusians-courageously-demand-democratic-change-eu-must-stand-them_en

⁽¹²³⁾ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/469539>

EU–Belarus relations scaled down

We have also carried out a full review of EU–Belarus relations. As a result, we have scaled down our political contacts and sectoral dialogues with Belarusian authorities ⁽¹²⁴⁾ and have suspended or stopped our financial support to central authorities.

Finally, the EU has decided to increase its financial support to the Belarusian population ⁽¹²⁵⁾. On 11 December, the European Commission approved a €30 million package: it includes assistance to civil society and independent media (€8 million), youth mobility and scholarships (€8 million), SME support (€10 million) and health support (€4 million), including COVID-19 pandemic help. This is in addition to the immediate support to assist the victims of repression and state violence (€2.7 million) and for independent media (€1 million).

“*The EU will continue as long as necessary to support the people of Belarus in defending their fundamental right to elect their president through free and fair elections.*”

The EU will continue as long as necessary to support the people of Belarus in defending their fundamental right to elect their president through free and fair elections. And it stands ready to substantially step up its engagement with and support of a democratic Belarus with increased financial assistance and sectorial cooperation.

For this, we need, however, to have some key conditions in place – the respect for principles of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and the halt of all repression against persons engaged in the pro-democracy movement, the independent media and representatives of civil society. I hope, and we will work on it, that these conditions can be met in 2021.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46076/council-conclusions-on-belarus.pdf>

⁽¹²⁵⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/c_2020_8954_f1_commission_implementing_decision_en_v2_p1_110385.pdf

UKRAINE: REFORMS MUST CONTINUE

22/09/2020. In September 2020, I was in Ukraine for my first visit as High Representative. Since 2014, the EU has been the strongest partner of Ukraine. Our support will continue but is linked also to the urgent need to enhance the rule of law and the fight against corruption ⁽¹²⁶⁾.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this visit came much later than intended: undoubtedly, Ukraine has been at the top of the EU agenda since the Maidan “Revolution of Dignity” in 2014 and the conflict in the east. I met President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian Ministers of defence and of foreign affairs. I also met the Head of the Rada anti-corruption committee and representatives of an anti-corruption NGO. Finally, I discussed with the representatives of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the country and visited the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) that helps Ukraine modernise law enforcement with over 300 Ukrainian and European staff members.

“*My visits to the Maidan Memorial and to the Wall of Remembrance gave me a profound sense of what Ukrainians have gone through.*”

The most touching part of this trip was my visit to the Maidan Memorial dedicated to the “heavenly hundred” who lost their lives, murdered by snipers near Maidan Square in February 2014. In the following days, Russia invaded and illegally occupied Crimea. I also paid a visit at the Ministry of Defence memorial and to the Wall of Remembrance, the wall of the monastery where protestors took refuge during the 2013–2014 revolution, since converted into a memorial by adding pictures of fallen soldiers. The war in eastern Ukraine has claimed 13 000 lives and forced 2.4 million people out of their homes. These visits gave me a profound sense of what Ukrainians have gone through.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

EU: the strongest and most reliable partner of Ukraine

Since the beginning of this fight, the EU has stood by Ukraine, as its strongest and most reliable partner, in terms of economic integration, support for the reform processes, and defence of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, concluded in 2014, is the most comprehensive one that the EU has with any other third country. Since then, Ukraine has received from the EU €14 billion, an unprecedented level of support. Since 2007, the European Investment Bank has financed 43 projects in Ukraine for € 6.45 billion. And in addition to the already mentioned EUAM, the European Union Border Assistance Mission works with Ukraine to harmonise border control and customs procedures with those in EU Member States.

Plenty of work to be done together

There is, however, still plenty of work to be done together to fully reap the benefits of that cooperation within the framework of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The best way for us to support Ukraine is to help reforming the country. But only the Ukrainians themselves can implement those reforms. A stable, prosperous and democratic Ukraine is the best way to stabilise our neighbourhood.

In recent months, the COVID-19 crisis has worsened the socio-economic situation in Ukraine as it has done elsewhere. Ukraine's GDP dropped by 11.4% in the second quarter of 2020 and in September, the country recorded its highest average COVID-19 cases, surpassing 3000 new daily cases. If the pace of the new infections continues, hospitals could be quickly overwhelmed. To face this crisis, the EU with its Member States are helping Ukraine with more than €190 million through the "Team Europe" initiative.

“President Zelenskyy's election in April 2019 was a sign of the strong willingness of the Ukrainians to fight corruption and to loosen the oligarchs' grip on the country”

However, not all of Ukraine's actual difficulties are related to COVID 19. President Zelenskyy's election in April 2019 was a sign of the strong willingness of the Ukrainians to fight corruption and to loosen the oligarchs' grip on the country. His

first months in office were characterised by a “turbo regime” with the parliament quickly adopting long-stalled reforms.

However, according to many observers, the pace of reforms has slowed down recently, including on the implementation of the Association Agreement commitments. The government reshuffle in early March and the dismissals of reformist figures sent worrying signals over the readiness to resist vested interests. This being said, President Zelenskyy continues to be a source of hope: citizens still expect him to deliver on reforms and promises of change for which he was elected. And still this May, he demonstrated leadership in pushing ahead with two crucial and difficult reforms, i.e. land reform and a banking resolution law.

The courageous work of anti-corruption NGOs

During my visit, I was also impressed by the courageous work of the NGO Anticorruption Action Center (AntAC). These brave citizens take personal risks in their fight against corruption. Vitaliy Shabunin, the head of AntAC, told me about when his house was burnt down last July. Such attacks must be thoroughly investigated.

“*I insisted in particular on the necessity to ensure transparent, merit-based and de-politicised selection processes for the anti-corruption authorities.*”

We also regret that there is still no criminal prosecution in the PrivatBank case regarding a fraud of more than \$5 billion. And oligarchs still maintain significant influence. For example, they own most national TV channels. Freedom of information is the oxygen of democracy, and independent media are crucial in Ukraine's efforts to secure a resilient information space, and a vibrant civil society.

Last July, we signed with Ukraine a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on a new macro financial assistance programme for an amount of €1.2 billion. I reminded President Zelenskyy that there were conditions attached to this MoU, above all concerning the enhancement of the rule of law and anti-corruption reforms. I insisted in particular on the necessity to ensure transparent, merit-based and depoliticised selection processes for the anti-corruption authorities.

“*President Zelenskyy won general praise for his outreach to the people in the east and his moves to help relaunch the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.*”

Regarding the conflict in eastern Ukraine and relations with Russia, President Zelenskyy's ambition was to change the dynamics. He won general praise for his outreach to the people in the east, including in the non-government controlled areas, and his moves to help relaunch the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. However, progress remains still limited nine months after the Paris Summit last December.

An unprecedented ceasefire

A new ceasefire has indeed been agreed and is effectively observed since 27 July. This is unprecedented. It failed, however, to create a positive dynamic in the negotiations and the pandemic has worsened the situation on the ground. The de-facto closure of the Line of Contact in eastern Ukraine, makes efforts for reconciliation and possible reintegration more difficult.

“*I reaffirmed EU support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and in particular our continued non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea.*”

I reaffirmed EU support to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity – and in particular our continued non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Crimea - and stressed the positive role of Ukraine in displaying flexibility and a forthcoming attitude. Russia needs to reciprocate and remain party to the Minsk Agreements processes.

This short visit to Ukraine made me even more committed to do everything possible during my mandate to ensure that EU support can lead to a significant improvement for the Ukrainian population and for the prospects for peace in the region.

FROM DAYTON TO BRUSSELS: WORKING FOR A STABLE AND DEMOCRATIC BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

20/11/2020. *In 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the bloodiest war in Europe since the Second World War. In November 2020, I was in Sarajevo to mark the 25th anniversary of that agreement. The European Union will help heal the wounds left by this war* ⁽¹²⁷⁾.

25 years ago, the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the bloodiest war in Europe after the Second World War. A devastating conflict that led to genocide, more than 100,000 deaths, and over a million refugees. The memories of this war, at the heart of our continent, will remain with us forever.

“*Looking back on the past 25 years, there has undoubtedly been a lot of progress towards building a stable and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina.*”

Looking back on the past 25 years, there has undoubtedly been a lot of progress towards building a stable and democratic Bosnia and Herzegovina. But the journey is not finished. A lot of hard work remains to ensure that all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) can look confidently to a more prosperous future, based on a clear political perspective: EU integration.

The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is European history

The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina is European history and the future of the country and of the whole western Balkans lies in the European Union. The 25th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement is an important juncture, which should inspire the political leadership and the country's institutions to transition from the structures that brought an end to conflict, to the principles that accelerate progress for all citizens. In other words, the transition from Dayton to Brussels.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Op-ed published in several outlets.

Today, there is no question that Bosnia and Herzegovina's future lies inside the European Union. With the European Commission's opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership application endorsed by the Council last year in December ⁽¹²⁸⁾, the country's authorities have a clear roadmap of the reforms they need to implement to advance on the EU accession path, including constitutional reforms.

“*We cannot change yesterday, but we can shape tomorrow, together. EU integration is the single most important objective uniting BiH political parties and the general public alike.*”

We cannot change yesterday, but we can shape tomorrow, together. EU integration is the single most important objective – with 80 per cent of BiH citizens in support – uniting BiH political parties and the general public alike. For years, in the absence of a clear positive vision for the future, young people – some not even born when the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed – have been leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina, to find a brighter tomorrow elsewhere. The EU integration process and the accompanying reforms might not convince everybody to stay, but it will certainly help cement prosperity and peace.

The EU is already BiH's main economic and political partner

The EU is already BiH's main economic and political partner – most recently in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and the socio-economic recovery from it. We are now working to put into action an unprecedented economic and investment plan and a green agenda paving the way for more connected, green, and people-focused growth in the western Balkans.

Young generations everywhere, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, expect leaders to deal with climate change, to come up with plans for sustainable growth, and a digital interconnected world. They want education that will allow them to succeed in life, flourishing in their own country. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs new ideas and contributions from young people. Their world should not be limited. Young people have the right to define themselves, to grow up free from prejudice and to be able to shape their own future.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/bosnia-herzegovina_en

“Political actors should heed the example of how the majority of people of Bosnia and Herzegovina live - as good neighbours, colleagues and friends, and actively promote the ‘living together.’”

Bosnia and Herzegovina’s EU progress also needs to be underpinned by genuine reconciliation. Political actors should heed the example of how the majority of people of Bosnia and Herzegovina live - as good neighbours, colleagues and friends and actively promote the ‘living together’. Regardless of divisive rhetoric that dominates the media and political discourse, it is evident that what unites the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina is far stronger than what divides them.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, traditionally “united in diversity” like the EU

With its cultural, ethnic and religious mix, Bosnia and Herzegovina has traditionally been “united in diversity”, the same way the EU is. The war brutally disrupted that diversity but it did not destroy it: Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a culturally rich and diverse European country.

“Because of the past, but most of all, for the future of this beautiful country, using inflammatory rhetoric, historical revisionism and glorifying war criminals is unacceptable.”

Because of the past, but most of all, for the future of this beautiful country and its people, using inflammatory rhetoric, historical revisionism and glorifying war criminals is unacceptable. The darkness of war in Europe should stay in history books. Let us learn from them and acknowledge the facts, while focusing on building lasting peace and a society based on democracy, rule of law, equality, non-discrimination and the full protection of human rights.

The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina demand this. They can count on the European Union to support their quest, but that quest remains in their hands.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE MIGRATION CRISIS IS FAR FROM OVER

05/01/2020. *At the end of 2020, we witnessed a serious humanitarian crisis concerning hundreds of migrants largely due to the dysfunctional governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, it also reminds us of the urgent need to update our common asylum and migration policy* ⁽¹²⁹⁾.

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.

Totally 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.

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

3 000 migrants without access to basic shelter in winter conditions

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 the 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.

“*Because of the dysfunctionality of decision-making in BiH, no 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 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/EU Special Representative 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.

Around 8 000–9 000 migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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 the whole of BiH.

“*The EU has consistently supported Bosnia and Herzegovina in addressing the needs of migrants and refugees and in strengthening border and asylum management.*”

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 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 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.

“*The current crisis in BiH reminds us that addressing migration towards Europe remains one of the most complex issues that we face.*”

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 proposed last September a new Pact on Migration and Asylum ⁽¹³⁰⁾, which is currently discussed by the EU Member States. It sets out more efficient and faster procedures, to avoid people spending 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.

⁽¹³⁰⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

A NEW START FOR THE BELGRADE-PRISTINA DIALOGUE

17/07/2020. In July 2020, I hosted – together with EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak – President Vucic of Serbia and Prime Minister Hoti of Kosovo for the first physical meeting of the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue. They had intense discussions on not easy subjects ⁽³¹⁾.

It was an important moment for me and the European Union. The dialogue, which the EU started to facilitate in 2011, is at the core of what we want to do in the western Balkans. During my hearing before the European Parliament I told that I will consider it one of my top priorities. The European Parliament strongly supported this prospect. During my first Foreign Affairs Council, I then proposed the appointment of the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak.

I would like to thank also, President Macron and Chancellor Merkel for their strong message of support to the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue by convening the Paris Summit. They gave the process the last push to start again. Thank you.

Intense discussions on not easy subjects

We spent the whole of yesterday's afternoon and early evening in intense discussions with the two partners. These were not easy discussions. The subjects – missing persons, displaced persons – are highly emotional issues and they are essential parts of reconciliation.

We also discussed economic cooperation, which for me is about the future relationship of Kosovo and Serbia. They belong to the same region and they are travelling to the same destination – Europe.

⁽³¹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

In the future, their people, capital and goods should move freely. They should also work together to develop their economy and their infrastructure. This is to the mutual benefit of both and the EU has put a lot of effort into creating the framework for such cooperation.

Our work with President Vucic and Prime Minister Hoti is only just starting. I respect the fact that yesterday, they presented their positions honestly and constructively even while there were disagreements. I was impressed by the fact that they were ready and eager to continue the work. We have asked them to send their team already next week, so we don't waste time.

“*We have a lot to accomplish together for the good of Serbia, Kosovo and the European Union.*”

And we will meet with President Vucic and Prime Minister Hoti in September. I look forward to working with them and I am very glad that we can count on the long diplomatic experience of the EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak for this complicated task. We have a lot to accomplish together for the good of Serbia, Kosovo and the European Union.

LET'S STRENGTHEN OUR TIES WITH AFRICA

06/10/2020. *We need to strengthen our ties with Africa, a young and dynamic continent. Firstly, to deal with the current crisis, and that was the purpose of my visit to Ethiopia in October 2020. But also to jointly foster economic development which is green, digital and fair* ⁽¹³²⁾.

It is my view that relations between Europe and Africa represent one of the most fundamental issues for the future of the European Union and I have put them right at the top of my agenda. The Commission tabled its proposals for a new strategy with Africa ⁽¹³³⁾ last March. The task now is to make this more ambitious partnership a reality. As a result of COVID-19, the summit scheduled for that purpose at the end of October between the African Union and the European Union has been postponed. But we will use this time to think more deeply with our African partners about our common priorities for the coming decade.

“*The end of the 20th century was dominated by Asia’s rise on the world stage. The 21st century is expected to be dominated by Africa’s rise.*”

The end of the 20th century was dominated by Asia’s rise on the world stage. The 21st century is expected to be dominated by Africa’s rise. Firstly, for demographic reasons ⁽¹³⁴⁾: estimated at 140 million in 1900, the continent’s population now stands at almost 1.3 billion. According to the United Nations, it will reach 2.5 billion by 2050 and more than 4 billion by 2100. Today, one human being in six lives in Africa. By 2050 that will have risen to one in four and by 2100 to more than one in three, according to the same forecasts.

⁽¹³²⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹³³⁾ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1583753318333&uri=JOIN:2020:4:FIN>

⁽¹³⁴⁾ See P 279 https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82073/demography-and-europe-world_en

“As Africa’s neighbour and its main partner, we are directly concerned by the conditions in which the rise of this continent takes place.”

As Africa’s neighbour and its main partner, we are directly concerned by the conditions in which the rise of this young and dynamic continent takes place. If we do not give this matter sufficient attention, others will - and probably at our expense.

In this and other areas, the COVID-19 epidemic is a game-changer. According to the WHO, with 26,000 deaths at the beginning of October compared with 238,000 in Europe, to date Africa appears to have been significantly less affected by the pandemic than other continents, contrary to what many feared. Among the 20 countries with the highest numbers of deaths worldwide, there are nine European countries but not a single African country. The worst affected among them, South Africa, is 26th in this ranking.

“Europe will probably have lessons to learn from Africa when it comes to managing pandemics.”

Not all the reasons for this state of affairs are known at this stage. The climate and the average age of the population, which is significantly lower in Africa than in Europe, probably have something to do with it. Clearly, another important factor is expertise in managing pandemics, particularly following the Ebola epidemic: Europe will probably have lessons to learn from Africa in this area.

That said, Africa has already been very badly affected by the economic and social fallout from the crisis. It has been hit by the disruptive effect on the local economy of sanitary measures, particularly in the agricultural sphere, combined with the decline in exports of raw materials, which play a major role in its economy, the collapse of international tourism and the downturn in remittances resulting from problems in developed countries. These remittances, which amounted to \$47 billion in 2019, were the region’s main source of foreign capital last year.

First recession in a quarter of a century

The International Monetary Fund ⁽¹³⁵⁾ anticipates a 3.2% recession in sub-Saharan Africa this year, the first in a quarter of a century. In the light of population growth, per capita income is expected to fall by 5.4% in 2020. While this recession is less severe than in Europe, where it is expected to approach 8 %, it will have a major impact in countries that are still far less wealthy than our own. According to the OECD ⁽¹³⁶⁾, South Africa in particular is expected to be the G20 country most affected by the crisis after India, with GDP at the end of 2021 forecast to be 11% lower than at the end of 2019.

“270 million people are threatened with famine as a result of COVID-19, making 2020 the worst year in terms of the humanitarian situation since World War II.”

This shock has exacerbated existing fragilities. According to David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), 270 million people are now at risk of famine as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, mainly in Africa. The WFP has helped over 130 million people this year, mainly in Africa, to cope with the fallout from COVID-19 and 30 million of them are 100% dependent on its aid for their survival.

Locust outbreaks in eastern Africa and the pandemic have combined with conflicts and the effects of climate change to make 2020 the worst year in terms of the humanitarian situation since World War II. We cannot let the COVID-19 epidemic mutate into a hunger epidemic.

“In the face of COVID-19, the Union’s ability, notwithstanding its own problems, to provide Africa with support on a sufficient scale will be crucial to the future of our relations.”

In the face of this crisis, the Union’s ability, notwithstanding its own problems, to provide Africa with support on a sufficient scale will be crucial to the future of our relations. With the ‘Team Europe’ package, the Union and its Member States have already reallocated almost €8 billion to Africa, €5.5 billion of which has gone to sub-Saharan Africa. In Togo, we have mobilised €44 million

⁽¹³⁵⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/06/24/WEOUpdateJune2020>

⁽¹³⁶⁾ See: <http://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/>

to support agriculture. In Botswana, we have distributed large quantities of protective equipment and medical supplies. In Guinea-Bissau, €1.5 million has been deployed to fund medical equipment and training of healthcare workers. In Ethiopia, we have mobilised almost €500 million to support the healthcare system and quarantine stations.

900 000 test kits for COVID-19

I will go there next Thursday to hand over 900 000 test kits for COVID-19 to the Africa Centre for Diseases Control attached to the African Union. These were funded by the German government within the Team Europe framework and were dispatched via the European Union Humanitarian Air Bridge set up by my colleague Janez Lenarčič, the Commissioner for Crisis Management. However, I am all too aware that this aid is merely a drop in the ocean: we will need to do much more.

In any event, the only long-term solution to COVID-19 is a vaccine. Many projects are currently in the process of being validated, but this race for a vaccine may also exacerbate inequalities between countries and geopolitical tensions. By taking part with the World Health Organisation in the COVAX project, we are working towards a multilateral solution to facilitate access to the vaccine for all, and particularly for the poorest countries, many of which are in Africa.

“*We are also pushing for the foreign debt of the most heavily indebted countries to be restructured or written off.*”

We are also pushing for the foreign debt of the most heavily indebted countries to be restructured or written off. African countries do not have the same capacity as Europe to withstand the socio-economic fallout from the crisis by running up a massive budget deficit or providing a substantial monetary policy stimulus. According to the IMF, African countries' tax revenue is expected to fall by \$70 billion this year, almost one third, while their borrowing capacity is limited: interest rate spreads for Africa have risen above 2008–2009 crisis levels.

Even before the current crisis, several countries, such as Mozambique, Mauritania or Tunisia, suffered from a very high level of foreign debt. That is why the European Union and its Member States have actively supported the G20 and Paris Club's debt service suspension initiative. The G7 has called for this suspension to be extended after 2020, when it is currently due to end. But that will not be enough: many countries are still spending more on servicing their

debt than on healthcare for their citizens. Some of these countries will need to restructure their foreign debt: this restructuring cannot be unconditional, but it must be substantial.

These immediate measures are, of course, essential, but we are well aware of their limitations. The continent's future essentially depends on the ability of Africans themselves to consolidate their institutions so the economy can grow, in part so the labour market can absorb 30 million young people each year.

To achieve that aim, we intend to propose that our African partners work with us to ensure that the economic recovery can be green, digital and fair in Africa and Europe alike. On the digital front, Africa has already taken a considerable leap forward in recent years. It was very quick to adopt mobile telephony and the widespread use of mobile payment systems has made it possible, in particular, to overcome major problems with access to banking services which hampered the continent's development. Accelerating this momentum, in particular through the creation of African companies specialising in this sector, can significantly boost the continent's post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

“*We intend to propose that our African partners work with us to ensure that the economic recovery is green, digital and fair in Africa and Europe alike.*”

At the same time, it will be essential to develop a low-carbon and circular economy in order to meet the legitimate needs of Africans in the long term while also tackling the ecological crisis that currently threatens humanity. And here, Africa's potential is considerable, be it in terms of sustainable farming, solar energy, biomass or hydropower, although care will also have to be taken to ensure they are exploited in a sustainable way.

Avoiding Europe's mistakes

I know that many Africans, as well as a significant number of Europeans, worry that going down this path may hamper their economic development. For my part, I am convinced that the exact opposite is true: only if Africa can avoid the mistakes we have made in Europe over the last two centuries in terms of environmental damage will it be able to offer its inhabitants a sufficient number of jobs and a significant improvement in their living standards in future.

DEMONSTRATING EUROPE'S COMMITMENT TO AFRICA

15/10/2020. *In October 2020, I travelled with Commissioner Lenarčič to hand over anti-COVID-19 material to the African Union and discuss how to strengthen the EU–AU partnership. I also exchanged with the Ethiopian government about the difficult situation in the country* ⁽¹³⁷⁾.

Upon arrival, we participated in the hand-over of coronavirus-testing kits to the African Union Centre for Diseases Control. We delivered 7.5 tons of essential medical and humanitarian equipment and 900,000 coronavirus kits that will be distributed on the entire continent. We met with Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union, Smaïl Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, and Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Minister of Foreign Affairs Gedu Andargachew.

Support for a strong, democratic and diverse Ethiopia.

Abiy Ahmed has recently written in *The Economist* ⁽¹³⁸⁾ that his vision is to build an “inclusive, multinational, democratic and prosperous Ethiopia” and to “reject the dangerous demagogues who argue that we cannot be our ethnicity - Oromo, Amhara, Somali, Tigrayan, Sidama - and be an Ethiopian at the same time”. After first moves that were widely celebrated, his ambitious reforms and internal pacification efforts remain a work in progress.

He was awarded a Nobel Prize and, without question, his abilities to seek agreement will be needed to address the growing unrest in the various regions of Ethiopia. Commissioner Janez Lenarčič and I reiterated the EU's support for a strong, unified, democratic and diverse Ethiopia.

⁽¹³⁷⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹³⁸⁾ See <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2020/09/17/abiy-ahmed-on-the-threats-to-ethiopia-as-democratic-transition>

Being the second most populous country in Africa after Nigeria with more than 100 million citizens, its regional leadership gives Ethiopia an advantage to attract foreign investment and to pool resources for ambitious investments in skills and infrastructure. The EU's development cooperation with Ethiopia is one of the largest in the world with €815 million for the period 2014-2020. Ethiopia is also one of the major beneficiaries of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa with over €271.5 million for 2015-2019. Last December, President von der Leyen and Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen agreed to an additional package of €170 million.

“*Ethiopia faces a very significant crisis caused by migration and internal displacement, which the pandemic has worsened.*”

Ethiopia faces a very significant crisis caused by migration and internal displacement, which the pandemic has worsened. An estimated 3.2 million people are either internally displaced people (IDPs) or returnees. About 1.7 million are conflict-related IDPs and 600.000 drought-related. About 1 million are people forced to return from abroad. Together with Commissioner Lenarčič we visited two centres that provide assistance.

In Addis Ababa, we visited a centre run by the International Organization for Migration that provides shelter to Ethiopian migrants that have returned, mainly from Yemen and Saudi Arabia. A 12-year old girl told us her story: her stepfather had kicked her out of her home and she had walked all the way through Yemen until Saudi Arabia. After just a few days of work in domestic service, she was arrested when she left the house to put out the garbage. She was then put in a detention centre and sent back to Ethiopia.

“*The personal experiences that we heard portray the hardship in the daily life of millions, which are impossible to convey with words.*”

In the Somali region, we also visited the Qoloji camp, which hosts 80.000 internally displaced people. It is a massive settlement that offers extremely basic living conditions and medical assistance. Many people stay for years and children get only four years of schooling. The personal experiences that we heard portray the hardship in the daily life of millions, which are impossible to convey with words.

Ethiopia, which hosts around 1 million refugees and migrants from neighbouring countries, shows how migration is a crucial issue of our time. It shows how solidarity to welcome those in need should be at the core of our actions. It also demonstrates that our actions should combine immediate assistance with longer-term projects that address the root causes of migration. This approach has been at the heart of the EU Trust Fund for Africa that has mobilised almost €5 billion since its creation five years ago.

Mustafa Mohamed Omar, President of the Ethiopia Somali Region, gave us a vivid account of the importance of local leaders that face the realities on the ground. Ultimately, they are the ones with the responsibility to create a narrative that puts collaboration ahead of grievances and common interests ahead of differences.

“*Ethiopia can maximize the benefits of our long-standing commitment with a clear project sharing both benefits and risks between the federal and regional governments.*”

Ethiopia can maximize the benefits of our long-standing commitment with a clear and ambitious common project sharing both benefits and risks between the federal and regional governments. Providing a fair and predictable business environment for the many foreign investors that provide employment and access to international markets is an important lever for the country's development. It should not be affected by domestic political disputes.

Stepping up our partnership with the African Union

We also met Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union and Smaïl Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security. The AU and the EU share a common interest to address both global challenges and local conflicts. The elections in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, the consolidation of the transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan, and the situations in Somalia and Libya deserve the close collaboration between our two institutions. As I have often highlighted since the beginning of my mandate ⁽¹³⁹⁾, our partnership with Africa is a centrepiece of our foreign policy and of our vision to develop a fair and sustainable planet.

⁽¹³⁹⁾ See P 228.

This was also the main message I delivered on Wednesday 14 October at the Africa Week ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ organised by the Group of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

“*At the European Council, EU leaders are set to underline their commitment to make the partnership more ambitious, more political and more geared towards the future.*”

The week’s European Council will also discuss how to take Europe partnership with Africa to the next level. Regrettably, I will not be able to participate in this debate, as I am still self-isolating as a precautionary measure, in line with public health measures. I am sure that EU leaders will send a collective message of their commitment to make the partnership more ambitious, more political and more geared towards the future.

Having had to postpone the EU–AU Summit due to the pandemic, we should now use the extra time we have, to accelerate preparations and identify concrete deliverables. For my part, I hope to go back to Africa next month, if COVID-19 restrictions permit, to keep working on this relationship, as one of my top priorities.



140 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkgowSDsAOQ&feature=youtu.be>

THE NILE AND BEYOND: GEOPOLITICS OF WATER

19/07/2020. *While the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) takes place, the flow of the Nile will be reduced downstream. This vital issue must be negotiated with Sudan and Egypt. More broadly, access to water is becoming one of the main geopolitical issues of our century* ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Water is life. We can survive several days without eating but not without drinking. Water is also the basic ingredient, essential to the production of all kind of food, whether vegetable or animal. This is why the issue of access to fresh water has always been central for humans, and has therefore always been a source of many conflicts. Inherently linked to climate change, economic development and population growth, however, these conflicts are today taking on an increasingly worrying dimension: access to water is becoming one of the main geopolitical issues of our century.

The situation along the Nile is worrying

Today, the situation along the Nile is particularly worrying. The immediate issue is the construction and filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). With an installed capacity of 6.45 gigawatts, it will be the largest dam in Africa and the seventh largest in the world. The challenge is to ensure the economic development of over 250 million people who inhabit the Blue Nile Basin. Work is currently being completed and the filling of the reservoir is expected to start shortly.

While the filling takes place, the flow of the river will be reduced downstream as the dam will retain part of it. Only once the dam is totally filled may the river flow be restored. However, in periods of drought, the needs of downstream countries will still have to be balanced against the need of water retention for the operation of the dam. But they also need to be set against potential opportunities arising from the dam's construction, not only for Ethiopia, but also for its neighbours, in terms of regulated water flow, agricultural production and abundant electricity, which can be sold and transmitted regionally.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

“After ten years it is highly time to resolve the GERD matter: the Horn of Africa already faces too many other challenges.”

All these vital issues must be addressed in a negotiated way with the downstream countries, Sudan and Egypt. Negotiations on those issues started in 2011 but are actually stalled. After ten years it is time to resolve this matter: the Horn of Africa already faces too many other challenges.

The EU became engaged several weeks ago because the concerned countries - Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia - are all of strategic importance for us. We have been in frequent contact with all parties. From what we hear, a solution is possible although years of mistrust cannot be dismissed overnight. With technical imagination, political boldness and support from the international community, this dispute could be turned into an opportunity for so many people.

The European Union supports the African Union

As current chair of the African Union President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa has taken the lead to accelerate efforts to find a solution both for the short-term issue of the filling of the GERD and for a longer-term solution to this matter. In a few days, he will host a summit of the concerned leaders and I am very pleased that the European Union has been asked to serve as an observer to these talks. We have expressed our strong support to the action of the AU President ⁽¹⁴²⁾, and the leaders of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia owe it to him to deliver an African solution to that issue.

The filling period of the dam must and can be addressed to everyone's satisfaction. The operations after the filling need further discussions to reach a water sharing arrangements, as occurs in all river basins. The spirit of cooperation among all, as required under international law, should prevail. I am ready to coordinate with my colleagues in the international community to mobilise financial supports if the region can offer a predictable and agreed path forward on the management of the river.

⁽¹⁴²⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/83099/statement-high-representative-vice-president-josep-borrell-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam-gerd_en

The Nile case is far from being isolated

Unfortunately, the example of the Nile is far from isolated. Although 71 per cent of the planet is covered by seas and oceans, their water is salty. Freshwater, which is the only water suitable for human consumption and agriculture, is in fact already a scarce commodity. Seawater can also be desalinated, and more and more countries are making use of it, but this remains an expensive solution in terms of investment and energy.

“*Freshwater, which is the only water suitable for human consumption and agriculture, is in fact already a scarce commodity.*”

According to the United Nations⁽¹⁴³⁾, freshwater withdrawals from lakes, rivers or groundwater for agriculture, industry or household consumption have doubled since the 1960s. Moreover, according to the World Resources Institute⁽¹⁴⁴⁾, 17 countries, including, Iran, India and Pakistan, home to a quarter of the world's population, are already in a situation of extreme “water stress”, with more than 80% of their freshwater resources withdrawn for human, agricultural or industrial consumption.

In 2019, Chennai, India's sixth-largest city, ran out of water for weeks, while in 2018, people in Cape Town, South Africa, narrowly avoided the same fate. The crisis is not sparing countries like the United States, where some states, such as New Mexico, are also under extreme water stress. In 2017, Rome had rationed water to preserve its resources. And I come from a country, Spain, where water management has also long been critical: in 2008, the city of Barcelona was forced to import drinking water from France to meet the needs of its population.

“*The water situation is expected to deteriorate further in the future because of climate change, economic development and continued population growth.*”

According to the United Nations, this situation is expected to deteriorate further in the future in many parts of the world because of climate change, economic

⁽¹⁴³⁾ See <https://en.unesco.org/themes/water-security/wwap/wwdr/2020>

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ See <https://www.wri.org/blog/2019/08/17-countries-home-one-quarter-world-population-face-extremely-high-water-stress>

development and continued population growth. This issue is already leading not only to difficult internal situations in many countries, including inside Europe, but also to international conflicts such as the one currently affecting the countries bordering the Nile.

Water is at the root of many conflicts

The question of control over water resources is thus at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the occupied territories. The management of the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers is also a source of difficulties between Turkey, Syria and Iraq, particularly following the construction by Turkey of a giant dam, the Güneypođu Anadolu Projesi, the Southeastern Anatolia Project. In Asia, the management of the Mekong River is also a major source of tensions between China and its South-East Asian neighbours, Laos and Cambodia.

“*There is unfortunately every reason to fear that water conflicts will multiply in the future.*”

There is unfortunately every reason to fear that this type of conflict will multiply in the future. As can be seen from the map above, Europe and its neighbourhood are very directly concerned by the water scarcity issue and the geopolitical tensions it can generate.

“Water diplomacy” will be more and more essential to EU foreign policy

The EU has already actively promoted water resource management over the last decade, disbursing more than €2.5 billion in 62 countries and providing access to clean water to more than 70 million people and sanitation to over 24 million. It has also promoted the implementation of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Water Courses and International Lakes (Helsinki Water Convention 1992).

However, “water diplomacy” will for sure play an even more important role in the future of European external policy.

EUROPE STANDS WITH SUDAN AND ITS YOUTH

27/06/2020. *Making sure that a democratic transition succeeds is never easy. In 2019, Sudan embarked on a journey towards democracy. The country's youth and women wanted a better future for their country, after many years of dictatorship and corruption* ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾.

We live in turbulent geo-political times. Understandably, our attention is drawn to negative or worrying events. Therefore, when there is an important and positive development - like a democratic and pacific revolution - we should acknowledge it and support it. Sudan is a case in point. It has embarked on a journey towards democracy and it deserves – but also needs – our attention, our solidarity and our support.

The youth blowing the winds of change

Sudan's population is very young with an average age of under 20 years. This means that at the moment when the Sudanese people took to the streets to peacefully protest against 30-years of dictatorship, most of the country's population had never experienced anything different. Nevertheless, they mobilised for a change for freedom, peace and justice.

“*When the Sudanese people took to the streets to peacefully protest against 30-years of dictatorship, most of the country's population had never experienced anything different.*”

When I visited Sudan last February, during my first mission to Africa, I met with lots of students at the Khartoum University. I had the chance to listen to them, pay tribute to their action and tell them in person how they – the young women and men of Sudan – had shown the world that ‘people are power’ and that political change can be both peaceful and successful.

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

Sudan to take up a leading role for regional stability

Like these young Sudanese people, I grew up in a country, Spain, ruled for decades by a dictator. Becoming a democracy allowed Spain to join the European Union in 1986 - the European Community at that time - and to inaugurate a period of freedom, democracy and economic development. Our experience in Europe has been that regional integration has big, positive effects on peace, democracy and economic development.

We want Sudan to play a strong role in the region, fostering greater regional cooperation and stability. This is especially important in light of the serious security conditions all around - in Libya, Somalia, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

“Those driving the democratic transition in Sudan risked their lives for a society – ideals we Europeans too often take for granted. We owe it to them to do all we can to achieve their democratic aspirations.”

Those driving the democratic transition in Sudan risked their lives for the ideals of a democratic society – ideals we Europeans too often take for granted. That is why we owe it to them to do all we can to achieve their democratic aspirations, especially at a time when the corona virus pandemic is creating havoc and putting massive pressure on societies and resources.

It was for this reason that yesterday, alongside the Sudanese Government, Germany and the UN, we co-hosted the Sudan Partnership Conference. Our collective goal was to mobilise political and financial support from the international community to enable the Sudanese authorities to bring the revolution of 2018/2019 forward and make sure no step backward happens.

The outcome fully matched our ambitions: no fewer than 50 countries and international organisations committed to back the country's reform agenda. And all together, we have raised €1.6 billion, out of which €770 million were provided by the European Union and its Member States (Team Europe).

“We have sent out a strong signal and put our money where our mouth is, encouraging Sudan on its path to democracy, rule of law and development.”

This is not a minor success: we have sent out a strong signal and put our money where our mouth is, encouraging Sudan on its path to democracy, rule of law and development.

The Sudan Partnership Conference was a milestone. But establishing democracy is a journey, not an event. The people of Sudan should know they can count on our support all along the way.



PLACING CULTURE AT THE HEART OF OUR DIALOGUE WITH AFRICA

03/01/2021. *In 2021, we want to give fresh impetus to the partnership between the European Union and Africa. However, this partnership should not be limited to economic and political issues. Culture and exchanges should become a key part of it* ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾.

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.

“*The contribution made by Africa to global culture is considerable. Without Africans and Afro-descendants, there would be no pop, no RnB, no jazz, no blues, no rock, no funk, no disco, no salsa, no reggae and no rap.*”

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

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 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 precisely because it touches people's hearts and is 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 mausoleums 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.

“Over the last 50 years, the film festival Fespaco has established itself as one of the main events for showcasing African cinema on the world stage.”

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.

The Youth Hub and the Maisha project

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 between Europe and Africa since 2014 through the Erasmus+ programme. We want to go further and 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 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.



LATIN AMERICA-EUROPE: THE 'OTHER' TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

18/10/2020. *In October 2020, at our Foreign Affairs Council, we took stock of our relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) at a time when this region is going through a dramatic crisis. LAC has lately not been high enough on our agenda* ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾.

Our partnership with Latin America contains a paradox: despite having much in common, our interactions remain well below their potential. With Latin America, we share indeed languages, culture, history and religion... An important part of the Latin American population are descendants of European migrants from the 16th to the 20th centuries who left in search of a new 'promised land'. Buenos Aires and Santiago look like European cities. From many points of view, we are the most like-minded people in the world.

Latin America has had an immense cultural influence

However, Latin America is also very different from Europe. Its identity is a mix of its indigenous roots and the Hispanic, Portuguese, but also African, French or Italian influences. By growing its own personality, Latin America is becoming more and more South America. As a result, Latin America has had an immense cultural influence during the last century and has been a laboratory for many political experiences. Nevertheless, it suffers also chronically from endemic social and political violence.

Many people believed, when I started as HR/VP, that being Spanish meant I was going to pay a lot of attention to Latin America. However, due to the crises in our neighbourhood and the coronavirus restrictions, I haven't been able to travel to the region in almost one year. We have to reverse the tide: it is time now to engage more actively.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

The dramatic impact of COVID-19 in Latin America

In July we had already discussed the dramatic impact of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Since then the situation has further deteriorated and the region is the hardest hit by the pandemic. This has led to an alarming rise of poverty and inequality. With only 8% of the world's population, the region now records one-third of global deaths.

Health systems are often overstretched and the region has inherited a number of social issues, some of which are also present in Europe, that have aggravated the impact of the pandemic: large informal sectors, poverty, insecurity, overcrowded cities, isolated rural communities, inadequate sanitation and limited healthcare.

“*The region is the hardest hit by the pandemic. Large informal sectors, overcrowded cities, insecurity, isolated rural communities, inadequate sanitation and limited healthcare have aggravated its impact.*”

Even before the pandemic, frustration was growing in the region as the development progress of recent decades has started to unravel. A scenario of long-term political instability, insecurity and challenges to democracy and human rights looks all too likely. Organised crime is increasing its grip in the world's most violent region, and support for democracy has dwindled to a historic low (from 61% in 2010 to 48% in 2018, according to Latinobarometro ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾).

The region suffers from many political crises. Venezuela remains an open wound: some 5.1 million Venezuelans have now sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The biggest humanitarian crisis of the region and one of the less funded by the international community.

Internal conflict and violence persist in Colombia, Bolivia and Nicaragua with social tensions mounting in several countries of the region. Venezuela and Colombia now rank among the top countries of origin of asylum seekers in the EU (in third and fourth place respectively). However, because they don't arrive at our shores by boats risking their lives, this flow is not noticed.

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ See <https://www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>

The worst recession ever

The IMF now warns of another “lost decade”, with economies forecast to shrink by 8.1% in 2020. As the region faces its worst recession ever, demonstrating our solidarity with its 665 million inhabitants in their hour of need is not only a moral imperative. It is also an opportunity to step up EU engagement with a region whose strategic relevance has gone unnoticed for too long.

“*As Latin America faces its worst recession ever, demonstrating our solidarity with its 665 million inhabitants is not only a moral imperative. It is also an opportunity for the EU.*”

The attention we give to the LAC region is indeed not proportionate to its importance. Together we represent almost one-third of the votes at the UN. The stock of EU-27 foreign direct investment in LAC amounts to €758 billion; more than the total of EU investment in China, India, Japan, and Russia combined. The EU is also the region’s principal development partner and a main provider of humanitarian assistance. And there are intense people-to-people contacts: close to 6 million nationals from the EU and LAC work and live across the Atlantic. The EU has negotiated association, trade, or political and cooperation agreements with 27 of the 33 countries, making LAC the region with the closest institutional ties to the EU.

A growing sense of neglect

However, we have not had a summit since 2015 and few high-level visits. This has not gone unnoticed: our diplomatic missions are sending reports of a growing sense of neglect. During the same time, other international players are moving forward. The US has kept a steady engagement. And Chinese investment has increased tenfold between 2008 and 2018. In fact, China recently overtook us as the Latin America’s second most important trading partner.

“*Other international players are moving forward: the US has kept a steady engagement, and Chinese investment has increased tenfold between 2008 and 2018.*”

I am therefore grateful to Germany for offering to host a ministerial EU-LAC conference planned in Berlin in December. This initiative could set in motion a new dynamic of high-level engagement. It is also urgent to re-energise the EU's relationship with Mexico and Brazil, our main strategic partners in the region. We should move swiftly towards summits in 2021.

“*Supporting Latin America to make a green, digital, sustainable and inclusive recovery is in our mutual interest.*”

Supporting LAC countries to make a green, digital, sustainable and inclusive recovery is in our mutual interest. LAC is home to the Amazon tropical forest: 50% of the planet's biodiversity And it accounts for around 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Ensuring that the region moves towards a more sustainable growth path is a matter of global concern. This should include raising the ambition under the Paris Agreement ahead of COP 26 in 2021.

The EU-Mercosur agreement could be a game changer

In that respect, the EU-Mercosur agreement could be a game changer. I remember travelling to Brazil and Argentina, as President of the European Parliament, at the beginning of this century and hearing that this agreement was “almost” done. Roughly, 20 years later, it is still “almost” done. If agreed, it would be the largest association agreement ever achieved by the EU and could contribute significantly to economic recovery on both sides of the Atlantic.

However, I am aware that the current political climate does not facilitate its ratification. The European Parliament has adopted a resolution warning that, as it stands, this agreement could not be ratified. At the Council level there is also opposition from a significant number of Member States. So, we need to engage with parliaments and citizens to better address their concerns.

“*The EU-Mercosur agreement has a deep geopolitical significance: help both regions to avoid being placed in a position of subordination in the US-China confrontation.*”

The EU-Mercosur Agreement should not be seen as a mere free trade agreement. Neither Mercosur nor the EU was established as a mere free trade

area, and an agreement between the two cannot be viewed, in a reductionist manner, in those terms either. It has a deep geopolitical significance: it is a tool to enable both regions to cope better with the growing US–China confrontation, in which both Latin America and the EU risk being placed in a position of strategic subordination.

Legitimate concerns from European citizens

The EU that negotiated the Mercosur agreement at the beginning of the 2000's is not the same as in 2020, and even less by the time we get to 2030 with our European Green Deal Agenda. It is legitimate for European citizens to hesitate about signing an agreement with governments that reject the Paris Agreement and whose policies in the Amazon create important environmental concerns.

“*The costs of failure of the EU-Mercosur agreement would be substantial: after 20 years of negotiation, it has become a question of credibility for Europe in the region.*”

However, the political and economic costs of failure would be substantial: after 20 years of negotiation, it has become a question of credibility for Europe in the region. This agreement should be seen as a lever for a change in production and consumption models. We should use it to foster policy dialogue and regulatory convergence for the “green” transition of both regional groups. If we don't have this agreement, we lose a lot of potential leverage to discuss those issues with the LAC countries.

The agreement already provides useful tools to address this problem, and it should be possible to reinforce them with additional instruments on climate and environment, without reopening what has already been negotiated. As EU, we would be better off with a strengthened agreement than without it.

The question that arises today about environmental issues, was once asked about the protection of democratic standards. Today all EU association agreements include a democratic clause. This kind of clause was created in 1991, when Argentina, just emerging from a military dictatorship and fearing its return, asked for it to be included in its association agreement. In 1995, the European Council decided to extend it to all association agreements with third countries.

As we have innovated with a Latin American country on the essential question of respect for the democratic political system, we could do now something similar with the equally important question of environmental and climate sustainability.

In any case, we should be more pro-active to work together at the multilateral level, identifying specific issues where such cooperation could be most fruitful. We are preparing a more detailed roadmap for engagement and actions, to be presented early next year.

A unique window of opportunity

We now have a unique window of opportunity, which we cannot afford to miss. Relations with Latin America are particularly close to my heart. However, I am convinced that it will benefit the entire EU if we succeed in raising our relations to the level they deserve.



VENEZUELA: THE CLEAR URGENCY OF A POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC SOLUTION

08/10/2020. *In October 2020, we discussed in the European Parliament the dramatic situation in Venezuela. We have unsuccessfully tried to help create the conditions for free and fair elections. However, I will continue to work for a democratic and peaceful solution* ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾.

The slow collapse of what once was one of the richest countries in the western hemisphere is one of the great tragedies of our times. The situation is desperate for the Venezuelan people, but the entire region is affected, with appalling numbers of people fleeing the country. Underlying all this are deeply fractured politics and society.

“*The situation is desperate for the Venezuelan people, but the entire region is affected, with appalling numbers of people fleeing the country*”

Some numbers can illustrate the depths to which Venezuela has sunk. According to European Commission data, 95% of the population does not have regular access to water and 96% of the population lacks continued access to electricity. Fuel shortages have become so intense that long lines of citizens have become a daily picture in Caracas, where police special forces have been deployed at gas stations.

Further deterioration of the already critical food security situation

Strict lockdown measures due to the COVID-19 outbreak and lack of fuel have triggered an additional deterioration of the already critical situation in terms of food security. According to Caritas, the attendance of malnourished children at their nutritional centres has decreased by more than 50% in the last months. Around 800 000 children have also dropped out of schools.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

The human rights situation is also dramatic, as reflected by the reports of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We have put Venezuelan regime officials on the EU sanctions list precisely for that reason and we continue monitoring the situation on the ground through our work with civil society in the country.

Following these multiple crises, Venezuelan GDP has declined by a quarter since the beginning of 2020 and by about three quarters since 2013 while inflation is estimated to exceed 500 %. This, together with the drop of remittances from Venezuelan migrants of about half, makes a dreadful scenario for the coming months.

“According to a recent poll, 59% of the Venezuelans support peaceful dialogue and negotiations as the way out of the crisis. And that’s exactly what I have been working on.”

In this dramatic context, there is an absolute urgency to find a political solution to the crisis. It is true that we often say for any foreign policy crisis that ‘we need a political solution’. Sometimes this may be a cliché but here it is absolutely the case. This is certainly the opinion of the Venezuelan people. According to a recent poll ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾, 59% of the interviewees support peaceful dialogue and negotiations as the way out of the crisis. And that’s exactly what I have been working on, with all relevant actors, and particularly with EU Member States and with our Latin American partners in the International Contact Group.

The Venezuela mission has been communicated to all Member States

During the debate in the European Parliament, it was striking that a number of MEPs, mainly from the EPP and other right-wing parties, have criticized myself and the EEAS for having taken various initiatives that were precisely aimed at promoting dialogue and negotiations in the search for a democratic solution. Some were accusing me of having sent a secret or semi-clandestine mission, which had somehow legitimized the Maduro regime.

It’s curious to call a mission secret since it had been communicated to all Member States. And concerning the alleged “legitimation” of the regime, can anyone believe that the participation of the opposition in the Belarus elections was a way to legitimate Lukashenko? On the contrary, it has been a way to expose

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ See <https://www.datincorp.com/>

them as neither free nor fair. In reality, the debate was driven in large part by internal Spanish political dynamics and it generated more heat than light.

Taking a step back of party-political theatre

For these reasons, it is worth taking a step back from the party-political theatre and point-scoring and instead look at what I, as High Representative, have been doing to contribute to the democratic, political solution that everyone knows is needed.

The first step out of the political impasse in Venezuela is indeed to promote a credible framework for the forthcoming legislative elections, actually foreseen by the Maduro regime on December 6. During the summer, in agreement with the G4, the coalition of the opposition parties led by President Juan Guaidó, I relayed to the regime the minimum requirements defined by the opposition for a credible electoral process and their participation. I have been in touch, on several occasions, with the Maduro government and the opposition following up the aforementioned request.

“*In the International Contact Group and the Foreign Affairs Council, ministers supported to continue reaching out to the Maduro government to improve electoral conditions*”

I have explained these efforts in the International Contact Group ministerial meeting ⁽¹⁵¹⁾ that took place on 17 September and the Foreign Affairs Council of 21 September ⁽¹⁵²⁾. In both meetings, ministers supported our work and to continue reaching out to the Maduro government to improve electoral conditions and, for that, the postponement of the elections. This also was a logistic requirement in case we decided to send an electoral observation mission because at least five months are needed for its preparation.

It is in this context that two EEAS officials travelled to Caracas to discuss the situation in the country with all relevant parties; reiterate the EU’s position that the electoral conditions which are now in place do not allow for fair, democratic, competitive elections on 6 December; and state that the organising the requested Election Observation Mission of the EU is not realistic with this calendar, since at least five months are needed to prepare it.

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/85334/International%20Contact%20Group%20on%20Venezuela%20Ministerial%20Declaration

⁽¹⁵²⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2020/09/21/>

A mission, standard to diplomatic practice

This kind of mission is a standard diplomatic practice. In 2019, there were three missions of the International Contact Group in various formats, all of them led by an EU senior official. The Norwegian government has also sent several missions to try to unblock the stalemate, the last one during this summer.

The EEAS officials met in five days with over 70 persons. Firstly, with the President of the National Assembly Juan Guaidó. The representatives of the G4 recalled the five conditions for democratic and transparent elections that they handed to me some months ago and asked to keep seeking their acceptance by the regime. EEAS envoys also met Henrique Capriles, former presidential candidate of the opposition, who urged the EU to ask for a postponement of the elections, maintaining all channels of communication open and use this opportunity to avoid Venezuela fallings deeper into political and social chaos.

An EU election observation mission is absolutely impossible under current conditions

The EEAS envoys met also two representatives of the Maduro regime. Responding to their invitation to the EU to observe the December elections, the EEAS officials made it crystal clear that if Venezuela did not decide to postpone the elections and use the additional time to meet the necessary democratic standards, an EU election observation mission will be absolutely impossible. The EEAS officials were not there to negotiate; they did not offer anything; they just transmitted this important message.

In addition, the EEAS envoys had meetings with the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference, which plays a key role in assisting the Venezuelan people in the current humanitarian crisis. The Episcopal Conference representatives stressed that if the political parties miss the opportunity to run in these elections, the regime will take up all the political space and absolute control of all institutions. Finally, the mission representatives met with interlocutors from civil society, academia and the private sector.

“*The clear message from most our interlocutors is that the EU is the only player that can talk to all sides with credibility. Isn't this the aim of those who support a geopolitical EU?*”

To sum up, in Caracas there was widespread support for the efforts of the EU to create space for dialogue. The clear message that came out from most interlocutors is that the EU is the only player that can talk to all sides and can do so with credibility. Isn't this the aim of those of us who support a geopolitical EU?

There was virtual unanimity that there can be no unilateral solution to the situation in Venezuela and that the only way forward is through incremental progress and dialogue, rather than expecting a single cathartic event. The predominant view was that, even if a postponement of the elections would not, in itself, be the solution to the Venezuela problem, it would certainly be the only way to keep the door open for one.

“*There can be no unilateral solution in Venezuela. The only way forward is through incremental progress and dialogue, rather than expecting a single cathartic event.*”

Unfortunately, the recent statement of the Maduro's regime, refusing to postpone the elections on the stated ground of constitutional requirements, will only serve to deepen the political divisions of Venezuela. This is clearly not the path we want. As EU, we will continue to support all efforts for a political, peaceful and democratic way out of the crisis that the people of Venezuela so badly want, need and deserve.

The critique of our attempt to mediate is an example of unreflective political point-scoring. International life sometimes requires speaking loudly and carrying a big stick. However, diplomacy is mostly about speaking discreetly, and articulating a long-term strategy. It is also, as we do in many other cases, about speaking to those with whom we disagree, precisely to try to get them to reach an agreement.

“*International life sometimes requires speaking loudly and carrying a big stick. However, diplomacy is mostly about speaking discreetly and articulating a long-term strategy.*”

However, the failure to reach such an agreement between the Maduro regime and the opposition is very bad news for the Venezuelan people. They deserve every effort we can make to create space for dialogue that leads to a sustainable and democratic solution to the multiple crises - political, humanitarian and economic - affecting their country.

STRENGTHENING EU-ASEAN PARTNERSHIP, AN URGENT NECESSITY

20/09/2020. *In September 2020, I had a videoconference with Foreign Ministers of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The EU shares many common views with this organisation. We must and will strengthen our ties* ⁽¹⁵³⁾.

With its ten Member States, this association, founded in 1967, now has a population of 650 million inhabitants, more than the 450 million of the European Union. In 2018, the combined GDP of the ASEAN was €3 trillion, compared with \$16 trillion for the European Union. The gap remains significant, but the economic growth experienced by the region has been very rapid in recent years: in 2000, the combined GDP of the 10 ASEAN member countries represented only \$600 billion, so it has grown five times in less than 20 years.

The ASEAN countries have benefited in particular from the growing desire of many economic actors, whether Chinese or western, to find places outside China, but in its vicinity, to set up production facilities or to find subcontractors in sectors such as textiles, electronics or automobile equipment.

Less integration than in the European Union

The degree of integration of ASEAN is, however, hardly comparable for the moment with that of the European Union: unanimity remains the basic rule in all domains for decision making and the means available to the organisation's central bodies are still very limited. However, this could change under the impact of both the current crisis and the growing strategic rivalry between the United States and China.

The health crisis as such has been quite well managed by the ASEAN countries. However, the current economic crisis is expected to lead this year to a recession estimated at 2.6% of GDP in the region and unemployment is rising rapidly.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

Important sectors such as textiles, international tourism and automotive equipment sub-contracting are severely affected. The recession is indeed less severe than in Europe, but in a region where GDP grew by an average of 5.3 per cent per year between 2000 and 2018, the shock remains very strong. Especially since the social protection systems are still limited in those countries. 11 million people are at risk of falling into poverty this year in ASEAN.

“Europe has mobilised over €800 million through the Team Europe initiative to help the ASEAN region to cope with the COVID-19 crisis, more than any other partner of the region.”

Like in Europe, responses to the health crisis have started mainly on a national basis within ASEAN. However, in April ASEAN leaders announced the setting up of a COVID-19 Response Fund, an ASEAN Regional Reserve of Medical Supplies for Public Health Emergencies as well as consular assistance to ASEAN nationals. The European Union has not remained inactive to help the region to face that crisis. In ASEAN alone, we mobilised over €800 million through the Team Europe initiative, more than any other partner of the region.

Vaccine security, a battleground for influence in the region

The only viable exit strategy of the health crisis is a vaccine and that is the reason why vaccine security has become a new battleground for influence in the region. In August, China inked a deal with Indonesia for the supply of 40 million doses of vaccine from November 2020. Some days later, the Chinese Premier told the leaders of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam that China would provide them with priority access to COVID-19 vaccines. The Philippines' leader Duterte also claims that Beijing promised him an early vaccine. In parallel, a new US-ASEAN Health Futures initiative was launched last April focusing on joint research and health capacity, but ASEAN disapproved of Washington's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organisation.

For our part, we chose a multilateral response: the EU is mobilising €400 million in guarantees to support the COVAX initiative for a global supply of vaccines for citizens across the world, in poor and rich countries. We have proposed during our meeting that experts from EU and ASEAN get together to see how best we can cooperate on vaccine security.

Reboot the economy

The second priority for ASEAN, as for Europe, is of course to reboot the economy. US–China tensions and the pandemic will have long-term repercussions for ASEAN. US–China decoupling in high-tech and telecommunications, banking and finance could force South-East Asian countries to make tough choices. Meanwhile the disruptions of the global value chain heavily hit manufacturing in ASEAN countries, forcing them to reflect on their positioning. On the other hand, countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines are hoping to benefit from the diversification away from China. Japan effectively encourages this trend, heavily subsidising domestic manufacturers to transfer their overseas production bases from China to South-East Asia.

“*Having been the number one source of foreign direct investment in ASEAN over many years, the EU is committed to stepping up our economic partnership to speed up recovery.*”

Having been the number one source of foreign direct investment in ASEAN over many years, the EU is committed to stepping up our economic partnership. That means first to pursue our trade agenda: the free trade agreements between the EU and Singapore and Vietnam have entered into force last year and despite the impact of COVID-19, Singapore was able to export 12% more to us in the first six months after that. The EU is negotiating agreements with other ASEAN countries and we should pursue these with renewed urgency.

Building up, on our numerous EU–ASEAN programmes

In parallel, we will build on our numerous EU–ASEAN programmes to facilitate trade and integration to speed up economic recovery. The launching of the EU-supported ASEAN Customs Transit System later this year is one example. We look also forward to finalising an air transport agreement with ASEAN as soon as possible. The agreement would be the first of its kind, creating the world’s biggest aviation market for over 1 billion people.

The EU cumulatively contributes also 50% of the €1.2 billion ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility. An immediate common objective should be to establish an EU–ASEAN energy dialogue to tap into the potential of sustainable connectivity and the green recovery.

But the focus of ASEAN countries is not only on COVID-19 and recovery. Nowhere is the US-China rivalry more striking than in the South China Sea. Over the past few months, China challenged the territorial waters of its neighbours and intensified military activity.

“*Around 40% of the EU’s foreign trade goes through the South China Sea. The EU cannot allow countries to undermine international law and maritime security in that area.*”

The EU cannot allow countries to unilaterally undermine international law and maritime security in the South China Sea. Any disruption or instability affects trade flows for everyone: around 40% of the EU’s foreign trade goes through the South China Sea.

All parties should refrain from the threat or use of force and from any provocative actions. Instead, they should resolve disputes through peaceful means, such as the dispute settlement mechanisms under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We look forward to the conclusion of the talks on an effective, substantive and legally binding code of conduct in the South China Sea between ASEAN and its neighbours, which should not prejudice the interests of third parties.

“*The EU looks forward to the conclusion of the talks on a substantive and legally binding Code of Conduct in the South China Sea between ASEAN and his neighbours.*”

Asian security is closely linked to European security. That’s why, for example, we are working with our ASEAN partners to deploy counterterrorism advisors in several of our European Union delegations across Asia. Last year, the EU signed also an agreement on Vietnam’s participation in our European military and civilian missions, which are deployed from the Indian Ocean to Africa. I hope it will be the first of many with our friends in ASEAN, because our missions do not only serve European interests. They serve the interest of peace and security in some of the most troubled parts of the world.

The US–China economic and geopolitical rivalry is making ASEAN increasingly uncomfortable. ASEAN does not want to be forced to align with any one partner. Instead, ASEAN swears by its own “centrality”, which has long allowed the organisation to be the platform of choice for economic and security diplomacy.

ASEAN adopted last year an “Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” built around four pillars – maritime security, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals, and economic cooperation - to assert the position of the association as the conduit for cooperation in the whole region. The EU will have also to work more in depth on its own Indo-Pacific policy in the near future. The German government recently adopted Indo-Pacific Guidelines, a useful contribution for that purpose.

The significance of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP)

In this context, the planned signature of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), negotiated since 2012 with China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand, at the ASEAN Summit next November has gained much in significance. Despite India dropping out of the agreement, the signing of the RCEP will be for ASEAN a major statement in favour of its own “centrality” and of an open multilateral trade system.

To summarise, while others choose to undercut multilateralism, ASEAN – like the EU – wants to ensure that trading systems and security are governed by rules and based on international agreements, not on the idea that “might makes right”. And neither ASEAN nor the EU are ready to become part of any ‘sphere of influence’.

“ASEAN will always find in the EU a trustworthy, reliable and predictable partner. We have only a clear and public agenda: to defend the rules-based international system.”

Therefore I gave to my counterparts and to the public in the region the strong message ⁽⁵⁴⁾ that they will always find in the European Union a trustworthy, reliable and predictable partner. We have no hidden agenda, only a clear and public one: to defend the rules-based international system. And we share with ASEAN the special responsibility to uphold the global, multilateral order.

The EU-ASEAN partnership is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ See: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85375/asean-eu-strengthening-our-partnership-necessity_en

THE EU–ASEAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: HOW DID THAT HAPPEN?

06/12/2020. *In December 2020, the EU and ASEAN took the decision to establish a strategic partnership. It is worth telling the story of the long road to this historic decision and what it means* ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.

Earlier this week I wrote about the EEAS being ten years old ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾. I shared my impressions from the debate I had had with two former High Representatives, Javier Solana and Federica Mogherini, on the morning of 1 December. In fact, I went straight to that debate from having co-chaired the 23rd EU–ASEAN ministerial meeting with the Singaporean Foreign Minister, Vivian Balakrishnan – of course virtually, as with so many events these days. All EU and ASEAN Member States were represented for what proved to be a particularly fruitful meeting. In fact, the outcome was that we upgraded EU–ASEAN relations to a strategic partnership ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ with immediate effect.



⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ See page XX https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89786/eeas-10-%E2%80%93-europe-worldwide_en

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89626/eu-asean-strategic-partnership_en

A ten year long path

As I also wrote earlier, 1 December was a special day for me personally, as it marked the end of the first year of my mandate – or the beginning of my second if you like. The ten years of the EEAS have witnessed steady progress in EU–ASEAN relations, sometimes fast, sometimes slower, but at least always with the same goal in mind. In fact, it was ten years ago that ASEAN and its partners changed one of their core treaties – the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia – to allow for accession by regional organisations, as opposed to states.

The EU then signed the treaty in 2012 and remains the only regional organisation to have done so. Catherine Ashton co-chaired the EU–ASEAN ministerial meeting in 2014, which first agreed to work towards the upgrading of the partnership to a strategic one. We opened the EU Mission to ASEAN under a dedicated ambassador in 2016, and during this decade we saw Korea, India, Australia, the US, New Zealand and Russia join China and Japan in being recognised as strategic partners of ASEAN. But not the European Union.

Important lessons from this process

There are some important lessons from this process. First, progress can take time, particularly in building a relationship with another regional body with its own strategic outlook and different interests among its own Member States. The first steps forward occurred in the decade after the ‘twin expansions’ of the EU and ASEAN, which followed the end of the Cold War. So we must seize other opportunities when they arise now.

“*The increased tension between the US and China has created a new dynamic in the region. ASEAN does not want to ‘choose sides’ and we are not asking it to.*”

The increased tension between the US and China has created a new dynamic in the region. ASEAN does not want to ‘choose sides’ and we are not asking it to. But faced with this rivalry, it is looking for new pillars to buttress its stability and prosperity. The EU’s reliability and consistency are increasingly valued assets. Those who have most strongly defended them politically in the region – the EU

and Japan – are increasingly seen as the most trustworthy partners in terms of supporting the rules-based international order, even if we are not seen as the most powerful players in the region.

“There will always be differences between friends, and that is true as well for the EU and ASEAN. Over recent years, one of the difficulties we have had in our relationship has concerned palm oil and its place in our biofuels regime.”

There will always be differences between friends, and that is true as well for the EU and ASEAN. Over recent years, one of the difficulties we have had in our relationship has concerned palm oil and its place in our biofuels regime. Those differences have not gone away – indeed there is a dispute settlement process under way at the World Trade Organisation on the issue. We have, however, agreed to launch the dialogue on issues affecting its production and sustainability, which we decided to establish last year. Getting to this point has required close cooperation between the EEAS and the relevant Commission services dealing with energy and climate issues, as we need for so many aspects of EU foreign policy.

Individual differences should not cloud our view of the broader strategic interest

ASEAN and the EU have both come to see that individual points of difference should not cloud our view of the broader strategic interest. Jean Monnet put it better than I can when talking about the establishment of our own Union: ‘Make men work together; show them that beyond their differences and geographical boundaries, there lies a common interest.’ I would say women too. And of course now the European Union and ASEAN as well.

And we have many shared interests: from the immediate, such as international vaccine cooperation, rebuilding our economies and carefully reopening our countries, to the overarching imperatives of promoting effective multilateralism and a rules-based international order. Our South-East Asian partners were grateful for our long-term commitment to the region and its integration through numerous ongoing EU-funded activities, as well as for our ‘Team Europe’ response to the pandemic.

First invitation of an EU High Representative to the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting

It is important for the EU to extend its security footprint in the region. For the first time, an EU High Representative has been invited to the meeting of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus grouping (ASEAN, US, China, Japan, India, Australia, New Zealand) on 9 December, marking the tenth anniversary of that grouping also.

“*We are ready to expand our engagement in and with Asia. The EEAS and our Member States have particular expertise, for example in the area of peacekeeping, given our own operations around the world, or maritime and cybersecurity.*”

In this context, it is worth stressing that we are ready to expand our engagement in and with Asia ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾. The EEAS and our Member States have particular expertise, for example in the area of peacekeeping, given our own operations around the world, or maritime and cybersecurity. We should build on the increasing number of security dialogues and framework participation agreements for participation in Common Security and Defence Policy missions with our partners in the Indo-Pacific. We should also increase our collective engagement with ASEAN in multilateral fora, focusing on key EU political priorities such as climate action, the digital transformation, sustainable development and human rights, including labour rights.

Being ASEAN's strategic partner gives the EU a key opportunity to step up our engagement in a growing, dynamic region.

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/05/28/deepening-eu-security-co-operation-with-asian-partners-council-adopts-conclusions/>

THE ASIAN REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (RCEP): WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE EU?

19/11/2020. *The ten ASEAN countries and five Asia-Pacific countries (China, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand) agreed in November 2020 a major trade deal that covers 30% of the world's GDP. We welcome rules-based, multilateral economic integration* ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾.

The signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has created the world's largest free trade zone stretching from the border of Kazakhstan to the South Pacific. It has triggered many headlines notably about the sheer size of the deal, the prominent role of China and the fact that the US and India are not a party. Trade deals are rarely just about trade: they also have wider political ramifications.

“*We must enhance our engagement in the Indo Pacific region to make sure our voice is heard and the overall architecture of regional cooperation remains open and rules-based.*”

Some in Europe may wonder, have we missed out? Is the European Union weaker because 15 other countries have signed a free trade deal without us? The answer is no. Just as we believe in free and fair trade and in multilateralism as the route to get there, so we can be happy when others also take this path to enhance their own prosperity. And by growing the global economy, the RCEP will help provide more – not fewer – opportunities for trade with the region, just as our own single market provides opportunities for them. As the EU we tend to have more ambitious free trade agreements with almost all countries in the RCEP agreement.

Still, as the EU we should pay close attention and be mindful of the strategic stakes involved: the Indo-Pacific region is of strategic importance to us. We must enhance our engagement to make sure our voice is heard and the overall architecture of regional cooperation remains open and rules-based.

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

What is in the RCEP agreement and what does that mean?

The main effect of the RCEP is to have bundled together the various free trade agreements that ASEAN has with the five other Asia Pacific countries into a single framework. It covers trade in goods but does little to reduce non-tariff barriers. It excludes most services but also agriculture, which is a sensitive sector. It is a 'shallower' agreement than the existing EU FTAs with the region. And it cannot be compared with our own single market. But that was never the point.

More than 30 negotiating rounds over eight years, numerous ministerial meetings and three leaders' summits have resulted in a significant achievement and, as the Asian leaders said on Sunday, brought "an unprecedented mega regional trading arrangement that comprises a diverse mix of developed, developing and least developed economies of the region."

“*The timing of the deal is also significant: it is a sign of the members' commitment to rules-based trade and investment in the era of unilateral reward and retaliation.*”

While we in the EU are still studying its 20 chapters, 510 pages and annexes, its apparent achievements are clearer in the scale than in the depth of its coverage: 30% of the global population and GDP, 28% of global trade, and including five members of the G20. A major benefit will be the harmonisation of rules of origin that will also help European businesses in the region, allowing companies to ship products across the region more easily without encountering different rule of origin criteria for each step in the manufacturing process or in each country crossed. This will lower costs for all companies with supply chains stretching across the region. The agreement also makes progress as regards intellectual property rights. At the same time, it appears that labour rights and environmental standards, which are integral to EU FTAs, are missing from this agreement.

The timing of the deal is significant: it is a sign of the members' commitment to rules-based trade and investment in the era of unilateral reward and retaliation. It also comes when all economies look for ways to recover from the ravages of COVID-19. More specifically the signatories have stressed how this deal signals their commitment to inclusive and sustainable development, job creation and strengthening regional supply chains. These are goals we all share.

The EU and ASEAN: a partnership of strategic importance

Our economic ties to South-East Asia are robust. For many years the EU has been the largest source of foreign direct investment flows into ASEAN and one of its largest trading partners. We already have key free trade agreements in place with Singapore and Vietnam, plus Japan and Korea, and have negotiations underway with several more, including Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. These agreements have helped sustain trade despite the pandemic, for example through major increases of imports from Singapore of vital organic chemicals and pharmaceuticals.

“Given everything that is going on in the world, we see ASEAN as a natural partner and like-minded advocate of regional integration and multilateralism.”

At the same time, we need to go further. With ASEAN we have great ambitions to expand our engagement, from trade to connectivity, from digital transformation to joint efforts to promote regional and global security. It is our hope to be able to lift our cooperation soon to the level of a strategic partnership. Given everything that is going on in the world, we see ASEAN as a natural partner ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ and like-minded advocate of regional integration and multilateralism.

The Indo-Pacific region: which balance and whose rules?

Given the many security crises in our neighbourhood, I inevitably have to direct much of my attention to events happening close to our borders. However, I am convinced that the Asia-Pacific is our *economic* neighbourhood. Therefore, we have a stake in how the region develops.

The RCEP agreement is evidence of ASEAN's success in managing to place itself at the heart of its region despite big powers tending to throw their weight around. ASEAN has also developed an 'Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' ⁽¹⁶¹⁾, which against a backdrop of growing security and political tensions, emphasises the need for the region to remain open, stable, inclusive and rules-based. It is clear that the Indo-Pacific will be the most dynamic region in the world and the centre of growth for decades to come. The success of the region in handling the COVID-19 pandemic, certainly compared to Europe and the US, has further reinforced this trend.

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ See p 259 and 264

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ See: <https://asean.org/asean-outlook-indo-pacific/>



“*The EU should engage more with the broader Indo-Pacific region. As elsewhere, the key question is what will be the nature of the regional order?*”

I am determined to expand our cooperation with ASEAN and develop our own view on how the EU should engage the broader Indo-Pacific region. As elsewhere, the key question is what will be the nature of the regional order? As I have said before, agreed rules make states secure, people free and companies willing to invest ⁽¹⁶²⁾.

Many years ago, in February 2015, President Obama said when signing the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), that agreements like these allow us ‘to write the rules of the road in the 21st century’. But history took a different turn when President Trump withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in his first days in office (which eventually went ahead anyway, without the US, and became the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)).

⁽¹⁶²⁾ See P 134

Now, nearly four years later and at the end of President's Trump term in office, the US finds itself outside again as another mega trade deal is concluded. Many have commented on the wider ramifications of these decisions. Indeed a paper ⁽¹⁶³⁾ by the Peterson Institute for International Economics has suggested that "The exits [of India and the US] reflect similar motives in both countries, including nationalist policies on one hand, and fears of losing ground to China in economic and strategic competition on the other."

A decisive incentive to Africa and Latin America

The emergence of this gigantic Asian free trade zone should also be a decisive incentive to Africa and Latin America to accelerate their plans of regional integration. Without doubt, the size of the market and the common rules set by the RCEP have a direct effect on the investment climate in emerging economies. Both Africa and Latin America should do everything within their reach to adapt to a new competitive landscape.

Globalisation is not dead. Asians show us that they can adapt to it and shape it, through multilateralism. Europeans should be proactive in the Indo Pacific and have a position towards China that is firm but also open. Like Japan, a signatory of the RCEP and one of our main allies.

In all this, we should remember that we are not closed camps: we trade both within and between us and we share many challenges. That's why the EU must seek to work with its partners in Asia and the US, to write the rulebook of the 21st century in an open and collaborative manner.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ See <https://www.piie.com/system/files/documents/wp20-9.pdf>

INDIA, A KEY PARTNER FOR EUROPE

16/07/2020. *In July 2020, I participated, together with Presidents Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen, in the 15th EU–India summit with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India and the EU are converging on a number of issues and India could help renew multilateralism ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾.*

The summit was originally supposed to take place in person, in Brussels, back in March. Now, 4 months on, the context in which we held the Summit has vastly changed: the COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all. We live in a world increasingly dominated by the strategic rivalry between China and the United States where multilateralism is under siege. We have often stressed that, in this context, Europe must go its own way and be at the forefront of those who want not only to save multilateralism but to strengthen it.

India can help Europe save multilateralism

In this respect, India can obviously become an important partner for us with its almost 1.4 billion inhabitants, its economic dynamism, particularly in sectors such as information technology or pharmaceuticals, and its growing international role, not only regionally but also increasingly globally.

In January this year, my first visit outside the European Union in my capacity as High Representative took me to India. I met with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ministers of external affairs and of defence and addressed the annual Raisina Dialogue at its closing ceremony. We discussed global uncertainties, growing US–China tensions and increasing assertiveness from China.

“*Climate change, peace, maritime security, digitalisation, water management, renewable energy or disaster risks... India and Europe converge on a great number of issues.*”

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

The pandemic has accelerated and strengthened those trends. COVID-19 requires a global response, international cooperation and solidarity. With our Indian partners, we discussed on Wednesday vaccine development, strengthening multilateral institutions, and a swift and green global economic recovery. The summit was also the occasion for both sides to discuss EU-India bilateral relations and regional and security issues.

Our positions converge on a great number of multilateral issues, such as climate change, peace and stability, maritime security, digitalisation, water management, renewable energy or disaster risk reduction, as demonstrated by the Summit Joint Statement ⁽⁶⁵⁾.

“*India is acknowledging that the EU is a key political partner, and we believe India has an important global role to play.*”

India is increasingly acknowledging that the EU is becoming a key political partner, and we believe India has an important global role to play; this is why we welcomed its recent election as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2021–2022 and India’s Presidency of the G20 in 2022.

Work together to reform the WTO

In this context, one of our urgent tasks is to work together to reform the WTO, which is under increasing strain if its members do not genuinely come together to shore it up. However, we need also to improve our bilateral trade relations. During the summit, we agreed on establishing a high-level dialogue to move forward on an investment protection and trade agreement.

During my visit to New Delhi in January, I made it clear that the EU intended to forge closer ties with India, as part of a strategy of working with like-minded partners to renew multilateralism. COVID-19 fallout reinforces my conviction that this should be one of the top priorities of the European Union in the years ahead.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/07/15/joint-statement-15th-eu-india-summit-15-july-2020/>

WHY EU-PAKISTAN RELATIONS ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR US

06/11/2020. *In November 2020, we held the 5th EU-Pakistan strategic dialogue. With the prolonged COVID-19 crisis, the fight against terrorism and radicalisation and the growing international tensions, it is important to deepen our ties with a country like Pakistan* ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾.

Last Tuesday, I met via VTC my Pakistani counterpart Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾, Minister for Foreign Affairs. He represents a country of 220 million people, making it one of the world's major Muslim-majority countries. Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons and plays a central role in a critical region involving China, India, Iran and Afghanistan. In the current circumstances, EU–Pakistan relations are a very important issue for us.

A very young country

Pakistan is also an extremely young country: more than half its population is under 30 years old. However, it faces major difficulties in creating sufficient jobs for this large number of young people. And these difficulties have been further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. These long-standing problems contribute to persistent social and political instability, as well as strong religious tensions, even though the country has managed to put an end to the military dictatorships to which it was subjected for several decades.

“*I expressed my deep concern about the disinformation about the situation of Islam and Muslims in Europe that we have observed in many parts of the world, including Pakistan.*”

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88122/european-union-pakistan-strategic-dialogue-5th-round-joint-press-release_en

We have of course discussed international terrorism and the attacks that have taken place in Europe in recent days. I expressed my deep concern especially about the disinformation about the situation of Islam and Muslims in Europe that we have observed in many parts of the world, including Pakistan. I also expressed my concerns about the use of the death penalty in Pakistan and the abuse of the Blasphemy Act, while welcoming the forthcoming adoption of a law against torture. My Pakistani counterpart, for his part, underlined the concerns raised by the resurgence of what he described as “Islamophobic acts” in Europe. He told us that these acts had deeply hurt Muslims around the world, and particularly in Pakistan.

“*The EU model based on the freedom to believe or not and the freedom of expression is often difficult to understand for societies that have different values and systems.*”

We had a frank discussion on these sensitive issues. The EU is based on a model of a secular society, where individual rights and freedoms are central and where public authorities respect the freedom of everyone to believe or not, and the freedom of expression, including on matters related to religion. This model is often difficult to understand for societies that have different values and societal and political systems.

Exchanging on these difficult issues, we both agreed in condemning all violence and the killing of innocent people, and reaffirmed our joint determination to defend and strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms and to promote tolerance and coexistence between different religious faiths.

“*We agreed to condemn all violence and the killing of innocent people, and reaffirmed our joint determination to defend human rights and promote tolerance between religious faiths.*”

Related, we continued our discussions on counterterrorism issues, and in particular on the measures foreseen by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)⁽¹⁶⁸⁾. This 200-country intergovernmental organisation has established international standards to combat money laundering and terrorism financing. We took stock of significant progress made in addressing 21 out of 27 items of the Pakistani action plan. At the last review of the FATF, the EU had advocated for a positive tone

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ See: <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/>

of the statement on Pakistan. I asked our interlocutors to complete quickly its implementation and offered EU technical assistance. More broadly, we will hold in 2021 the first meeting of the EU-Pakistan Security Dialogue foreseen in our 2019 joint strategic engagement plan.

60% of the products benefiting from the EU General Scheme of Preferences + come from Pakistan

Economic relations have also been an important part of our exchanges, even more so as the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are heavily affecting the region. We have spent €150 million in assistance to Pakistan in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The EU is also the country's second largest trading partner, with 35% of Pakistan's exports going to Europe. Pakistan benefits from the European Union's General Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. GSP+ removes import duties from products coming from vulnerable developing countries, to help them alleviate poverty and create jobs based on international values and principles. To qualify, these countries have to implement 27 international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, the protection of the environment and good governance. Currently 60% of products imported into the EU under this customs regime come from Pakistan. We are exploring ways of making full use of this regime to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

“*The EU advocates the full implementation of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative by all creditors, including China, and encourage the G20 to go further on the debt issue.*”

Pakistan should also fully benefit from the COVID-19 related Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) decided by the G20. It is one of the countries in the world with the highest ratios of external debt to trade according to World Bank data: in 2018, Pakistan's debt stock represented 211 per cent of its trade. I confirmed to my interlocutor that the EU advocates the full and transparent implementation of the DSSI by all official creditors, including China, which is a major external lender to Pakistan. We encourage also the international community to take further steps on that issue.

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ See: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/generalised-scheme-of-preferences/>

Pakistan is also one of the countries in the world most affected by climate change. The Indus River is the key water artery for its agriculture and economy, but with its sources in the Himalayan triangle between India, China and Pakistan, it is quickly becoming a major point of tension in regional climate geopolitics. We hope to develop our cooperation with Pakistan on energy and climate related issues and count on Pakistan to help enhance the commitments made by the different countries in the framework of the Paris Agreement next year.

The difficult way ahead in Afghanistan

Finally, we of course discussed at length the security situation in the region, and in particular in Afghanistan. We agreed to provide strong support for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ and welcomed the progress made in the last two years, in particular the signature, in February 2020, of an agreement between the US and the Taliban. We are well aware of the difficulty of the task remaining and the obstacles still to overcome, which the latest deadly attack on the University of Kabul has just highlighted.

Foreign Minister Qureshi expressed Pakistan's concerns about human rights violations by India in the region of Jammu and Kashmir, and its attempts to change the demography of the disputed territory. As the EU, we are following the situation in that region closely and I underlined the need for restraint, a de-escalation of tensions and the resolution of the dispute through dialogue and diplomatic engagement.

Indeed, with the shared threat of terrorism, the worsening COVID-19 crisis in Europe and around the world, and the growing systemic rivalry between China and the United States, it is more important than ever for the EU to deepen its ties with a country like Pakistan, crucial for regional stability in South Asia. And this is what we will do.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ See https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88120/afghanistan-joint-declaration-between-eu-and-pakistan_en

DEMOGRAPHY AND EUROPE IN THE WORLD

05/07/2020. *Europe's share of the world's population is rapidly declining. This is one of the major reasons why we need to strengthen our political integration if we want to have a say in tomorrow's world. ⁽⁷¹⁾*

“Demography is destiny” said the sociologist Auguste Comte: the basic idea is that population trends and distributions determine the future of a country or region. Recently, my colleague Dubravka Suica, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for demography and democracy, provided us with an analysis of the foreseeable consequences of the demographic changes underway in Europe and globally. This work deserves our full attention, because this subject is both central to the Union’s internal affairs and for its place in the world.

The pincer movement: fewer births, longer lives.

Demographic trends have a strong inertia since they depend for the coming decades on births already registered. However, demographic projections with a 50-year horizon are not an exact science: behaviours can sometimes change more rapidly than expected and diseases such as COVID-19, conflicts or migration can substantially alter the situation. With this caveat in mind, these projections are very useful in preparing for the future.

For a while, Europeans have been having fewer children than before. With an average of 1.55 children per woman in 2018, Europe is far from the rate of 2.1 children, which is necessary to stabilise the European population. Since 2012, deaths exceed births, which means that without migration from outside Europe, our population would already have started to decline.

“Since 2012, deaths exceed births in the EU, which means that without migration from outside Europe, our population would already have started to decline.”

⁽⁷¹⁾ Published in the blog *A window on the World*.



The EU now has a population of 447 million. According to Eurostat projections ⁽¹⁷²⁾, this figure is expected to reach 449 million around 2025, before declining from 2030 onwards to 424 million in 2070. All this is accompanied by significant ageing: the proportion of people over 65 years is set to rise from 20% in 2019 to 30% in 2070. At the same time, the population aged 20-64 (i.e. those of working age) is expected to decline steadily.

This dual movement will rapidly increase the so-called dependency ratio between the number of people over 65 and the number of people of working age between 20 and 64. Over the next decades, this will constitute a major challenge for our economies as well as the financing of our social and health systems. On this subject, the employment rate of the people of working age, as the specialists say, can however substantially change the situation: hence the importance the Commission attaches to this question.

“Over the next decades, ageing will constitute a major challenge for our economies as well as the financing of our social and health systems.”

⁽¹⁷²⁾ See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/population-projections-data>

The Commission's report ⁽⁷³⁾ shows also that there are considerable differences regarding demographic trends between regions within Europe. Some areas, particularly rural ones in eastern and southern Europe could probably experience a steady and rapid population decline. Hence the need for active policies, particularly in the field of employment and health, to ensure that demographic change does not exacerbate differences within the Union. The Commission will be working over the next few months on ways of providing more support to the older people and rural regions that are most affected.

“*In 1950, the population of the 27 countries that make up actually the Union represented 12.9% of the world's population. Today it accounts for 5.7 %. By 2070, the EU should weigh only 3.7% of humanity.*”

This report also underlines how demographic trends will affect Europe's place in the world. The world's population is expected to continue to grow from 7.8 billion in 2020 to 10.5 billion in 2070, according to the United Nations' central scenario ⁽⁷⁴⁾. In 1950, the population of the 27 countries that make up actually the Union represented 12.9 % of the world's population. Today it accounts for 5.7 %. By 2070, the EU should weigh only 3.7 % of humanity.

The contrasting trajectories of the US, China, India and Africa

Moreover, population forecasts for other regions of the world shed light on the main challenges for the EU's external policy over the next half-century.

The population of the United States, whose demography is slightly more dynamic than ours, is expected to catch up with that of the EU by 2070. However, by that time, we would still be in a very similar situation: the United States would account for only 3.9% of the world's population.

China, which today accounts for 18.5 per cent of the world's population, will also see its relative demographic weight decline significantly. By 2070, the Middle Kingdom is expected to have lost 181 million inhabitants and will weigh “only” 12

⁽⁷³⁾ See https://ec.europa.eu/eip/ageing/news/european-commission-adopted-report-impact-demographic-change-europe_en

⁽⁷⁴⁾ See <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

per cent of the world's population. The median age of the Chinese population, which is 38 years today, is expected to rise to 49 years in 2070. This is even higher than in Europe, where it should reach 48 years by that time.

“China will experience a very rapid ageing of its population over the next half-century. While its demographic decline should ease the pressure on the environment, ageing will undoubtedly be one of the most important challenges for the country.”

China will indeed experience a very rapid ageing of its population over the next half-century. While its demographic decline should ease the pressure on the environment in the most densely populated areas, the ageing of the population will undoubtedly be one of the most important challenges for a country that does not yet have a developed welfare system.

By 2070, on the contrary, India is expected to have gained 249 million people and to account for 15.6% of the world's population, almost a third more than China. However, it is not certain that this population growth will translate into a corresponding rise in India's power: it will indeed pose considerable problems in a country with a degraded environment, scarce resources and high internal tensions.

The rise of Africa

What emerges above all from the Commission's report is the demographic upheaval underway in Sub-Saharan Africa. This area accounted in 1950 for only 7.1% of the world's population, half as much as Europe. It now accounts for 14%, more than twice as many as the Union. In 2070 its population should weigh 27.4%, more than a quarter of the world population and seven times ours.

“Sub-Saharan Africa accounted in 1950 for 7.1% of the world's population, half as much as Europe. It now accounts for 14%, twice as many as the Union. In 2070 its population should weigh 27.4%, more than a quarter of the world population.”

The future of sub-Saharan Africa, its political stability and economic success, will undoubtedly have a decisive impact on how the world of tomorrow will look like. This is particularly true for Europe, which is a neighbour of the African continent and is linked to it by many old ties, even if they have not always been friendly in the past. The future of the EU will depend to a major extent on our ability to accompany Africa's development during the 21st century and contribute to its success.

The demographic trends at work will pose important challenges for Europe both internally and externally. Demographic weight is certainly not the only determinant of the importance of a political entity. In economic terms, the ability to mobilise the entire working age population and the capacity for innovation can make a significant difference.

A country like Japan, which has already experienced massive population ageing and has seen its population decline since 2009, is nonetheless still a major economic power, particularly in the field of high technology. And regarding geostrategic issues, the weight of a country is no longer measured primarily by its ability to line up large numbers of soldiers on the battlefields.

“*In view of the demographic changes underway, in 2070 not a single European country, acting alone, would be able to play a significant role in the world.*”

Nevertheless, in view of the demographic changes underway, in 2070 not a single European country, acting alone, would be able to play a significant role in the world. If Europeans want to continue to have a say in world affairs, it is essential to deepen our Union. Not to impose our will on others, but to preserve our ability to decide by and for ourselves, without having choices imposed on us by others, especially those whose values are not in line with ours.

CONCLUSION

2021, A YEAR THAT PROMISES TO BE EQUALLY CHALLENGING

As we have seen throughout this book, 2020 has been a very busy year for the EU's external policy, but 2021 does not look like it will be any calmer. Let us hope and make sure that it will be the year in which we begin to emerge from this crisis while rebuilding a just, green and digital future in Europe and in the world.

However, at the time of sending this book to print, the latest events show that it is not going to be an easy task. In the first days of 2021, Europe is still struggling with a new surge of COVID-19 infections, and European governments have again had to impose stricter lockdowns. We need to succeed in giving all Europeans access to vaccines and in starting to implement, without delay, the Next Generation EU initiative.

We will also have to work hard to ensure that all countries, including the poorest ones, have access to vaccines. We have often said that vaccines have to be considered a global public good accessible to all human beings. However, this is easier said than done, in spite of all efforts and resources devoted to this end by the European Commission, supporting the international COVAX initiative. At the same time, we will continue to push the international community to provide more effectively help to poor countries affected by the crisis, notably through a debt restructuring process for the most vulnerable ones.

Apart from these key challenges directly associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 we experienced, in a magnified manner, the difficulty of planning and forecasting in the field of European foreign policy.

However, with all necessary caveats, we will have to continue the work to stabilise our immediate neighbourhood and deal with the “new empires”. After difficult years, the EU-Russia relations have deteriorated even further after the poisoning, arrest, and sentencing of Alexei Navalny. We will have to draw the consequences and decide on what kind of relations we want/can have with Russia. We should combine pushing back when it infringes international law, contain its pressures and engage on the issues that are on our interest. For that we should be able to act with unity and determination. Equally, we will have to overcome tensions with Turkey and in the Eastern Neighborhood and to rebalance our relations with China.

When it comes to our closest partners, we have the great opportunity to relaunch the transatlantic relationship, while developing a partnership with our ‘new neighbour’ the United Kingdom. ‘Making multilateralism great again’ will be central in all our efforts, especially regarding the climate crisis with the prospect of the COP 26 in Glasgow in November 2021.

All these actions should ensure one thing: that EU citizen continue to benefit from the peace, stability and prosperity that the EU has brought them for more than six decades. This is why we intend to develop our strategic autonomy and make sure that the EU becomes one of the major global players in the post-COVID-19 era. It is necessary to ensure that we can further defend our values and interests in a changing world.

ANNEX

GLOBAL EVENTS AND KEY ACTIVITIES DURING FIRST YEAR OF MANDATE

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.

DECEMBER 2019

RUSSIA – OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava. First meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

AFRICA – Ceremony in honour of the 13 French soldiers who died in Mali; President von der Leyen's first official visit to Ethiopia; agreement on the first meeting of African Union Commission and the European Commission; €170 million announced in new EU funding to support Ethiopia.

IRAN – Joint Commission of the JCPOA; violent crackdown on protests in Iran.

CHINA – Early reporting on a 'pneumonic plague' in Wuhan (Hubei).

ASIA – meeting in Madrid with foreign ministers and senior representatives of 51 European and Asian countries, alongside the EU and ASEAN, under the theme 'Asia and Europe: Together for Effective Multilateralism'.

HUMAN RIGHTS – Foreign affairs ministers agree to develop a new EU global human rights sanctions regime.

CLIMATE – COP25 climate summit in Madrid.

JANUARY 2020

LIBYA – Turkey authorises deployment of military units in Libya; meeting on Libya with French, German, Italian and UK foreign ministers; meetings with Prime Minister al-Serraj and Foreign Minister Siala in Brussels; extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council, in the presence of UN Special Representative Salamé; mandate from EU foreign ministers to engage with all actors to

move towards a political solution in the framework of the Berlin process and UN-led mediated efforts; Berlin Conference on Libya.

WESTERN BALKANS – Visit to Serbia and Kosovo; relaunch of Belgrade–Pristina dialogue.

AFRICA – Meeting of the G5 Sahel in Pau (France).

IRAN – Killing of General Soleimani in Iraq; meeting in Paris with Foreign Minister Le Drian to discuss the JCPOA.

UNITED STATES – President Trump and Chinese Vice-Premier Liu He sign the US–China ‘phase one’ trade deal; impeachment trial of President Trump begins in the Senate.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – Declaration in support of the Venezuelan National Assembly; speech at European Parliament plenary on the political situation in Venezuela, in support of Juan Guaido as legitimate President of the National Assembly.

CHINA – UN says there is an emergency in China, but it is not yet ‘global’; EU Civil Protection Mechanism activated to assist with repatriation of EU citizens from China.

ASIA – Raisina Dialogue, India’s flagship conference on geopolitics hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation; meeting on Green Central Asia initiative.

FEBRUARY 2020

TURKEY – New detention order against Osman Kavala; Council designates two persons under framework for restrictive measures in response to Turkey’s unauthorised drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean; Turkey opens borders and actively encourages migrants and refugees to take the land route to Europe through Greece.

LIBYA – Exchange with Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu; meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov; International Follow-up Committee of the Berlin Conference on Libya in Munich; EU Member States reach political agreement on new operation, IRINI, in the Mediterranean to support and implement the UN arms embargo; escalation of violence in Tripoli.

AFRICA – 10th African Union(AU)-EU Commission-to-Commission meeting; first official visit to the AU, Ethiopia and Sudan; announcement of €100 million to support Sudan’s democratic transition process and €30 million in humanitarian assistance.

IRAN – Visit to Iran.

UNITED STATES – US Senate acquits President Trump in his impeachment trial; the United States and the Afghan Taliban sign a conditional peace agreement in Doha; visit to United States and meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

CHINA – EU facilitates and finances delivery of personal protective equipment to China; EU statement on the sentencing to 10 years' imprisonment of Swedish citizen Gui Minhai.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – Munich security conference; College readout on coherence among EU defence initiatives.

MARCH 2020

TURKEY – European Commission President von der Leyen, Commission Vice-President Schinas, EP President Sassoli and President of the European Council Michel travel to Greece and praise this country as a 'shield', after Turkey opens the border; mission to Turkey with Commissioner Lenarčič to discuss the situation in north-west Syria and refugee flows to and from Turkey; extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on crisis in Idlib and situation at the EU's external borders with Turkey; Commission and Council presidents meet with President Erdogan in Brussels; EU–Turkey 2016 statement remains valid, and both sides agree to review all elements of the agreement.

LIBYA – Further increase in violence and fighting; EUNAVFOR MED Sophia comes to an end, and EUNAVFOR MED IRINI begins its mandate to help enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya.

RUSSIA – EU condemns Russian decision to put the European Endowment for Democracy on their list of 'undesirable organisations'.

AFRICA – Joint communication towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa.

UNITED STATES – United States begins a conditional troop withdrawal from Afghanistan (12 000 troops, of which 8 600 are withdrawn within 135 days).

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – EU mobilises international donors to pledge over €2.4 billion to support migrants and refugees from Venezuela in the region.

CHINA – I use the expression 'battle of narratives', in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and its global consequences, for the first time.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – European Council mandates EEAS Task Force to coordinate repatriation of EU citizens stranded abroad because of the pandemic.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EUNAVFOR MED Sophia comes to an end, and EUNAVFOR MED IRINI begins its mandate in the Mediterranean.

HUMAN rights – European Commission adopts the EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2020–2024.

DISINFORMATION – Increasing numbers of coordinated disinformation narratives; EEAS starts to issue regular special reports about coronavirus-related disinformation.

APRIL 2020

TURKEY – Exchange with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu on EU–Turkey statement and COVID-19 response.

LIBYA – Exchange with Foreign Minister Sialla; EU support given to Libya for COVID-19 response; EU call for truce on the eve of Ramadan; joint statement with French, German and Italian foreign ministers.

WESTERN BALKANS – Opening of the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia.

AFRICA – Joint declaration of the European Council and the G5 Sahel to reaffirm their commitment to the security, stability and development of the region; high-level meeting on Somalia.

IRAN – EU provides humanitarian COVID-19-related help to Iran.

UNITED STATES – President Trump announces that the United States will suspend funding to the World Health Organization pending an investigation of its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and its relationship with China.

CHINA – Exchange with Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the need for global cooperation and international solidarity; I am asked to brief the European Parliament on its most recent disinformation report that was allegedly altered to allay Chinese concerns.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – EU launches ‘Team Europe’ to support partner countries in need.

DISINFORMATION – Disinformation on Foreign Affairs Council agenda; agreement on the need to intensify joint efforts between EU institutions and Member States.

MAY 2020

TURKEY – Statement of the EU foreign ministers on the situation in the eastern Mediterranean and solidarity with Greece and Cyprus, condemning Turkey's unilateral actions.

LIBYA – Attacks in Tripoli; declaration on behalf of the EU reiterating the EU's call for a truce; exchange with Prime Minister al-Serraj.

AFRICA – EU statement on Sudan's decision to ban female genital mutilation; EU provides support in Horn of Africa region to humanitarian projects in Djibouti (€500 000), Ethiopia (€42 million), Kenya (€15 million) and Somalia (€48 million).

IRAN – Supreme Leader Khamenei makes threatening remarks questioning Israel's legitimacy; the United States ends three waivers covering key JCPOA nuclear projects, including the Arak Modernisation Project.

UNITED STATES – George Floyd is killed by Minneapolis police, sparking mass protests across the United States; for the first time, Twitter labels a tweet by President Trump 'misleading'; together with Commission President von der Leyen, I urge the United States to reconsider its decision to break ties with the World Health Organization.

CHINA – Chinese officials say the latest outbreak of the virus in Beijing is a European strain and suspend salmon imports from the EU; at the EU–China summit, leaders underline need for global cooperation, including on vaccine development; China approves new Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL); the EU stresses attachment to the 'one country, two systems' principle and Hong Kong's autonomy, urges respect for rights and freedoms, and expresses grave concern, underlining that the decision calls into question China's will to uphold international commitments; Foreign Affairs Council discusses situation in Hong Kong as part of wider discussions on EU–China relations.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – EU has brought almost 600 000 EU citizens back home; Franco-German proposal to establish a recovery fund, building on which the European Commission proposes the Next Generation EU initiative with a €750 billion recovery fund.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – Reaction to US withdrawal from Open Skies Treaty.

MULTILATERALISM – EU-led resolution adopted by the World Health Organisation Assembly; Commission President and I react to US announcement on WHO withdrawal.

HUMAN RIGHTS – Declaration on behalf of the EU on human rights in the times of the coronavirus pandemic.

JUNE 2020

TURKEY – EU adopts additional €485 million to continue two flagship humanitarian programmes supporting refugees in Turkey; tensions continue to rise in the eastern Mediterranean; mission to Greece and Cyprus.

LIBYA – Joint statement with the French, German and Italian foreign ministers on commitments to halt fighting, resume dialogue and reach a ceasefire within the framework of the 5 + 5 joint military committee.

SYRIA – EU and UN co-chair the fourth Brussels Conference on ‘Supporting the future of Syria and the region’, which mobilises aid to Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring countries through pledges totalling €4.9 billion for 2020, and multi-year pledges of close to €2 billion for 2021 and beyond.

RUSSIA – Constitutional referendum allowing President Putin to run again for two more terms and placing the Russian Constitution above international law.

AFRICA – Council adopts conclusions on Africa ‘On the path to a deeper and stronger partnership, living up to the European and African aspirations’; Sudan Partnership Conference co-hosted by Sudan, the EU, the UN and Germany; meeting with G5 Sahel foreign ministers and European ministers of defence.

UNITED STATES – In response to the authorisation of sanctions and additional visa restrictions against the International Criminal Court by the US administration, I express concern and reconfirm the EU’s unwavering support for the court; the New York Times reports that President Trump did not authorise any response to Russia’s offer of financial incentives to the Taliban for killing US soldiers in Afghanistan.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – EU declaration calling on the Venezuelan government and opposition to engage in inclusive negotiations towards the constitution of the Electoral Nominations Committee and the lifting of bans on opposition parties; 11 Venezuelan officials added to the EU’s sanctions list; EU declaration on the latest developments in Venezuela defending the EU ambassador.

CHINA – EU–China Strategic Dialogue; I demand that China take the necessary steps to de-escalate the situation in Hong Kong and respect its international commitments and Hong Kong’s Basic Law; G7 foreign ministers issue statement regretting the National Security Law and urging China to reconsider; EU leaders raise Hong Kong at the EU–China Summit and stress that the EU defends its interests and values, including human rights and trade principles, in its relationship with China; leaders agree to progress on

Investment Agreement talks; China's National People's Congress adopts the National Security Law; I encourage India and China to show restraint and to take steps to de-escalate after deadly clashes along the Line of Actual Control.

ASIA – Meeting with five Central Asian foreign ministers.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – European Commission pledges €300 million to Gavi to support the COVAX initiative, which aims to make COVID-19 vaccines available to all countries; World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus participates in an EU development ministers' meeting.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – Council conclusions adopted on defence; Member States task me with developing a Strategic Compass.

DISINFORMATION – Joint communication (the Commission and me) on tackling coronavirus disinformation, outlining lessons learned and steps to be taken.

JULY 2020

TURKEY – Four human rights defenders convicted in so-called Büyükada case; mission to Turkey; court ruling paves way for Istanbul's Hagia Sophia to revert to mosque; Council adopts conclusions on Turkey's drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean; exchange with Turkey's Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu on need to de-escalate tensions.

ISRAEL – The Israeli government suspends its annexation project in occupied territory, a project heavily criticised by the EU.

WESTERN BALKANS – Pristina–Belgrade dialogue in Brussels.

RUSSIA – First listings of four individuals and one entity (the Russian intelligence agency GRU) under the cyber sanctions regime as a result of their involvement in several cyber-attacks.

BELARUS – I condemn the non-registration of two presidential candidates and urge Belarus to invite the OSCE to observe the election process.

AFRICA – South Africa jumpstarts negotiations over the GERD dam project between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, a step welcomed by the EU; EU launches the Central African Republic civilian advisory mission and extends the mandate of the military training mission; EU organises three humanitarian air bridge flights to Somalia with a total of 42 tonnes of humanitarian and medical supplies.

IRAN – Iran triggers JCPOA Dispute Resolution Mechanism; fifth anniversary of the JCPOA.

UNITED STATES – EU urges the US administration to reverse its decision to resume the federal death penalty after a 17-year hiatus (first federal execution since 2003).

CHINA – EU-27 declaration on the adoption of the new Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL), urging China not to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy; Council conclusions set out the coordinated package of measures in response to the NSL, covering EU and Member State actions; EU welcomes China's ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty; Jamestown Foundation publishes a report on mass sterilisation, forced implants and coercive birth control on Uighurs in Xinjiang; EU imposes sanctions against six individuals (two Chinese) and three entities (one Chinese) responsible for or involved in various cyber-attacks.

ASIA – EU-India Summit.

COVID 19 RESPONSE – European Council agrees on the Next Generation EU initiative and the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021–2027.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EU imposes first sanctions against cyber-attacks; new EU civilian advisory mission in the Central African Republic fully operational.

AUGUST 2020

TURKEY – I hold talks with Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu in Malta ahead of Berlin Gymnich informal meeting of EU foreign ministers; tensions continue to rise in the eastern Mediterranean with new naval mobilisations and renewed drilling activities by Turkey; death of Turkish lawyer Ebru Timtik after hunger strike.

LIBYA – Political announcements on a ceasefire by the Libyan Presidency Council and the Libyan House of Representatives.

LEBANON – Following a devastating explosion in Beirut, the EU expresses its full solidarity with the families of the victims, the Lebanese people and the Lebanese authorities.

RUSSIA – Poisoning of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny with Novichok.

BELARUS – Ahead of presidential elections, I call on the Belarusian authorities to guarantee the full political rights of all candidates; after the election, EU foreign ministers call for an end to violence and the release of detainees and agree to work on EU sanctions; largest rally in Belarus's modern history takes place; extraordinary European Council meeting stresses EU solidarity with the Belarusian people; I call Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov to stress that any negative external interference must be avoided; EU foreign ministers decide to go ahead with sanctions at their Gymnich informal meeting.

AFRICA – Putsch in Mali; EU organises humanitarian air bridge to Côte d'Ivoire carrying 7,5 tonnes of essential equipment.

IRAN – UN Security Council votes against US proposal to extend UN arms embargo on Iran after its expiration in August; US triggers the UN snapback mechanism.

CHINA – EU-27 declaration calling on Hong Kong authorities to reconsider the decision to postpone legislative elections; EU statement criticising the arrests of Jimmy Lai, members of his family and other individuals and the raid of the Apple Daily newspaper.

SEPTEMBER 2020

LIBYA – Visit to Libya, meeting Prime Minister al-Serraj in Tripoli and President of the House of Representatives Saleh in Al Qubah; renewal of UNSMIL mandate; new EU listings for human rights abuses and violating UN arms embargo.

EGYPT – First visit to Egypt, to discuss the EU–Egypt partnership, as well as exchange on Libya, the Middle East Peace Process, the situation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

WESTERN BALKANS – New round of Belgrade–Pristina dialogue.

BELARUS – Exchange with UN Secretary General Guterres; EU condemns the escalation of violence and intimidation against members of the opposition Coordination Council; EU leads the resolution at the UN Human Rights Council on the human rights situation; EU foreign ministers receive presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya at the Foreign Affairs Council; Lukashenko holds secret inauguration; EU refuses to recognise him as president.

UKRAINE – Visit to Kyiv to relaunch the reform programme of the Ukrainian government.

AFRICA – Fifth Angola–EU ministerial meeting.

IRAN – Joint Commission of JCPOA; execution of wrestler Navid Afkari; United States reinstates unilaterally UN sanctions.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH – Clashes erupt along the Line of Contact; I call for cessation of hostilities, de-escalation and observance of the ceasefire, as well as a return to negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – Ministerial-level meeting of the International Contact Group on Venezuela; EU elections experts mission to Bolivia to

support the electoral process; EU officials mission to Caracas to support dialogue and consensus ahead of the elections in Venezuela.

CHINA – EU–China leaders’ videoconference; EU underlines the shared responsibility for deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine and to participate in the independent review of the pandemic outbreak; EU links the conclusion of the Strategic Agenda for Cooperation 2025 to significant progress on the negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment; EU and China sign a bilateral agreement to protect 200 (100:100) geographical indications; Hong Kong police arrest pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong following other arrests; EU calls for scrutiny by independent judiciary and respect for fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong; at the UN General Assembly, Xi Jinping commits to peaking carbon emissions by 2030 and to achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, an important move welcomed by the EU.

ASIA – EU–ASEAN foreign ministers’ videoconference.

EUROPEAN Union – First State of the Union address by Commission President von der Leyen.

MULTILATERALISM – participation in 75th UN General Assembly.

MIGRATION – Commission adopts new Migration and Asylum Pact.

OCTOBER 2020

TURKEY – European Council conclusions on the eastern Mediterranean: positive political agenda provides constructive efforts to stop illegal activities versus all instruments and options at disposal in case of renewed unilateral actions or provocations; I am tasked with preparing a multilateral conference on the Mediterranean; declaration on behalf of the EU on developments around Varosha; Tatar becomes new Turkish Cypriot leader; France recalls ambassador to Turkey after President Erdoğan questions Macron’s mental state; President Erdogan calls for a boycott of French products amid growing tensions between the two countries.

LIBYA – Delisting of Agila Saleh and Nuri Abu Sahmain from EU sanctions list; Berlin ministerial meeting co-organised by UN and Germany; resumption of 5 + 5 Joint Military Committee in Geneva under UN auspices; declaration on behalf of the EU on the announcement of a ceasefire agreement.

MEDITERRANEAN – 5 + 5 ministerial meeting in Tunisia.

RUSSIA – Foreign Affairs Council reaffirms five guiding principles for EU–Russia relations – key is implementation of Minsk agreements; exchange

with Foreign Minister Lavrov on Nagorno-Karabakh and sanctions for poisoning Navalny; European Council imposes sanctions against six persons and one entity for involvement in Navalny poisoning.

BELARUS – EU adopts first set of restrictive measures, against 40 individuals responsible for repression and intimidation against peaceful demonstrators, opposition members and journalists; I oppose the demand by Belarus that Poland and Lithuania withdraw their ambassadors in Minsk; Foreign Affairs Council decides to scale down bilateral cooperation, recalibrate financial assistance, continue engagement with Belarusian society, maintain cooperation in the Eastern Partnership at non-political level; it also gives the political green light to prepare a next set of sanctions, including on Lukashenko; exchange with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov; I brief EP plenary on EU–Belarus relations; democratic opposition in Belarus awarded 2020 European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought.

UKRAINE – EU–Ukraine summit.

AFRICA – Visit with Commissioner Lenarčič to Ethiopia and the African Union to deliver 7.5 tonnes of coronavirus testing kits; progress on GERD between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt; signing of the peace agreement between the civilian-led transitional government and the Sudan revolutionary movements; Israel and Sudan announce normalisation of relations; African Union Peace and Security Council and EU Political and Security Committee hold 12th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting; EU allocates €11.8 million for COVID-19 response to Lesotho and €25 million to fight the coronavirus crisis in The Gambia.

IRAN – Commission launches two online platforms to support small and medium-sized enterprises interested in doing legitimate trade with Iran; Commission expands guidance on provision of COVID-19-related humanitarian aid to Iran despite sanctions.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH – European Council discusses the situation; European Commission provides €500 000 in initial emergency aid to help civilians affected by the conflict; I address the European Parliament plenary on the situation; EU foreign ministers discuss the situation following a brief from French Foreign Minister Le Drian; I speak to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, expressing the EU's full support for the ceasefire agreement and for the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs; I speak to both Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers, welcoming the joint announcement of a humanitarian ceasefire but deploring that violations continue, leading to more civilian suffering; I receive Armenian President Armen Sarkissian in Brussels, calling

again for a ceasefire, as the previous agreements have not been respected, and for a return to negotiations under the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs; I discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh situation with US Secretary of State Pompeo; European Commission allocates an additional €400 000 in humanitarian aid to assist conflict-affected civilians.

UNITED STATES – Exchange with Secretary of State Pompeo on launch of EU–US dialogue on China; the US becomes the first country in the world to record 100 000 daily cases of coronavirus, passing 9 million in total.

CHINA – European Council formally endorses for the first time the March 2019 Strategic Outlook on China joint communication, calling for the Commission and I to present a progress report by March 2021.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – EU imposes cyber sanctions over 2015 Bundestag hack.

MULTILATERALISM – 75th anniversary of the UN.

NOVEMBER 2020

TURKEY – Council extends sanctions regime against illegal drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean; at Foreign Affairs Council I underline that ‘Turkey’s behaviour is widening its separation from the European Union’.

LIBYA – Libyan Political Dialogue Forum finds agreement on holding of elections.

MEDITERRANEAN – Fifth Union for the Mediterranean Regional Forum.

WESTERN BALKANS – Visit Bosnia and Herzegovina for the 25th anniversary of the Dayton agreement.

BELARUS – EU adopts second set of sanctions, including on Lukashenko and 15 other officials over ongoing repression; Raman Bandarenka dies after police violence; EU foreign ministers discuss the situation at the Foreign Affairs Council and agree to proceed with a third sanctions package; I present the review of EU–Belarus relations, downgrading all contacts and cooperation but maintaining cooperation where it is beneficial for the EU or for the Belarusian people.

AFRICA – EU supports the fight against COVID-19 in the Sahel region with €92 million (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger).

ETHIOPIA – State of emergency declared and military operations launched in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia; exchanges with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed; statement by the Co-Presidents of the African,

Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP)–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly; discussion at the Foreign Affairs Ministers Council; meeting with Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Demeke Mekonnen; first meeting between Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy and the African Union high-level envoys; Ethiopian government states end of military operation in Tigray after having taken control of Tigray capital Mekelle;

IRAN – Ongoing efforts to prevent execution of the Swedish-Iranian dual national Djalali; killing of the nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH – Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement enters into force on 10 November; I speak to the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, stressing the need for continued respect for the ceasefire, for negotiations moving forwards, and for respect for international humanitarian law and protecting cultural heritage; European Commission allocates additional €3 million in humanitarian assistance to the conflict-affected populations.

UNITED STATES – US presidential election and victory of Democrat candidate Joe Biden; United States formally exits the Paris Climate Agreement; EU foreign affairs ministers have an initial discussion on the future of EU–US relations; EU condemns the first ever federal death row executions during a presidential transition and calls on the US administration to halt all federal executions.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – EU extends sanctions regime against Venezuela owing to human rights concerns ahead of legislative elections.

CHINA – Exchange with Foreign Minister Wang Yi to take stock of implementation of commitments reached at the June Summit and September leaders' videoconference, particularly stressing the importance of progress on the Investment Agreement; we also discuss Hong Kong, and I inform my counterpart of the dialogue with the US on China.

ASIA – The ten countries of ASEAN and five Asia-Pacific countries (Australia, China, Japan, Korea and New Zealand) agree a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a major trade deal that covers 30% of the world's population and GDP; fifth EU–Pakistan strategic meeting.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – Council agrees on general conditions for third state participation in PESCO defence projects; first ever EU Threat Analysis, PESCO Strategic Review and first Comprehensive Annual Review on Defence.

HUMAN RIGHTS – Council adopts EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2020–2024; European Commission adopts EU gender action plan III.

DECEMBER 2020

EEAS AT 10 – Launch of the 10th anniversary of the EEAS with a discussion with my predecessors Javier Solana and Federica Mogherini.

UNITED KINGDOM – EU and United Kingdom reach a trade agreement on their post-Brexit relations; this agreement has to be approved by the European Parliament, and negotiations on various matters are still due to take place.

TURKEY – European Council conclusions reaffirm positive agenda and options for extension of sanctions regime, and invite me and the European Commission to submit a report assessing the state of play of EU–Turkey relations by March 2021.

WESTERN BALKANS – EU–Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council.

BELARUS – EU foreign ministers confirm intention to adopt third sanctions package as soon as possible; European Commission adopts a €24 million support package to directly benefit the Belarusian people; meeting with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who receives the 2020 European Parliament Sakharov Prize on behalf of the democratic opposition in Belarus.

AFRICA – Sudan delisted from US terrorist list; negotiators reach a political deal on a new EU/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific partnership agreement.

ETHIOPIA – Meeting with Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister Demeke Mekonne; statement on the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Tigray; discussion in the Foreign Affairs Council on concern over ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia, high refugee toll in Sudan, need to support UN efforts; decision to postpone disbursement of future budget support; call with Commissioner Lenarčič of the UNHCR to ensure the safety and well-being of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia

IRAN – Fifth EU–Iran High-level Dialogue; execution of opposition journalist Ruhollah Zam; postponement of the EU–Iran Business forum; Joint Commission of the JCPOA and ministerial meeting of JCPOA participants.

NAGORNO-KARABAKH – First reported ceasefire violations between Azerbaijan's and Armenia's forces.

UNITED STATES – Adoption of joint communication on a new EU–US agenda focusing on areas where the EU and United States can show global leadership and take swift steps to address outstanding issues; EU foreign ministers adopt Council conclusions mirroring the joint communication; European Council discusses and adopts conclusions on future EU–US relations.

LATIN AMERICA/CARIBBEAN – EU rejects Venezuelan elections to the National Assembly as neither free nor fair; EU–Latin America and Caribbean Informal Ministerial Meeting in Berlin; EU delivers emergency aid to Central America following devastating hurricanes.

CHINA – Pro-democracy figures Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow and Ivan Lam are sentenced; pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai and Bloomberg journalist Fan Haze are detained; for the second year, Chinese authorities prevent several human rights activists from attending a Human Rights Day event at the EU delegation, prompting an official complaint from the EU; BBC reports that China is deploying forced labour of Uighurs in the Xinjiang cotton fields, which account for 20% of the world's cotton supply; EU and China conclude in principle negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment; China commits to a greater level of market access for EU investors and makes commitments to ensure fair treatment for EU companies in China, including in terms of transparency of subsidies for state-owned enterprises and rules against the forced transfer of technologies; China also agrees to provisions on sustainable development, including commitments on forced labour and the ratification of the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions.

ASIA – EU and ASEAN establish strategic partnership; I attend ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting.

COVID-19 RESPONSE – European Council agrees on unlocking the Next Generation EU initiative and the MFF 2021–2027 after the vetoes of Poland and Hungary on the rule of law provisions.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – European Commission adopts new EU cybersecurity strategy; agreement on European Peace Facility, a new global off-budget instrument.

HUMAN RIGHTS – Council adopts EU global human rights sanctions regime.

ABBREVIATIONS

AntAC	Anticorruption Action Centre	JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina	LIDC	low-income developing country
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence	MEP	Member of the European Parliament
COVAX	COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility	MoU	memorandum of understanding
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019	MP	Member of Parliament
DSSI	Debt Service Suspension Initiative	NGO	non-governmental organisation
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
EEAS	the European External Action Service	QMV	qualified majority voting
EIB	European Investment Bank	RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre	UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
FTA	free trade agreement	UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
GDP	gross domestic product	Unicef	United Nations Children's Fund
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam	UNSC	United Nations Security Council
HR/VP	High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission	VTC	video teleconference
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency	WFP	World Food Programme
IDP	internally displaced person	WHO	World Health Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund	WTO	World Trade Organization

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Josep Borrell Fontelles is EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission.



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