

EUISS

# YEARBOOK OF EUROPEAN SECURITY

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2021

by  
Daniel Fiott

with  
Marco Zeiss

# European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

100, avenue de Suffren  
75015 Paris

<http://www.iss.europa.eu>  
Director: Gustav Lindstrom

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print	ISBN 978-92-9462-042-2	online	ISBN 978-92-9462-040-8
	CATALOGUE NUMBER QN-AJ-21-		CATALOGUE NUMBER QN-AJ-21-
	001-EN-C		001-EN-N
	DOI 10.2815/422402		DOI 10.2815/307756

Published by the EU Institute for Security Studies and printed in Belgium by Bietlot.  
Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021.

Cover image credit: Julius Drost/Unsplash

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# Abbreviations

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**ACDC**

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

**ACLED**

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

**AfCFTA**

African Continental Free Trade Area

**APF**

African Peace Facility

**API**

Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient

**ARC**

Annual Review Conference

**ASEAN**

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

**AU PSC**

Political and Security Committee of the AU

**AU**

African Union

**BRI**

Belt and Road Initiative

**CAI**

EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment

**CAR**

Central African Republic

**CARD**

Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

**CBMP**

Cross Border Movement Permission

**CDP**

Capability Development Plan

**CEF**

Connecting Europe Facility

**CETA**

Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement

**CFSP**

Common Foreign and Security Policy

**COE**

Centre of Excellence

**COVAX**

Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access

**CPCC**

Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability

**CSDP**

Common Security and Defence Policy

**CSTO**

Collective Security Treaty Organisation

**DoD**

Department of Defense

**DPRK**

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

**DRC**

Democratic Republic of Congo

**DSSI**

Debt Service Suspension Initiative

**EAEU**

Eurasian Economic Union

**EaP**

Eastern Partnership

**EASA**

European Aviation Safety Agency

**EAW**

European Arrest Warrant

**EBRD**

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

**ECDC**

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

**ECOWAS**

Economic Community of West African States

**EDA**

European Defence Agency

**EDF**

European Defence Fund

**EDIDP**

European Defence Industrial Development Programme

**EDT**

Emerging Disruptive Technologies

**EEAS**

European External Action Service

**EED**

European Endowment for Democracy

**EEZ**

Exclusive Economic Zone

**EIB**

European Investment Bank

**EMA**

European Medicines Agency

**ENISA**

European Union Agency for Cybersecurity

**EOM**

Election Observation Mission

**EPF**

European Peace Facility

**EU**

European Union

**EUAM**

European Union Advisory Mission

**EUBAM**

European Union Border Assistance Mission

**EUGS**

European Union Global Strategy

**EUISS**

European Union Institute for Security Studies

**EUMM**

European Union Monitoring Mission

**EUMS**

European Union Military Staff

**EUNAVFOR**

European Union Naval Force

**EUPOL**

European Union Police Mission

**Europol**

European Union Law Enforcement Agency

**EUSR**

European Union Special Representative

**EUTM**

European Union Training Mission

**EUTMCC**

EU Training Mission Competence Centre

**FAC**

Foreign Affairs Council

**G7**

Group of 7

**G20**

Group of 20

**GCC**

Gulf Cooperation Council

**GERD**

Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

**GNI**

Gross National Income

**HASC**

House Armed Services Committee

**HR/VP**

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

**ICC**

International Criminal Court

**ICT**

Information Communication Technologies

**IDP**

Internally Displaced People

**IGAD**

Intergovernmental Authority on Development

**IGRC**

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

**IISS**

International Institute for  
Strategic Studies

**ILO**

International Labour Organization

**IMF**

International Monetary Fund

**INTCEN**

EU Intelligence and  
Situation Centre

**IPCR**

Integrated Political  
Crisis Response

**JCC**

Joint Cooperation Committee

**JCPoA**

Joint Comprehensive  
Plan of Action

**MFF**

Multinational Financial Framework

**MoCA**

Ministerial on Climate Action

**MMF**

Multinational Multirole Tanker and  
Transport Fleet

**MPAC**

Master Plan on ASEAN  
Connectivity

**MPCC**

Military Planning and Conduct  
Capability

**MRTT**

Multirole Tanker Transport

**NATO**

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**NGO**

Non-Governmental Organisation

**NIP**

National Implementation Plan

**NIS**

Network and Information Systems

**OACPS**

Organisation of African, Caribbean  
and Pacific States

**OPCW**

Organisation for the Prohibition of  
Chemical Weapons

**OSCE**

Organisation for Security and  
Cooperation in Europe

**PADR**

Preparatory Action on  
Defence Research

**PESCO**

Permanent Structured Cooperation

**PNR**

Passenger Name Record

**PPE**

Personal Protection Equipment

**PRC**

People's Republic of China

**PSC**

EU Political and  
Security Committee

**PSR**

PESCO Strategic Review

**R&T**

Research & Technology

**RAS**

Rapid Alert System

**RCEP**

Regional Comprehensive Economic  
Partnership

**ROK**

Republic of Korea

**RPAS**

Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems

**R-TGoNU**

Revitalised Transitional  
Government of National Unity

**SDGs**

Sustainable Development Goals

**SIAC**

Single Intelligence  
Analysis Capacity

**SIS**

Schengen Information System

**SMM**

Special Monitoring Mission

**SPA**

Strategic Partnership Agreement

**TE-SAT**

European Union Terrorism  
Situation and Trend Report

**TFEU**

Treaty on the Functioning of the  
European Union

**UAE**

United Arab Emirates

**UCPM**

EU Civil Protection Mechanism

**UN**

United Nations

**UNCLOS**

UN Convention on the Law  
of the Sea

**UNESCO**

United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural  
Organisation

**UNHCR**

UN High Commissioner  
for Refugees

**UNSC**

United Nations Security Council

**UNSCR**

United Nations Security Council  
Resolution

**WEF**

World Economic Forum

**WHO**

World Health Organisation

**WMD**

Weapons of Mass Destruction

**WTO**

World Trade Organisation

# Country codes

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**AT**

Austria

**BE**

Belgium

**BG**

Bulgaria

**CY**

Cyprus

**CZ**

Czechia

**DK**

Denmark

**DE**

Germany

**EE**

Estonia

**EL**

Greece

**ES**

Spain

**FI**

Finland

**FR**

France

**HR**

Croatia

**HU**

Hungary

**IE**

Ireland

**IT**

Italy

**LV**

Latvia

**LT**

Lithuania

**LU**

Luxembourg

**MT**

Malta

**NL**

Netherlands

**PL**

Poland

**PT**

Portugal

**RO**

Romania

**SE**

Sweden

**SL**

Slovenia

**SK**

Slovakia



# Preface

---

**BY JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES**

High Representative for the Union's Foreign and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

**T**he year 2020 has been the year of the Covid-19 pandemic. When the crisis came, it took us by surprise. What initially started as a health crisis, soon triggered an unprecedented economic and social crisis as well, with major geopolitical ramifications. It is no exaggeration to say that the pandemic has been a global crisis: affecting the whole world and in many domains.

Naturally, the pandemic dominated our work in 2020. First, we had to undertake emergency action to repatriate 600 000 EU citizens stranded around the world. We also had to set up a large-scale humanitarian and assistance operation to help our partners around the world. 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 forged close cooperation between Member States and European institutions: an approach we have called 'Team Europe'. We were able to demonstrate just how powerful such synergies are. Going forward, we must generalise this approach beyond the emergency situation and make it the normal way the EU operates around the world.

It is important to constantly remind ourselves that helping emerging and developing countries deal with the crisis is not only a question of solidarity but also in our own interest. Despite our

internal needs, the way we deal with the pandemic globally will have a decisive influence on Europe's place in the world after the crisis.

The pandemic gave rise to a major 'battle of narratives' — notably with 'mask diplomacy' and 'vaccine diplomacy' — and disinformation operations. When a simple 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.

The European reaction to the pandemic demonstrated our commitment to strengthening our internal cohesion, with the adoption of Next Generation EU in July 2020. This initiative broke two important taboos. First, it enabled the Union to issue debt securities on a large scale which will help us prepare our future by accelerating the environmental and digital transition. Second, it foresees 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 crisis there is a risk of turning inward, of stopping to care for or worry about the outside world. It was a key challenge for EU foreign policy to avoid falling into this trap. But we did achieve this in 2020, and we will continue to try and avoid it in the coming years.

**E**uropeans have to deal with the world as it is, not as they want it to be.

All this reminds us that Europeans have to deal with the world as it is, not as they want it to be. The pandemic has made our security environment more challenging. In an uncertain and often hostile world, we need a strong EU that is 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 the extraordinary year 2020 shows us that we are making progress.

In 2020, we launched Operation IRINI to help enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya, we created a new European Defence Fund (EDF) and we adopted the first-ever cyber sanctions to counter the actors who threaten us in cyberspace. These are just some examples to show that we are a Union that acts and protects. We are becoming less naïve and we think and act more in geopolitical terms. Through small steps, but with greater strategic awareness and determination.

The Yearbook analyses the dramatic events of 2020 and how EU foreign policy responded. 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. My choice in this regard is clear.

Looking ahead, we must prepare to shape the post-pandemic world. It is hard to summarise the outlook for our post-pandemic world but five trends are clear: none are fully new, but all have been accelerated by the crisis.

The first is unprecedented competition between states, shaping a world of competitive nationalism, power politics and zero-sum games. Secondly, our world is becoming more multipolar than multilateral, with the strategic competition between the United States and China often paralysing the United Nations Security Council, World Trade Organisation and World Health Organisation. Thirdly, although we have stopped travelling as individuals, globalisation continues. Interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft-power is weaponised: vaccines, data and technology standards are all instruments of political competition. Fourthly, we see that some countries follow ‘a logic of empires’, arguing in terms of historical rights and zones of influence, rather than adhering to agreed rules and local consent. Finally, the world is becoming less free and democracy is under attack — both at home and abroad. We face a real battle of narratives.

Saying we have to treat the world as it is does not mean we should accept it, but rather base our policy choices on a realistic assessment. These five trends should be viewed as a call to action. Going forward, three mega challenges will determine the EU’s future role in this post-pandemic world:

- > How do we deal with a more ‘crowded’ neighbourhood?
- > What is the EU’s position in the strategic triangle with the US and China?
- > How do we ensure effective action on global challenges, especially the climate crisis and the regulation of technology?



The EU's neighbourhood has become 'crowded' and competitive with various actors employing hybrid tactics. At the same time, we know that the people in the neighbourhood want more from Europe, delivered faster and better. The European model of democracy, solidarity, freedoms and fundamental rights remains extremely powerful and attractive. We must continue to work with anyone that shares our vision.

That means maintaining our commitments with the Western Balkans and keeping the whole region on a European path, which includes reviving the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue. That means supporting Ukraine when it faces Russian aggression and as its reform agenda brings the country closer to the EU. That means continuing to put pressure on the regime in Belarus for the oppression of citizens. That means supporting Libya and its new national unity government. And that means doing all we can to prevent a catastrophe in Lebanon due to the political stalemate. Further afield, we have to build stability in the Sahel and deal with the new situation in Afghanistan. The list goes on. The agenda is vast, but the EU needs to step up when it comes to its neighbourhood, both by demanding and by offering more.

The second mega challenge is how to steer the EU's course in the US-China-EU strategic triangle — and how to mix elements of cooperation and competition into a coherent strategy. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party — a chance to underline its historic achievements but also send a defiant message. President Xi Jinping has warned that foreign powers will 'get their heads bashed' if they attempt to 'bully or influence' the country.

Growing Chinese influence, built on centralisation at home and assertiveness abroad, is recognisable everywhere, and cooperation with China is getting more difficult. This is in part due to the EU's linkage between market access and human rights. However, with 25 % of all global growth in 2021 expected to come from China, economic cooperation remains essential.

Meanwhile in the US, the talk is about seeing China as a partner, competitor and rival, as the EU does, but there is a bipartisan consensus that strategic competition will dominate the relationship. Indeed, US-China strategic competition will shape the world for decades to come, and the EU needs to steer a clear course. The Biden

team has welcomed the relaunch of an EU-US dialogue on China. It is crucial to keep in mind that the EU and US have a shared history and our political systems are the product of the Enlightenment, even if our interests are not always identical.

A lot of EU-China work is about doing our homework regarding investment screening, foreign subsidies, 5G, procurement, anti-coercion instruments and developing an Indo-Pacific strategy.

Finally, we face a crisis of multilateralism. Even after the 'return' of the US under Biden, the supply of multilateral action is still less than the demand. The revival of multilateralism is critical if we are to deliver on the big issues. Climate change and technology are two exemplary tests for the multilateral system. So is ensuring that the entire world has access to vaccines and framing balanced approaches to the challenge of migration.

On climate change we see that freak weather events such as floods and heat waves are not a thing of the future. They are already happening today. Global warming is happening twice as fast in the Arctic. We are moving past all sorts of 'tipping points'. A world of 3°C warming by 2100 — which is the current trajectory

— is radically different from 1°C or 2°C warming. COP26 in Glasgow is probably the last moment to still halt runaway climate change, but this will require a radical acceleration of global efforts. Climate change is also a geopolitical issue. It will create new security threats and shifts in global power.

Multilateralism also needs to deliver on the technology front, specifically by agreeing standards for Artificial Intelligence, data (the oil of the 21<sup>st</sup> century), autonomous weapons, cloud services and surveillance. Who will set the rules? On what basis and values? Throughout history, control over technology has determined who runs the world. Can we continue to rely on the 'Brussels effect' if none of the Big Tech companies are European? It is clear that Europeans need to work hard to help set the rules for the future.

The final global challenge is to ensure that all countries, including the poorest ones, have access to vaccines. The EU is the only region around the world to vaccinate our own population, export half of our production and be a leading donor to COVAX. But we need

**C**limate change is also a geopolitical issue. It will create new security threats and shifts in global power.

to do much more. Access to vaccines is the great fault line in the world today and vaccine inequality will drive an unequal recovery. That means a more unequal and hence unstable world. The EU is active on various fronts to avoid this and we continue to push the international community to help poor countries that are affected by the crisis, notably through a debt restructuring process for the most vulnerable ones.

In the field of EU foreign and security policymaking, we must do more to bring together the world of ideas and the world of policymakers. To make sense of the world and our place in it, we need to draw on deep thinking and sharp analyses, to clarify our policy options and choices. And to make a success of EU foreign policy we need a common strategic culture across the EU. For all these reasons, I am grateful for the crucial work of the EUISS.

# Introduction

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The year 2020 will be forever associated with the outbreak of and the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic. The global health crisis originated in China in December 2019, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the virus as a pandemic in mid-March 2020<sup>(1)</sup>. By mid-December 2020, there were reported infection cases of over 71.5 million people and approximately 1.6 million fatalities globally. In the European Union (EU) alone, over 13 million reportedly contracted the virus by the end of 2020 and there were over 300 000 fatalities<sup>(2)</sup>. Within the EU a number of countries were hit extremely hard by the virus, and the initial EU response to the crisis was perceived as being uncoordinated and slow. Keeping in mind that competences for health had not been transferred to the EU-level, individual Member States worked through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) to provide medical mobile units, medical staff, ventilators, medical protective gear and even to repatriate EU citizens from abroad — by December 2020 over 90 000 EU citizens were brought home. As from May 2020, the European Commission started to procure 10 million medical face masks to be delivered to medical workers in the EU<sup>(3)</sup>.

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(1) World Health Organisation, 'WHO announces COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic', 12 March 2020 (<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>).

(2) All figures taken from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 14 December 2020 (<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/download-todays-data-geographic-distribution-covid-19-cases-worldwide>).

(3) European Commission, 'European solidarity in protecting health workers and citizens' ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/coronavirus-european-solidarity-action\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/coronavirus-european-solidarity-action_en)).

Despite the tragic human costs of the pandemic, there were also major economic challenges throughout the year because of the first and second waves of the virus. As people were confined to their homes, it became apparent that industries such as aerospace, tourism and the arts would suffer because of a lack of mobility. Even though digital, chemical and medical industries fared better during the crisis, pressure on global supply chains emerged and there was an immediate economic hit to trade — even though, commerce recovered relatively quickly during the year<sup>(4)</sup>. In March 2020, EU transport ministers convened under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU agreed to establish ‘green transport corridors’ to enable freight transportation to continue unimpeded in the Single Market. On 21 July 2020, EU leaders also addressed the long-term economic effects of the pandemic by creating a €750 billion recovery fund designed to stimulate growth and reform. Alongside the EU’s multi-annual financial framework (MFF), a total of €1.8 trillion will be invested in green and digital sectors, among other priority areas<sup>(5)</sup>.

**One of the core security dimensions of the pandemic was the use of disinformation.**

Of course, there was also an important foreign policy and security dimension to the Covid-19 pandemic with two main schools of thought believing that the pandemic would either aggravate existing crises or create a profoundly new security environment<sup>(6)</sup>. One of the core security

dimensions of the pandemic was the use of disinformation to create and sustain myths about the origin of the virus. Furthermore, the EU was concerned that the virus would erode stability in many neighbouring countries. To this end, at the beginning of April 2020, the EU launched its ‘Team Europe’ initiative to provide financial assistance and support to vulnerable countries. A package of €20

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- (4) De Vet, J.-M. et al., ‘Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on EU Industries’, Study requested by the ITRE Committee, European Parliament, March 2021 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662903/IPOL\\_STU\(2021\)662903\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662903/IPOL_STU(2021)662903_EN.pdf)).
  - (5) European Commission, ‘Recovery plan for Europe’ ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en)).
  - (6) Gaub, F. and Boswinkel, L., ‘How COVID-19 changed the future: Geopolitical implications for Europe’, *Chaillot Paper* No 162, EUISS, December 2020 ([https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP\\_162\\_o.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_162_o.pdf)).

billion was established to deliver medical and humanitarian assistance, strengthen health, water and sanitation systems, and to mitigate the economic crisis by supporting the private sector and a reduction in poverty<sup>(7)</sup>. Later, in September 2020, the European Commission also announced its participation in the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, which is an international effort to provide vaccines on a global basis. Months before this in June 2020, the Commission also unveiled its vaccines strategy to develop, manufacture and deploy Covid-19 vaccines — the first vaccines were authorised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in December 2020.

In conjunction with the virus, however, a number of salient geopolitical events occurred during the year. In mid-December, Joseph R. Biden was declared president-elect by the US electoral college but not after a tense few days that saw President Donald J. Trump contest the election results in key states. Yet, beyond the divisive presidential elections, the year saw several worrying developments for multilateralism including Washington's September decision to impose sanctions on senior prosecutors and officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC), its October decision to leave the WHO and its withdrawal from the 1992 Open Skies Treaty in November. In early January 2020, the US also killed Iran's General Qasem Soleimani in an air strike under the rationale that Soleimani was responsible for creating instability in the Middle East. This was seen as a further sign of a deterioration in the US-Iran relationship, and the act did little to keep alive hopes that progress could be made on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for Iran's nuclear deal.

At the end of 2020, there was controversy over an agreement reached by the EU and China for investments. The EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), was criticised by commentators and the press for being hastily agreed at a minilateral summit between high-ranking officials from the European

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(7) EEAS, 'Coronavirus: European Union launches "Team Europe" package to support partner countries with more than €20 billion', 8 April 2020 (<https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77326/coronavirus-european-union-launches-%20team-europe%20package-support-partner-countries-more-%20en>).

Commission, European Council, France, Germany and China<sup>(8)</sup>. Although the CAI has still not been approved by the European Parliament, and notwithstanding EU tools such as investment protection and restrictive measures, the agreement was mainly criticised for not paying due attention to human rights abuses in China (e.g. the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang), the suppression of freedoms (e.g. the June 2020 security law in Hong Kong) and doubts that China would actually honour its commitment under the CAI to protect the rights of European investors in the country. The CAI even elicited criticism from the incoming Biden administration, who called for consultations with the EU before the agreement was concluded at the political level<sup>(9)</sup>. Overall, the CAI was seen as a test of the EU's ability to balance its economic, strategic and normative interests and values.

## **The security situation on the EU's borders continued to deteriorate in 2020.**

The security situation on the EU's borders continued to deteriorate in 2020. In the East, Russian President Vladimir Putin pushed through constitutional reforms that would enable him to stay in power even beyond 2023. The EU imposed its first-ever restrictive measures against

cyber-attacks on Russia on 30 July 2020, for Russia's attempted cyber-attack against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in 2018. Furthermore, Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was poisoned in Russia with the 'Novichok' chemical nerve agent in mid-2020, and had to receive medical treatment in Germany. Meanwhile, there were mass protests in Belarus against the regime of Alexander Lukashenko and violence flared up in August 2020 with the brutal repression of peaceful protestors. In October 2020, the EU imposed sanctions on individuals working for the regime and Belarus demanded the expulsion of Polish and Lithuanian diplomats resident in Minsk after groundless

(8) For example, see Godement, F., 'Wins and Losses in the EU-China Investment Agreement (CAI)', *Policy Paper*, Institut Montaigne, January 2021 (<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/wins-and-losses-eu-china-investment-agreement-cai>).

(9) Kluth, A., 'The China-EU Investment Deal is a Mistake', *Bloomberg Opinion*, 30 December 2020 (<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-12-30/europe-s-big-investment-deal-with-china-is-a-mistake>).

accusations. In solidarity with Poland and Lithuania, EU Member States such as Czechia, Germany and Romania decided to recall their ambassadors from Belarus.

The 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan along the Line of Contact in Nagorno-Karabakh further destabilised the Caucasus region. A fragile ceasefire in November 2020 between the warring parties ended six weeks of armed conflict that erupted at the end of September. The conflict resulted in thousands of fatalities and displaced persons. Under the ceasefire agreement, Armenian troops were called to leave Nagorno-Karabakh and were replaced by Russian peacekeepers. The mission by Russia has neither a United Nations (UN) nor Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mandate, but Moscow did receive authorisation from Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Russian forces have deployed to the Nagorno-Karabakh territories of Azerbaijan for an initial five-year period<sup>(10)</sup>.

In the Southern neighbourhood, the conflict in Libya evolved into a broader geopolitical concern for the EU with the presence of the Russian Wagner Group — a private military company — in the country. The group was suspected of positioning military equipment such as fighter aircraft, air defence combat vehicles, transport aircraft and armoured vehicles in Libya<sup>(11)</sup>. Turkey also deployed military units to Libya in January 2020 and it extended the deployment for another 18 months in late December. Ankara stoked further instability in the Mediterranean region throughout the year. In February 2020, Turkey announced unauthorised drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean and a month later it ‘encouraged migrants and refugees to advance to the Greek borders and try to enter into the European Union’<sup>(12)</sup>. 2020 saw Turkey engage in provocations by deploying drilling and exploratory vessels close to Cyprus and

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(10) Rácz, A., ‘In Russia’s hands: Nagorno-Karabakh after the ceasefire agreement’, *Brief No 8*, EUISS, April 2021 ([https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_8\\_2021.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_8_2021.pdf)).

(11) US Department of Defense, ‘Russia, Wagner Group continue military involvement in Libya’, 24 July 2020 (<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2287821/russia-wagner-group-continue-military-involvement-in-libya/>).

(12) Borrell Fontelles, J., ‘The way ahead after a difficult 2020 for EU-Turkey relations’, 18 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90861/way-ahead-after-difficult-2020-eu-turkey-relations-%C2%A0\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90861/way-ahead-after-difficult-2020-eu-turkey-relations-%C2%A0_en)).



Greece. Against such provocations, in November the Council of the EU extended the Union's sanctions regime against Turkey until 12 November 2021. Turkey's decision to unseal the fenced-off area of Varosha in the same month was seen as a blatant provocation to Cyprus and the EU.

**Turkey's decision to unseal the fenced-off area of Varosha in the same month was seen as a blatant provocation to Cyprus and the EU.**

The EU agreed in February 2020 to deploy a new naval operation called Irini. Operation Irini was deployed at the end of March and its main tasks include enforcing the UN arms embargo on Libya through maritime, satellite and aerial assets. Irini would also be expected to gather information on illicit exports of oil and petroleum from Libya, the training of the

Libyan Coast Guard and Navy and to disrupt human smuggling and trafficking networks. Elsewhere in the Mediterranean, there was a huge port explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, on 4 August 2020 which created major devastation in the city. In response, the EU mobilised financial resources worth over €60 million and deployed 300 civil crisis experts through the UCPM <sup>(13)</sup>.

Furthermore, there were a number of crisis situations in sub-Saharan Africa. In November, the Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency in relation to the Tigray region following violent clashes between federal and resistance forces. The EU had drawn attention to the major humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ethiopia with a strong objection to '[e]thnically targeted measures, hate speech and allegations of atrocities' <sup>(14)</sup>. In Mali, the country witnessed an attempted *coup d'état* in August which led to the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and the installation of a military-backed national committee. In addition to its support for the Group of Five Force in the Sahel (G5 Sahel), the Union decided to deploy its new civilian advisory mission (EUAM) to the Central

(13) EEAS, 'Beirut blast: EU offers full support to Lebanon and the Lebanese people', 5 August 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/83777/beirut-blast-eu-offers-full-support-lebanon-and-lebanese-people\\_th](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/83777/beirut-blast-eu-offers-full-support-lebanon-and-lebanese-people_th)).

(14) EEAS, 'Ethiopia: Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner Janez Lenarčič', 12 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88647/ethiopia-joint-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-and-commissioner\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88647/ethiopia-joint-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-and-commissioner_en)).

African Republic (CAR) in July, having agreed to set up the mission in late 2019. EUAM CAR has been deployed to help reform internal security forces as well as to provide advice to authorities on security reform.

In the area of security and defence, 2020 saw the EU begin a process to provide greater clarity for how, when and where the Union should act in crisis management, capacity building and the protection of Europe. The process began under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU when the Council of Ministers called for a '360 degrees' threat analysis to scope out the threats facing the Union. By the end of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, EU defence ministers were presented with the classified results of the threat analysis. This laid the foundation for the work on the Strategic Compass in 2021. Additionally, the German Presidency led to final agreement on the MFF and the European Defence Fund (EDF), the creation of a Centre for Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management and a resolution on third state participation in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

Finally, the year in security and defence ended with an effervescent debate between the German defence minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, and the French president, Emmanuel Macron, over the notion of EU strategic autonomy. On the eve of the US presidential elections in November, Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer stated that '[i]llusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end: Europeans will not be able to replace America's crucial role as a security provider' <sup>(15)</sup>. This statement seemed not only to up-end increasing calls for more European autonomy during the Trump presidency, but it also resulted in a response from President Macron who strongly disagreed with the views of the German defence minister <sup>(16)</sup>. The French president called for greater European strategic autonomy in order for the EU to be a more serious partner to the United States. Despite furore created by the exchange, there was

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(15) Kramp-Karrenbauer, A., 'Europe still needs America', *Politico Europe*, 2 November 2020 (<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-still-needs-america/>).

(16) 'La doctrine Macron: une conversation avec le Président français', *Le Grand Continent*, 16 November 2020 (<https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/11/16/macron/>).

little doubt that both politicians saw a pressing need for a greater European capacity to act in security and defence.

## The 2021 Yearbook

As with every edition, the task of the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Yearbook of European Security is to provide an analytical overview of events that affected European security. The Yearbook looks at events and international moments that required a response from the EU, plus it details how the Union acted during crises in 2020. The Yearbook aims to be a comprehensive account of the year in the life of the EU as an international and security actor. Please keep in mind, however, that entries and information in this Yearbook need to relate to the EU and security. This means that not every country or region is covered in as much detail as others — in some cases, and depending on events, individual countries or partners may not even appear in the book. To this end, the Yearbook is divided into two main sections: external action, and security and defence. We adopt a broad definition of security in order to cover the broadest possible number of pertinent issues that were tackled by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Therefore, in the first section of this Yearbook, one can read about the EU's multilateral efforts and response to the Covid-19 crisis, following by dedicated geographical and regional sections on North Africa and the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

The second major section of the Yearbook focuses on European security and defence, and this includes, but is not restricted to, the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In this section, we chart the EU's progress in defence by looking at its CSDP military and civilian missions and operations, defence expenditure and the status of PESCO, the EDF and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD). Beyond defence, however, this section also takes a comprehensive look at other important security issues such as space, cybersecurity, maritime security, terrorism, border management, hybrid threats and more.

Each edition of the Yearbook for the past three years has benefited from a sleek and functional design, and each section is aided

by informative data visuals and pull-out quotations. All of the data used in this book can be found listed in the annex and the data sources are made available on the EU's Open Data Portal. To continue a new feature introduced in last year's Yearbook, the reader will find boxes highlighting relevant analysis produced by the Institute during the year. Each section also ends with a listing of core documents and a key events timeline. Finally, and in keeping with the tradition of the past few editions of the Yearbook, there is an index in the annex that is designed to enhance the use of the book as a reference guide.

There are always many individuals to thank. We should like to thank Fanny Pollet for language editing the entire book and to Christian Dietrich for all of the visuals and layout formatting. To ensure the analytical rigour of the Yearbook, a number of EUISS analysts were involved in the review process and we thank our colleagues for taking the time to review the respective sections that pertain to their interest and expertise areas. No review process can, however, be truly complete without comments and suggestions from Gustav Lindstrom and Florence Gaub. Beyond the EUISS, we must thank colleagues in other EU institutions and bodies including Lavinia Baciú, Fabian Breuer, Vidas Grunda, Mikko Harjulehto, Andre Konze, Peadar Ó Catháin, Christof Opolony and Valentina Stylianou. As ever, the EUISS thanks the Council of the EU, the EU Military Staff (EUMS), the European External Action Service (EEAS), European Defence Agency (EDA), European Commission, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) for making their databases available for use. Finally, it goes without saying that all faults lie with the authors.



Image: Free-Photos/pixabay

A satellite view of Earth at night, showing the illuminated landmasses and city lights against the dark background of the oceans and the blackness of space. The image is oriented vertically, with the top of the frame showing the horizon and the bottom showing the dense network of city lights across continents.

# **EXTERNAL ACTION**



# The EU and Covid-19

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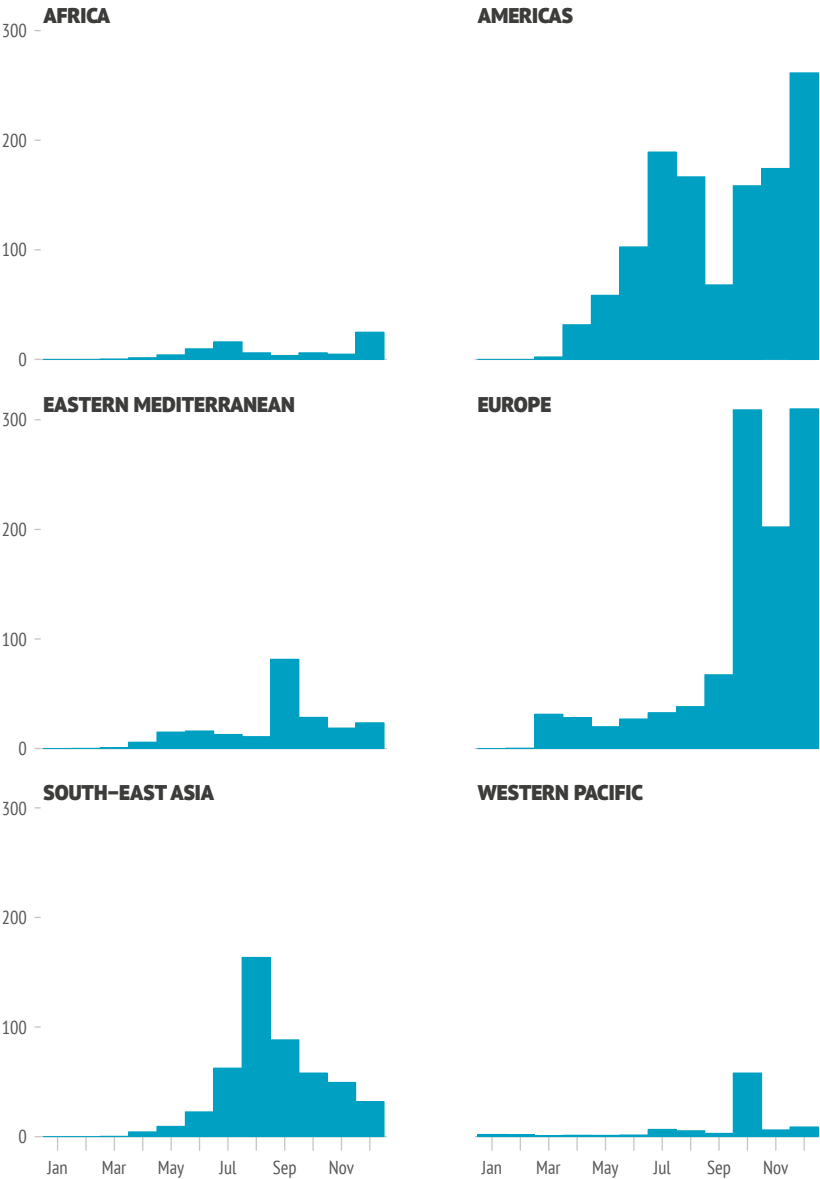
**M**uch of the EU's diplomatic energy in 2020 was taken up by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Union came under pressure in a number of ways and not just in relation to the provision of medical equipment. Following the WHO's declaration of a public health emergency of international concern on 30 January, which confirmed that the virus that emerged in China in December 2019 was a pandemic, the Union moved quickly to ensure that reporting and information exchange mechanisms were activated at the EU-level. In this respect, on 13 February 2020, the Council of the EU praised the swift activation of the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanisms on 28 January by the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU and of the UCPM. It also saluted the work of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). However, as the virus spread around the world, the EU would face significant challenges to manage cross-border travel and ensure the supply of personal protection equipment (PPE) and other medical equipment.

**The global health crisis eventually became subject to geopolitical rivalries.**

What is more, the global health crisis eventually became subject to geopolitical rivalries with the United States threatening to withdraw from the WHO because of perceived bias towards China, and Beijing's exploitation of the crisis through 'mask diplomacy' and disinformation campaigns. The Council of the EU emphasised this point in mid-December when it called for greater efforts to deal with hybrid threats and disinformation in the context of the pandemic. Conclusions adopted by the Council on 15 December called for a strengthening of the EEAS StratCom Task Forces and the disinformation Rapid Alert System (RAS) as a way to

# Covid-19

Worldwide reported confirmed cases, thousand, 2020



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021



## International responses to the pandemic: democratic vs authoritarian systems

'Both democracies and authoritarian systems have dealt and continue to deal with the crisis in different ways: no political system has been proved to be demonstrably 'better' than another in the swiftness of its response or in reducing the lethal impact of the disease. Instead, previous experience of a similar pandemic, demographic factors and the health status of a population have been of crucial importance in determining how much a state has been affected by the virus. But it must be remembered that, unlike non-democratic systems in China and elsewhere, European democratic systems have to take a more cautious and measured approach in dealing with a pandemic crisis. For instance, certain healthcare measures restrict democratic freedoms, meaning that decision-makers have to persuade the public of the necessity for introducing such measures. While this might take longer than in an authoritarian system, it still has the merit of securing support and compliance.'

Gaub, F. and Boswinkel, L., 'Who's first wins? International crisis response to Covid-19', *Brief No 11, EUISS*, May 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/who's-first-wins-international-crisis-response-covid-19>).

decrease the threat from new technologies and the health crisis. The Council of the EU recognised the harm caused by external narratives against the EU as it responded to the pandemic.

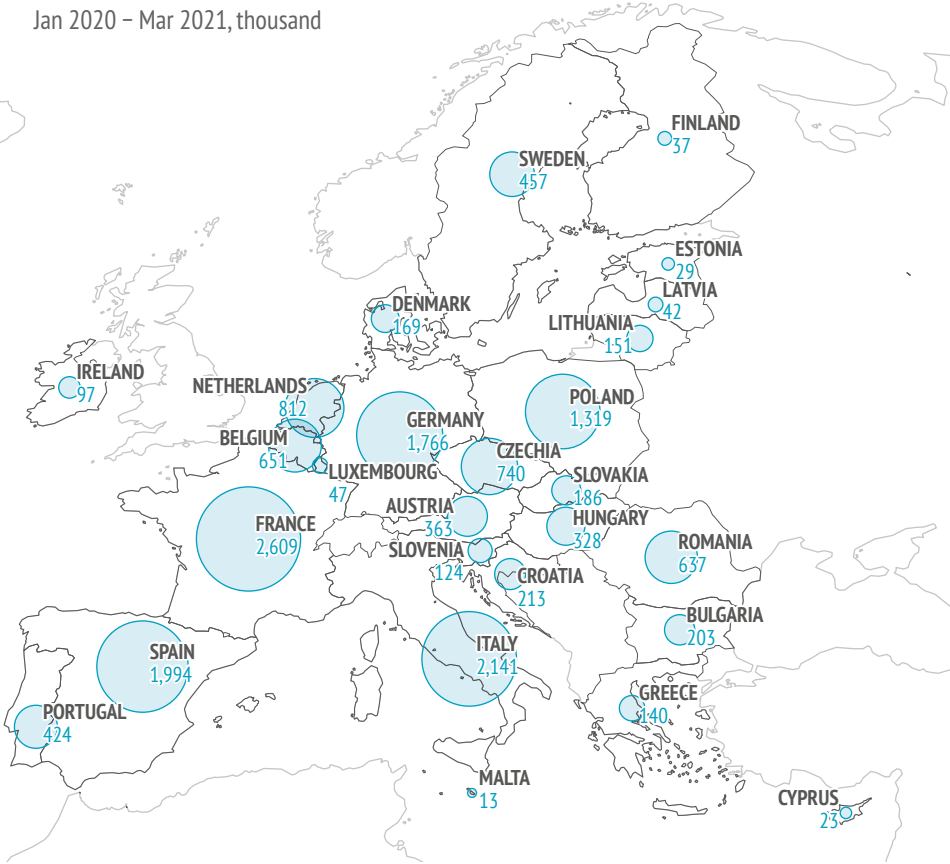
The Covid-19 pandemic gave rise to a range of emergency measures at the EU level. Most of the measures were economic in nature and sought to strengthen the European economy to manage the pandemic and boost the post-Covid-19 recovery. In mid-March, the European Commission called for a coordinated economic response to the outbreak of Covid-19<sup>(1)</sup> and at the end of May, the Commission developed a strategy to use the EU budget to aid with the economic recovery<sup>(2)</sup>. More specifically, on 27 April 2020, the Commission proposed a European recovery plan worth €1.85 trillion to kick-start the EU economy and help with the economic

(1) European Commission, 'Communication on a coordinated economic response to the COVID-19 outbreak', COM(2020) 112 final, 13 March 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:91687006-6524-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:91687006-6524-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).

(2) European Commission, 'Communication on the EU budget powering the recovery plan for Europe', COM(2020) 442 final, 27 May 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:4524c01c-a0e6-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:4524c01c-a0e6-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).

## Covid-19

EU27 – Cumulative cases,  
Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

recovery<sup>(3)</sup>. At the end of October, the Commission proposed further response measures including enhancing information exchange on the relaxation of lockdown measures across the Union, more rapid testing for Covid-19, promoting more widespread use of contact

(3) European Commission, 'Communication on Europe's moment: repair and prepare for the next generation', COM(2020) 456 final, 27 May 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0456&from=en>).

tracing apps, supporting the development of vaccines, improving communication to citizens, securing essential supplies and facilitating the re-opening of the single market.

Finally, at the end of the year a Council regulation was agreed for a €750 billion EU recovery instrument that would enhance investments in climate and digital transition, research and innovation, job creation, sector reform and crisis preparedness in case of future major emergencies <sup>(4)</sup>. Such measures were combined with specific proposals to further enhance the EU's resilience to health crises. On 11 November, the Commission published its strategy for building a European Health Union by investing in existing health mechanisms and significantly strengthening the EU Health Security Committee to ensure that it can take formal decisions during health crises. The strategy also called for more EU-level competences for monitoring vaccine developments, clinical trials, developing pandemic response plans and enhancing epidemiological surveillance in the EU. On 25 November, the Commission presented its pharmaceutical strategy for Europe which called for more affordable, quality and safe medicines within the Union, security of supply for medicines and ingredients, investment in medicinal research and innovation, improving public procurement and fighting counterfeit drugs, security against antimicrobial resistance, protecting intellectual property rights and more.

To concretely advance the European Health Union, the Commission sought to strengthen existing supporting bodies, response frameworks and agencies including the UCPM, the EMA <sup>(5)</sup> and the ECDC <sup>(6)</sup>. In particular, its proposed changes to the UCPM were designed to ensure that the mechanism could better support at the EU level. As the UCPM relies on Member State contributions,

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(4) Council Regulation (EU) 2020/2094 of 22 December 2020 establishing a European Union Recovery Instrument to support the recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R2094&from=EN>).

(5) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation to reinforce the role of the European Medicines Agency in crisis preparedness and management for medicinal products and medical devices', COM(2020) 725 final, 11 November 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0725&from=EN>).

(6) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation to amend Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 establishing a European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control', COM(2020) 726 final, 11 November 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0726&from=EN>).

## A snapshot of a multifaceted crisis and EU response (Jan – Mar 2020)

- > *28 January* – the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU activates the IPCR mechanisms at the EU-level.
- > *28 January* – the UCPM is activated to repatriate 350 EU citizens back to the Union.
- > *30 January* – the ECDC begins regular epidemiological updates.
- > *31 January* – the European Commission dedicates €10 million to initial research into the virus.
- > *1 February* – a further 90 EU citizens are repatriated from China through the UCPM.
- > *24 February* – €229 million aid package dedicated by the Union to non-EU countries struggling to diagnose and respond to the virus.
- > *12 March* – Temporary Asset Purchase Programme worth €120 billion put in place by the European Central Bank to ease lending and lower interest rates.
- > *13 March* – establishment of a €37 billion Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative to assist EU governments combat the virus.
- > *13 March* – Emergency safety directive issued by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) mandates disinfection and cleaning of all aircraft to and from high-risk destinations.
- > *15 March* – the EU limits the exportation of vital personal protective equipment (PPE) outside of the single market to ensure EU medical staff have sufficient stocks of face masks and protective garments.
- > *16 March* – the European Commission makes an initial €80 million investment in CureVac, a biopharmaceutical company working on a vaccine against Covid-19.
- > *16-17 March* – a further 604 EU citizens are brought home from Morocco under the UCPM.
- > *19 March* – the Commission finances 90 % of a stockpile of PPE and medical equipment under the rescEU initiative to ensure the EU has sufficient stocks of ventilators and masks.
- > *20 March* – EU agencies such as EU Law Enforcement Agency (Europol) and the EU Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) warn of increased malicious cyber-attacks and criminal activities.
- > *20 March* – the European Committee for Standardisation announces that 11 standards for filtering masks, medical gloves and protective clothing will be freely available to aid production in the EU.
- > *21 March* – Operation Pangea results in 121 arrests of individuals engaged in selling €13 million worth of counterfeit Covid-19 medicines.

the Commission argued that this was a potential vulnerability as the pandemic had afflicted many Member States' ability to contribute to the UCPM. As the Commission stated, the UCPM 'currently relies totally on Member States' resources. As shown in recent months, this system of mutual European solidarity tends to falter if all, or most, Member States are impacted by the same emergency simultaneously and are therefore unable to offer each other assistance' (7). In this respect, the Commission called for own resources in order to directly procure goods and provisions as a safety net under the rescEU system.

Vaccinations became increasingly important in the EU's Covid-19 strategy. On 17 June 2020, the European Commission's initial vac-

**The European Commission's initial vaccine strategy focused on creating a common central procurement process.**

cine strategy focused on creating a common central procurement process to build on the vaccine alliance already established between France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. The Commission called for the centralisation of vaccine procurement at the level of EU-27 in order to avoid competition for vaccines between Member States, as well as to create a vaccination

procurement system that would be more rapid and efficient than 27 individual strategies. To this end, the Commission stated that it would enter into advance purchase agreements with vaccine producers on behalf of the Member States but that the Member States would 'be invited to contribute their expertise on potential vaccine candidates as well as provide additional financing', if required. While recognising that the 'failure rate for vaccine development is high', the Commission still believed that it was right to move as early as possible to have options for a range of vaccines (8).

(7) European Commission, 'Proposal for a decision amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism', COM(2020) 220 final, 2 June 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0220&qid=1621066996662&from=EN>).

(8) European Commission, 'Communication on the EU strategy for COVID-19 vaccines', COM(2020) 245 final, 17 June 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0245&from=en>).

## Covid-19 and EU foreign and security policy

‘Covid-19 erupted into a landscape of change: even before the pandemic unfolded, ‘uncertainty’ had become the defining feature of our times. This perception of heightened uncertainty and unpredictability was the result of several trends occurring simultaneously: from relations with China to those with the US, from a change in international trade patterns to a rise in disinformation campaigns and a global decline in democracy, several building blocks of European foreign policy appeared to shift dangerously. In the case of some of these trends, the pandemic gave an opportunity for accelerated linear continuity, while it merged into other trends without necessarily being connected to them. As for others, Covid-19 had a transformative impact, creating an opening for change.’

Gaub, F. and Boswinkel L., ‘How Covid-19 changed the future’, *Chaillot Paper* No 162, December 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/how-covid-19-changed-future>).

In mid-October 2020, the Commission released a revised strategy for vaccination and vaccine deployment across the Union. The strategy recognised that developing vaccines was essential given the onset of ‘Covid-19 fatigue’ and the worrying infection spikes experienced by the EU after the summer months in 2020. The strategy recognised that it usually takes around 10 years to develop a vaccine, but the EU and other countries were aiming for rapid development within a timeframe of 12–18 months. The Commission stressed the importance of ensuring vaccine safety but it had signed three contracts (by 15 October 2020) for 300 million doses with Astra Zeneca, an option for 300 million doses with Sanofi–GSK and 200 million doses with Johnson & Johnson, plus it had initiated discussions for further contracts with CureVac, Moderna and BioNTech/Pfizer<sup>(9)</sup>.

When the BioNTech vaccine was unveiled in mid-November 2020, the EU of course saw this as a welcome development, but it also saw the risks that could emerge from ‘vaccine nationalism’. Indeed, the EU also became the target of damaging narratives and disinformation and it had to contend with the ‘vaccine diplomacy’ of state actors like China and Russia. Accordingly, the EU developed a strategy that would allow for the vaccination of EU citizens within

(9) European Commission, ‘Communication on the preparedness for COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment’, COM(2020) 680 final, 15 October 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0680&from=en>).

the Union as well as to export vaccines globally in order to assist partners to decrease infection rates. By the end of 2020, the EU and Member States had dedicated some €870 million to the COVAX facility in order to share vaccine access with the rest of the world<sup>(10)</sup>.

At the Paris Peace Forum on 16 November 2020, the focus was on the EU's efforts in dealing with the 'post-Covid world' and how best to stimulate multilateralism. In a speech at the Forum, HR/VP Borrell underlined that the crisis of multilateralism predates the Trump presidency and was being challenged by the multiplication of actors, the return of national sovereignty and the complexity of international problems<sup>(11)</sup>. In this respect, the post-Covid world order would require deeper multilateralism and the EU would be called upon to support fragile partners and countries, as well as to build a more effective global governance regime for health and challenges linked to the global commons (e.g. climate change).

In addition to its own domestic challenges related to the pandemic, the Union still nevertheless started to support fragile countries facing the strains of Covid-19. For example, at the end of October, the EU and the WHO initiated a Covid-19 response project for Mongolia to provide assistance to the country's health sector and to prepare it for future medical challenges. In the same month, the EU financed the purchase of protective masks, oxygen concentrators and ventilation equipment for health services in Serbia and to support vulnerable people such as 'elderly people, single mothers, and Roma community'<sup>(12)</sup>. In mid-November, the EU also supplied 65 tonnes of personal protective equipment for frontline workers in South Sudan. Such measures should be seen against the backdrop that at least 6.5 million people were facing acute food

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(10) EEAS, 'No to vaccine nationalism, yes to vaccine multilateralism', 13 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88701/no-vaccine-nationalism-yes-vaccine-multilateralism\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88701/no-vaccine-nationalism-yes-vaccine-multilateralism_en)).

(11) EEAS, 'Multilateralism and European Strategic Autonomy in a (post)-Covid world', 15 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88732/multilateralism-and-european-strategic-autonomy-post-covid-world-%C2%A0\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88732/multilateralism-and-european-strategic-autonomy-post-covid-world-%C2%A0_en)).

(12) EEAS, 'Serbia: EU supports doctors and medical staff to face second peak of health crisis', 23 October 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87463/serbia-eu-supports-doctors-and-medical-staff-face-second-peak-health-crisis\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87463/serbia-eu-supports-doctors-and-medical-staff-face-second-peak-health-crisis_en)).

## The EU, Covid-19 and the UN Global Ceasefire initiative

In April, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate global ceasefire due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU strongly supported the initiative and saw the ceasefire initiative as a way to broker peace and deliver humanitarian assistance to those most in need. In a declaration published on 3 April, the HR/VP stated: 'Now, more than ever, is the time to agree on a worldwide truce, to stop all armed conflicts and immediately halt the fighting. Terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations, should not be allowed to take advantage of that truce. We urge all those involved in armed conflicts anywhere in the world to engage in efforts to find a political solution to the conflict. We also urge all warring parties to comply fully with International Humanitarian Law and guarantee unimpeded access for humanitarian aid. This is even more vital in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Now is the time for international solidarity. Now is the time to devote all our energy and resources to fight the world's common challenge – the coronavirus. It is time to focus on global health. Only together can we protect the most vulnerable people in our societies, both medically and economically, from this virus and the human suffering that it brings'.

\* EEAS, 'Declaration by the High Representative Josep Borrell on behalf of the EU on the UN Secretary General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire', 3 April 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/03/declaration-by-the-high-representative-josep-borrell-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-un-secretary-general-s-appeal-for-an-immediate-global-ceasefire/>).

insecurity even before the pandemic broke out, and the country was dealing with natural disasters such as extreme flooding<sup>(13)</sup>.

The EU's global response to Covid-19 was labelled as a 'Team Europe' effort. On 8 April 2020, a joint communication from the HR/VP and the European Commission stressed the importance of developing a global European response to the pandemic. As the world's largest donor and a leading economic power, the HR/VP and the Commission called for the EU to show solidarity with the rest of the world under the guiding principle that the EU 'can only fully take care of [its] own health

**The EU's global response to Covid-19 was labelled as a 'Team Europe' effort.**

(13) EEAS, 'Additional support by the EU to the continuity of humanitarian services in South Sudan under COVID-19', 12 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88627/additional-support-eu-continuity-humanitarian-services-south-sudan-under-covid-19\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88627/additional-support-eu-continuity-humanitarian-services-south-sudan-under-covid-19_en)).



## Covid-19 and conflict dynamics

'In December 2019, when the novel strain of coronavirus first hit the headlines, 12 countries in the world were experiencing organised violence on an extensive scale, with more than 100 incidents of violence and attacks against civilians recorded in that month. To most of these countries, the virus seemed a distant threat at the time. Yet, a few months and over 7 million recorded Covid-19 cases later, it has evolved from a distant threat to a stark reality. The global crisis – which has unleashed an emergency in the world's public health, political, and economic systems simultaneously – has subjected even the most stable societies to unprecedented disruption. In conflict-affected countries, i.e. countries with ongoing conflicts or a high risk of relapse into conflict, and countries emerging from conflicts, the pandemic has added another layer on top of often multiple existing layers of crisis.'

Mustasilta, K., 'From Bad to Worse? The Impact(s) of Covid-19 on conflict Dynamics', *Brief No 13, Conflict Series, EUISS, June 2020* (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/bad-worse-impacts-covid-19-conflict-dynamics>).

and safety if [it] also support[s] others' <sup>(14)</sup>. In this regard, the joint communication emphasised the need for multilateral solutions to the pandemic through relevant UN organs, the G20, the G7 and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The global European response also had to take into consideration the likely humanitarian, health, social and economic consequences of the pandemic and this meant focusing on the resilience of the most vulnerable countries and regions. Overall, the HR/VP and Commission called for a financial package worth €15.6 billion to support partner countries during the Covid-19 crisis.

Council of the EU conclusions in June 2020 also stressed the need for the Union to support least developed countries in places like Africa, Western Balkans, Latin America and other regions. In particular, the Council called on the Union to develop a rights-based and people-centred approach to the crisis in order to assist the most vulnerable and marginalised groups (with particular attention to gender, age and disabilities) around the world. The 'Team Europe' label was more than a slogan. In fact, it was an organising

(14) European Commission and HR/VP, 'Joint Communication on the global EU response to COVID-19', JOIN(2020) 11 final, 8 April 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TEXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0011&from=en>).

structure that brought together EU institutions and Member States and key agencies such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). ‘Team Europe’s’ efforts focused on three main areas: 1) emergency response and immediate humanitarian needs; 2) strengthening water and sanitation systems and response capacity in third countries; and 3) support to manage the social, economic and political consequences of the pandemic in vulnerable regions and countries.

## EU humanitarian air bridge

In May, the EU established a humanitarian air bridge to deliver humanitarian and health personnel as well as equipment to the most vulnerable countries and regions across the globe. The bridge works by sourcing planes in EU Member States to deliver aid and personnel, while return flights help with the repatriation of EU citizens and the rotation of humanitarian teams. Transport costs are 100 % financed by the European Commission\*. From May 2020 to the end of July, the EU had made 45 individual flights using the air bridge. Over 1 100 tonnes of medical equipment and 1 475 medical and humanitarian staff were delivered to critical areas in Africa, Asia and the Americas\*\*.

In addition, the EU announced a range of financial support measures during 2020. On 20 May, the European Commission announced €50 million in support following a UN Global Appeal, to manage Covid-19 in humanitarian zones\*\*\*. By September, the EU had provided a further €150 million in humanitarian assistance for the delivery of life-saving PPE, medicines and medical equipment\*\*\*\*. Despite this assistance, however, the EU had to deal with the issue of delivering Covid-19 relief to countries that were subject to EU sanctions and restrictive measures. In theory, existing sanctions in countries such as Iran, Nicaragua, Syria and Venezuela would make it difficult for the EU to deliver aid without falling foul of its own restrictions. To this end, in May 2020 the Commission published a guidance note for humanitarian assistance organisations and workers, banks, donors and NGOs which specified that relief should be delivered to the hardest hit areas — revisions of the guidance note were published in October and November.

\* European Commission, ‘Coronavirus Global Response: EU sets up a humanitarian air bridge’, 8 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_813](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_813)).

\*\* European Commission, ‘Coronavirus global response: 45 EU humanitarian air bridge flights deliver over 1,000 tonnes of medical aid’, 29 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1424](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1424)).

\*\*\* European Commission, ‘Coronavirus global response: EU allocates additional €50 million in humanitarian aid’, 20 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_905](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_905)).

\*\*\*\* European Commission, ‘Coronavirus: EU allocates €150 million for the transport of essential medical items’, 18 September 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1671](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1671)).

Lastly, the EU continued to support multilateral institutions such as the WHO, especially as this body had come under undue pressure from the United States. In November 2020, the Council of the EU underlined its opinion that the WHO is the leading coordination body for global health.

The EU ended 2020 with a reflection on its response to the pandemic. In December, the Council of the EU stressed that Covid-19 revealed weaknesses in the EU's response to health crises. It called for greater preparedness for future crises by ensuring the security of supply of medicinal products, facilitating more effective exchange of health data and to ensure that the pandemic does not affect the provision of medical services for those with cancer and other non-communicable diseases. The Council of the EU recognised that initial planning and response issues could be partly related to the fact that health and pandemic preparedness is a Member State competence. Nevertheless, one of the core lessons learned was that the Union had to develop a more robust health security framework, improve its public communication on health, counter disinformation on the virus, enhance cross-border contact-tracing mechanisms, invest in relevant national reserves and stockpiles of medical goods and strengthen crucial supply chains for PPE and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

## **The issue of critical supply became an essential one for the EU in 2020.**

The issue of critical supply became an essential one for the EU in 2020 because of the pandemic and the geopolitical rise of China. For example, on 17 June 2020, the European Commission released a White Paper on the potential harm from foreign

subsidies, which the Commission argued could have an impact on critical supply as foreign market entrants can be backed by non-EU state subsidies. Such harmful foreign subsidies could damage the EU's competitiveness and undermine the EU internal market level playing field<sup>(15)</sup>. On 3 September 2020, a Commission communication focused on the importance of resilience in the supply of critical

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(15) European Commission, 'White Paper on levelling the playing field as regards foreign subsidies', COM(2020) 253 final, 17 June 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0253&from=en>).

raw materials. The Commission called for a more coherent strategy to sourcing and using critical raw materials such as rare earth elements, not only for strategic and economic reasons but also due to the adverse environmental effects from resource extraction. The communication stressed that the Covid-19 crisis had shown that the EU needs to do more to reduce resource dependences, strengthen diversification and safeguard value chains.

### EU supply security and trade dependences

‘Fears about the EU’s trade, resource and technology dependences have only grown since the outbreak of the pandemic, even though US-China trade disputes and the rolling out of 5G have played a significant role, too. Some analysts have pointed to the beginning of a ‘decoupling’ of certain supply chains away from China, and, while evidence suggests that some ‘reshoring’ has taken place since at least 2011, there are debates about whether the production of certain technologies should be relocated back to Europe after decades of de-industrialisation. Decoupling and/or reshoring are a reaction to geopolitically risky dependences, with the fear being that certain products, technologies or raw materials will be unavailable during times of crisis or that a reliance on third-party supplies will limit political freedom. In the digital age – where data dominates – there are also concerns that dependences may lead among other things to espionage or a curtailment of personal rights and freedoms. Despite the fact that decoupling is unfeasible, save perhaps for in very specific critical technology domains, the threat perception surrounding critical supplies has given rise to a different vocabulary and EU communiques and strategies are today replete with references to ‘technological sovereignty’, ‘open strategic autonomy’ and ‘digital sovereignty’.

Fiott, D. and Theodosopoulos, V., ‘Sovereignty over supply? The EU’s ability to manage critical dependences while engaging with the world’, *Brief No 21*, EUISS, December 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/sovereignty-over-supply>).

On 16 December 2020, the European Commission proposed a legislation on the resilience of critical entities. The proposed directive sought to reduce supply vulnerabilities, ensure the resilience of critical infrastructure and safeguard against events that may lead to serious cross-sectoral and cross-border disruptions. In the wake of the pandemic, the Commission’s legislative proposal was not only aimed at medical supply chains but also critical infrastructure, networks and operations that provide vital services for the EU and its Member States. In this respect, the proposed directive aimed to respond to new security challenges as the emergence of new technologies such as 5G and unmanned vehicles and state-sponsored

hybrid threats. For the European Commission, a key task was balancing these legitimate security concerns with a need to ensure the openness of the EU single market. The proposed legislation outlined a range of measures including: enhancing national frameworks for resilience of critical entities, investment screening and the identification of existing vulnerabilities for critical entities <sup>(16)</sup>.

**One of the other areas of EU policy that appeared to be strengthened because of the Covid-19 pandemic related to strategic foresight.**

Furthermore, one of the other areas of EU policy that appeared to be strengthened because of the Covid-19 pandemic related to strategic foresight. Indeed, on 9 September the Commission published its 2020 strategic foresight report through which it called for a systematic integration of strategic foresight in EU policymaking. The Commission stressed that all areas of EU policy should be guided by the quest for resilience in the post-pandemic world and that resilience should be understood to have social and economic, geopolitical, green and digital dimensions. Through its strategic foresight report, the Commission called for more structured horizon scanning in EU policies and it proposed potentially developing a resilience index that could be used to monitor and analyse EU policies. The Commission's report was less an attempt to foresee the future and more of an organising text that gave structure to achieving the EU's work on strategic autonomy and the green and digital transitions.

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(16) European Commission, 'Proposal for a directive on the resilience of critical entities', COM(2020) 829 final, 16 December 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:74d1acf7-3f94-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:74d1acf7-3f94-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).

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- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Covid-19', 13 February 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6038-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission and HR/VP, 'Joint Communication on the global EU response to COVID-19', JOIN(2020) 11 final, 8 April 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0011&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Team Europe global response to Covid-19', 5 June 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8630-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, '2020 strategic foresight report: charting the course towards a more resilient Europe', 9 September 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategic\\_foresight\\_report\\_2020\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategic_foresight_report_2020_1.pdf)).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on additional COVID-19 response measures', COM(2020) 687 final, 28 October 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0687&from=en>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on building a European Health Union: reinforcing the EU's resilience for cross-border health threats', COM(2020) 724 final, 11 November 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0724&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on the role of the EU in strengthening the World Health Organisation', 17 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12957-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on a pharmaceutical strategy for Europe', COM(2020) 761 final, 25 November 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0761&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Covid-19 lessons learned in health', 18 December 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14196-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

# Multilateralism

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**I**n the UN's 75th year of existence, the EU underlined its commitment to the UN in upholding a multilateral and rules-based global governance system. The Union lent its full support to the UN's 'building back better' agenda in order to achieve a sustainable and green recovery as part of the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. On 17 February, the Council of the EU outlined the way in which it would support human rights within the UN system in 2020. It

**The EU and UN signed an agreement to enhance cooperation on peace operations.**

stressed the need to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with renewed vigour, advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda, link human rights and the environment, pay increased attention to new and emerging digital technologies, support human rights defenders, oppose

the death penalty, fight torture and inhuman treatments, sustain freedom of opinion and expression, oppose all forms of discrimination, protect the rights of the child and combat terrorism. At the end of September, the EU and UN signed an agreement to enhance cooperation on peace operations, and in December 2020 the EU also re-committed efforts towards peace mediation. It stressed the importance of working closely with the UN to prevent and resolve crises across the globe. The EU also underlined the need to invest in mediation efforts especially with relatively new challenges such as the need to protect cultural heritage, to manage digital technologies and to provide support for mental and psychosocial issues.

2020 was an important year for the EU in foreign policy due to the 10th anniversary of the formal establishment of the EEAS, which took place on 1 December 2010 following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. The last ten years have seen the Service engage in a

range of important security challenges including the Iran nuclear deal, the wars in Libya and Syria, Russia's illegal seizure of Crimea, challenges to multilateralism, crises in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, the migration crisis of 2015 and more. The EEAS has also spent the past ten years providing greater strategic direction for the EU in foreign and security policy, and this could be seen with the 2016 publication of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) and the follow-on initiatives related to security and defence, resilience, global cooperation and the integrated approach.

### European Parliament annual report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy

In its annual report on CFSP, which was adopted on 20 January 2021, the European Parliament outlined its assessment for the year 2020. The report recognised that the EU had to become a 'partner of choice' in an increasingly hostile geopolitical environment. The European Parliament called for the EU to uphold its interests and values, but it urged the EU to show stronger political will in meeting the objectives of the CFSP. The Parliament repeated calls from previous years for a genuine European Defence Union and it called on EU Member States to further enhance the Union's capacity for autonomous action in global affairs. It acknowledged the EU's steps in responding globally to the coronavirus, but it called for more coordination of CFSP tools and to enhance the EU's foreign and security decision-making capacities. The European Parliament also called for renewed momentum in the transatlantic relationship and it stressed that the Union must step up its actions in African and regional conflict hotspots such as in the Caucasus, the Middle East and North Africa.

European Parliament, 'Implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy — annual report 2020', 20 January 2021 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0012\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0012_EN.html)).

Human rights remained high on the EU's agenda during the year and on 7 December 2020, the Union agreed to an EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime. Likened to a sort of 'EU Magnitsky Act', the EU's regime is flexible in allowing sanctions to be implemented on a global rather than a country-specific basis and ensuring that the EU has the right legal framework to do so. As HR/VP Borrell stated at the time, '[t]he new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime will not be bound by borders, or specific to a country. It will allow [the EU] to target state and non-state actors, regardless of



where they are and regardless of whether they commit violations and abuses in their own state, in another state or across borders. [The EU] no longer need[s] to agree a specific sanctions framework for every country where we know violations occur, which will save us a lot of time' <sup>(1)</sup>.

### The EU human rights sanctions regime

'In December 2018, the Council of the European Union initiated discussions about the creation of a new sanctions regime designed to address gross human rights violations, following a proposal from the Netherlands. So far, the EU only operates three thematic sanctions regimes: those targeting terrorism, cyberattacks and chemical weapons attacks. Unlike classical sanctions packages addressing crises in specific countries, such as Guinea or Venezuela, horizontal sanctions regimes apply to individuals and entities considered to have committed severe human rights abuses. Once approved, the planned blacklist is set to become the EU's fourth horizontal sanctions regime, enlarging its vast body of autonomous sanctions regimes, i.e. restrictions adopted in the absence of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate.'

Portela, C., 'A blacklist is (almost) born: Building a resilient EU human rights sanctions regime', *Brief No 5*, EUISS, March, 2020, (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/blacklist-almost-born>).

On 23 November, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore, opened the online launch event of the EU's Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024. The action plan is designed to proactively deal with global human rights abuses and persistent backsliding on democracy around the world by providing greater financial support to counter these trends. In this respect, HR/VP Borrell spoke about a 'democratic recession' that was also closer to the EU than may have been imagined in the past. The HR/VP stressed that 'Europe's support for democracy is an important source of [the EU's] power of attraction', especially in an era of competition between great powers <sup>(2)</sup>. In November 2020, the Council of the EU also recalled the importance it attaches to the

(1) EEAS, 'Stronger EU action against human rights violations', 10 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90395/stronger-eu-action-against-human-rights-violations\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90395/stronger-eu-action-against-human-rights-violations_en)).

(2) EEAS, 'We need straight-talk and determined action on democracy', 24 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89243/we-need-straight-talk-and-determined-action-democracy\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89243/we-need-straight-talk-and-determined-action-democracy_en)).

## EU Delegations around the world

Staff levels by contractual status, Dec 2019



Data: European External Action Service, 2020

Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan. The Council called for swift implementation of the action plan and it underlined the important role that will be played by EU Delegations, Member States' embassies and CSDP civilian and military missions and operations in implementing it.

Another aspect of human rights that gained greater attention in 2020 related to global supply chains. As part of its commitments to the UN system, the EU stressed that global supply chains should uphold social and labour rights, corporate social responsibility, due diligence, decent work and counter child labour. The Union noted a sharp decline in working hours and substantial losses of wages due to the Covid-19 pandemic and how this would affect global economic recovery. In conclusions on 2 December, the Council of the EU called on EU Member States to draw up national action plans to show how the SDGs will be integrated into supply chains. It also tasked the European Commission with launching an EU action plan on global supply chains, sustainability and human rights by 2021.

**The EU stressed that global supply chains should uphold social and labour rights.**

## Revitalising the Non-Proliferation Treaty

'As part of the CFSP, the EU aspires to present itself as a unitary actor by coordinating its positions and voting jointly in international fora. Over the years, projecting an image of relative unity has represented a major accomplishment given that nuclear deterrence remains one of the most divisive issues in the CFSP. Voting behaviour at the UN General Assembly reveals that nuclear and disarmament issues rank among the most controversial among EU members, with the European nuclear powers and non-NATO members often voting differently from the EU mainstream. The EU's modus operandi at the NPT combines the hammering out of a common stance with member state action in like-minded groupings, allowing members to promote their views beyond the EU consensus. The flexibility of this approach makes it possible for the EU to appear as a cohesive entity while Member States can keep their affiliation to other groupings. Moreover, this flexibility has made it possible to accommodate the alignment of third countries, turning the EU into a veritable regional group representing Europe rather than just its members.'

Portela, C., 'Revitalising the NPT: Preparing the EU for the Tenth RevCon', *Brief No 1*, EUISS, January 2020 ([https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/revitalising-npt-0#\\_revitalising\\_the\\_eu\\_at\\_the\\_npt](https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/revitalising-npt-0#_revitalising_the_eu_at_the_npt)).

An important aspect of the EU's efforts on multilateralism related to the Union's partnership with the US, which had become strained under the Trump presidency. In fact, following the election of President Biden the EU set about reinvigorating the relationship by stressing the importance of transatlantic leadership on issues such as climate change and global health. There was also hope from the EU side of a shift in the US' policies towards the JCPoA and Iran. In addition, the EU believed that a coherent EU-US approach to China was required under the new US presidency. The EU also hoped that a Biden presidency would smooth over tensions in NATO and allow the EU and NATO to cooperate on issues such as Russia, Afghanistan, hybrid threats, and Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Climate change continued to be a major focus for the EU's diplomatic efforts, even though the US formally withdrew from the Paris Agreement in November 2020 on President Trump's orders (the US would re-join the accord in April 2021). In October, with China announcing that it would become carbon neutral by 2060, the Union re-affirmed its commitment to reach climate neutrality by 2050. Compared to China and the US, the EU is working hard to reduce greenhouse emissions (the EU-27 represents 7 % of the

global total of emissions, while China and the US represent 27 % and 14 % respectively)<sup>(3)</sup>. On 20 January 2020, the Council of the EU released conclusions on climate diplomacy, which not only reiterated the EU's commitment to climate action but called for the HR/VP to develop a strategic approach to climate diplomacy that would find ways to better engage third countries to intensify climate efforts.

A raft of legislative proposals on climate-related issues was produced by the European Commission in 2020. On 4 March, the Commission set out its framework to achieve the European Green Deal agreed in 2019 in its first 'European Climate Law'. The legislative proposal paved the way for future measures to achieve the 2050 climate neutrality objective. Most importantly, the Commission's legislative proposal sought to enshrine these objectives in EU law, thereby allowing for regular assessments of progress made towards climate neutrality. On 17 September, the Commission made yet another legislative proposal when it became clear that existing policy steps would not be enough to meet the 2050 climate neutrality target. In this regard, the Commission proposed that any target for 2050 could only be met with an interim target of a 55 % reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2030. On 9 December, the Commission then released its proposal for a European Climate Pact. The pact would actively involve citizens and communities in the fight against climate change, and would function by sharing information on climate change, sponsoring participatory events and ensuring linkages between local and regional climate initiatives.

**On 9 December, the Commission then released its proposal for a European Climate Pact.**

On 9 November 2020, the EEAS published its 'Climate Change and Defence Roadmap' which highlighted the linkages between climate change and security and set out a range of short, medium and longer-term objectives to better adapt the CSDP to climate change. In this respect, the roadmap is considered an important element of the European Green Deal. As the roadmap states, '[c]limate policy

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(3) EEAS, 'China carbon neutrality in 2060: a possible game changer for climate', 23 October 2020, ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87431/china-carbon-neutrality-2060-possible-game-changer-climate\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87431/china-carbon-neutrality-2060-possible-game-changer-climate_en)).

## EU Special Representatives

In February, the Council of the EU decided to extend the mandates of six EU Special Representatives (EUSRs). Ángel Losada Fernández had his mandate as EUSR for the Sahel extended for a further 12 months, until 28 February 2021. Nataliya Apostolova had her mandate as EUSR for Kosovo\* extended for a further 6 months, until 31 August 2020, and she was replaced from September 2020 until 31 August 2021 by Tomas Szunyog. Alexander Rondos had his mandate as EUSR for the Horn of Africa extended for a further 6 months, until 31 August 2020. Peter Burian had his mandate as EUSR for Central Asia extended by a further 12 months, until 28 February 2021. Susanna Terstal had her mandate as EUSR for the Middle East Process extended by a further 12 months until 28 February 2021. Toivo Klaar had his mandate as EUSR for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia extended for a further 12 months, until 28 February 2021\*\*.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

\*\* Council of the European Union, 'Council extends the mandates of six EU Special Representatives', 25 February 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/02/25/council-extends-the-mandates-of-six-eu-special-representatives/>).

implications should become an integral part of the EU's thinking and action on issues such as defence research and development, industry and technology or infrastructure, as well as the EU CSDP. With this in mind, the roadmap will contribute also to the objectives of the European Green Deal by aiming to reduce the emissions in particular in the defence sector as part of the collective effort towards climate neutrality by 2050, increased energy sustainability, the prioritisation of energy efficiency, and the protection of biodiversity<sup>(4)</sup>. HR/VP Borrell presented the roadmap at a high-level conference organised by the EEAS and the EUISS on 11 December 2020<sup>(5)</sup>.

Additionally, EU development aid policy was a focus of attention for the European Council in 2020. On 5 June, the Council of the EU conducted its annual report to the European Council on the EU

(4) EEAS, 'Climate Change and Defence Roadmap', 9 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12741-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

(5) EEAS, 'Climate change, defence and crisis management: from reflection to action', 11 December 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/climate-change-defence-and-crisis-management-reflection-action>).

development aid activities. According to the report, EU development assistance totalled €75.2 billion in 2019 and this meant that the EU continued to be the biggest global provider of development assistance. Despite these strong efforts, the Council of the EU acknowledged that more are required to meet collective and individual development aid targets. In particular, the Council of the EU restated its commitment to continue to meet the needs of least developed, low income and fragile countries, especially in light of the Covid-19 crisis. Overall, the Council of the EU reiterated its target to provide 0.7 % of Gross National Income (GNI) as development aid within the 2030 Agenda timeframe<sup>(6)</sup>.

Humanitarian aid policy was also high on the EU's agenda in 2020, especially because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Published in 2020, the Commission's annual report on financing external action in 2019 showed that the EU remained a leading donor with €2.4 billion worth of

**The UCPM was activated 20 times for disasters inside and outside the Union.**

relief delivered to vulnerable people in more than 80 countries. The Commission also stated that in 2019, the UCPM was activated 20 times for disasters inside and outside the Union, especially for crisis-hit countries such as Bolivia, Guatemala, Israel and Lebanon. In its more specific annual report on humanitarian aid operations, the Commission underlined its support to key crisis zones and challenges including the Sahel, the Great Lakes region, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region, Venezuela and other parts of Latin America, Afghanistan, the Rohingya crisis, Syria, Iraq, Libya and much more. Of course, EU humanitarian aid was also impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and on 29 May, the Commission called for the establishment of an EU Recovery Instrument to ensure that humanitarian assistance could be better geared towards responding to the pandemic and its ill-effects.

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(6) For all data in this paragraph see: Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions – Annual Report 2020 to the European Council on EU development aid targets', 5 June 2020, pp. 3–4 and p. 8 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8628-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

## The EU's chemical weapons sanctions regime

'Marking a worrying turn for international policymakers, the use of chemical weapons has increased in recent years in spite of the robust disarmament regime seeking to curb their use. In October 2018, the EU adopted a sanctions regime against the proliferation and use of chemical weapons. The 2018 sanctions regime constitutes the EU's first coercive instrument against chemical weapons. Even though the EU had previously employed sanctions to halt nuclear proliferation, in accordance with its 2003 strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), it had never applied sanctions to chemical weapons activities. Also, previous EU non-proliferation sanctions had taken place against the background of a pre-existing mandate agreed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Both Pyongyang and Tehran had been under UN sanctions before Brussels enacted its own restrictions. By contrast, the EU sanctions regime against chemical weapons is not based on a UNSC mandate. Finally, the sanctions regime takes the form of a 'horizontal' or thematic list, in contrast to classical sanctions regimes that address specific country crises. The chemical weapons sanctions regime was only the second thematic sanctions regime ever adopted by the EU after the UNSC-inspired 2001 terrorism list. It was the first in a series of EU autonomous horizontal regimes adopted in close sequence: a sanctions regime against cyber-attacks was agreed in 2019, and another against human rights violations is currently under preparation.'

Portela, C. and Moret, E., 'The EU's chemical weapons sanctions regime', *Brief No 17*, EUISS, July 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/eu's-chemical-weapons-sanctions-regime>).

# EU voting at the United Nations

In 2020, 57 individual UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) were voted on.

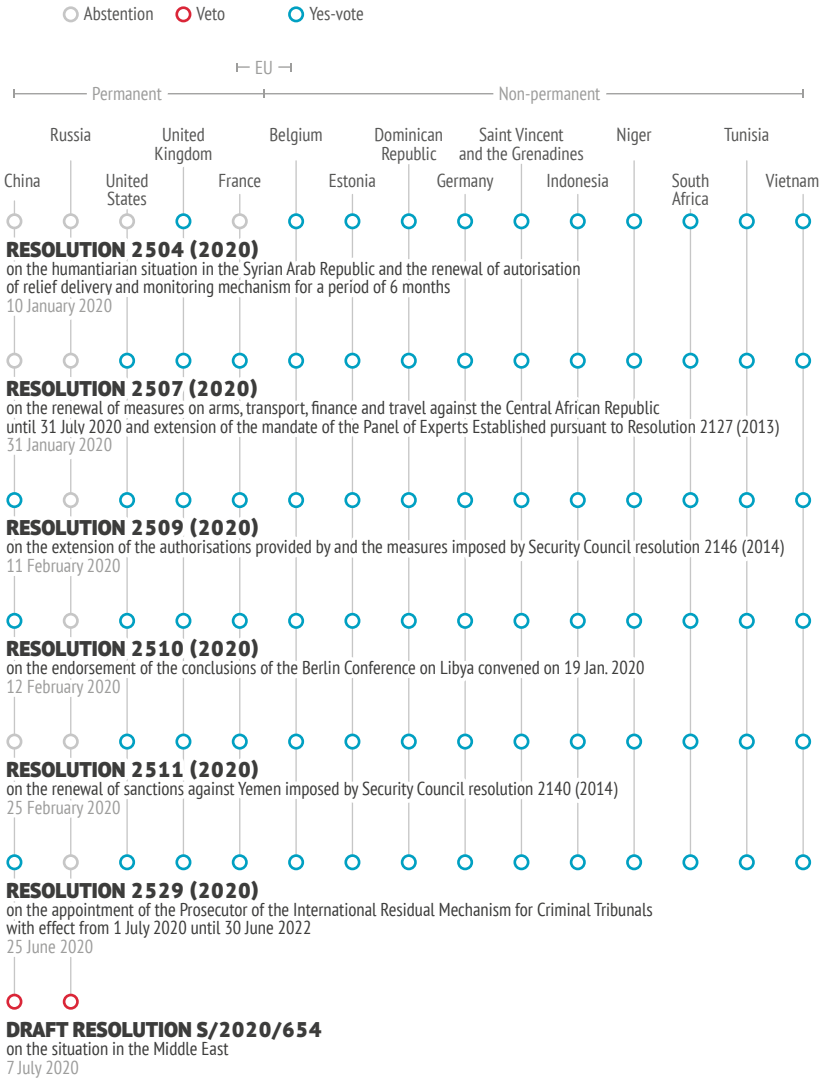
- > 45 were passed unanimously
- > 12 were subject to abstentions
- > 3 draft Security Council resolutions were vetoed.

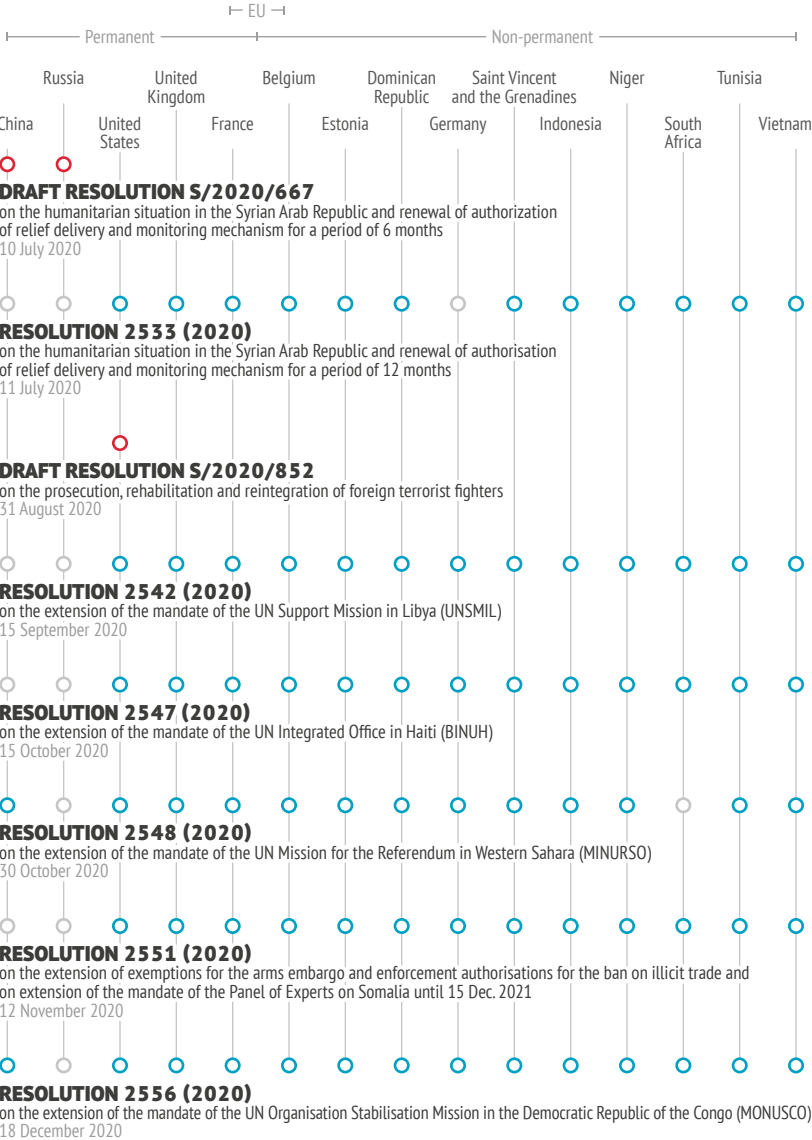
In addition to France as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, the EU was represented by Belgium, Estonia and Germany.



# UN Security Council voting

By permanent and non-permanent members, 2020





## Core documents

- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on climate diplomacy', 20 January 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5033-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2020', 17 February 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5982-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law)', COM(2020) 80 final, 4 March 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0080&from=EN>).
- > European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid', COM(2020) 461 final, 29 May 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0461&from=EN>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on the annual report 2020 to the European Council on EU development aid targets', 5 June 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8628-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Annual report on the EU's humanitarian aid operations financed in 2019', COM(2020) 358 final, 7 August 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0358&from=en>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on the 2020 Strategic Foresight Report: strategic foresight – charting the course towards a more resilient Europe', COM(2020) 493 final, 9 September 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0493&from=en>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on stepping up Europe's 2020 climate ambition – Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people', COM(2020) 562 final, 17 September 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0562&from=en>).
- > European Commission and HR/VP, 'Joint proposal for a Council regulation concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses', JOIN(2020) 20 final, 19 October 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:75ac0201-5ccd-11eb-b487-01aa75ed71a1.0004.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:75ac0201-5ccd-11eb-b487-01aa75ed71a1.0004.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Climate change and defence roadmap', 9 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12741-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on the EU Action Plan on human rights and democracy 2020-2024', 18 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12848-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on human rights and decent work in global supply chains', 2 December 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13512-2020-REV-1/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on EU peace mediation', 7 December 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13573-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication for a European Climate Pact', COM(2020) 788 final, 9 December 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0788&from=en>).
- > European Commission, 'Report on the implementation of the EU's Instruments for financing external Action in 2019', COM(2020) 804 final, 14 December 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0804&from=en>).
- > European Parliament, 'Implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy — annual report 2020', 20 January 2021 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0012\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0012_EN.html)).

# Turkey and the Western Balkans

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## Turkey

One of the most significant challenges for the EU in 2020 was its relations with Turkey. A NATO ally, Turkey's illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean were a major cause of concern for the Union. Based on the bilateral and contested memorandum of understanding signed between Turkey and Libya in 2019 on exclusive economic zones (EEZs), Ankara provoked Greece and Cyprus during 2020 by deploying exploration and drilling vessels in their respective EEZs. Turkish provocations of this nature were usually accompanied by Turkish naval vessels, which further escalated the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. During 2020, the EU

**Ankara provoked Greece and Cyprus during 2020 by deploying exploration and drilling vessels.**

expressed its deep concern about illegal drilling operations in Cyprus' EEZ and breaches of airspace and territorial seas in January, May, August (when illegal drilling activities were accompanied by naval provocations) and November. There seemed to be a de-escalation at the end of September when the research vessel Oruç

Reis withdrew from its operations, but this was offset by the announcement that Turkey would extend the operations of its Yavuz drilling vessel.

Each of these episodes spurred EU's condemnation of Turkey for not trying to de-escalate the situation, and the Union strongly underlined its solidarity with Greece and Cyprus. In fact, on 6 November 2020, the Council of the EU extended sanctions on Turkey for illegal drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean until 12 November 2021. Despite these actions, the HR/VP maintained communication channels with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu during the year. Calls and meetings were held in January (to convey the EU's solidarity in the wake of the earthquake that struck eastern Turkey), March, July and August. However, in March 2020 the crisis became particularly heated given Turkey's decision to encourage migrants and refugees to head towards the Greek borders to enter the EU. In 2019, Turkey was home to 3.6 million Syrian refugees, 370 000 refugees from Afghanistan and many more from Iraq, Iran and Somalia<sup>(1)</sup>.

On 8 October 2020, Turkey caused even more concern when it took the decision to 're-open' the sealed-off area of Varosha, which Turkish forces had fenced off after its invasion of Cyprus in 1974. Greek Cypriots have not been allowed to return to Varosha since this time, but Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited the area in October in breach of UNSC resolutions. The EU expressed its grave concern over the decision and called on Turkey to desist from such measures. In another symbolic gesture to harm EU-Turkey relations, Turkey took the decision in mid-July to turn over the management of the Hagia Sophia — a UNESCO World Heritage site that signifies the meeting of Christianity and Islam — to its Religious Affairs Presidency, which put into question the openness of the site for multiple cultures and religions. Furthermore, on 22 November, EUNAVFOR Operation IRINI inspected a Turkish-flagged merchant ship in the Mediterranean based on reasonable grounds that it might be violating the UN arms embargo.

The EU continued to support refugees in the region — Turkey hosts close to 4 million refugees and 70 % of them are children and women. At the beginning of June, the European Commission

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(1) European Commission, 'Communication on the fourth annual report on the facility for refugees in Turkey', COM(2020) 162 final, 30 April 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0162&from=en>).

announced additional financial support of €585 million in response to the Syria crisis and €485 million of this amount was dedicated to Syrian refugees residing in Turkey <sup>(2)</sup>. The financial support, which was approved by the European Parliament on 10 July 2020, would help 1.7 million refugees meet their basic humanitarian needs and help 600 000 children go to school <sup>(3)</sup>. In December, the European Commission announced that it was extending its support to the region and Turkey until early 2022.

Human rights in the region remained a high concern for the EU. It expressed its dismay at the deterioration of the rule of law, fundamental rights and human rights in Turkey, especially given the sentencing and detention of journalist Can Dündar, of Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas and of civil society activist Osman Kavala, for exercising freedom of expression. In May, the EU expressed its concern at the decision by Turkish authorities to hamper the freedom of mayors from opposition parties through arbitrary suspensions. At the end of August, EU officials were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Ebru Timtik after she had been on hunger strike for several months. She was the fourth prisoner to die in Turkish prison cells in 2020.

## Western Balkans

One of the pressing challenges of the EU's relations with the Western Balkans in 2020 centred on EU accession. A European Commission communication published on 5 February 2020 reiterated the Union's unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, and that EU enlargement in the region was a geostrategic investment on the part of the EU. Accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia were opened shortly after on 25 March

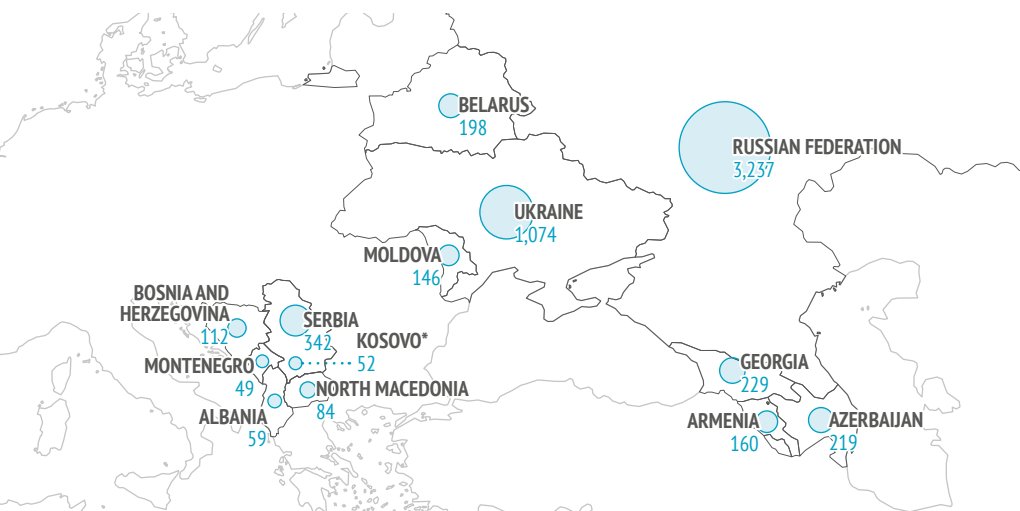
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(2) European Commission, 'Commission proposes to top up support for refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey', 3 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_998](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_998)).

(3) European Commission, 'Turkey: Extension of EU humanitarian programmes supporting 1.7 million refugees receives green light', 10 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1324](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1324)).

## Covid-19

Russia, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership – Cumulative cases,  
Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

2020. However, the Communication also recognised that there were improvements to be made in the accession process, not least in terms of addressing the structural weaknesses of countries in the region, and ensuring genuine and credible commitments on fundamental reforms. Most importantly, the new approach also underlined the political nature of EU accession. The Commission also stressed the need for more leadership from the region, plus a greater role for EU Member States in the process. In practice, this would mean that EU Member States could decide to halt negotiations should genuine progress on reforms not be made and a degree of reversibility would be introduced into the process (e.g. EU funding could be scaled down in case of a lack of reforms by Western Balkan governments).

**The Commission also stressed the need for more leadership from the region.**



The EU also moved swiftly to support the Western Balkans during the Covid-19 crisis. On 29 April, the European Commission outlined detailed support for the region in advance of the 6 May EU-Western Balkans leaders' meeting. The EU recognised the economic devastation caused by the pandemic in the region and called for cooperation in the area of joint procurement of medical equipment, managing temporary travel restrictions and countering disinformation in the region. The proposed recovery plan includes economic assistance, supporting the region with climate and digital transitions, enhancing energy linkages and tackling fundamental issues related to rule of law, democratic institutions and public administration.

On 6 May 2020, EU leaders signed the Zagreb Declaration on solidarity with partners in the Western Balkans in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organised under the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Declaration stressed the European perspective of Western Balkan states, and it accompanied a financial package of €3.3 billion to deal with the pandemic in the region<sup>(4)</sup>. In mid-July, the EU congratulated North Macedonia on parliamentary elections but it noted that a number of shortcomings could undermine the legal stability of the election. The Zagreb Declaration also stressed the need to cooperate on anti-corruption efforts, counter organised crime, promote gender equality, fight disinformation and hybrid threats, enhance economic relations, and strengthen connectivity in transport, energy, digital and between people. The fight against terrorism and illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans are also listed as important areas of cooperation. Finally, the Declaration underlined the need to commonly tackle migration challenges, diversify energy resources and transition to green economies.

In June, the Council of the EU released conclusions on enhancing cooperation with the Western Balkans in the field of migration and security. Concerned about migrant smuggling networks in the region, and the effects of the Covid-19 crisis, the Council of Ministers called for greater support for Western Balkans countries to help improve their respective asylum and migration systems; enhance the capacity to conduct voluntary and forced returns of illegally-staying

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(4) Council of the European Union, 'Zagreb Declaration', 6 May 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf>).

third-country nationals to countries of origin; boost information exchange in the region and with the EU; halt the spread of disinformation; develop cybersecurity capacities; dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks; and use CSDP missions and operations to enhance security cooperation. Regarding criminal networks and organised crime, the Council of the EU called for greater efforts to stem the spread of firearms, drugs, human smuggling and trafficking, fraud and money laundering, and terrorism and violent extremism. Finally, the Council conclusions called for a joint risk analysis picture of the region with regard to cases of large influxes of mixed migration.

Following the Zagreb Declaration and the steps to enhance closer cooperation with the Western Balkans during the year, on 26 May Frontex concluded agreements with Montenegro and Serbia for border management. On 6 October, the European Commission unveiled its economic and investment plan for the region. The plan would potentially see €9 billion invested in the region by the EU over the 2021–2027 period, with the hope that this money could leverage a further €20 billion for investments in infrastructure and connectivity and the green and digital transitions<sup>(5)</sup>. The European Commission made clear that the bulk of the investments in the region should be directed towards key productive investments and infrastructure such as clean energy, sustainable transport, ultra-fast and secure broadband, cybersecurity, inclusive education and labour market participation. Finally, the Commission also reiterated that the economic and investment plan should be used to help support the creation of a common regional market in the Western Balkans to better attract inward investment and build supply resilience in times of crisis.

11 July 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Srebrenica Genocide, which the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission and the HR/VP noted as one of the darkest chapters of modern European history. On 23 November 2020, HR/VP Borrell visited Sarajevo to mark the 25th anniversary of

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(5) European Commission, 'Communication for an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans', COM(2020) 641 final, 6 October 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d32825b0-08ad-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d32825b0-08ad-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).

the Dayton Peace Agreement and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The anniversary came only days after local elections on 15 November, and the EU reiterated its unequivocal commitment to BiH as a single, unified and sovereign country. In this context, and given the first local elections in Mostar since 2008, the EU called for calm and urged all parties to refrain from provocative and divisive rhetoric in the run-up to the elections. The Council also stressed its support for EUFOR Operation Althea, especially given the challenges posed by the pandemic. However, at the very end of the year the HR/VP expressed his concern for the serious humanitarian situation that had unfolded in BiH. In Lipa, over 3 000 migrants had been left without shelter in severe winter conditions after BiH authorities closed the reception centre to cope with the pandemic <sup>(6)</sup>.

Throughout the year, the EU provided the Western Balkans with vital medical and PPE equipment. For example, on 18 December 2020, the EU sent over 500 000 facemasks, 540 000 medical gloves, 49 200 protective overalls, 49 200 cover shoes and 5 500 goggles to Serbian authorities <sup>(7)</sup>. Kosovo also received financial support from

**The EU provided the Western Balkans with vital medical and PPE equipment.**

the EU in December to assist with the socio-economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. In February, the EU welcomed the vote of the Kosovo Assembly to confirm the new government led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti. The EU called for the resumption of the EU-facilitated

Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue following the confirmation. At the end of February, the EU welcomed Prime Minister Kurti's decision to lift import tariffs on raw materials from Serbia and BiH, especially as the tariffs had been a trigger for conflict in the region. In June, however, the EU noted weaknesses with Serbia's parliamentary elections and called to strengthen freedom of the press and political pluralism. In November, President of Kosovo Hashim Thaçi resigned

(6) EEAS, 'BiH: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the migrant situation in Una-Sana Canton', 31 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91097/bih-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-migrant-situation-una-sana-canton\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91097/bih-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-migrant-situation-una-sana-canton_en)).

(7) European Commission, 'Coronavirus: rescEU medical materials dispatched to Serbia', 18 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2495](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2495)).

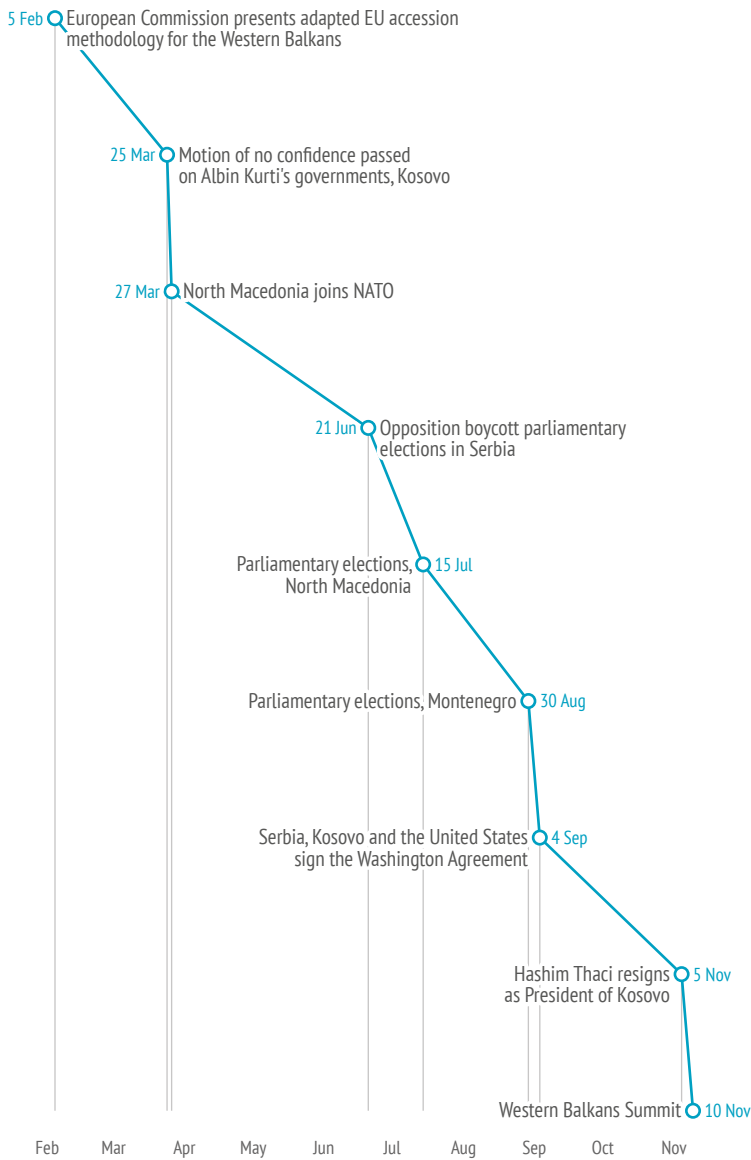
and agreed to cooperate with the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutors Office for charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

### Core documents

- > European Commission, 'Communication on enhancing the accession process – a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans', COM(2020) 57 final, 5 February 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0057&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process – Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia', 25 March 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7002-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery', COM(2020) 315 final, 29 April 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0315&from=en>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication on the fourth annual report on the facility for refugees in Turkey', COM(2020) 162 final, 30 April 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0162&from=en>).
- > European Council, 'Zagreb Declaration', 6 May 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security', 5 June 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8622-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Communication for an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans', COM(2020) 641 final, 6 October 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d32825b0-08ad-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:d32825b0-08ad-11eb-a511-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina/Operation EUFOR Althea', 12 October 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11433-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

Key events

Western Balkans



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021



# **The southern neighbourhood**

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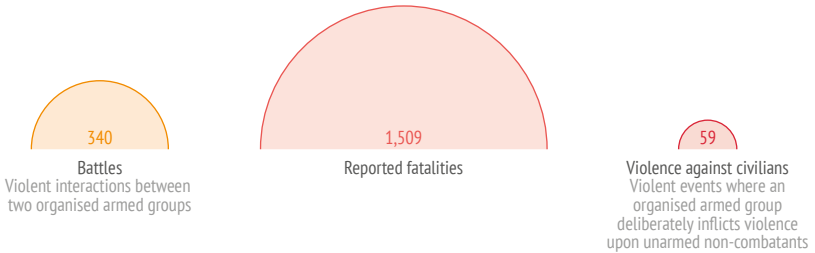
## **North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf Region**

**T**he conflict in Libya continued to concern the EU throughout 2020. In January, the EU expressed its strong apprehension at the decision by Turkey to authorise military deployments to Libya. The EU stressed that the further militarisation of the conflict would not help stabilise Libya over the long term. In the same month, Libya witnessed an escalation of violence in and around Tripoli with a military school being targeted during attacks. Other attacks in February hit the port in Tripoli and resulted in further human suffering and civilian casualties. Fighting in the country escalated in March despite the pandemic and international calls for a ceasefire. In some instances, civilian infrastructure was used for military purposes which led to increased numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs). In April, the Al Khadra General Hospital in Tripoli was struck by shells causing massive injuries and damages to this important medical facility.

Following these months of violence, the EU, the UN and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Italy called for a ceasefire and a return to the Berlin process to facilitate peace. However, in May, further attacks took place in Tripoli including strikes on residential areas and neighbourhoods by General Haftar's forces.

## Libya

Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

## Libya

EU Integrated Approach, since 2011, € million



EUBAM  
Libya  
CSDP

Data: European External Action Service, 2021

## Covid-19 and North Africa

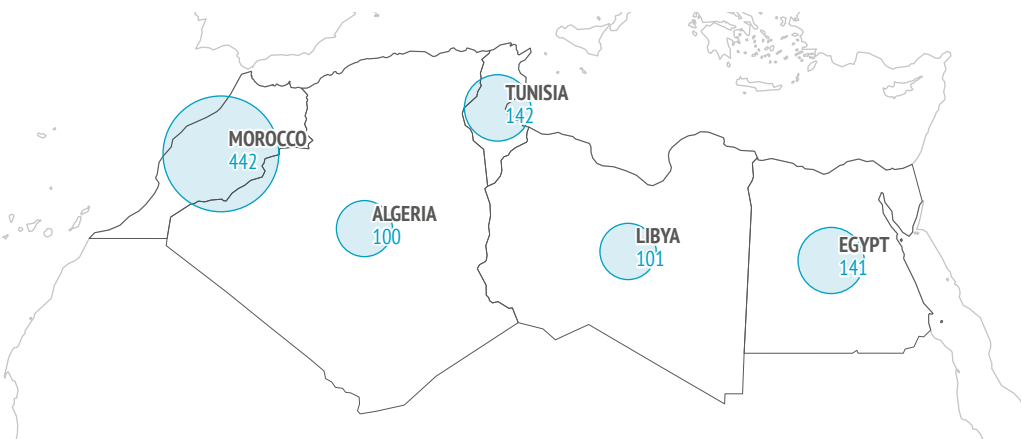
The pandemic served as a major shock to the economies of North Africa in 2020, although it should be noted that countries in the region were already experiencing strained economies before the initial outbreak of Covid-19. Nevertheless, the pandemic strained health systems in the region. From 3 January 2020 to 18 June 2021, Libya had experienced over 190 000 cases, Algeria over 134 000, Morocco over 525 000, Tunisia over 376 000 and Egypt over 275 000. More than 45 000 deaths were reported in the region by the World Health Organisation over this same period\*.

\* World Health Organisation, 'Global Data' (<https://covid19.who.int>).

Mid-May, the Union called for another ceasefire and a de-escalation of violence in Libya. A breakthrough seemed to emerge in mid-June following peace talks in Egypt and a commitment to halt fighting and resume dialogue. Despite this positive development, in the same month mass graves were discovered in Tarhuna, in the

## Covid-19

North Africa – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

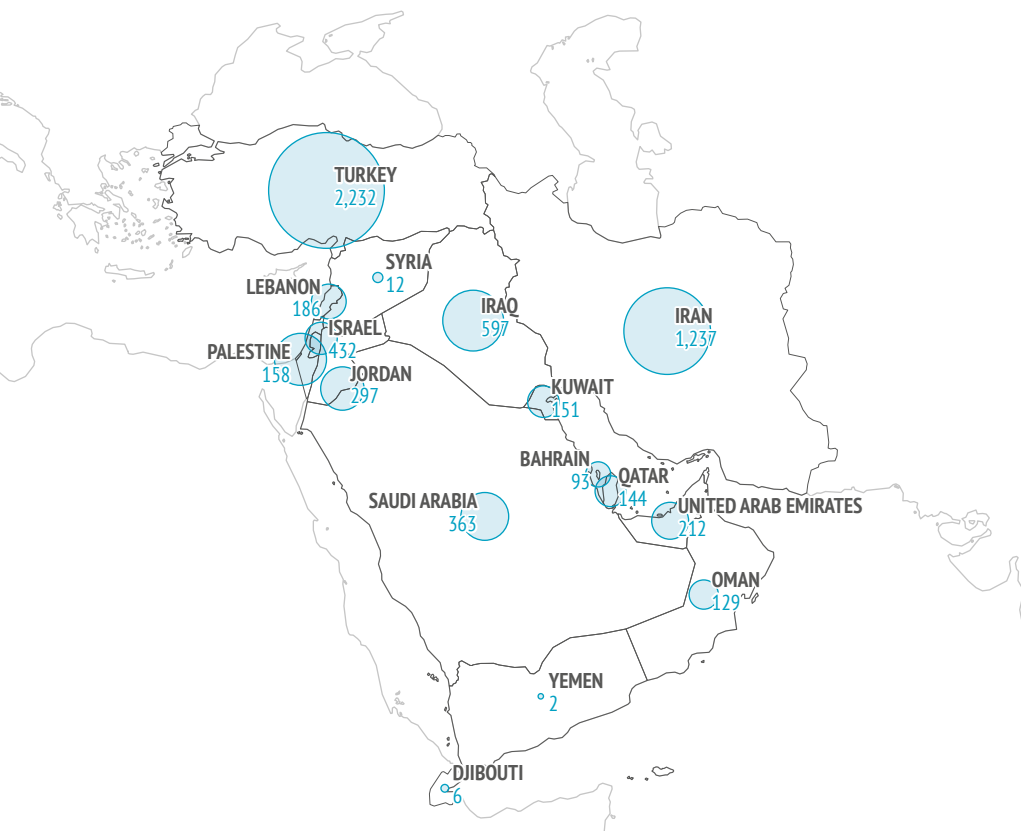
northwest of Libya. Regional players involved in the Libyan conflict continued to threaten to resort to violence during July, and the EU continued to call for a Libyan-led negotiated settlement.

On 1 September, HR/VP Borrell visited Libya following the 21 August agreement between the rival governments represented by President Fayeze al-Serraj and Speaker Aguila Saleh respectively, which formed the basis for a ceasefire. The EU underlined that it wished to reach a permanent and sustainable ceasefire, the lifting of the oil blockade across Libya and political dialogue. At the end of September, the Council of the EU imposed additional sanctions on individuals and entities in Libya for human rights abuses and violations of the UN arms embargo, but Agila Saleh, speaker of the Tobruk-based House of Representatives, and Nuri Abu Sahmain, former president of the General National Congress of Libya, were removed from the sanctions list following their constructive role in supporting a negotiated political settlement to the crisis. Further sanctions were imposed in mid-October for individuals engaged in the violation of the UN arms embargo. However, October ended with good news as a ceasefire agreement by the Libyan representatives



## Covid-19

Middle East and Gulf Region – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

of the 5+5 Joint Military Committee was signed in Geneva on 23 October.

The Covid-19 pandemic took its toll on Tunisia's economy during 2020, with mass unemployment and business bankruptcy experienced in parts of the country. Even before the pandemic struck, the Tunisian economy was affected by slow growth and high debt levels. One estimate shows that Tunisia experienced a 9.2 % contraction in

growth during 2020<sup>(1)</sup>. At the end of March, the EU disbursed grants worth €250 million to help the country with the effects of the pandemic. Additional grants worth €60 million were also made available to the country's health programme ('Health/Esaha Aziza')<sup>(2)</sup>. In addition, following progress on the respect of human rights and rule of law<sup>(3)</sup>, the EU awarded funding worth €90 million to assist with development. In June, protests broke out in Tataouine as the governorate experienced a rapid increase in unemployment, and further unrest would occur throughout the year and in 2021.

In December, the EU released its report on relations between the EU and Algeria for the period 2018 to 2020. The report concluded that the EU will step up its support for the country during the pandemic by approving emergency assistance including PPE and social and economic assistance. The report also acknowledged the difficult period that Algeria had experienced since 2019. Unprecedented and peaceful grassroots protests ('Hirak') had eventually led to the election of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, which gave rise to a constitutional review in 2020. In Egypt, the Union expressed its concern at the deteriorating human rights situation in the country with arrests and prosecution of civil society organisations, media and citizens for simply expressing themselves on social media. In December, the EU and Egypt managed to sign an amendment to the Health Sector Policy Support Programme-II, worth €89 million, to better gear efforts to combatting the coronavirus in Egypt.

Lebanon was an unstable country throughout 2020. In January, positive news emerged when a new government was formed on a platform to address acute economic challenges and structural reforms. However, Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib resigned from his post at the end of September following instability in the country and a failure to form a government cabinet. Following the 4

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- (1) The World Bank, 'Tunisia Economic Monitor: Rebuilding the potential of Tunisian firms - Fall 2020', 1 September 2020 (<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/194331608565600726/tunisia-economic-monitor-rebuilding-the-potential-of-tunisian-firms-fall-2020>).
  - (2) EEAS, 'L'Union européenne appuie les efforts de la Tunisie pour lutter contre le Covid-19', 28 March 2020, ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/76678/lunion-europeenne-appuie-les-efforts-de-la-tunisie-pour-lutter-contre-le-covid-19\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/tunisia/76678/lunion-europeenne-appuie-les-efforts-de-la-tunisie-pour-lutter-contre-le-covid-19_en)).
  - (3) European Commission, 'Tunisia' ([https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/tunisia\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/tunisia_en)).

August port blast in Beirut, the EU focused its efforts on providing humanitarian and logistics support to Lebanon. The port explosion occurred because of the accidental ignition of 2 750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, which had been stored in Beirut for years in insecure conditions. The port blast resulted in over 200 fatalities, 6 000 injuries, 300 000 people displaced and a surge in Covid-19 cases afterwards<sup>(4)</sup>. Such a crisis emerged in the context of the ongoing political crisis in the country, civil unrest and the fact that Lebanon is home to over 1 million Syrian as well as Palestinian refugees<sup>(5)</sup>.

EU support to Lebanon followed quickly after the blast. On 9 August, the EU pledged support worth over €60 million to the country to meet immediate humanitarian needs and help the victims of the port blast — the EU has provided Lebanon with €2.3 billion in financial and humanitarian assistance since 2011. Under the UCPM,

**The EU deployed more than 250 humanitarian and relief experts on the ground in Beirut days after the explosion.**

the EU deployed more than 250 humanitarian and relief experts on the ground in Beirut days after the explosion<sup>(6)</sup>. By the end of August, the EU humanitarian air bridge flight mechanism delivered more than 29 tonnes of essential PPE and humanitarian aid to Beirut<sup>(7)</sup>. A further 30 tonnes of equipment and assistance was

delivered on 12 September 2020 and European Commissioner Janez Lenarčič visited Lebanon to discuss what additional support the Union could provide<sup>(8)</sup>.

Following Prime Minister-designate Mustapha Adib's resignation in September, Saad Hariri was nominated Prime Minister-designate

(4) International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 'Case study: Chemical explosion Beirut port', 2020 ([https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CaseStudy\\_BeirutExplosion\\_TechBioHazardsweb.pdf](https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CaseStudy_BeirutExplosion_TechBioHazardsweb.pdf)).

(5) Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Lebanon', 7 December 2020.

(6) European Commission, 'European Commission pledges additional €30 million in immediate support for Lebanon', 9 August 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1466](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1466)).

(7) European Commission, 'Lebanon: EU delivers additional emergency assistance following the explosion in Beirut', 31 August 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1537](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1537)).

(8) European Commission, 'EU steps up aid for Lebanon – European Commissioner for Crisis Management in Beirut', 12 September 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1637](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1637)).

## China and the Middle East

'It is commonly perceived that the engagement of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the Middle East is driven primarily by economic interests, and that it prefers to steer clear of the conflicts in the region as much as possible. Its landmark 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), launched in 2013 as a global infrastructure development strategy, contributes to this perception. This notion, however, overlooks the larger context of China's engagement, both historical and contemporary. China's new activism in the Middle East reflects the evolution of Chinese foreign policy thinking, in line with the country's rise as an economic superpower. Its original choice of partners in the region was influenced by ideological considerations and a shared anti-colonial and anti-imperialist narrative. But its transformation into an economic powerhouse has inevitably altered its priorities and influence in the Middle East. Its economic penetration of the region is reflected in the set of cooperation agreements that it has concluded with the regional states as well as in subregional cooperation formats, e. g. the China-Arab State Cooperation Forum. The PRC's increasing engagement in the Middle East may well be driven by its need for resources to fuel its economic growth; however, there is inevitably a political dimension too, due not only to the fact that China has a seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) and seeks to project the image of a 'responsible' superpower but also because of the need to protect its investments and commercial interests in the region.'

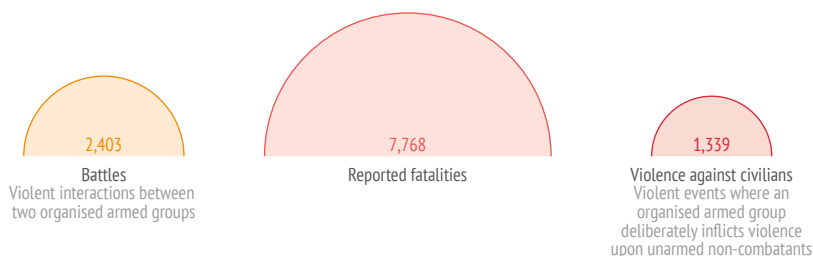
Rózsa, E., 'Deciphering China in the Middle East', *Brief No 14*, EUISS, June 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/deciphering-china-middle-east>).

and the EU called for the swift formation of a government given the humanitarian crisis in the country and long-overdue reforms. The EU called on the new government to adhere to the roadmap of reforms supported by the International Support Group. In December, the Council of the EU stressed the grave financial, economic, social and political crisis afflicting the country and it saluted the Union's relief efforts alongside the World Bank and the UN. The Council also outlined the need for economic and governance reforms in the areas of inclusion, social security, fundamental rights and freedoms, regulation of the financial and electricity sectors, and public procurement.

Syria continued to pose challenges for EU crisis response in 2020, especially given the Covid-19 virus. In mid-January, the EU welcomed the decision by the UNSC to extend its authorisation for cross-border humanitarian assistance in the country, but this news was marred by airstrikes by the Syrian regime in the north-west

## Syria

Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

of the country. The strikes aggravated an already acute humanitarian crisis in Syria, which had resulted in the displacement of 350 000 civilians in January alone<sup>(9)</sup>. By the beginning of February, this number had almost doubled as the Syrian regime intensified its bombing campaign in Idlib. In the same month, the EU added a further eight individuals and two entities to its ever-growing sanctions list for supporting the Syrian regime. The EU and UN both called for a ceasefire at the end of March in view of the pandemic and the disastrous humanitarian situation in the country, but, at the end of April, a terrorist attack struck Afrin central market which resulted in mass casualties. EU sanctions on the Syrian regime were extended on 28 May for another year, until 1 June 2021.

In mid-May, the European Commission published guidance on how humanitarian assistance could be provided to Syria despite the virus and sanctions on the country. The guidance made clear that the more than 270 individuals subjected to sanctions should not stop humanitarian aid deliveries to the most vulnerable people and areas of Syria. The Commission recognised that certain equipment such as trucks that are used to transport humanitarian aid could be subject to restrictive measures, but, again, it stressed the need to

(9) EEAS, 'Syria: Statement by the Spokesperson on military attacks on civilians in Idlib', 23 January 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73360/syria-statement-spokesperson-military-attacks-civilians-idlib\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73360/syria-statement-spokesperson-military-attacks-civilians-idlib_en)).

freely transport PPE, ventilators and medical equipment to affected areas <sup>(10)</sup>. From 22–30 June, the fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region was organised and the meeting took stock of more than nine years of conflict in the country. Approximately 80 delegates from international organisations and regional partners attended the conference, and much of the discussion focused on the immediate needs of Syrians during the pandemic. Overall, the conference resulted in a pledge of €6.9 billion for Syria and neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees. The EU pledged 71 % or €4.9 billion of the total amount <sup>(11)</sup>.

Good news emerged in mid-July as the UNSC agreed to a resolution to allow cross-border assistance for those suffering in Syria — before being adopted the resolution had been repeatedly vetoed by China and Russia. In August, there was news that the Constitutional Committee, which had not met since the outbreak of Covid-19, had convened to discuss the political and humanitarian situation in the country. The Constitutional Committee is an UN-facilitated assembly that is seeking to reconcile the Syrian regime and opposition groups. On 6 November 2020, the Council of the EU imposed further sanctions on additional Syrian ministers for their role in violent repression in the country.

During a press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 28 January, President Trump unveiled his so-called ‘deal of the century’ for the Middle East entitled ‘Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People’. The political framework of the peace plan came several months after the Trump administration had published the economic portion

**The conference resulted in a pledge of €6.9 billion for Syria and neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees.**

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(10) European Commission, ‘Commission guidance note on the provision of humanitarian aid to fight the Covid-19 pandemic in certain environments subject to EU restrictive measures’, C(2020) 3179 final, 11 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business\\_economy\\_euro/banking\\_and\\_finance/documents/200511-syria-humanitarian-aid-guidance-note\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/business_economy_euro/banking_and_finance/documents/200511-syria-humanitarian-aid-guidance-note_en.pdf)).

(11) European Commission, ‘Syrian crisis: EU mobilises an overall pledge of €6.9 billion for 2020 and beyond’, 30 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1211](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1211)).

## Arab police reform

'In its ideal form, the police force or service is both a state institution and a part of the community. It serves to regulate daily life and enforce the rule of law in an active partnership with citizens. And, even while policing approaches and models vary as much as the contexts in which they operate, police forces still fulfil their essential role as long as they protect citizens' rights, life and property while taking into consideration the community's needs. In much of the Arab world, the police have become detached from the community they are supposed to serve. The partnership between police and people has become dysfunctional and mutually mistrustful; rights and needs are ignored, while the police often serve other masters than the citizen and the law. This rupture brings conflict, violence and insecurity into the heart of the community and the state.'

Gaub, F. and Walsh, A., 'Relationship therapy: making Arab police reform work', *Chaillot Paper* No 160, EUISS, November 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/relationship-therapy-making-arab-police-reform-work>).

of the plan ('Peace to Prosperity') in June 2019. Despite this step, the EU expressed its concern that Israeli authorities had approved the construction of approximately 2 000 housing units in illegal settlements in the West Bank <sup>(12)</sup>. Further settlement announcements were made by Israeli authorities in February, during the formation of a new government in Israel, and in October with a further 5 000 housing units <sup>(13)</sup>. On 1 February, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the White House plan and cut all ties with the US and Israel, including security ties. Subsequently, the plan was also rejected by the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

In a statement released by the HR/VP Josep Borrell, the Union reaffirmed its support for a negotiated two-State solution, based on

(12) EEAS, 'Israel: Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest settlement announcements', 9 January 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/72805/israel-statement-spokesperson-latest-settlement-announcements\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/72805/israel-statement-spokesperson-latest-settlement-announcements_en)).

(13) EEAS, 'West Bank: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on Israeli settlement expansion', 15 October 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87070/west-bank-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-israeli-settlement-expansion\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/87070/west-bank-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-israeli-settlement-expansion_en)).

1967 lines, as set out in the Council conclusions in 2014<sup>(14)</sup>. The HR/VP also declared that the EU does not recognise Israel's sovereignty over the territories occupied since 1967. During May, with the formation of a new government, the EU expressed its hope of working constructively on peace in the region and assisting Israel with the ill effects of the pandemic. In November, however, there was cause for further concern as Israeli forces demolished more than 70 structures belonging to Palestinian families in the northern Jordan Valley<sup>(15)</sup>.

The EU continued to support the most vulnerable Palestinian people in 2020. On 8 July, the EU dedicated €22.7 million in humanitarian aid to those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Palestinians face violence, hardship and lack of essential services and the Covid-19 pandemic had increased their vulnerability. The EU noted that since the outbreak of the virus, the demolition of Palestinian housing and infrastructure had continued. The EU estimates that 2.4 million Palestinians need humanitarian assistance<sup>(16)</sup>. By the end of the year, the EU had also provided the Palestinian Authority with financial support for 30 infrastructure projects in Gaza and it transferred allowance payments to the Palestinian Authority for basic social protection to vulnerable families in the West Bank and Gaza.

Later in the year, the Trump administration brokered several peace agreements ('Abraham Accords') between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Kingdom of Bahrain, Sudan and the Kingdom of Morocco — the first between Israel and Arab countries since 1994. The EU viewed the agreements as positive overall and at the end of the year, the Union thanked Kuwait for its efforts to resolve the crisis within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The EU stated that solving the internal rift within the GCC would be key to restoring unity and confidence in the region, and the Union hoped that it could resume its cooperation with the Council.

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(14) EEAS, 'MEPP: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the US initiative', 4 February 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/73960/MEPP:%20Statement%20by%20the%20High%20Representative/Vice-President%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20US%20initiative](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/73960/MEPP:%20Statement%20by%20the%20High%20Representative/Vice-President%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20US%20initiative)).

(15) EEAS, 'Statement by the Spokesperson on the Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures', 5 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88156/statement-spokesperson-israeli-demolitions-palestinian-structures\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88156/statement-spokesperson-israeli-demolitions-palestinian-structures_en)).

(16) For all data in this paragraph see: European Commission, 'EU allocates over €22 million to help Palestinians in need', 8 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1298](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1298)).



The US-brokered so-called 'Abraham Accords' were also seen as an attempt to further weaken Iran which is a common rival of the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain. Tensions between

**Tensions between Washington and Tehran had escalated further at the beginning of the year.**

Washington and Tehran had escalated further at the beginning of the year. On 3 January, the US killed Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the al-Quds force within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IGRC), in a targeted drone strike in Baghdad, Iraq. In

retaliation, Iran attacked two Iraqi military bases housing US troops on 8 January. On the same day, Iran accidentally shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, killing 176 people. In a separate statement, on 14 January, the E3 (Germany, France and the UK) also criticised Iran's 5 January announcement that outlined Tehran's fifth breach of the 2015 JCPoA and referred the matter to the Joint Commission under the Dispute Resolution Mechanism, as set out in paragraph 36 of the JCPoA.

In May, the EU roundly condemned comments by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, after he called into question Israel's legitimacy. Later in the year, the US announced it would invoke the so-called 'snapback mechanism' to reimpose UN sanctions against Iran. However, the US position remained widely isolated and the HR/VP stressed that the US had left the JCPoA in May 2018, and could therefore not initiate the process of reinstating UN sanctions under the UN Security Council resolution 2231. In addition to the JCPoA, Iran also continued to breach fundamental freedoms and engage in human rights abuses. For example, the EU condemned Iran's decision to convict and execute Ruhollah Zam on 12 December for participating in protests.

The EU also offered support to Iraq in 2020 and the humanitarian air bridge provided over 40 tonnes of medical and humanitarian supplies at the end of July. In the same month, the EU announced a fresh humanitarian aid package of €35 million to help victims of

conflict, displacement and the Covid-19 virus<sup>(17)</sup>. Iraq started the year with violence as nationwide anti-government protests resulted in loss of life and arrests. On 10 January, an extraordinary meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, joined by NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, discussed the developments in Iraq. The Council called for urgent de-escalation and maximum restraint while also condemning attacks on coalition forces fighting against Daesh. Prior to this, the E3 had already issued a similar joint statement on 6 January. In a speech to the European Parliament on 14 January 2020, the HR/VP stated that the spiral of violence could profit Daesh and other terrorist groups in the country.

The EU welcomed the news about the appointment of a new prime minister in February and it hoped this would be an important step for stability and reform in Iraq. However, in March, Daesh attacked the military base in Taji, which resulted in casualties for Global Coalition forces combatting the terrorist group. On 7 April 2020, the EU decided to extend the EUAM to Iraq until 30 April 2022 to help implement the security sector reform. By May, a vote of confidence by the Iraqi Council of Representatives on the new government of Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhimi signalled an appetite for long-term stability in the country.

The conflict in Yemen posed a significant challenge for the EU, even without the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. In January, the EU condemned an attack on a military camp in Marib by the Houthi movement which resulted in the deaths of more than 60 Yemeni soldiers. These attacks mirrored further violence in the country throughout January, although the government announced that it desired a ceasefire in the country after five years of war and the pandemic. At the beginning of April, a ceasefire announcement was made by Saudi Arabia on behalf of the 'Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen', and the EU stated that this was positive news. This was undermined at the end of June following attacks on Saudi Arabia with drones and ballistic missiles, plus a resumption and intensification of violence inside Yemen.

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(17) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: EU humanitarian air bridge to Iraq and new funding', 27 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1414](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1414)).

## Yemen

EU Integrated Approach, since 2015, € million



Data: European External Action Service, 2021

### The intertwined layers of the Yemen conflict

‘The crisis in Yemen epitomises the complexity of contemporary intra-state conflicts: rather than a simple, binary war, the situation is characterised by various layers of conflict with multiple state, hybrid, non-state actors and foreign state powers playing active roles. Analysts and policymakers need to be aware of this complexity in order to grasp the drivers and implications of this war, and identify possible avenues for conflict resolution. Yemen matters a lot for the strategic interests of the EU: its Western waters are the southern frontier of the Mediterranean Sea. But Yemen has also become an arena of strategic competition for the Gulf and Middle Eastern state powers, who have constructed or taken over control of ports, military bases and airports along its coasts and islands as a springboard for projection in the Western Indian Ocean. Finally, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), established in 2009 and based in Yemen, remains one of the most entrenched and resilient jihadi networks in terms of local ties and political adaptability.’

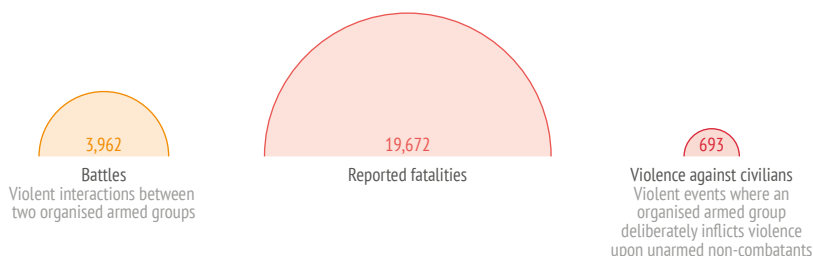
Ardemagni, E., ‘Beyond Yemen’s miliadioms: restarting from local agency’, *Brief No 8, Conflict Series*, EUISS, April 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/beyond-yemen's-miliadioms>).

At the beginning of June, the European Commission provided €70 million in new funding to the country to deal with famine and the spread of the virus<sup>(18)</sup>. The humanitarian support was principally geared to providing food, nutrition, water, shelter and hygiene kits in a country where 80 % of the population need some form of humanitarian assistance. In July, the EU provided more financial

(18) European Commission, ‘Yemen: EU allocates over €70 million to help most vulnerable population’, 3 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_993](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_993)).

## Yemen

Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

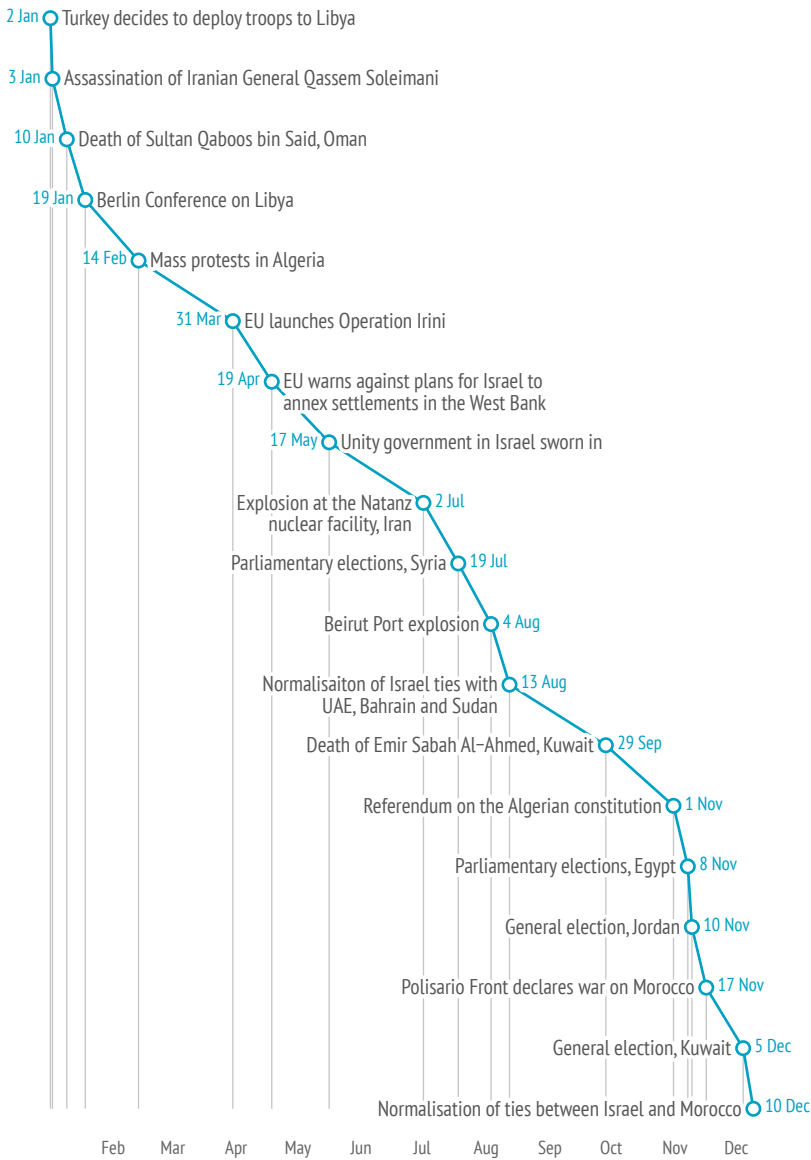
assistance and delivered 220 tonnes of critical PPE and medical items to Yemen<sup>(19)</sup>. In the same month, news came that members of the Baha'i community had been released by the Houthi movement after prolonged imprisonment. In September, the EU, the US, Kuwait, Sweden, UK, China, France and Russia all called for a peace settlement and ceasefire in the country, and by the end of the month, the government of Yemen and the Houthi movement collectively released more than 1 000 conflict-related prisoners and detainees<sup>(20)</sup>. Positive news emerged on 19 December 2020 when a new Yemeni government was installed following the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement. Yet, the positive news did not last long, as on 30 December, an attack on Aden airport took place soon after the arrival of the new government of ministers. The EU expressed its deep concern that the attack was designed to derail the Riyadh Agreement and destabilise Yemen further.

(19) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: EU humanitarian air bridge and €70 million in additional aid for Yemen', 23 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1384](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1384)).

(20) EEAS, 'Yemen: Statement by the Spokesperson on the prisoners' exchange', 28 September 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85943/yemen-statement-spokesperson-prisoners-exchange\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85943/yemen-statement-spokesperson-prisoners-exchange_en)).

Key events

MENA and Gulf



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

## Sub-Saharan Africa

During 2020, the EU was committed to strengthening its partnership with Africa. The Union affirmed that a prosperous, peaceful and resilient Africa is in the core interests of the EU, especially at a time when the world is making a climate transition and is confronted to a pandemic. In particular, the EU stressed that close EU–Africa cooperation is required to support multilateralism and the promotion of an international rules-based order based on human rights, rule of law and democracy; to maintain peace, security and stability; to ensure sustainable and inclusive development to meet the challenges of climate change, global health and other challenges; and to support sustainable economic growth by stimulating trade and investment between Europe and Africa. To reinforce this message, in February, European Commission President von der Leyen and 20 Commission College members travelled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the 10th EU–AU Commission-to-Commission meeting. The EU also stressed its commitment to Africa's prosperity and resilience during the pandemic and it underlined the importance of the EU humanitarian air bridge initiative and international debt relief efforts.

From 8–9 October, a visit to the AU in Addis Ababa by HR/VP Borrell and European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič, further cemented the EU's commitment to the EU–AU partnership. Furthermore, out of the total €18.8 billion 'Team Europe' package, €3.8 billion were allocated to Africa, with the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) providing an additional €1.42 billion in guarantees for Africa and the neighbourhood. Moreover, the European Investment Bank (EIB) committed €1.46 billion worth of support to Sub-Saharan African countries to fight the pandemic<sup>(21)</sup>.

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(21) The Africa–EU partnership, 'COVID-19 response in Africa: Team Europe in action', 29 April 2020 (<https://africa-eu-partnership.org/en/stay-informed/news/covid-19-response-africa-team-europe-action>).

## European and global approaches towards sub-Saharan Africa

‘... at the dawn of the 2020s, Africa seems to be embarking on a decade of transformations, triggered by twenty years of sustained economic growth outperforming that of other continents, progress in regional integration underpinned by the creation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), widespread diffusion of technological innovation accompanying the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and amid new hopes of democratic transitions in several African countries. As a new narrative describing Africa as a ‘land of opportunities’ has emerged in the international community, the EU has not been the only actor to look at the continent through fresh lenses. A number of global powers have started to engage, or have intensified their engagement, with Africa, projecting economic or political influence and creating new patterns of multipolar competition, which some observers have described as a ‘new scramble for Africa’. This is happening at a time when the economic and technological confrontation between the US and China is intensifying, and its effects are rippling through the globe.’

Faleg, G. and Palleschi, C., ‘African Strategies: European and Global Approaches towards Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Chaillot Paper* No 158, EUISS, June 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/african-strategies>).

These objectives and issues were brought together in the EU’s Joint Communication ‘Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa’, which was published on 9 March 2020. The joint communication recognised the growing economic importance of Africa and it underlined the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) — whose Secretariat was inaugurated in August 2020. It noted that, even though several African countries were among the fastest-growing economies in the world in 2018, 390 million people living on the continent still lived under the poverty line <sup>(22)</sup>. The joint communication also recognised that many players on the world scene had become increasingly interested in Africa. To put the EU-Africa relationship on a sound footing, it proposed enhanced partnerships in five key areas: 1) green transition and energy access; 2) digital transformation; 3) sustainable growth and jobs; 4) peace and governance; and 5) migration and mobility. It also highlighted the Union’s ambition of forging a ‘partnership of equals’ with Africa. On 30 June, the Council of the EU approved conclusions

(22) European Commission and HR/VP, ‘Joint Communication – Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa’, JOIN(2020) 4 final, 9 March 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=en>).

on Africa, reinforcing the paramount importance of a stronger EU–Africa partnership.

Such measures were buoyed by the resumption of ministerial-level talks in mid-June for the ‘post-Cotonou’ relationship between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). A political deal was reached on 3 December between the EU and the 79 members of the OACPS, and the agreement will be in place for the next 20 years<sup>(23)</sup>. Additionally, a number of cooperative occurrences took place during the year that further contributed to constructive EU–AU relations. At the end of October, the Peace and Security Council of the AU (AU PSC) and the EU’s Political and Security Committee (PSC) met virtually for their 12th annual meeting to discuss security challenges in the Sahel, Sudan and Somalia, as well as AU–EU cooperation. At the end of the year, the AU and Europe joined forces to combat illicit financial flows in Africa with a €7 million multi-donor action including the EU and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ)<sup>(24)</sup>. In December, the EU and AU also signed a partnership to scale up preparedness for health emergencies and this saw greater linkages between the ECDC and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (ACDC). Furthermore, on 8 December the EU and AU held their 16th Human Rights Dialogue and both parties underlined the need to safeguard fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. Finally, at the end of December, the EU announced that it would mobilise €82.5 million to strengthen digital and space technology cooperation with Africa<sup>(25)</sup>.

In November 2020, the Council of the EU continued its efforts on promoting international debt relief for African countries. In particular, the EU recognised that the Covid-19 crisis had considerably affected indebted, vulnerable, low-income countries and that a

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(23) European Commission, ‘Post-Cotonou: Negotiators reach a political deal on a new EU/Africa–Caribbean–Pacific Partnership Agreement’, 3 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2291](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2291)).

(24) European Commission, ‘Africa and Europe join forces to fight Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) in Africa’, 4 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/africa-and-europe-join-forces-fight-illicit-financial-flows-iffs-africa\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/africa-and-europe-join-forces-fight-illicit-financial-flows-iffs-africa_en)).

(25) European Commission, ‘EU mobilises €82.5 million to strengthen cooperation with Africa in digital and space technology’, 21 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2429](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2429)).



multilateral response to alleviating liquidity pressures should be a priority. As part of the progress on the G20–Paris Club Debt Service

**The EU called for a coordinated response to debt relief in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.**

Suspension Initiative (DSSI), the EU called for a coordinated response to debt relief in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In this regard, on 23 November the EU announced that it would join the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) with a €183 million contribution towards debt relief in 29 low-income

countries. This amount made the EU the largest donor to the CCRT and it contributed to allowing low-income countries — including 24 African countries — to focus on the health crisis rather than debt repayments <sup>(26)</sup>.

An additional part of the EU's response to the Covid-19 crisis in Africa was to lend support to countries and regions through the EU humanitarian air bridge initiative. The bridge was put in place to transport humanitarian and health workers and medical emergency supplies to the worst afflicted places. One of the first flights that took place left in May for the CAR, taking humanitarian cargo and bringing back EU citizens — this was the first of three flights to the country. Throughout the year, the EU used the bridge to make multiple flights to deliver humanitarian assistance such as water purifiers, shelter, nutrition, PPE and personnel to CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia and South Sudan. Some of these countries also received EU humanitarian aid during the year. For example, in June, Sudan received €120 million <sup>(27)</sup> and Burkina

(26) European Commission, 'EU contributes €183 million to debt relief for 29 of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries', 23 November 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2183](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2183)).

(27) European Commission, 'Coronavirus response: Team Europe support to Sudan through EU humanitarian air bridge flight', 24 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1180](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1180)).

Faso over €60 million<sup>(28)</sup>. In July, Uganda received €24 million<sup>(29)</sup>. Finally, on 1 September 2020, the EU and its Member States delivered 500 000 virus testing kits to the AU and pledged to deliver 1.4 million kits overall<sup>(30)</sup>.

Despite these broader efforts, however, sub-Saharan Africa continued to be the location for conflict and crises. At the end of March, the EU condemned the terrorist attacks by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, which left approximately 150 members of the Chadian and Nigerian security forces dead and many more injured<sup>(31)</sup>. Following an intensification of violence and terrorism in the Sahel in April, the EU and G5 Sahel countries re-emphasised their resolve to provide stability in the region with a specific political statement on 28 April 2020. To this end, the EU announced a further €194 million in support for the Sahel countries to face the pandemic in the region and deal with security pressures. In particular, €112 million was dedicated to developing the security and defence capabilities of the G5 Sahel countries and €82 million was mobilised for vulnerable populations in the region<sup>(32)</sup>. There was positive news at the end of May as Chad's new anti-terrorism law abolished the death penalty for terrorism-related crimes.

The EU's presence through the CSDP also underwent many developments in 2020, not least because the Union launched a new civilian advisory mission to the CAR in July — EUAM CAR would become operational on 9 August for an initial 2-year period. In March, the Council of the EU extended the mandate and budget of EUTM Mali to enhance the Union's contribution to the G5 Sahel Joint Force's efforts in the region. However, at the start of June, a series

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(28) European Commission, 'Coronavirus response: EU humanitarian air bridge supports Burkina Faso', 22 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1130](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1130)).

(29) European Commission, 'Humanitarian aid: EU announces €24 million in Uganda amid coronavirus pandemic', 14 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1341](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1341)).

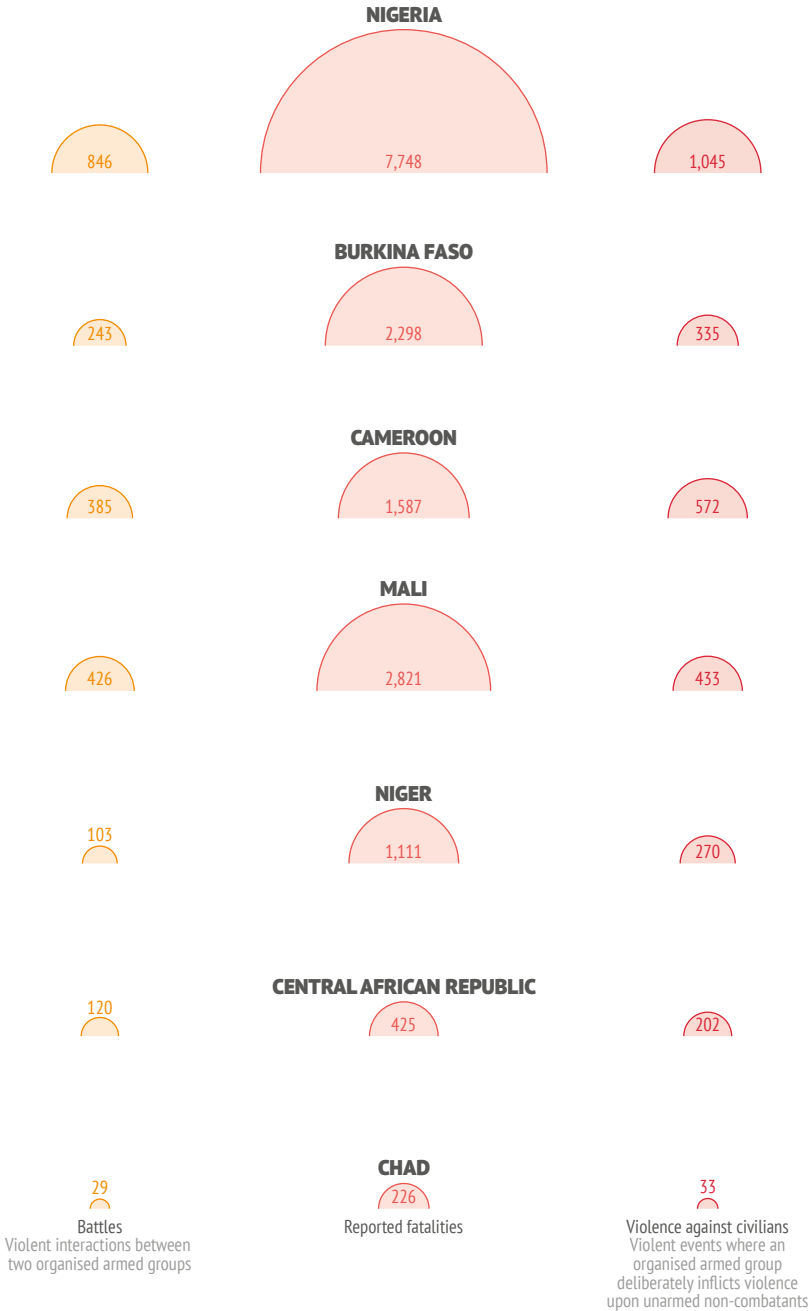
(30) European Commission, 'EU and Germany join efforts to support the African Union's response to coronavirus', 1 September 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1514](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1514)).

(31) EEAS, 'Chad/Nigeria: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the latest terrorist attacks', 25 March 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76503/chadnigeria-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-latest-terrorist-attacks\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/76503/chadnigeria-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-latest-terrorist-attacks_en)).

(32) EEAS, 'EU announces €194 million additional support to the Sahel', 28 April 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_768](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_768)).

The Sahel

Crisis events, 2020



## Covid-19

Sub-Saharan Africa – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



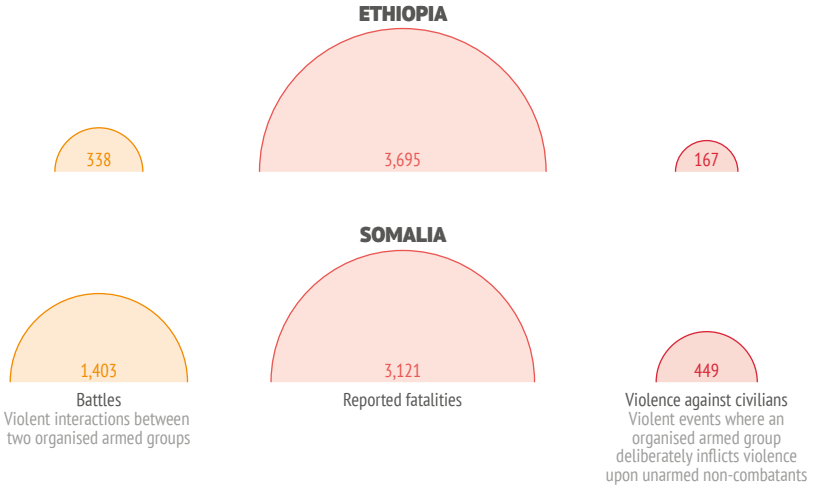
Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

of terrorist attacks in Mali led to the death of multiple civilians, including women and children, giving way to weeks of violence in the country. A meeting of the International Coalition for the Sahel was convened on 12 June to discuss the security situation in the region and again reiterate support for the G5 Sahel countries.

In October, the EU and UN held a virtual ministerial roundtable for donors to the region and the Commission announced that it was committing €43.6 million to the Central Sahelian states of

## Horn of Africa

Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger<sup>(33)</sup>. The EU also welcomed the news at the beginning of October that a new interim president, Bah Ndaw, and prime minister, Moctar Ouane, had been appointed in Mali for an 18-month period. The announcement followed the 18 August 2020 military *coup d'état* in Mali which saw long-standing President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé resign from office, and Mali suspended from the African Union. The EU also welcomed the positive experiences during the presidential and parliamentary elections that took place in Burkina Faso at the end of November and the Union thanked the AU, UN, International Organisation of La Francophonie and ECOWAS for their efforts in ensuring stable elections in the country.

In the wider West African region, the EU noted that the human rights and humanitarian situation in Nigeria had deteriorated since

(33) European Commission, 'EU steps up support for Africa's Central Sahel countries', 20 October 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1950](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1950)).

## The Sahel and climate conflicts

'The idea that terrorism and climate change are somehow connected is a seductive one. It offers international donors the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone by addressing jointly what are arguably the most pressing issues facing the international community, thereby overcoming political divides. And it provides local governments with a narrative that depoliticises conflicts and downplays their own responsibilities. However, such simplistic Malthusian arguments that connect terrorism in the Sahel to climatic and environmental factors do not stand up to empirical scrutiny. Whether and how natural resources are associated with conflicts' onsets and dynamics, and to what extent climate change has the potential to exacerbate these trends, are questions that remain highly contested. Just as much as with other issue-areas of climate change, there is no shortage of unsubstantiated misconceptions about climate and conflict, and environment and security more broadly.'

Raineri, L., 'Sahel climate conflicts? When (fighting) climate change fuels terrorism', Brief No 20, Conflict Series, EUISS, November 2020, (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/sahel-climate-conflicts-when-fighting-climate-change-fuels-terrorism>).

2019. The country had been blighted by several terrorist attacks and armed conflicts in 2020. In November 2020, youth protests against police brutality took place in Nigeria under the slogan 'End SARS' (SARS standing for the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, which is a special unit of the Nigerian police). In the DRC, there was an intensification of violence in the province of Ituri with almost daily attacks on civilians, which resulted in more than 300 deaths and the displacement of 200 000 people<sup>(34)</sup>. On 25 June, the Ebola outbreak that struck Kivu in August 2018 was declared over but at the beginning of the month, a further outbreak was declared in the Equateur province<sup>(35)</sup>.

In the Horn of Africa, the EU announced in mid-May that it would allocate €105.5 million to the region due to the pandemic.

(34) EEAS, 'Democratic Republic of the Congo: Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the security situation in Ituri', 20 May 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/80006/democratic-republic-congo-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-security\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/80006/democratic-republic-congo-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-security_en)).

(35) World Health Organisation, '10th Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared over; vigilance against flare-ups and support for survivors must continue', 25 June 2020 (<https://www.who.int/news/item/25-06-2020-10th-ebola-outbreak-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-declared-over-vigilance-against-flare-ups-and-support-for-survivors-must-continue>).

The additional money would be directed towards health and food security in the region. The Horn of Africa is already the location of armed conflict, displacement, droughts and floods and some 25 million people are at risk from food shortages in the region<sup>(36)</sup>. In mid-March, the EU stated its concern about incidents at the Kenya-Somalia border and it regretted the build-up of security forces in the Gedo region, which was a cause for instability and had resulted in casualties and large-scale displacement in the region. In July, however, the EU welcomed the engagement of the AU and South Africa to mediate dialogue between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over the construction and filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which has given rise to tensions over water security and development in the region. In October, the EU again called for a constructive approach to the GERD and asked the parties involved to remain calm and to negotiate under AU auspices.

### Russia in Sub-Saharan Africa

'The conviction that policies in sub-Saharan Africa can this time bring about quantifiable dividends are inter-linked with Russia's great power instincts and its preoccupation with securing the recognition of its global status. From the Russian point of view, sub-Saharan Africa is another battleground where established and rising powers clash for resources, market shares and political influence. Moreover, from 2010 onwards Russia has not derived its great power status exclusively from claims of pre-eminence in its immediate neighbourhood; its status is increasingly based on the ability to conduct a global foreign policy. In this regard, one Russian expert recently underscored that "Russia's policy in Africa shows that our geostrategic interests are wider than it is thought".'

Faleg G. and Secieru, S., 'Russia's forays into Sub-Saharan Africa: do you want to be my friend, again?', *Brief No 6, Geopolitical Series, EUISS*, March 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/russias-forays-sub-saharan-africa>).

In particular, the Tigray conflict was a major cause for concern as Ethiopian refugees fled from their homes towards the Sudanese borders — more than 29 000 Ethiopian refugees had reached Sudan

(36) European Commission, 'Coronavirus: EU provides support in Horn of Africa region', 14 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_880](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_880)).

from October to November <sup>(37)</sup>. Hostilities worsened by the end of November and there were major concerns about humanitarian access to parts of Ethiopia, as well as a tragedy when three Danish Refugee Council workers were killed in Tigray in mid-December. The Union joined calls by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in December to protect the well-being of Eritrean refugees caught in Ethiopia and the conflict in Tigray. Towards the end of the year, the conflict and crisis in Ethiopia worsened. The EU stressed its concern for the humanitarian situation in the region and for the fact that non-Ethiopian participants could be involved in the conflict.

**The Tigray conflict was a major cause for concern.**

In Somalia, the EU expressed its dismay at the destabilising act to file a vote of no confidence in the House of the People of Somalia against the cabinet while not meeting basic constitutional requirements. The EU also mobilised emergency support for Somalia after it was hit by Cyclone GATI in mid-December, which resulted in thousands of displaced persons and an aggravation of the humanitarian situation in the country.

In Sudan, there was positive news in May as the country continued to make steps forward by announcing that it would ban female genital mutilation. In mid-June, Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-al-Rahman was transferred by Sudan to the ICC in The Hague after his indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur from 2003 to 2004. There was more positive news at the end of August, as a peace agreement was initialled between the civilian-led Transitional Government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front. The agreement was seen as a milestone for peace in Sudan, and the EU congratulated the parties involved and South Sudan for its mediation efforts. The Union also called for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudan Liberation Movement to join the agreement and engage in serious negotiations with the Transitional Government.

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(37) European Commission, 'Tigray conflict: EU humanitarian support to Ethiopian refugees reaching Sudan', 19 November 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2160](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2160)).



With more than 45 000 refugees from Ethiopia entering Sudan over a few weeks, the EU announced in early December support for Sudan worth €70 million<sup>(38)</sup>. By 19 December, the EU extended humanitarian support to the region by €23.7 million as the crisis worsened in Ethiopia and neighbouring Sudan and Kenya<sup>(39)</sup>. On 25 June 2020, the EU, Sudan, Germany and the UN hosted a virtual High-Level Sudan Partnership Conference to pledge international support to the country and region. A total of €1.6 billion was pledged, with ‘Team Europe’

**A total of €1.6 billion was pledged, with ‘Team Europe’ contributing €770 million to this amount.**

contributing €770 million to this amount for development funding, humanitarian assistance and support to Sudan for the coronavirus. In a Joint Communiqué adopted by the more than 50 stakeholders at the conference, the bulk of the assistance would be dedicated to Sudan’s Family Support programme for the most vulnerable house-

holds<sup>(40)</sup>. At the end of the year, Sudan was eventually removed from the US State Sponsors of Terrorism list which further underlined the reforms made in the country during the year.

In South Sudan, the EU welcomed the formation of the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in February, as a way to achieving peace, inclusivity and sustainable development in the country. In this respect, the EU applauded the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union in assisting with the R-TGoNU process. Nevertheless, the Council of the EU recognised at the end of April 2020 that South Sudan faced significant challenges, including economic and social development, lack of political inclusion and respect for fundamental freedoms, food insecurity, gender inequality and corruption. In June, there was widespread violence in the country. Attacks and fatalities in Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Warrap and other

(38) European Commission, ‘Sudan: EU steps up aid following humanitarian visit’, 2 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2280](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2280)).

(39) European Commission, ‘Tigray conflict: EU increases humanitarian support by €23.7 million in Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya’, 19 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2503](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2503)).

(40) European Commission, ‘Sudan Partnership Conference: EU mobilises more support for Sudan’s transition’, 25 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1183](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1183)).

regions were a major concern for the EU. The Union also noted that South Sudan is vulnerable to the wider effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and it also underlined the risk from natural disasters such as locust swarms. Finally, the Council of the EU also shed light on continued risks to human rights through a culture of impunity and conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The EU also provided much-needed humanitarian assistance to the country and in July, the Commission announced €42.5 million in additional support to manage the virus, the desert locust plague and food insecurity<sup>(41)</sup>.

In Mozambique, the deteriorating situation in the Cabo Delgado province required urgent attention from the EU which condemned the attacks led by insurgents. On 22 April, the Council of the EU recalled the progress made in Mozambique following the August 2019 Peace and National Reconciliation Agreement between the government of Mozambique and RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance). However, the Council also made it clear that it stood ready to implement the recommendations

of the electoral observation mission sent to the country in October 2019, as well as providing humanitarian assistance following natural disasters (e.g. Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019) and the pandemic. In September, the Government of

**The Government of Mozambique requested assistance from the EU to help train its armed forces.**

Mozambique requested assistance from the EU to help train its armed forces in efforts to respond to the insurgency<sup>(42)</sup>.

In Zimbabwe, the EU shed light on the deep and prolonged crisis in the country and it called on the government to implement economic and political reforms. The EU signalled its concern about an ongoing shrinking democratic space in the country and the continued corruption, deteriorating humanitarian crisis and human rights violations and abuses. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU also drew attention to the acute humanitarian crisis

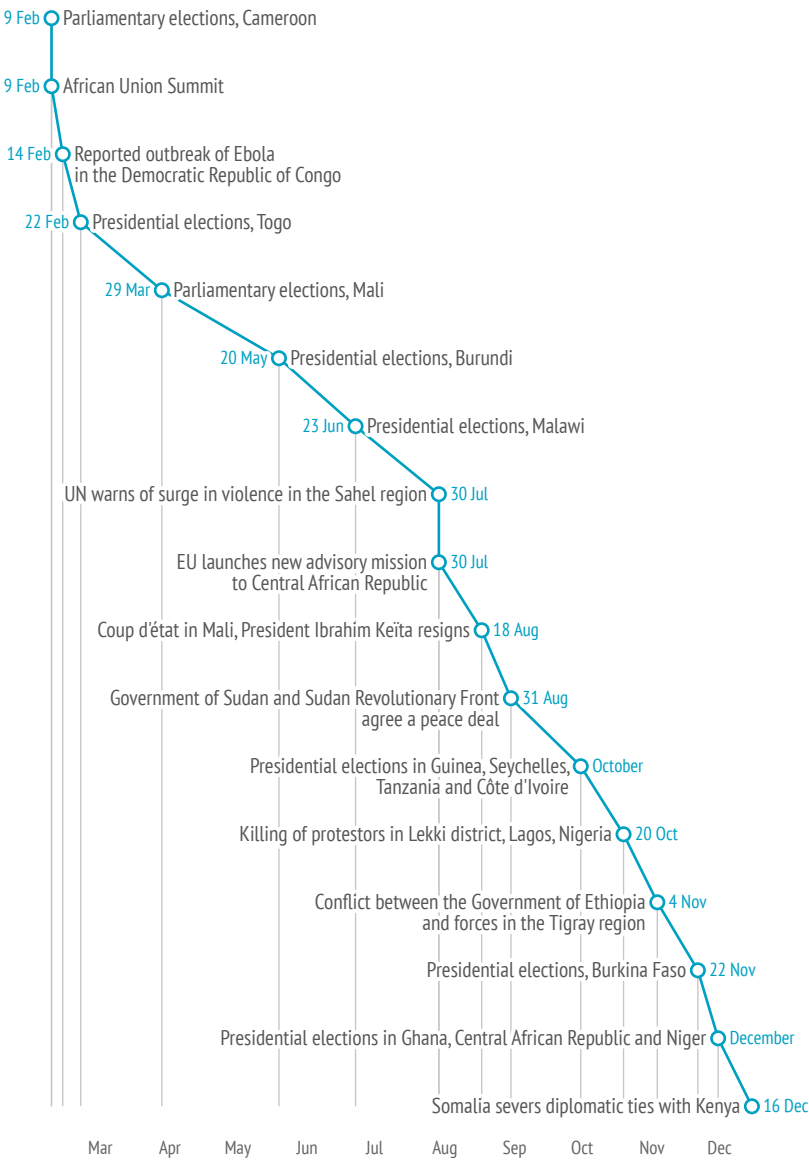
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(41) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: 2 EU humanitarian air bridge flights to South Sudan and new funding', 22 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1393](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1393)).

(42) Reuters, 'European Union agrees to help Mozambique tackle insurgency: statement', 14 October 2020 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mozambique-insurgency-eu-idUKKBN26Z2WT>).

Key events

Sub-Saharan Africa



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

in Zimbabwe and the severe food security emergency. To ensure that the Zimbabwean authorities adhere to fundamental freedoms and rights, the Council of the EU decided to renew its arms embargo on the country in February. It also extended the targeted assets freeze against the Zimbabwe Defence Industries company, which is involved in the lack of security in the country and rule of law and human rights abuses. Overall, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic and droughts, the EU delivered a total humanitarian aid package worth €64.7 million to southern Africa in July<sup>(43)</sup>.

### Core documents

- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Zimbabwe', 17 February 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5992-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > European Commission, 'Joint Communication towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa', JOIN(2020) 4 final, 9 March 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Mozambique', 22 April 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7467-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union 'Conclusions on South Sudan', 30 April 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7575-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Africa', 30 June 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9265-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on international debt relief in particular for African countries', 30 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13529-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Lebanon', 7 December 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13730-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

(43) European Commission, 'Humanitarian aid: €64 million for most vulnerable in southern Africa', 20 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1374](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1374)).

# The eastern neighbourhood

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## Russia

**I**n 2020, Russia's continued illegal occupation of Crimea and parts of Eastern Ukraine and its range of malicious activities towards the EU were not conducive to cooperation. Despite calls for closer EU–Russia dialogue from some EU leaders, the relationship was bedevilled by a range of challenges. Russia even failed to join the EU in cooperation on research into the Covid-19 virus and vaccines<sup>(1)</sup>. Due to Covid-19, EU–Russia people-to-people exchanges were significantly disrupted and there was a drop in Schengen visas issued to Russian citizens because of the pandemic — over 4 million visas were issued by the EU to Russian citizens in 2019 before the pandemic, but this number sank to 635 271 in 2020<sup>(2)</sup>. In particular, disinformation from Russia on Covid-19 was a source of major concern for the Union and at the end of 2020, the EU's East StratCom Taskforce detailed at least 61 forms of pro-Kremlin disinformation including that nano-chips could be inserted into people

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(1) RIA Novosti, 'Marcus Ederer: The consequences of COVID-19 will be larger than the 2008 crisis', 2 April 2020 (<https://ria.ru/20200402/1569486371.html>).

(2) See: <https://statistics.schengenvisainfo.com/2019-schengen-visa-statistics-by-third-country/> (for 2019 Schengen visa numbers) and <https://statistics.schengenvisainfo.com/2020-schengen-visa-statistics-by-third-country/> (for 2020 figures).

when they are vaccinated or that vaccinations with brain debilitating agents will be introduced to people<sup>(3)</sup>.

The EU maintained a number of high-level dialogues with Russia during 2020. For example, on 16 January 2020 President of the European Council Charles Michel had a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on a range of issues including the situation in Libya, Iran, Iraq and Ukraine. The EU's HR/VP spoke with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, on numerous occasions during the year to raise the Union's objections to Moscow's destabilising activities in the region and further afield. They spoke specifically about the crises in Libya and Syria, but also about eastern Ukraine, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the occupation of Crimea, the political conflict in Belarus and Venezuela.

On 16 March, the HR/VP published a declaration following six years since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and he underlined the EU's continued support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In April, Russia took the provocative move to include most of Crimea and Sevastopol into its list of border territories, which effectively means that non-Russian citizens such as Ukrainians cannot own land in Ukraine. What is more, from mid-April to mid-October, Russia continued to draft residents from the illegally annexed Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian armed forces — a practice started in 2014. The EU condemned Russia's conscription efforts as a violation of international humanitarian law. At the end of July, Russia further undermined Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and challenged security in the Black Sea by laying the keel for two assault naval vessels in Kerch. Nevertheless, a truce concluded in July in eastern Ukraine did help to reduce violence on the frontline.

On 18 June, the Council of the EU decided to renew sanctions on Russia by a further year until 23 June 2021 and prohibited the

**I**n April, Russia took the provocative move to include most of Crimea and Sevastopol into its list of border territories.

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(3) EEAS, 'Pro-Kremlin disinformation: Covid-19 Vaccines', 22 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90950/pro-kremlin-disinformation-covid-19-vaccines\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90950/pro-kremlin-disinformation-covid-19-vaccines_en)).

Ukraine  
Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

Ukraine  
EU Integrated Approach, since 2014, € million



Data: European External Action Service, 2021

imports of products from Crimea and Sevastopol into the EU, among other commercial sanctions. Furthermore, on 28 June the EU renewed economic sanctions against Russia until 31 January 2021, for its continued illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilising actions in Ukraine. During 2020, Crimean Tatars were arrested for their political affiliation under Russian legislation illegally applied to Crimea — seven individuals were sentenced to 13 to 19 years in prison on 16 September <sup>(4)</sup>. Such measures reflected the ill-treatment of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in occupied territory. In mid-September, the EU criticised Russia’s move to hold illegal elections in Sevastopol and the Crimean peninsula. The Kremlin further aggravated the situation in November when President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognising documents and vehicle registrations

(4) EEAS, ‘Ukraine: Spokesperson statement on the sentencing of Crimean Tatars by a Russian court’, 18 September 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85347/ukraine-spokesperson-statement-sentencing-crimean-tatars-russian-court\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85347/ukraine-spokesperson-statement-sentencing-crimean-tatars-russian-court_en)).

issued in Donetsk and Luhansk, Ukraine, by Russian authorities. In addition, there was no stop to the issuance of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens.

### Russian futures in 2030

‘The myth of Russian exceptionalism is widespread both within Russia and outside of the country. Russian conservative intellectuals are the strongest advocates of the concept of Russia’s unique path of historical development – a narrative that is also supported by the Russian governing elite. Russian political leaders employ this discourse often to justify the failure to implement reforms or the slow pace of implementation. Yet Russia is not alone in its claims for uniqueness – in fact, such exceptionalist claims are a global phenomenon of our times [...] Russia is not any less or more distinctive than any other country in the international system that is facing global challenges and opportunities from its own unique perspective. Russia is by no means immune to global trends such as digitalisation or energy transition. Yet Russia is not a passive absorber of megatrends: it analyses, shapes, reacts to and resists them from its own specific political, cultural, economic and societal vantage points. It is simultaneously a trendsetter, trend-follower and trend-shaper.’

Saari, S. and Secrieru, S. (eds.), ‘Russian futures 2030: the shape of things to come’, *Chaillot Paper* No 159, EUISS, September 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/russian-futures-2030>).

Fundamental freedoms in Russia were strained throughout the year. At the end of March, the EU condemned a move by Russian authorities to classify the EU-established European Endowment for Democracy (EED) as an ‘undesirable organisation’. In April, the EU called on Russian authorities to condemn and investigate the intimidation of journalist Elena Milashina by the Chechen government. On 1 July, nationwide voting in Russia for constitutional amendments ended and the EU regretted that campaigning for and against the amendments was banned by authorities. At the end of July, a Russian court sentenced a historian and human rights activist, Yuri Dmitriev, to 3.6 years in prison for his work on human rights — he had already been in prison for 3 years when sentenced. The EU made a statement on violations of the rights of human rights defenders in the Russian Federation on 12 April at the OSCE.

Most worryingly, however, preliminary results from the Charité – Universitätsmedizin hospital in Berlin at the end of August confirmed that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny had been poisoned while in Siberia. In fact, on 2 September the German



government confirmed that the results showed that Alexei Navalny was poisoned using a military-grade chemical nerve agent from the Novichok group — the agent was similar to the one used in Salisbury, UK, against Sergei and Yulia Skripal on 4 March 2018. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed that the agent was from the Novichok group on 6 October. The EU condemned the attack in the harshest terms and called on the Russian authorities to cooperate fully with the OPCW to ensure an impartial international investigation. The EU imposed sanctions for the use of chemical weapons in the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny on six individuals and an entity on 15 October.

Another significant development was the decision taken by the Council of the EU on 30 July to impose its first-ever sanctions against cyber-attacks. The ‘cyber sanctions’ were imposed for an attempted cyber-attack on the OPCW in 2018 and the actions of groups known publicly as ‘WannaCry’, ‘NotPetya’ and ‘Operation Cloud Hopper’. On 17 December, the EU prolonged economic sanctions for another six months in response to Russia’s destabilising role in Ukraine. A day later, the Russian State Duma stated that it was considering the adoption of further legislation that would restrict the activities of

**A**nother significant development was the decision taken by the Council of the EU on 30 July to impose its first-ever sanctions against cyber-attacks.

non-Russian NGOs (what Moscow called ‘foreign agents’). The law would oblige non-Russian NGOs to submit to the government financial overviews and a schedule of planned activities in Russia. Earlier in December, the Russian Federation had revoked the residency permit of US citizen and director of a human rights organisation, Vanessa Kogan, in further evidence of Russia’s curtailment of fundamental freedoms and rights.

## The Sino-Russian normative partnership

‘The Sino-Russian partnership is dense and multidimensional, and it is rooted in shared norms. International norms – the standard of expected state behaviour – reflect the underlying values of the global system, and underpin international cooperation in the political, economic and security-related fields. Sino-Russian normative cooperation aims at redefining and re-interpreting existing international norms in a way that reflects their shared principles, worldviews and threat perceptions – ‘like-mindedness’ as Chinese official communication refers to it. Both China and Russia share a conviction that today’s international order is unfairly dominated by the US and the West, and that the current international norms and their interpretation reflect Western values that should not be considered universal. They are both convinced that these need to be changed, and that the time is ripe for this. For Beijing and Moscow, a post-Western era of global governance looms on the horizon. This shared reading of the present and predilection for such a future global order has been translated into dynamically evolving normative cooperation between the partners at multilateral level. Two other important and shared convictions are, first, that neither party represents a threat to the other regime’s survival (and even has an interest in supporting the other regime) and, second, that the West would like to see the regime in both China and Russia challenged (and under the right circumstances is ready to contribute to this). The shared worldview and threat perception help to smooth out the differences between the two countries: when their interpretations differ, they show mutual self-restraint and acquiesce rather than go against each other in the name of national interest.’

Ekman, A., Saari, S. and Secieru, S., ‘Stand by me! The Sino-Russian normative partnership in action’, *Brief No 18*, EUISS, August 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/stand-me-sino-russian-normative-partnership-action>).

## Eastern Partnership

2020 was an important year for relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. On 18 March, the European Commission and the HR/VP published a joint communication on the EaP policy beyond 2020. Through the EaP, the EU has been engaging with Eastern countries on the basis of economic cooperation, governance, connectivity and societal links. The partnership celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 2019. Following a consultation on the EaP in 2019, the Commission and the HR/VP underlined that the Union had a strategic interest in developing closer ties with the

six EaP countries, but that more was required to address pressing challenges in the region. This point was stressed during the 18 June 2020 EaP-EU leaders' conference, held by video link-up due to the pandemic. It was stated that a specific focus on governance is required in order to build rule of law, fight corruption and organised crime, and improve the role of the independent media and civil society. The Union underlined that it would continue to apply its incentive-based approach to the EaP countries, which would entail specific reforms and verifiable benchmarks for progress. The joint communication made clear that after 2020 the EU's priorities would centre on further integrating economies, boosting governance and institutions, working towards climate resilience, enhancing digital transformation and connectivity, and supporting more inclusive and fair societies. Such issues would be taken up at the EaP Summit in 2021, after the planned 2020 meeting had been rescheduled due to Covid-19.

Belarus was a major cause for concern for the EU in 2020 as protests broke out in the country throughout the year. In February, the EU prolonged sanctions and the arms embargo against the country until 28 February 2021 in view of severe human rights abuses since 2004. May started as a promising month as the EU concluded agreements with Belarus on visa facilitation and readmission, but the celebrations were short-lived given the news that President Alyaksandr Lukashenka would run in the Belarusian presidential elections on 9 August. The EU warned Belarus to ensure fair and free elections but there was major concern after opposition figures and thousands of peaceful protesters were detained or arrested by Belarusian authorities. In mid-July, the EU expressed its dismay at further restrictions on presidential candidates and the Union stated that Belarusian authorities had failed to ensure a meaningful and competitive political contest.

## Belarus in the face of Russian coercion

'Belarus is traditionally considered to be Russia's closest ally, and their alliance is a cornerstone of post-Soviet integration projects, both military (the Collective Security Treaty Organisation – CSTO) and economic (the Eurasian Economic Union – EAEU). But bilateral relations have entered a different and more conflictual phase. The paradigm shift started in 2014, when Belarus invoked its constitutional neutrality pledge to refuse to side with Russia in its ongoing conflict with Ukraine and the West. Playing this card allowed President Lukashenka to appear as a security guarantor both in the eyes of Belarusians and the West. Irritated by such autonomy, Moscow indicated that it now wants more for its money. Russia is no longer ready to subsidise the Belarusian economy in exchange for its neighbour's fleeting geopolitical loyalty. In linking, in 2018, the resumption of economic privileges to 'deeper' political integration within the Union State that the two countries nominally established 20 years ago, Russia stepped up the pressure. Yet Vladimir Putin made Belarus an offer he knew Aliaksandr Lukashenka would refuse: the Belarusian president had repeatedly stated that Belarus's sovereignty was 'not for sale'.'

Marin, A., 'Under pressure: can Belarus resist Russian coercion?', *Brief No 15*, Geopolitical Series, EUISS, July 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/under-pressure-can-belarus-resist-russian-coercion>).

Following the elections in August, in which Lukashenka won a disputed landslide victory, the EU denounced the elections as neither fair nor free. As a consequence, the Council of the EU stated that Lukashenka lacked any democratic legitimacy and it called for fresh elections. On 16 August, the largest peaceful rally in Belarusian history took place with hundreds of thousands of citizens taking to the streets as part of the 'Freedom March'. The EU went on to strongly condemn the violence perpetrated by the Belarusian security services and authorities, especially given that peaceful protestors were the target of indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests and detention. As a result of the events in Belarus, the EU reserved the right for further sanctions on key Belarus government representatives, it scaled back its bilateral cooperation with the Belarus government, it recalibrated bilateral financial assistance to the country through the EIB and EBRD, and it sought to support key non-state stakeholders in the country. Further sanctions against individuals and entities in

**As a consequence, the Council of the EU stated that Lukashenka lacked any democratic legitimacy and it called for fresh elections.**

Belarus for repression and election falsification were imposed in October, November (including on Alyaksandr Lukashenka himself) and December.

In September there was an escalation of violence with the Belarusian authorities showing an open disregard for the rule of law and international obligations. Leading figures from the opposition had either been arrested or forced into exile. Intimidation and arbitrary detentions and violence marked the country. The EU announced on 24 September that it does not recognise the falsified results of the 9 August presidential elections and it condemned the so-called 'inauguration' of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. On 16 December, HR/VP Borrell met with opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya to discuss the situation in the country and he congratulated Ms Tsikhanouskaya and the Belarusian democratic opposition for being awarded the Sakharov Prize for their courage and determination to promote democracy and human rights in Belarus. The meeting coincided with a third round of sanctions against the regime for ongoing repression against peaceful protesters, journalists and opposition members. Overall, the EU has sanctioned 88 individuals and seven entities since the brutal crackdown began on 1 October 2020<sup>(5)</sup>. The EU also denounced Belarusian's decision to expel senior diplomats from Lithuania and Poland in October and it highlighted the brutal murder of Raman Bandarenka, a peaceful protestor who died of injuries at the hands of the police. The EU also committed financial support to the Belarusian people including €53 million in August for the victims of oppression and the independent media and €24 million in December for civil society, youth, health and SMEs. Moreover, in December the European Commission advanced its work on a Comprehensive Plan of Economic Support for a Democratic Belarus, which would be rolled out in case of democratic transition in the country.

Ukraine's security continued to be high on the EU's agenda in 2020. In March, the EU stressed its concern that armed formations at the checkpoints in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions had

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(5) Council of the European Union, 'Belarus: EU imposes third round of sanctions over ongoing repression', 17 December 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/17/belarus-eu-imposes-third-round-of-sanctions-over-ongoing-repression/>).

blocked OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) patrols from accessing non-government-controlled areas. In the same month, the EU voiced its concern about the arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of individuals in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In April, the EU greeted the positive news that a mutual release and exchange of detainees in eastern Ukraine was to take place, which is an important measure agreed under the Normandy Format. In September, the EU extended sanctions against individuals seeking to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine until 15 March 2021, and the measures were re-applied to 175 individuals and 44 entities<sup>(6)</sup>.

In April, the EU announced €13 million in support for the most vulnerable people in Ukraine facing conflict and ongoing hostilities. This specific envelope of support was dedicated to schools and health facilities in conflict zones, as well as to provide education and water. Since March 2014, the conflict in Ukraine has afflicted over 5.2 million people and 3.5 million are still in need of humanitarian support<sup>(7)</sup>. In June, the UCPM was activated to help Ukraine deal with flooding — the worst the country had experienced for 50 years. The EU helped Sweden deliver flood barriers, hoses and technical expertise to Ukraine in addition to mapping services provided by Copernicus<sup>(8)</sup>. In July, the EU voiced concern at the decision by the Governor of the National Bank of Ukraine, Yakiv Smolii, to stand down because of political pressure.

**Since March 2014, the conflict in Ukraine has afflicted over 5.2 million people.**

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(6) Council of the European Union, 'Ukraine: EU extends sanctions against violations of territorial integrity for a further 6 months', 10 September 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/10/ukraine-eu-extends-sanctions-against-violations-of-territorial-integrity-for-a-further-6-months/>).

(7) European Commission, 'Ukraine: €13 million in humanitarian aid for conflict affected population', 16 April 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_673](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_673)).

(8) European Commission, 'EU mobilises emergency assistance following floods in Ukraine', 27 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1215](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1215)).

## Approaches to peace in Donbas

'Following the Euromaidan protests and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has witnessed continued violence in the east of the country, with approximately 13,000 people killed, including more than 3,300 civilians, and as many as 30,000 wounded. After a period of stalled negotiations, 2019 brought new momentum to the peace process: Ukraine's new president, Volodymyr Zelensky, and his political party 'Servant of the People' won an unprecedented majority in the 2019 elections, gaining full control over the executive and legislative branches of power with more than 70% of all votes cast across the country. One of the instrumental factors for President Zelensky's victory was his promise to end the war in Donbas. To this end, he agreed to revive negotiations in the Normandy Format (between France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine) and reactivated direct communication channels with the Kremlin. The president's message regarding reconciliation with the separatist, Russia-backed 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk appears to resonate with the majority of Ukrainians: more than 50% of citizens believe that Kyiv should negotiate a peace deal with separatist leaders and more than 70% support the Ukrainian president's engagement in direct dialogue with Russia. However, much disagreement remains over the direction of the peace plan in general and the extent of power sharing between the central government in Kyiv and the different layers of subnational authorities, in particular in the conflict territories.'

Madoian, K., 'Local versus regional approaches to peace in Donbas', *Brief* No 2, Conflict Series, EUISS, February, 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/devil-detail-local-versus-regional-approaches-peace-donbas>).

Finally, on 6 October the 22nd EU-Ukraine Summit took place and launched new initiatives including an EU-Ukraine cyber dialogue, as well as reiterating the Union's support for Ukraine during the pandemic. In the same month, the European Commission allocated a further €10 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine in advance of the winter and the response to the pandemic<sup>(9)</sup>. The Council of the EU also added further persons and entities to its list of sanctions for involvement in the construction of the Kerch railway bridge. This was followed in mid-December by an EU-Ukraine joint discussion on the consequences of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. This was the eighth meeting of this kind and both sides presented policies and actions with regard to upholding

(9) European Commission, 'Ukraine: €10 million in humanitarian aid to withstand winter and coronavirus pandemic', 6 October 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1744](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1744)).

Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The year ended with a €600 million disbursement in macro-financial assistance by the EU to Ukraine to help the country with the negative fallout from Covid-19 <sup>(10)</sup>.

Two EaP countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, headed into war in 2020. Political tensions began at the end of March following the so-called presidential and parliamentary elections in Nagorno-Karabakh, which were disputed by the EU and other international partners. The military escalation began around an incident at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan with the use of heavy weapons and resulting in loss of life. The EU called for calm and to stop the armed confrontation, while also inviting both sides to engage in communication with each other through the OSCE. On 22 July, the HR/VP convened a call with both countries' foreign ministers and urged restraint on both sides until mediation efforts began. However, by 27 September 2020, full-blown fighting erupted at the line of contact in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, causing military and civilian casualties. This was the largest confrontation in the region since 1993, when Armenia managed to seize nearly 20 % of Azerbaijani territory and expelled hundreds of thousands of ethnic Azeris <sup>(11)</sup>.

Fighting subsided on 10 October as a humanitarian ceasefire was agreed between the two sides, and the EU called for immediate negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group. The ceasefire did not last long, however, as the Azerbaijani city of Ganja was hit by strikes from both sides, causing civilian casualties. A further humanitarian ceasefire was agreed on 17 October 2020, but attacks on civilians resumed in late October in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Although a ceasefire was signed by the two countries and Russia on 9 November 2020, the agreement locked in a very fragile

**The agreement locked in a very fragile peace and there were already signs of ceasefire violations.**

(10) European Commission, 'EU disburses €600 million in macro-financial assistance to Ukraine', 9 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/news/eu-disburses-€600-million-macro-financial-assistance-ukraine\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/eu-disburses-€600-million-macro-financial-assistance-ukraine_en)).

(11) Beehner, L., 'Nagorno-Karabakh: the crisis in the Caucasus', Council on Foreign Relations, 3 November 2005 (<https://www.cfr.org/background/nagorno-karabakh-crisis-caucasus>).



peace and there were already signs of ceasefire violations. The agreement also allowed Russia to deploy peacekeepers to the region for a 5-year period with the possibility of a further extension, should both sides agree. During separate meetings with the Azerbaijani and Armenian authorities, the HR/VP made it clear that the conflict had effectively made it impossible for cooperation with the EU. The European Commission had provided close to €4 million in humanitarian support since October to assist civilians caught up in the conflict<sup>(12)</sup>. In December, the EU and the WHO provided Azerbaijan with medical equipment and PPE to better manage the pandemic. Armenia also received grants worth €92 million during the year to deal with the coronavirus<sup>(13)</sup>.

The EU also continued its support for other EaP countries, including an overall €500 million contribution to the COVAX initiative to provide vaccines to the Union's southern and eastern neighbourhoods<sup>(14)</sup>. At the end of March, the EU pledged €1 billion to EaP countries to assist with health care systems and immediate PPE needs<sup>(15)</sup>. Throughout the year, the EU invested financial support in police sector reform in Moldova and at the end of November, it disbursed €50 million in micro-financial assistance to help the country with the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>(16)</sup>. The EU also closely followed the presidential elections held on 1 November. It expressed its respect for Moldovan voters who had demonstrated their commitment to

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- (12) European Commission, 'Nagorno Karabakh: EU allocates additional €3 million in emergency aid for civilians affected by the hostilities', 19 November 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2161](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2161)).
  - (13) EEAS, 'European Union disburses additional € 24 million in grants to support Armenia's fight against COVID-19 pandemic', 23 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90986/european-union-disburses-additional-€-24-million-grants-support-armenia-s-fight-against-covid\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90986/european-union-disburses-additional-€-24-million-grants-support-armenia-s-fight-against-covid_en)).
  - (14) European Investment Bank, 'Team Europe contributes €500 million to COVAX initiative to provide one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses for low and middle income countries', 15 December 2020 (<https://www.eib.org/en/press/all/2020-366-team-europe-contributes-eur500-million-to-covax-initiative-to-provide-one-billion-covid-19-vaccine-doses-for-low-and-middle-income-countries>).
  - (15) Brugner, P. and Schuch, K., 'The EU's global response to the COVID-19 crisis with a focus on the Eastern Neighbourhood and Africa', Austrian Society for European Politics, 3 June 2020 (<https://www.oefge.at/policy-briefs/the-eus-global-response-to-the-covid-19-crisis-with-a-focus-on-the-eastern-neighbourhood-and-africa/>).
  - (16) EU Neighbours portal, 'EU disburses €50 million in micro-financial assistance to Moldova to help deal with COVID-19 pandemic', 30 November 2020 (<https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/eu-disburses-eu50-million-micro-financial-assistance-moldova-help-deal>).

democracy despite the pandemic. However, the EU was concerned by the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODHIR election observation mission, which raised questions about legal gaps in the financial oversight of the elections, the media environment, access to polling stations and allegations of vote-buying, among other issues. At the start of December, the EU expressed concern at the hasty and non-transparent legislative proposals brought to parliament that sought to limit presidential powers, especially as individuals linked to corruption and banking fraud in 2014 supported the measures.

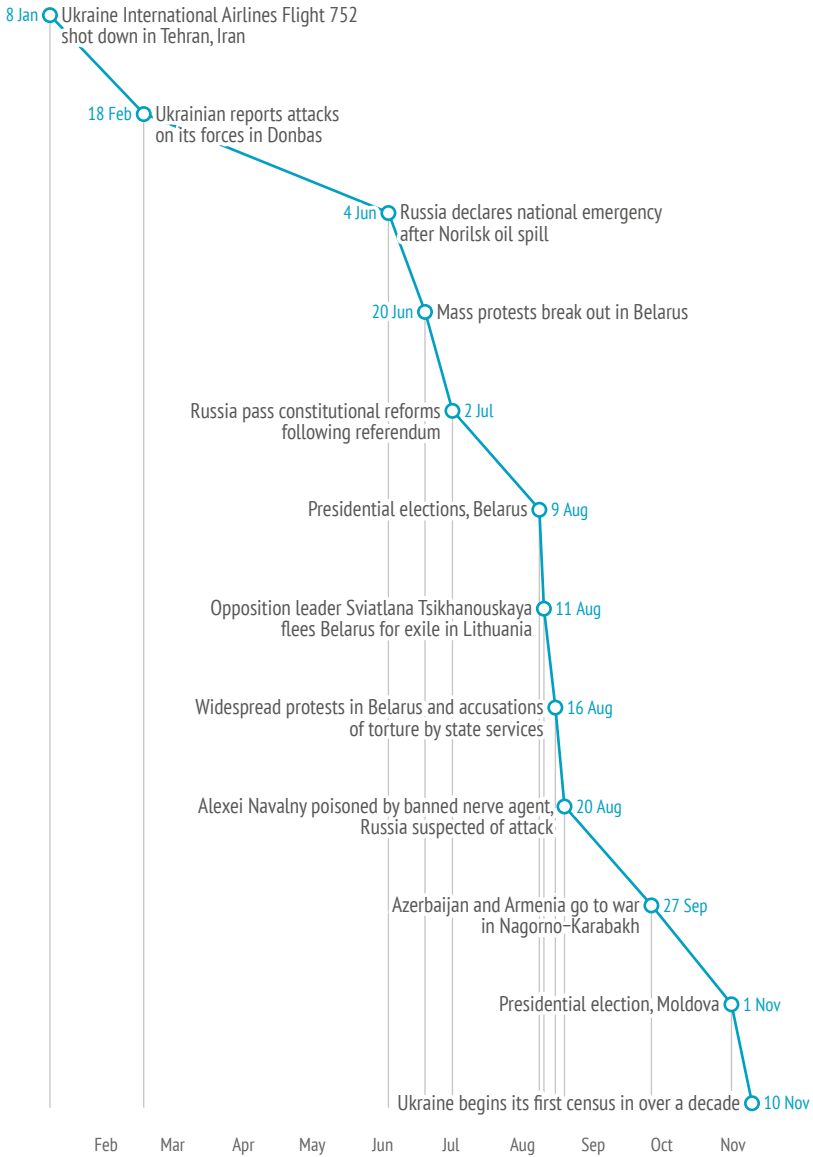
During the year, the EU supported Georgia and it provided loans for healthcare infrastructure development in the country. In March, the EU welcomed steps in Georgia for a cross-party agreement on constitutional amendments related to the electoral system and to ensure fair and free parliamentary elections in 2020. However, at the beginning of October the EU expressed concern about how the Georgian parliament was reviewing the selection process for supreme court judges, which the EU saw had shortcomings with regard to transparency and creating public trust in the political and legal process in the country. On 22 November, the EU issued a statement on the parliamentary elections in Georgia stating that it regretted 'both the mistrust that has affected the electoral process and the fact that opposition candidates did not contest seats in the second round' <sup>(17)</sup>. By mid-December, the opposition boycotted the work of the new legislature on claims that the elections took place with irregularities. At the end of the year, politicians in Georgia were engaged in heated and intense dialogue regarding comprehensive electoral reforms, but indecision created an atmosphere that was not conducive to improving future Georgian elections.

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(17) EU Neighbours portal, 'EU issues statement on Georgia's parliamentary elections', 23 November 2020 (<https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/eu-issues-statement-georgias-parliamentary-elections>).

Key events

Eastern neighbourhood



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

# Asia

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**I**n the Asia-Pacific, a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was signed between ten ASEAN countries, plus Australia, China, Japan and Korea on 15 November 2020. Covering 30 % of the world's population and GDP, the RCEP arguably represents the 'world's largest free trade zone stretching from the border of Kazakhstan to the South Pacific'<sup>(1)</sup>. On the back of this development, in December 2020 the EU and ASEAN took the historic step of establishing a strategic partnership which would lead to more regular summits at the level of leaders and bolster a multilateral approach to international affairs. The new strategic partnership built on the Union's close relations with ASEAN partners. In 2012, the EU had signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, making the EU the only regional organisation to do so, and in 2016, the EU opened a mission to ASEAN as well as appointing a specific ambassador. In December, the EU and ASEAN began their first expert dialogue on Covid-19 vaccines.

In the face of prolonged tensions between the US and China, the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership is designed to promote the international rules-based order, to dialogue on human rights and democracy, to deal with climate change and other global challenges and to cooperate on international vaccination efforts to combat Covid-19. Additionally, on 9 December HR/VP Borrell became the first EU high representative and Commission vice-president to take part in an ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus with Australia,

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(1) Borrell Fontelles, J., 'The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnerships – What does it mean for the EU?', HRVP blog, 19 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88997/regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership---what-does-it-mean-eu\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88997/regional-comprehensive-economic-partnership---what-does-it-mean-eu_en)).

China, India, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. Finally, on 1 December 2020 EU and ASEAN foreign ministers reiterated their commitment to connectivity between Europe and Asia and they underlined the importance of the EU strategy on connecting Europe and Asia and the master plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC).

### China's smart city ambitions

'The term 'smart city' relates to the use of technology to improve urban infrastructure and services, from energy grids to systems for transport/mobility and parking, and includes water treatment, waste management and security aspects, among others. China has made the smart city part of its national development strategy: the concept was endorsed by President Xi Jinping at a national urbanisation convention in 2015, and later explicitly mentioned in the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), adopted in March 2016. Since then, the central government has massively encouraged the development of smart cities across Chinese national territory – claiming in January 2019 to have a total of 500 "smart city pilot projects ready or under construction". It has also urged technology companies to become leaders at a global level, and to reach out to foreign cities in support of their own smart city development. China often promotes its smart cities through existing bilateral and regional frameworks (such as the China–ASEAN Summit or the China–Central Asia Cooperation Forum) and in particular under the banner of the 'Belt & Road Initiative' (BRI), as well as its derivative, the 'Digital Silk Road', which are attracting a significant number of countries.'

Ekman, A. and de Esperanza Picardo, C., 'Towards urban decoupling? China's smart city ambitions at the time of Covid-19', *Brief No 10*, EUISS, May 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/towards-urban-decoupling-china's-smart-city-ambitions-time-covid-19>).

## China

China–EU relations were mixed during 2020, not least because of tensions over Covid-19 and the nature of China's global Covid-19 strategy and the political communication surrounding its strategy. Indeed, the HR/VP pointed to a global 'battle of narratives' and

## Covid-19

East Asia – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

attempts to discredit the EU<sup>(2)</sup>. On the one hand, China became the 107th state party to the Arms Trade Treaty in mid-July and the EU and China signed a landmark bilateral agreement in September to protect 100 European Geographical Indications related to cheese, alcohol and hams. The EU and China aimed at enhancing their economic relations by agreeing in principle to a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December 2020. The CAI is designed to level the playing field for EU investors operating in China and to ensure that they are treated fairly when investing in the

(2) EEAS, 'EU HR/VP Josep Borrell: The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating', 24 March 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76401/eu-hrvp-josep-borrell-coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en)).

country. EU leaders and institutions also stated that the CAI would be the first agreement where China had agreed to include provisions on sustainable development, commitments on forced labour and the

**The HR/VP pointed to a global ‘battle of narratives’ and attempts to discredit the EU.**

ratification of relevant ILO conventions. Following the EU–China leaders’ summit of 30 December, the EU claimed that the CAI would advance European economic interests and create more balance in the EU–China trade relationship. The meeting and the principle agreement on the CAI

were criticised by several commentators, and even the incoming US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called for the EU to wait before moving forward with the agreement. Importantly, the European Parliament did not ratify the CAI in 2020 and so it did not come into force that year.

On the other hand, human rights abuses continued to plague relations. In December, HR/VP Borrell made clear in front of the European Parliament that the EU is worried about the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang and he acknowledged the concerning documented reports of forced labour. He also made clear that trade between the EU and China should be underpinned by adherence to responsible business conduct, and international labour standards and human rights. Other human rights concerns emerged during the year. For example, the EU called for the fair trial of Ms Li Yuhan — a human rights lawyer — as her 3-year detention since October 2017 has been accompanied by credible reports of torture and ill-treatment. Furthermore, at the end of 2020 the EU also voiced its concern about restrictions on the freedom of expression in China and the detention of journalist Ms Zhang Zhan and human rights lawyer Mr Yu Wensheng for either reporting on the origin of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan or drawing attention to human rights abuses in China. Additionally, the EU called for the immediate release of twelve individuals from Hong Kong who were detained by Chinese authorities and have not been given a fair trial or the chance to appoint lawyers of their choice. During the 22nd EU–China summit in June 2020, the EU also specifically called for the release of Swedish citizen Gui Minhai and two Canadian citizens Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor after their arbitrary detention.

The question of Hong Kong was a major issue for the EU in 2020. The year began with an announcement in May that the Chinese National People's Congress was going to deliberate a draft bill that revised the national security framework as it applied to Hong Kong. At the time, the EU made clear that it attached great importance to Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and it called on China to step back from violating the Hong Kong Basic Law and the commitments undertaken as part of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. At the 9 June EU-China Strategic Dialogue, the HR/VP made clear his reservations about China's actions in Hong Kong as well as other political concerns. This message was reinforced by a G7 foreign ministers statement that underscored the concern for the imposition of China's new national security law on Hong Kong. Following the formal adoption of the National Security Law on 30 June by China, the EU yet again expressed concern that the law contravened Hong Kong's basic law and that it would undermine the independence of the judiciary and rule of law.

The strict and rapid application of the National Security Law to Hong Kong resulted in protests among citizens. On 13 July, the Council of the EU expressed its deep concern about the situation in Hong Kong and called on China to respect the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle. A worsening of the situation emerged at the end of July when news broke that elections to the Legislative Council would be postponed for one year. The EU saw this as a delay to the renewal of the Council's democratic mandate and it called into question the freedoms guaranteed under Hong Kong's Basic Law. Furthermore, pro-democracy candidates for the elections had been disqualified to stop them from participating. In mid-August, increased arrests and raids under the China National Security Law was a major escalation of the situation, as members of the press and pro-democracy groups were detained by authorities arbitrarily. The arrests continued well into September and the pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong was arrested on 24 September by authorities. Further arbitrary arrests of pro-democracy lawmakers were made and condemned in November.

**On 13 July, the Council of the EU expressed its deep concern about the situation in Hong Kong and called on China to respect the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle.**



## Indo-Pacific

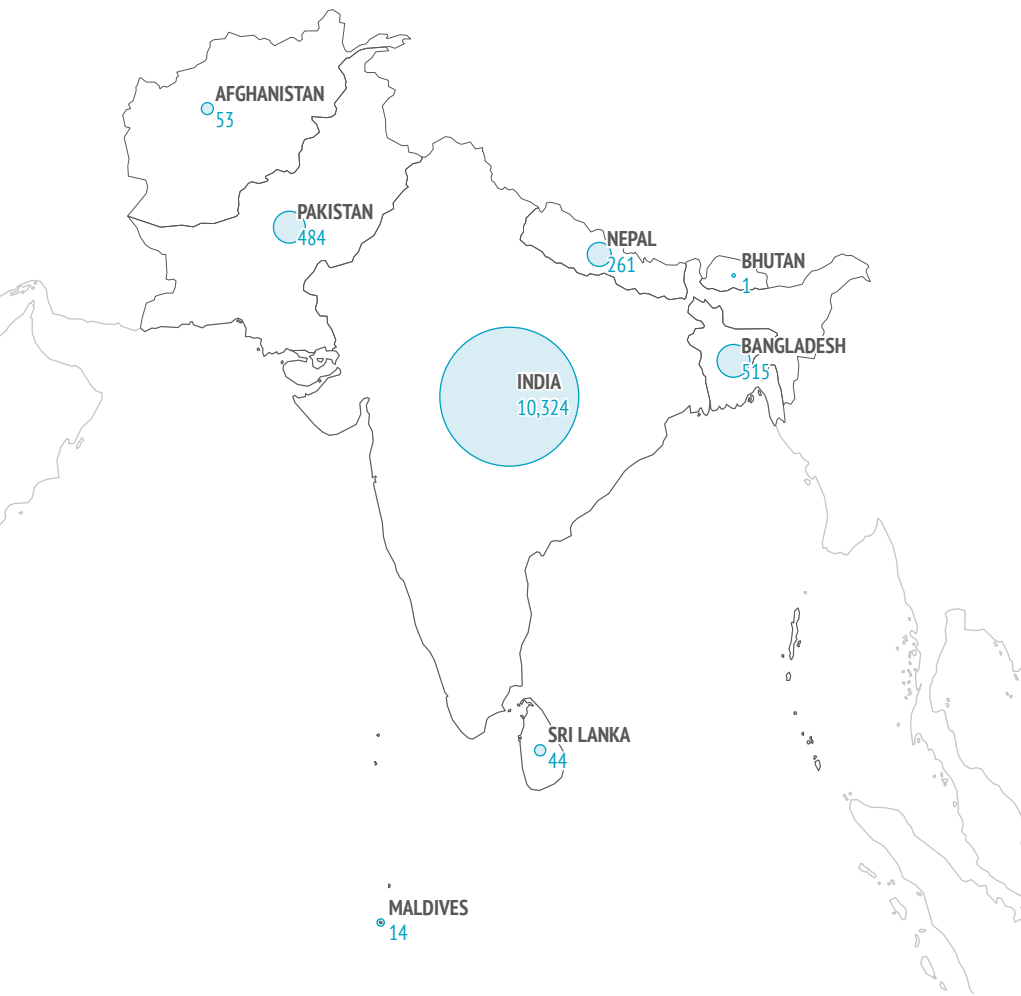
Taiwan was also on the agenda in 2020 due to growing tensions in the region after China increased its military presence in the Taiwan Strait and made direct incursions near the island. Taiwan featured prominently as part of the growing competition between the United States and China. While congratulating the people of Taiwan for the high turnout during presidential elections on 11 January, the EU underlined the importance of dialogue and constructive engagement in cross-strait relations. Taiwan-China relations and a host of many other security issues contributed to the EU's early steps towards a strategy for the Indo-Pacific. Joining France, both Germany and the Netherlands produced documents outlining their national approaches to the region. In meetings during the year with Australia, ASEAN, India, Japan and others, the EU flagged its intention not only to develop its own Indo-Pacific strategy in 2021 but to actively engage in the region.

The EU continued to build its strategic relationships with regional partners in 2020. With the Republic of Korea (ROK), January saw the two sides reaffirm their good economic and security relations during the 16th Joint Committee meeting. In mid-June, the EU strongly regretted the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) decision to demolish the inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong. The EU also condemned the belligerent rhetoric surrounding the event and the DPRK's decision to cut communication channels with ROK. The EU reiterated to ROK and regional partners that it wanted a de-nuclearised peninsula and peaceful relations in the region. On 30 July, the EU confirmed its list of sanctions imposed on individuals and entities from DPRK, and that the sanctions would be continued for a further year until July 2021. The EU and ROK had the opportunity to reaffirm their strong ties at the virtual leaders' conference that took place on 30 June. Both sides emphasised the need for mutual support during the Covid-19 crisis and they celebrated 10 years of the EU-ROK Strategic Partnership. The leaders also discussed issues of mutual interest such as digitalisation, aviation, humanitarian assistance and de-nuclearisation.

In its relationship with Japan, EU and Japanese senior officials met in Brussels on 31 January to take stock of the EU-Japan

Covid-19

South Asia – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). At the occasion of the first anniversary of the SPA, the two sides discussed enhancing relations in the areas of sustainable connectivity and infrastructure,

as well as joint action to address a number of crises affecting Asia and Europe. Following the virtual EU–Japan leaders’ meeting on 26 May, both sides affirmed the need to address the Covid-19 crisis and to build a strong Japan–EU partnership to tackle future pandemics. They also discussed global issues such as data regulation, critical supply chain management, sustainable development and security in the EU’s and Japan’s respective neighbourhoods. Such discussions mirrored positive actions during the year on security and defence including a joint naval exercise on 5–6 October and a joint port call on Djibouti on 15 October.

The EU spent 2020 strengthening its strategic relationship with India. At the Raisina Dialogue in mid-January, HR/VP Borrell

### Covid-19

Oceania – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Covid-19

South-East Asia – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

underlined the importance of the EU-India relationship and the Union’s important security and economic role in the Indo-Pacific region. Security concerns came to a head in mid-June when China and India clashed at the Line of Actual Control between the two countries, leading to the first casualties at the border since 1975. The EU urged caution and regretted the casualties. Following the 15th EU-India Summit held virtually on 17 July, the two partners affirmed the importance of the relationship and agreed to strengthen the multilateral order based on shared values, combat the Covid-19

pandemic, deepen trade ties and manage critical supply chains, meet the climate change challenge, enhance digital and transport connectivity, and boost security in the Indo-Pacific. At the meeting, the leaders adopted the 'EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025' to guide their relations for the coming years, as well as a joint declaration on resource efficiency and circular economy.

South and South-East Asia continued to be afflicted by humanitarian and natural disasters in 2020. Following the destruction caused by cyclone Amphan in eastern India and Bangladesh in May, the European Commission immediately dedicated €1.6 million to the region to support affected people and to help protect humanitarian aid and health workers working against the pandemic<sup>(3)</sup>. Typhoons Goni and Vamco devastated the Philippines and the EU moved quickly to support the country. In October, the European Commission announced that it would provide €8.1 million for humanitarian assistance in the region, with a particular focus on the situations in the Philippines, Nepal and South-East Asia. This is a densely populated area of the world that is home to 4.3 billion people or 60 % of the world's population<sup>(4)</sup>. Natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods are a frequent problem for the region and they can give rise to and aggravate challenges such as access to clean water and education or the provision of healthcare and sanitation services.

With Vietnam, the EU celebrated 30 years of diplomatic relations in 2020 and on 1 December it held the second EU-Vietnam consultation on security and defence in Brussels. The partners discussed security in the South China Sea and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), plus they reviewed the implementation of the EU-Vietnam agreement on the participation of Vietnam in CSDP missions and operations. They also discussed cybersecurity, maritime security and crisis management, and they engaged in a dialogue over strategies to combat Covid-19.

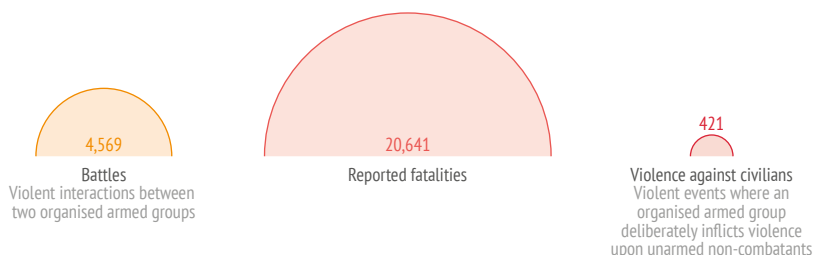
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(3) European Commission, 'Statement by Commissioner Janez Lenarčič on the destructive cyclone Amphan in eastern India and Bangladesh', 21 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_20\\_926](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_20_926)).

(4) European Commission, 'Humanitarian aid: EU provides €8.1 million for most vulnerable in South and South-East Asia', 30 October 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2005](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2005)).

## Afghanistan

Crisis events, 2020



Data: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021

The situation in Myanmar remained on the Union's radar in 2020. In May, hundreds of Rohingya were caught drifting at sea in appalling conditions as they were pushed away from the shores of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. In July, the EU applauded Indonesia for allowing safe disembarkation and providing humanitarian assistance to the refugees. 25 August 2020 marked the 3rd anniversary of the mass displacement of more than 740 000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar since violence in Rakhine State. Since this time, over 860 000 refugees have moved to Bangladesh and over 150 000 are hosted in other countries. On 22 October, the EU, the United States, United Kingdom and the UN hosted an international donors conference in solidarity with Rohingya refugees and the countries in the region. The EU mobilised €96 million for the purposes of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and conflict prevention <sup>(5)</sup>.

(5) For all data in this paragraph see: European Commission, 'EU mobilises international donors to support Rohingya refugees and countries in the region', 22 October 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1966](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1966)).

## Covid-19

Central Asia – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

## Central Asia

During the year, the US began to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan after Washington signed a conditional peace agreement with the Taliban in the Qatari capital Doha on 29 February. Under

**The US began to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan after Washington signed a conditional peace agreement with the Taliban.**

the terms of the agreement, the US agreed to withdraw all American and Coalition forces within 14 months, while the Taliban guaranteed that Afghan soil will not be used against the security of the US and its allies, and to participate in intra-Afghan peace negotiations. The EU welcomed the agreement considering it as an important first step towards a comprehensive peace process and ending the over 19-year-old

war. However, at the end of March, the EU displayed concern at the ongoing attacks in Zabul and in a Kabul Gurdwara that were directed at the Sikh community. Further attacks were reported in

mid-May in Kabul and Nangarhur on innocent civilians following an attack on a maternity ward and at a funeral ceremony. Despite this violent atmosphere, the EU welcomed the start of intra-Afghan negotiations in mid-September between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. However, the news was dented by further Taliban and terrorist violence during the year, including on Kabul University in November and on media representatives and human rights defenders in December.

The EU continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in 2020. In mid-June, the EU conducted a humanitarian air bridge flight to the country to deliver over 100 tonnes of medical supplies and PPE to EU partners in the country. Additionally, the Union announced that it would provide an additional €39 million to support the country in managing the pandemic and other crises such as natural disasters and forced displacement <sup>(6)</sup>. In November, the EU extended its support for Afghanistan at the 2020 Geneva Conference where it announced a €1.2 billion pledge to the country over the period 2021–2025. The financial support would, however, be conditional on an Afghan-led process that delivers peace and allows for a democratic and pluralistic society built on institutional transparency and accountability. As made clear by HR/VP Josep Borrell and European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen at the conference, the EU's support to Afghanistan is conditional upon the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially for women, children and minorities, including freedom of media. These principles were enshrined in a joint political communiqué and the Afghanistan Partnership Framework, which were adopted at the conference <sup>(7)</sup>.

On 6 November 2020, the EU and Pakistan held the fifth strategic dialogue on issues such as the Covid-19 crisis, demography, countering terrorism and radicalisation, and broader geopolitical challenges and shifts in the region. In particular, HR/VP Borrell had a frank discussion with his counterpart Makhdoom Shah Mahmood

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(6) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: EU humanitarian air bridge to Afghanistan and further support', 15 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1059](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1059)).

(7) European Commission, 'EU reconfirms support for Afghanistan at 2020 Geneva Conference', 24 November 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2193](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2193)).



Qureshi concerning disinformation spread in Pakistan about supposed 'Islamophobic acts' in Europe. The HR/VP underlined that 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' <sup>(8)</sup>.

There was a crisis in the Kyrgyz Republic in the later months of 2020 when the results of the 4 October parliamentary elections were judged to be not valid by the Central Electoral Commission of the country. Following this decision, the EU called on all political sides to respect the constitution and to resolve matters peacefully given that there were public and international concerns about the designation of the new prime minister. A few days later, President Sooronbay Jeenbekov resigned from his post because of the invalidation of the results. There was concern when the president's powers were transferred to the prime minister by the speaker of the parliament. At the end of November, the Council of Europe's Venice Commission called for the postponement of the parliamentary elections and the EU agreed with this position.

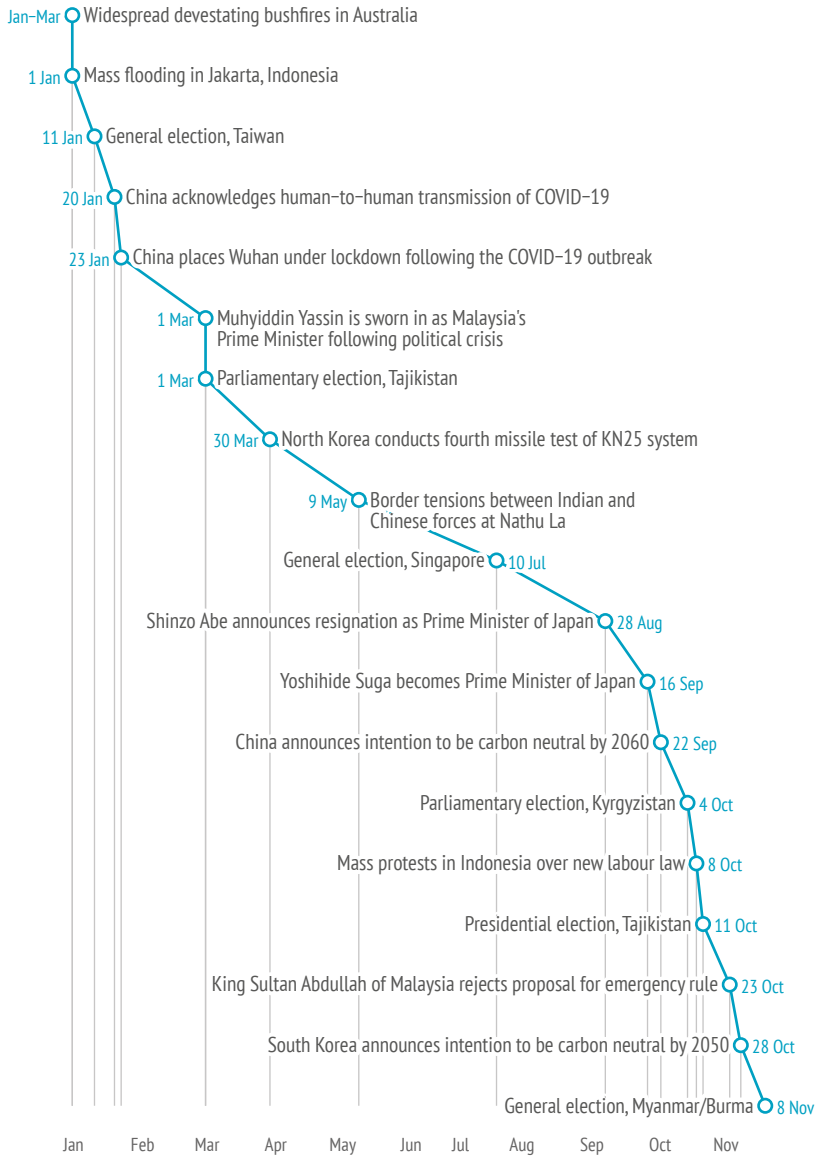
### Core documents

- > EEAS, 'EU-India strategic partnership: a roadmap to 2025', 15 July 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-india\\_strategic\\_partnership\\_a\\_roadmap\\_to\\_2025.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-india_strategic_partnership_a_roadmap_to_2025.pdf)).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on Hong Kong', 24 July 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45225/st09872-re01-en20.pdf>).
- > 'EU-ASEAN joint ministerial statement on connectivity', 1 December 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/01/eu-asean-joint-ministerial-statement-on-connectivity/>).
- > 'Co-chairs' press release of the 23rd ASEAN-EU ministerial meeting', 1 December 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/01/co-chairs-press-release-of-the-23rd-asean-eu-ministerial-meeting/>).

(8) EEAS, 'Why EU-Pakistan relations are so important for us', 6 November 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88284/why-eu-pakistan-relations-are-so-important-us\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/88284/why-eu-pakistan-relations-are-so-important-us_en)).

Key events

Asia



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021



# Americas

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## North America

**T**he EU's relations with North America in 2020 remained mixed: the Union maintained a constructive relationship with Canada, but the EU-US partnership continued to be marred by growing frictions between Brussels and Washington. EU-US relations were primarily marked by the global Covid-19 pandemic and the 2020 US presidential election in November. Moreover, long-standing controversies between the EU and the Trump administration, such as the intractable issue about fair transatlantic burden-sharing further strained EU-US relations throughout the year. Although defence spending by European allies and Canada increased in real terms by 3.9 % from 2019 to 2020, only 11 allies met the NATO defence investment pledge (a guideline to spend 2 % on defence by 2024) that was unanimously agreed upon by NATO Member States at the Wales Summit in 2014 <sup>(1)</sup>.

In June, US President Trump accused Germany of being 'delinquent' regarding its NATO commitments and announced the withdrawal of one-third of the 36 000 US military personnel in Germany

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(1) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'The Secretary General's Annual Report', 16 March 2021, p. 48 ([https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf#page=50](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/3/pdf/sgar20-en.pdf#page=50)).

(a decision halted by the Biden administration in February 2021)<sup>(2)</sup>. The Trump administration's withdrawal plans sparked a strong backlash in Berlin and within the US Congress due to concerns that a withdrawal would weaken the Alliance and transatlantic security. In July, the US House Armed Services Committee (HASC) voted to limit President Trump's troop withdrawal from Germany. Nonetheless, the US Department of Defense (DoD) proposed to withdraw 11 900 troops from Germany on 29 July<sup>(3)</sup>. Tensions between the US and Germany continued over the Nord Stream II gas pipeline. On 6 August, several US senators called for sanctions against the German port of Mukran if it continued 'providing goods, services, and support for the Nord Stream 2 project'<sup>(4)</sup>.

## US defence and artificial intelligence

'The 2019 Department of Defense (DoD) AI Strategy pledges an AI-enabled digital transformation of US military power in preparation for great power competition with China and Russia, both of whom are 'making significant investments in AI for military purposes' that 'threaten to erode [US] technological and operational advantages'. The strategy rests on five pillars: developing AI-enabled capabilities; effective AI governance, including decentralised experimentation; creating a skilled AI workforce; leadership in military ethics and AI safety; and engagement with private partners and international allies. It is underpinned by an ethical approach and proposes a framework in which AI technologies are used to address broader security issues such as disaster management.'

Soare, S., 'Digital divide? Transatlantic defence cooperation on AI', *Brief No 3*, EUISS, March 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/digital-divide-transatlantic-defence-cooperation-ai>).

On 22 May, the US announced its intention to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty. As a justification for its withdrawal, the US accused Russia of continuously violating the treaty for several years,

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- (2) Deutsche Welle, 'Trump says US cutting troops in Germany over NATO spending', 15 June 2020 (<https://www.dw.com/en/trump-to-cut-us-troop-numbers-in-germany/a-53822850>).
  - (3) US Department of Defense, 'DOD Proposes Removing More Than 11,000 Troops from Germany', 29 July 2020 (<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/2292311/dod-proposes-removing-more-than-11000-troops-from-germany/>).
  - (4) United States Senate, 'Letter from Senator Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton and Ron Johnson to Fährhafen Sassnitz GmbH', 5 August 2020 (<https://www.cruz.senate.gov/files/documents/Letters/2020.08.05%20Final%20Mukran%20Port%20Letter.pdf>).

citing for instance Russia's decision to illegally place a restriction on flight distance over Kaliningrad and denying access to observation flights along the Georgian–Russian border. Signed in 1992, the treaty permits unarmed aerial surveillance flights over the territories of its participating states and is seen as a cornerstone of the Euro–Atlantic security architecture. On 22 May, NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg released a statement in which he called upon Russia to return to full compliance with the treaty. In a separate statement by the HR/VP released on the same day, the EU stated that it regretted the announcement of the US to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty and called upon the US to reconsider their decision while also urging Russia to return to the full implementation of the treaty. A similar statement was also published by the foreign ministries of 12 EU Member States. The US withdrawal took effect on 22 November, six months after the notification. On 15 January 2021, Russia also announced its intention to withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty. Following the withdrawal from the JCPoA in 2018, and the Intermediate–Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, the Open Skies Treaty was the third arms control and non–proliferation arrangement which the US has abandoned under the Trump administration.

Furthermore, the US decision to set sanctions against the ICC was yet another area of tension in EU–US relations in 2020. Following visa restrictions to certain ICC officials in 2019, President Trump issued an executive order on June 11 authorising sanctions against ICC officials, including asset freezes and family entry bans. Three months before, the ICC allowed its prosecutor to open an investigation into alleged war crimes by US military personnel in Afghanistan. On 16 June, the HR/VP issued a statement expressing grave concern about the punitive measures and reconfirmed the EU's unwavering support for the ICC. In September, the US imposed sanctions on ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda and the ICC's Head of the Jurisdiction, Complementarity and Cooperation Division Phakiso Mochochoko. The sanctions once again elicited protest by the HR/VP Josep Borrell, who condemned the sanctions stating that they were unacceptable measures that attempted to obstruct the ICC's investigations and judicial proceedings, and expressed his support for the universality of the Rome Statute and the ICC.

The US position on climate change and global environmental governance also continued to create tensions in EU-US relations. On 4 November, the US officially withdrew from the Paris Agreement (a decision reversed by the Biden administration in February 2021). An additional source of tension was the Trump administration's decision to resume the federal death penalty in July, after a nearly two-decade hiatus<sup>(5)</sup>.

At the beginning of the year, European Commission President von der Leyen met with President Trump for the first time at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland on 21 January. Both sides agreed to move the common transatlantic agenda forward and exchanged views on issues related to trade, technology and energy. The meeting, which was also joined by then Commissioner for Trade, Phil Hogan, and Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton, occurred amidst new threats by the US president to impose tariffs on European automobiles, and just a few days after the US had signed the 'Phase one' trade deal with China. In early February, the HR/VP conducted his first official visit to the US where he met with Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. In their discussions, they reaffirmed the strong transatlantic bond between the Europeans and people in the US and exchanged views on the situation in the Middle East and Gulf region, Ukraine, the Western Balkans and Africa.

About a week later, Commission President von der Leyen and President of the European Council Michel met with Speaker of the US House of Representatives Pelosi in Brussels. In June, the US Secretary of State Pompeo joined a virtual meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) to engage in a strategic dialogue on bilateral EU-US relations and key foreign policy issues, including the Middle

**The US position on climate change and global environmental governance also continued to create tensions in EU-US relations.**

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(5) European External Action Service, 'United States: Statement by the Spokesperson on the resumption of the federal death penalty', 10 July 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/82677/united-states-statement-spokesperson-resumption-federal-death-penalty\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/82677/united-states-statement-spokesperson-resumption-federal-death-penalty_en)).

East Peace Process, the eastern neighbourhood, disinformation and relations with China. During the meeting, the HR/VP proposed to launch a distinct, bilateral dialogue with the US on China. A few months later, on 23 October, the HR/VP and the US Secretary of State launched a new bilateral dialogue on China between the EEAS and the US Department of State. The dialogue should serve as a dedicated forum for EU and US officials and experts to discuss the full range of issues related to relations with Beijing.

In terms of trade relations, the EU, US and Japan held a trilateral meeting in Washington, DC, US, on 14 January. In a joint statement, the three parties proposed reforms to strengthen existing WTO rules on industrial subsidies, including additional types of unconditionally prohibited subsidies, and discussed ways to end harmful forced technology transfer policies and practices. Three weeks later, on 6 February, Commissioner Hogan returned to the US to meet with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. Despite these efforts to reset EU-US trade relations, the Trump administration's aircraft tariffs with regard to the Airbus-Boeing dispute came into effect on 18 March. In response, Executive Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis announced countermeasures against US exports into the EU worth \$4 billion on 9 November<sup>(6)</sup>. The decision followed a formal authorisation by the WTO in October. At the same time however, the EU called upon the US administration to resolve the 16-year-old Boeing-Airbus dispute over subsidies.

On 21 August, US Trade Representative Lighthizer and then European Trade Commissioner Hogan released a joint statement announcing a package of tariff reductions in order to increase market access between the US and the EU and to de-escalate bilateral trade tensions. These tariff reductions were the first US-EU negotiated reductions in duties in over twenty years. Under the agreement, the EU was to eliminate tariffs on imports of US live and frozen lobster products. The US, in turn, was supposed to reduce by 50 % its tariff rates for certain products exported by the EU, including certain crystal glassware, surface preparations and propellant

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(6) European Commission, 'Boeing WTO case: The EU puts in place countermeasures against U.S. exports', 9 November 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2048](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2048)).

powders. On 9 September, the Commission published a proposal for a regulation on the elimination of customs duties on certain products<sup>(7)</sup>. The Council of the EU gave the green light to the mini tariff package with the US on 18 November and the European Parliament had consented to the package on 11 November.

Finally, the 2020 US presidential election had a major impact on the future of transatlantic relations. On 3 November, former Vice-President Joseph R. Biden was elected 46th President of the United States. The US Electoral College declared Biden president-elect on 14 December, and he was sworn in as President on 20 January 2021. Following the election, then-incumbent President Trump repeatedly made false accusations of massive electoral fraud and refused to accept the election results which ultimately culminated in an assault on the Capitol building by Trump supporters on 6 January 2021, and a second impeachment trial of Donald Trump.

In most EU capitals, the election of the new American president was widely seen as an opportunity to renew the EU-US partnership. On 7 November, the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission issued two separate statements in which they congratulated President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-President-Elect Harris and welcomed the record voter turnout. The statements were followed by a phone call between European Council President Michel and President-elect Biden on 23 November in which Biden was invited to a special meeting with the members of the European Council in Brussels in 2021.

On 2 December 2020, the European Commission and the HR/VP published ideas on a new EU-US agenda. After the US elections, the EU proposed a new transatlantic relationship to deal with issues such as the pandemic, climate change, digitalisation and security. As part of the agenda, the EU called on the US to join the COVAX initiative to ensure that safe vaccines could be equitably distributed

**I**n most EU capitals, the election of Joe Biden was widely seen as an opportunity to renew the EU-US partnership.

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(7) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the elimination of customs duties on certain products', COM (2020) 496 final, 8 September 2020 ([https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/september/tradoc\\_158923.pdf](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/september/tradoc_158923.pdf)).



## From crisis to renewal: the transatlantic relationship

‘...defence and trade are not the only areas where transatlantic partners disagree. The list is growing longer: multilateralism, migration, climate change, the planned European ‘carbon tax’ and ‘digital tax’, arms control, development and digital technologies, relations with Russia, strategic competition with China, the Iran nuclear deal, the US-proposed Middle East Peace Plan, moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, the extraterritorial effects of US sanctions on Europe, Brexit, the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and membership of the World Health Organisation (WHO), to name just a few. The interests gap between Europe and America is widening in all these areas...’

Soare S. (ed.), *Turning the Tide – How to rescue transatlantic relations*, EUISS, Paris, 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/turning-tide-how-rescue-transatlantic-relations>).

across the world and for the US to reinforce its commitments to the WHO. On climate change, the EU welcomed the US government’s intention to re-join the Paris Agreement and it called on Washington to work with Brussels on a transatlantic green trade agenda and a new green tech alliance. The agenda also referred to the need to solve long-standing bilateral EU-US trade disputes, establish a new EU-US Trade and Technology Council to develop trade and standards, and work on the responsibility of Big Tech on issues such as fair taxation and market distortions. On security and diplomacy, the EU affirmed its readiness to play a role in the US-initiated idea for a Summit for Democracy as well as a need for a new EU-US Security and Defence Dialogue.

Following this proposed new agenda, conclusions published on 7 December 2020 by the Council of the EU called for a deepening of ties with the United States to tackle global challenges and uphold values and common interests. Hoping for a renewed transatlantic

**The Council of the EU called for a deepening of ties with the United States to tackle global challenges and uphold values and common interests.**

agenda, the Council of Ministers stressed the importance of common EU-US efforts on climate change, sustainable development, global public health, trade, multilateralism and the Iran Nuclear Deal as well as security and defence. Recognising the cultural relations between the peoples of the United States and Europe, the Council underlined that it ‘stands ready to discuss the strategic direction of all

policies of shared interest and looks forward to expanding cooperation with the United States' <sup>(8)</sup>.

Relations with Canada were constructive throughout the year. On 10 February, a meeting of the EU–Canada Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), which was established under the EU–Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement, took place in Ottawa, Canada. Moreover, on 19 February, Brigadier General Fritz Urbach became the EU's first-ever defence attaché in Canada. As part of his mandate, he will support and foster security and defence cooperation and dialogues between Brussels and Ottawa. On 29 January, the 5th annual EU–Canada Security and Defence Dialogue took place in Brussels.

In July, the EU, Canada and China co-hosted the international meeting on climate cooperation and a sustainable economic recovery. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the fourth session of the Ministerial on Climate Action (MoCA) was held virtually. The meeting addressed how to align global recovery measures with the Paris Agreement and enhance resilience against future crises. During the EU–Canada Ministerial Meeting in September, the HR/VP and the Canadian foreign minister reaffirmed their joint commitment to address the Covid-19 crisis and pressing foreign and security policy challenges, including in Belarus, China, Ukraine, Lebanon, Mali and Venezuela. Both sides also committed to continuing to work together to promote an effective multilateral order and reaffirmed their commitment to the climate goals established under the Paris Agreement.

On 21 September, the EU and Canada celebrated the third anniversary of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). By December 2020, 15 EU Member States had ratified the agreement <sup>(9)</sup>. On 29 October, a virtual leader's meeting between the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission and the Canadian prime minister took place. In the joint press

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(8) Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on European Union – United States Relations', 7 December 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13724-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

(9) Council of the European Union, 'Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member, of the other part', Treaties and Agreements database (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/treaties-agreements/agreement/?id=2016017>).

release, the EU and Canada re-affirmed their determination to continue joint efforts to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic and stressed that solidarity, cooperation and effective multilateralism are essential to defeat the virus and accelerate the recovery. In this context, the leaders also stressed the necessity to make global supply chains more resilient and deepen their work towards a strategic partnership on critical raw materials to support the green and digital transition. Both sides also agreed on the need to step up global action to tackle climate change, as well as reiterated their commitment to strengthen the WHO and to reform the WTO. Finally, the leaders also discussed several foreign policy and security related issues, such as Belarus, Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Mediterranean, China, Sahel and Venezuela.

## Covid-19 and North America

On 21 January, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) detected the first case of SARS-CoV-2 in Washington State in the US. A few days later, on 31 January, the US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar declared a public health emergency and travel restrictions to and from China. On 13 March, President Trump declared a national emergency and on 18 March he announced he would invoke the Defense Production Act of 1950 to increase the production of necessary supplies such as ventilators. By April, the US recorded the highest death toll in the world, surpassing 20 000 <sup>(10)</sup>. A second and third wave of infections occurred in June and October.

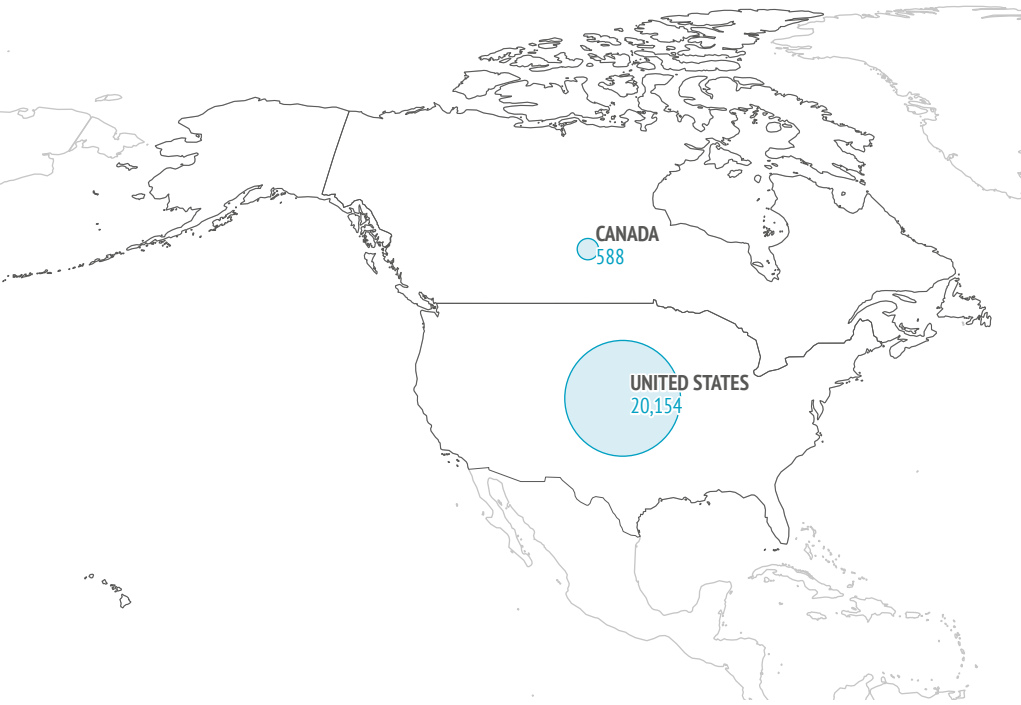
Throughout the year, the pandemic became increasingly politicised as President Trump repeatedly attempted to downplay the danger of the coronavirus, side-lined experts and continued to hold mass election rallies ignoring public health guidelines. During a rally in South Carolina on 28 February, President Trump called the infectious disease a 'new hoax' by the Democrats. Just a few

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(10) Reuters, 'U.S. coronavirus deaths top 20,000, highest in the world exceeding Italy: Reuters tally', 11 April 2020 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-casualties-idUSKCN21T0NA>).

## Covid-19

North America – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

weeks earlier, he suggested that the virus would ‘miraculously’ go away as temperatures rise in April. Towards the end of the year, on 14 December, the first tranche of vaccinations jointly developed by German company BioNTech and US firm Pfizer began in the US. By the end of December, the US reported more than 19 147 627 cases and 335 789 deaths by Covid-19, according to the WHO<sup>(11)</sup>. With approximately one-fifth of all Covid-19 cases and deaths globally, the

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(11) World Health Organisation, WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, Situation by Country, Territory & Area, United States of America (<https://covid19.who.int/table>) (accessed March 2021).

US ranked highest both in terms of total reported case counts and death toll in 2020.

The Trump administration's handling of the global pandemic put an additional toll on transatlantic relations. On 28 March, HR/VP Borrell discussed the response to the Covid-19 pandemic with US Secretary of State Pompeo. The HR/VP underlined the need to intensify international efforts to cope with the pandemic and mitigate its effects. However, a few weeks earlier the US unilaterally suspended travel from the Schengen area to the US because of a fear that Europeans would bring the virus. The travel ban was announced without prior consultation with European partners and was strongly criticised by European Commission President von der Leyen and President of the European Council Charles Michel at the time.

Moreover, amid increasing geopolitical tensions, the US president repeatedly referred to Covid-19 as the 'Chinese virus' despite mounting criticism domestically and internationally. On 25 March, a meeting of the G7 foreign ministers failed to agree to a joint statement because the Trump administration insisted on describing the coronavirus as 'the Wuhan virus'. In a video conference with Members of the European Parliament in April, the HR/VP strongly criticised the lack of US leadership during the pandemic and stated that 'blaming China is not the solution'.<sup>(12)</sup> Another worrying issue emerged a few weeks later when the Trump administration suspended US funding for the WHO. The president had accused the WHO of mismanaging the Covid-19 pandemic and of having a lack of independence from China. On 29 May, the US announced its intention to withdraw from the WHO, which was followed by an official notification to UN Secretary-General António Guterres on 6 July. The decision had major implications for the global response to the pandemic as the US is the largest funder of the WHO. For the 2018 and 2019 WHO funding cycle, the US contributed \$893 million, representing around 15 % of its total budget<sup>(13)</sup>. The US withdrawal from the WHO was seen as part of a broader pattern of the Trump

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(12) EU Observer, 'EU bluntly criticises US handling of pandemic', 21 April 2020 (<https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148130>).

(13) World Health Organisation, Contributors, United States of America (updated until Q4-2019) (<https://open.who.int/2018-19/contributors/contributor?name=United%20States%20of%20America>).

presidency which has seen the abandonment of several multilateral accords. Commission President von der Leyen and HR/VP Josep Borrell urged the US to reconsider their decision to leave the WHO in a statement on 30 May.

Moreover, President Trump's decision not to join the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility, led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Health Organization, also stood in stark contrast to the EU approach. In the Joint Communication for a new EU-US agenda for global change, the EU invited the new Biden administration to join global efforts to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, including developing a pandemic playbook for preparedness and response, and to work together to reinforce the WHO. On 21 January 2021, the US announced it would return to the WHO and join the COVAX vaccine facility.

In Canada, the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed on 25 January. By March, all provinces and territories in Canada had declared a state of emergency. Moreover, the federal government invoked for the first time the Quarantine Act which was introduced in 2005 in the aftermath of the SARS outbreak (2002–2004). The first wave of the pandemic peaked in mid-April. In September, Canada entered a second wave. Like in the US, vaccinations began on 14 December. As of 28 December, there had been 588 277 confirmed Covid-19 cases and 15 741 deaths reported to the WHO <sup>(14)</sup>. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the EU and Canada have been closely cooperating. On 14 April, the HR/VP and Canada's foreign minister released a joint statement and committed to intensively work together to address the Covid-19 crisis. Both sides agreed to collaborate on developing vaccines, protecting the flow of vital supplies, reinforce relevant international organisations, including the WHO, as well as countering disinformation.

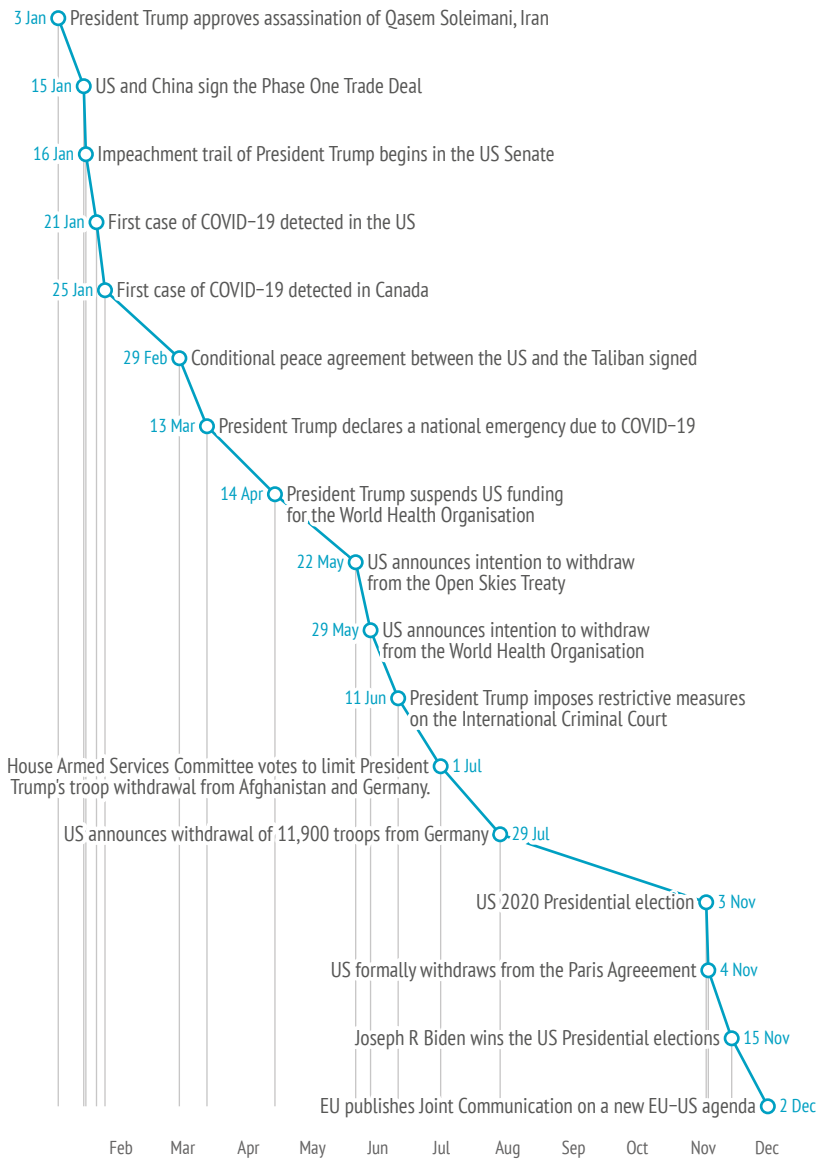
On 4 May, the EU and Canada, alongside other donors, launched the Coronavirus Global Response initiative which builds on the commitment made by G20 leaders on 26 March and aims to support accelerated vaccine development, and ensure universal access

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**(14)** World Health Organisation, WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, Canada (<https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/ca>).

Key events

North America



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

to Covid-19 vaccines, tests and treatments. Both sides also emphasised their commitment to build back better by enhancing green transition and digital transformation and supported G20 efforts to assist the most affected low-income countries, for instance by the G20/Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). Finally, the EU and Canada also cooperated closely to identify and respond to foreign threats, including state-sponsored information manipulation regarding Covid-19, via the EU's Rapid Alert System, the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, and NATO.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

Overall, in 2020 the EU sought to build its relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). On 14 December, the EU and LAC countries issued a joint communiqué following an informal meeting of ministers. The partners agreed to maintain dialogue and to work towards a future bi-regional summit. They also agreed to work together to support multilateralism and trade, and to combat Covid-19 and climate change. At the meeting, the EU and Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay discussed a way forward on the stalled EU-Mercosur trade agreement. In mid-December, the EU and Brazil met via video conference to discuss their relations in the context of the pandemic. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement and they stressed the need to continue dialogue on human rights, the environment, cybersecurity and illicit drugs.

Elsewhere, the EU continued its humanitarian air bridge flights to the region. In July, it delivered 72 tonnes of medical equipment and PPE to Haiti<sup>(15)</sup>, and Peru received 4 tonnes of equipment in September<sup>(16)</sup>. On 11 September, the EU announced that it dedicated

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(15) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: EU humanitarian air bridge to Haiti and new funding', 16 July 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1344](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1344)).

(16) European Commission, 'Coronavirus global response: EU humanitarian air bridge to Peru and €30.5 million for Latin America and the Caribbean', 11 September 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1590](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1590)).



€30.5 million in assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean as part of its global coronavirus response. Additionally, at the end of 2020, the EU responded to two Hurricanes (ETA and IOTA) that hit Central America and resulted in 700 000 displaced people and 7.3 million disrupted lives in the region. The EU provided some 17.7 tonnes worth of Covid-19 tests, tents, blankets, jerry cans and other items through the UCPM<sup>(17)</sup>.

The EU continued to support democracy in the region. In advance of the congressional elections held in Peru on 26 January 2020, the EU deployed an EOM to the country with 50 observers in a context where Peru was experiencing heated debates due to anti-corruption reforms. On 17 September, the EU deployed an EOM to Bolivia with independent electoral experts to monitor the 18 October 2020 elections in the country. The EOM reported that despite the tensions and restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the elections were credible and reflected the free will of the Bolivian people. Earlier in the year, the EU had expressed concern about the human rights situation in Bolivia following the detention of two former members of the Bolivian government after they had returned to the country from their asylum in Mexico. In August, and in the run-up to elections in the country, the HR/VP called on the Supreme Electoral Court to facilitate political dialogue between the parties. In mid-September, the EU called for calm in Colombia following the death of Javier Ordóñez at the hands of police officers during protests.

The crisis in Venezuela continued to be a source of concern for the Union, and the political crisis in the country was made worse by the pandemic. At the beginning of 2020, the EU expressed concern about the events surrounding the scheduled election of the president of the National Assembly, which were marked by serious scenes such as preventing Juan Guaidó, the president of the National Assembly, from holding the session and barring entry to several opposition politicians. The International Contact Group also made its concern known with a statement on 9 January. HR/VP Borrell echoed these

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(17) European Commission, 'Central America: EU increases humanitarian support by €5 million and delivers additional in kind assistance to hurricane victims', 15 December 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2440](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2440)).

Covid-19

South and Central America – Cumulative cases, Jan 2020 – Mar 2021, thousand



Data: World Health Organisation, 2021; European Commission, 2021

concerns by stating on the same day that blocking democratic processes in Venezuela is utterly unacceptable. During a session of the European Parliament on 14 January, the HR/VP yet again expressed deep concern at the 'parliamentary coup' that had taken place and stated that the so-called 'election' of Luis Parra was illegitimate. In March, violence occurred when a rally organised by Juan Guaidó was disrupted by gunmen and armed groups — these individuals opened fire against members of the opposition.

In the context of the pandemic, the EU called on all parties in Venezuela to find a peaceful resolution to differences and the Union welcomed the US proposal for a Democratic Transition Framework for the country. At the end of May, the EU and the Spanish govern-

ment co-convened an international donors conference for refugees and migrants in the region. The conference led to a pledge worth approximately €2.5 billion, with the EU making up the bulk of contributions. To date, around 5 million Venezuelans have been forced to leave

**To date, around 5 million Venezuelans have been forced to leave their homes.**

their homes<sup>(18)</sup>. To assist the country with the Covid-19 crisis, the EU conducted two flights to Venezuela in August, carrying 82.5 tonnes of life-saving PPE and medical equipment for the benefit of more than 500 000 Venezuelans<sup>(19)</sup>.

Despite the worsening health situation in Venezuela, there was further curtailment of democratic rights in mid-June when the Venezuelan Supreme Court arbitrarily suspended the participation of main opposition parties from elections for the Electoral Council. During a meeting of the International Contact Group on 24 June 2020, these measures were condemned by international partners. As a result, the EU added a further 11 officials to its sanctions list on 29 June 2020 for their involvement in the curtailment of democracy in Venezuela. Following the additional sanctions, the regime of Nicolas

(18) European Commission, 'EU mobilises international donors to support Venezuelan refugees and migrants and countries in the region', 26 May 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_922](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_922)).

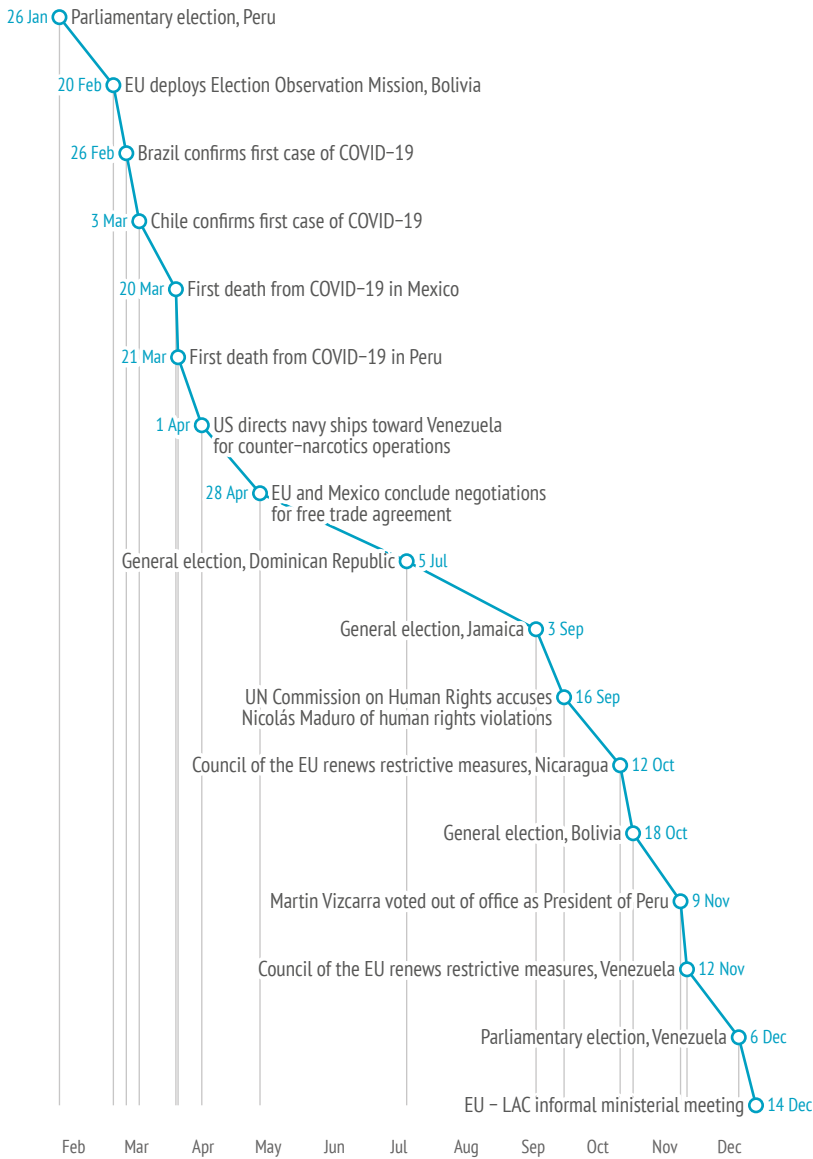
(19) European Commission, 'Coronavirus Global Response: EU humanitarian air bridge supports Venezuela', 22 August 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_1509](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_1509)).

Maduro announced that the EU Ambassador to Venezuela had 72 hours to leave the country. In mid-August, the HR/VP reached out to interlocutors in the country as the main opposition parties had made clear that they would not participate in legislative elections in December 2020 — the elections went ahead anyway without a national agreement or consensus on electoral conditions, thus failing to comply with basic standards for fair and free elections. A further meeting of the International Context Group on 17 September discussed the humanitarian situation in the country due to Covid-19.

Finally, Nicaragua was also a cause for concern for the EU throughout 2020. In April, the EU stressed that there had been no substantial progress on democracy and human rights in the country since mass social protests and demonstrations in April 2018. This message carried over into May when a declaration by HR/VP Borrell made clear that repression by security forces and pro-government armed groups was seriously undermining security and freedom in Nicaragua. As a result, the EU decided to sanction six individuals for serious human rights abuses in the country. In October, the Council of the EU extended restrictive measures until 15 October 2021 given the political situation. In December, the EU yet again expressed its dismay at the continuing deterioration of democracy and human rights in the country as a raft of new legislation and constitutional reforms were designed to hand life sentences for imprecise issues such as ‘hate crimes’ and to repress opposition parties.

Key events

Latin America and the Caribbean



Data: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

## Core documents

- > European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation on the elimination of customs duties on certain products', COM (2020) 496 final, 8 September 2020 ([https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/september/tradoc\\_158923.pdf](https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/september/tradoc_158923.pdf)).
- > European Commission and HR/VP, 'Joint Communication on a new EU-US agenda for global change', JOIN(2020) 22 final, 2 December 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0022&from=en>).
- > Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions on European Union-United States relations', 7 December 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/07/council-conclusions-on-european-union-united-states-relations/>).
- > European Council, 'Conclusions, 10-11 December 2020', 11 December 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/11/european-council-conclusions-10-11-december-2020/>).



Image: European Defence Agency

A blue-tinted photograph of a military aircraft in flight over a field of tall grass. The aircraft is on the left side of the frame, showing its wing and tail. The grass is in the foreground, and the sky is in the background.

# **EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE**





# Crisis management

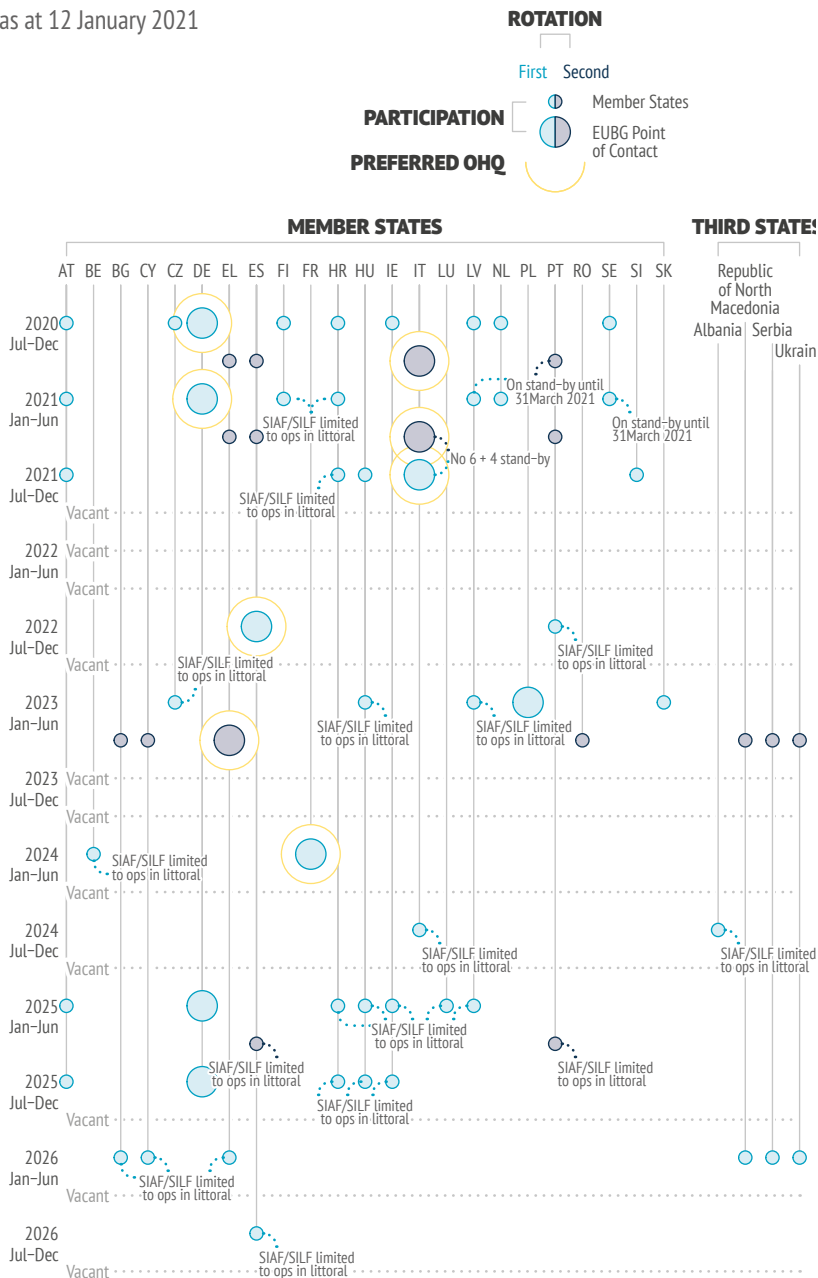
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## Civilian and military CSDP

**T**he pandemic posed several challenges for CSDP missions and operations in 2020, with a number of deployments witnessing infections of personnel and a temporary scaling-back as infection rates mounted globally. Council conclusions from 17 June highlighted the appreciation felt for Europe's armed forces in supporting civilian authorities with the pandemic. Indeed, the Council invited the HR/VP to find out specific ways in which the Member States' military assets and capabilities could be put to the service of the UCPM for both humanitarian purposes and in support of the provisions of the EU solidarity clause (Article 222 TFEU). Additionally, the Council called for personnel previously affected by the Covid-19 virus to urgently return to CSDP missions and operations.

Nevertheless, the Council of the EU continued to extend the mandate and tasks of several CSDP missions and operations. On 11 February, Marek Szczygiel — a Polish diplomat — was appointed by the Political and Security Committee (PSC) as the new head of mission for the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia. On 12 March, a new force commander for EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA was appointed — Rear Admiral Ignacio Villanueva Serrano began his mandate on 17 March in what was the Operation's 34th operational rotation. On 23 March, EUTM Mali was given a broader mandate and a larger budget for its mission. Under the extended mandate, EUTM Mali would support the G5 Sahel countries and it would actively contribute to the EU's integrated approach in the Sahel region. A

Offers and commitments,  
as at 12 January 2021



Data: Council of the EU, 2021

new EU mission force Commander, Brigadier General Frantisek Ridzak (Czechia), was appointed on 16 April.

In the Mediterranean, the EU formally launched EUNAVFOR Operation IRINI on 31 March following political approval for the operation in February. Operation IRINI was deployed to uphold the UN arms embargo on Libya, as well as to train the Libyan coast guard and to break up illegal oil smuggling and human trafficking networks. On 28 May, the Council of the EU decided to appoint two new force commanders for Operation IRINI with Rear Admiral Ettore Socci (Italy) serving until 18 October 2020 and Commodore Theodoros Mikropoulos (Greece) taking up command until 31 March 2021.

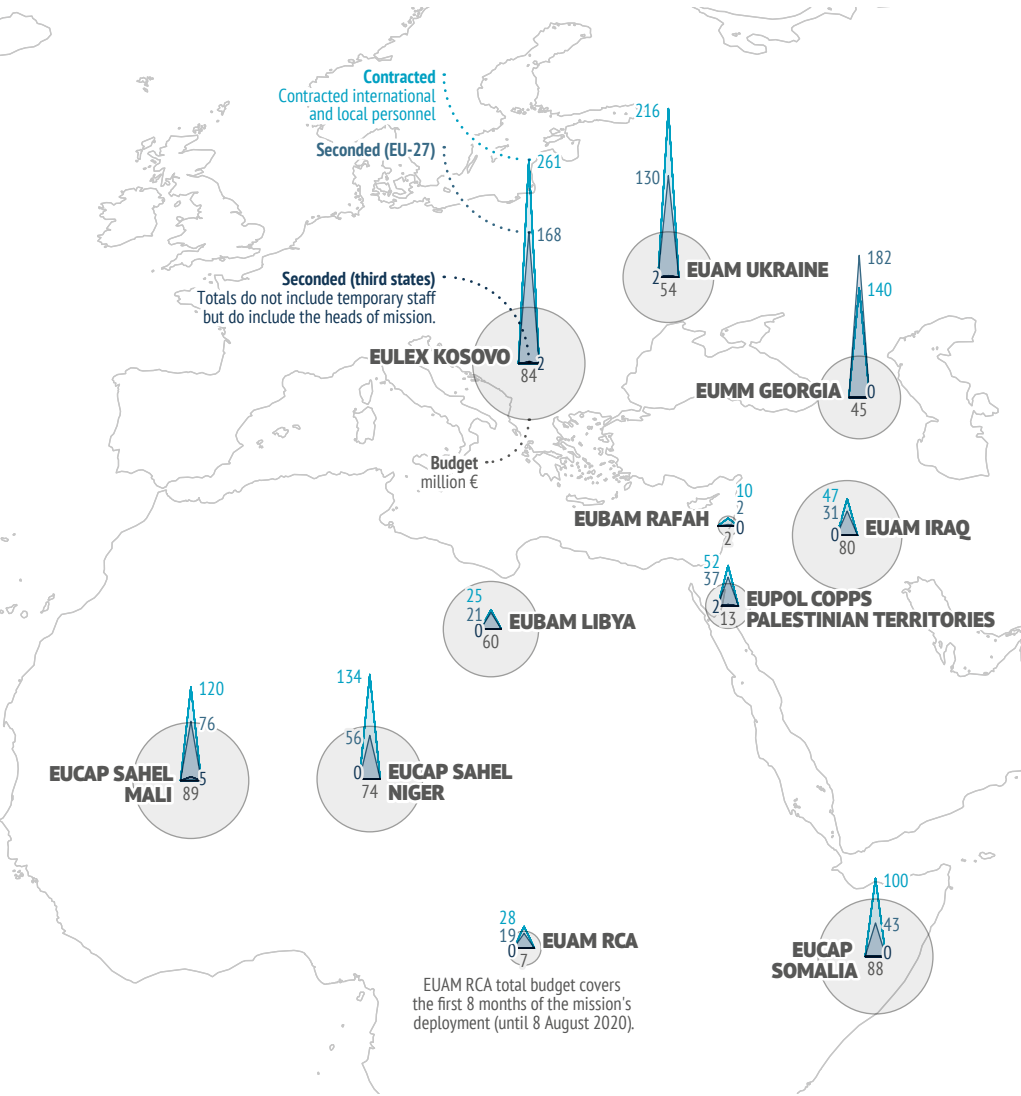
### The legacy and future of the Common Security and Defence Policy

'In response to the challenges it faces, the EU and its member states have invested in a range of policy mechanisms that are designed to pull governments closer together on defence. While it is certainly true that there is nothing comparable in the history of EU security and defence to the hyperactivity that has been observed in this domain since 2016, the reality today is that the 'alphabet soup' of EU security and defence – CSDP, PESCO, EDF, CARD, CDP, MPCC, NIPs, EPF, etc. – has not yet led to any tangible shift in the Union's capability base or readiness for deployment. The expectations for EU security and defence have perhaps never been higher, but neither has the risk that the EU fails to deliver. Expectations certainly have to be put into perspective and there is a danger that developments under the CSDP since 1999 may be overshadowed by the steps taken in the past few years. Without an appreciation of the historical evolution of EU security and defence since 1999, it is hard to put recent initiatives into perspective.'

Fiott, D. (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020 – The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence*, EUISS, Paris, 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/csdp-2020>).

# CSDP civilian missions

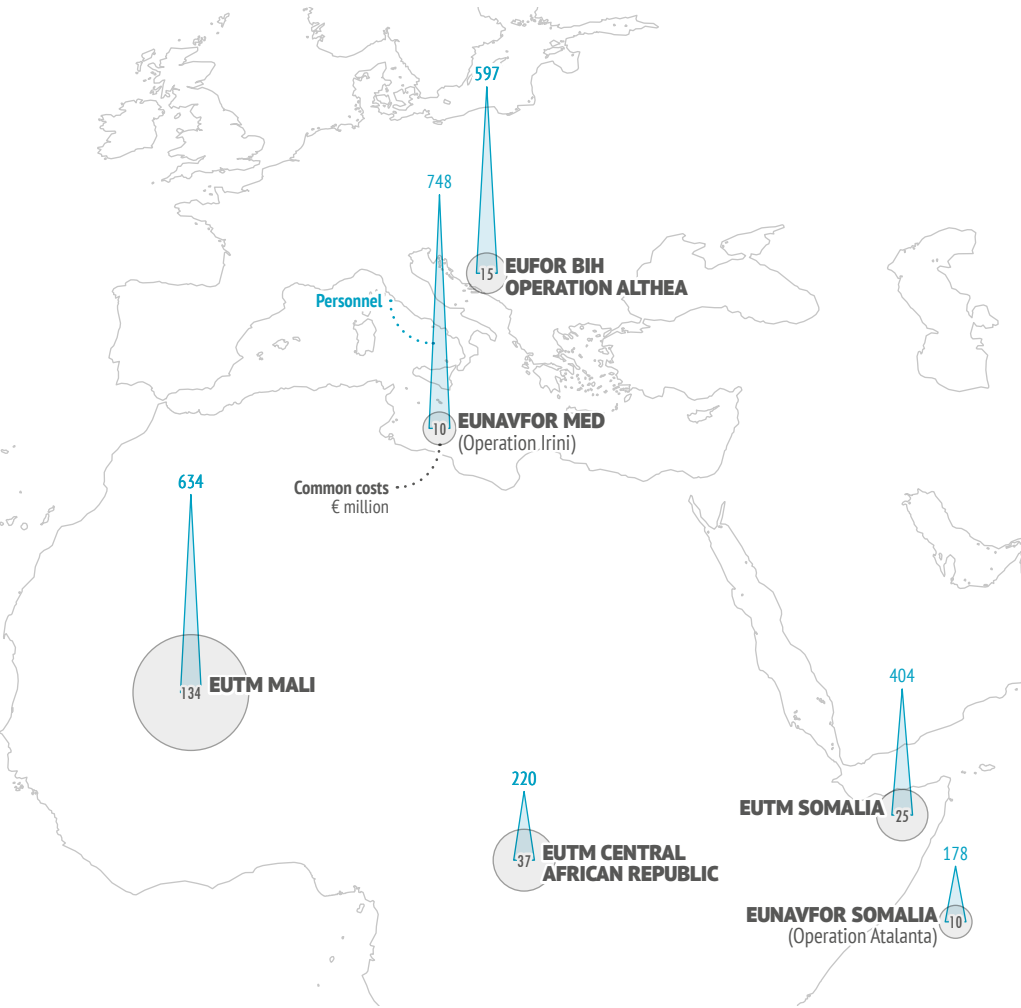
Personnel totals and budget, 2020



Data: European External Action Service, 2020

CSDP military missions and operations

Personnel (as of 31 Dec 2020) and common costs, 2020



EUFOR BiH Operation Althea: UN Security Council Resolution 2549(2020) until 4 November 2021.  
Data: EU Military Staff, 2021

Furthermore, on 7 April the EU decided to extend the civilian CSDP advisory mission to Iraq until 30 April 2022. At the end of June, a number of civilian CSDP missions were extended. EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) Libya was extended until 30 June 2021 and Vincenzo Tagliaferri (Italy) was extended as the head of mission. EUBAM Rafah was also extended under 30 June 2021, and so was the EU Police Mission (EUPOL) to the Palestinian Territories. On 20 July, the EU launched a new civilian CSDP mission to CAR (EUAM RCA) following political approval for the deployment on 9 December 2019. The EU also extended the mandate of EUTM RCA until 19 September 2022. On 7 September, the Council of the EU decided to extend EUCAP Sahel Niger until 30 September 2022 and to emphasise tasks such as capacity building to counter irregular migration and to tackle terrorism and organised crime. In October, the Council of the EU reiterated its support for EUFOR Operation Althea and acknowledged the challenges operating during the pandemic. In December, it was decided to extend EUNAVFOR Operation ATALANTA, EUCAP Somalia and EUTM Somalia until 31 December 2022, and to ensure that the missions could undertake various additional tasks related to maritime governance and security.

### EUNAVFOR Operation IRINI

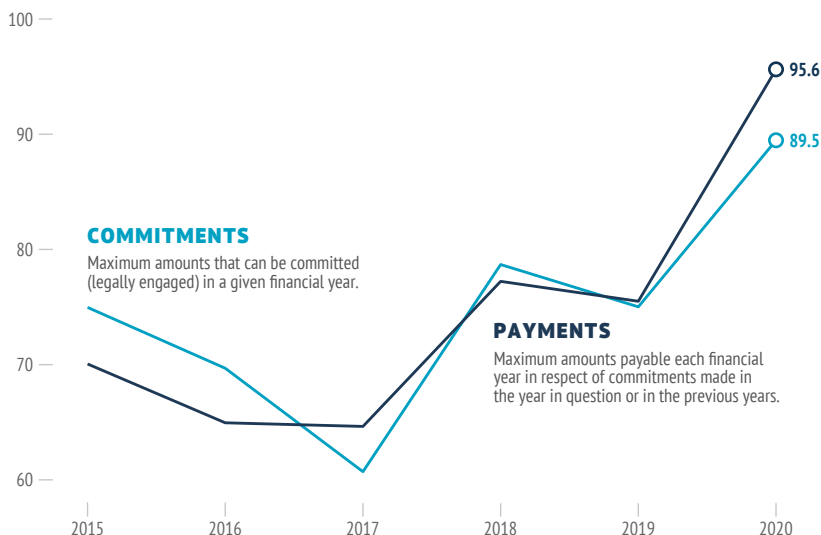
‘On 17 February 2020, the Council of the EU reached a political agreement to launch a new operation in the Mediterranean, aimed at implementing the UN arms embargo on Libya by using aerial, satellite and maritime assets. The operation should, as secondary tasks, contribute to the implementation of UN measures to prevent the illicit export of petroleum from Libya, to capacity building and training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy, and to the disruption of the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks’\*.

\* Council of the European Union, ‘Decision on a European Union military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI)’, 25 March 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6414-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

At the beginning of July, the EU appointed a new director general of the EU Military Staff and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean (France) assumed command from his predecessor Lieutenant General Esa Pulkkinen (Finland). The handover ceremony marked a ten-year aggregate

## Athena Mechanism

Budgets, 2015–2020, € million



Data: Council of the EU, 2021

stint at the EU Military Staff for Pulkkinen, who was one of the eight original ‘founding fathers’ of the EU Military Staff. Attending the ceremony were the chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano (Italy), and the chair of the PSC, Ambassador Sofie From-Emmesberger. Pulkkinen was awarded the

**The EU also launched a crisis management exercise on 21 September 2020 called ‘Integrated Resolve’.**

EU’s CSDP Medal for Extraordinary Meritorious Service. Pulkkinen has overseen the creation of the MPCC and served as a commander of the EU’s military training missions to Mali, CAR and Somalia. Vice Admiral Bléjean has extensive experience with CSDP, having served in senior roles for EUNAVFOR ATALANTA

and EUNAVFOR MED Operational Sophia.

The EU also launched a crisis management exercise on 21 September 2020 called ‘Integrated Resolve’. The exercise focused on external crises and conflicts and CSDP planning and conduct in

## EUAM Central African Republic

Initially launched on 9 December 2019, the advisory mission to CAR became fully operational on 9 August 2020 and it will have a mandate for two years. In terms of its rationale, the ‘mission will support the reform of the internal security forces to enable the CAR authorities to mitigate the current security challenges in the country. EU experts will support the Ministry of the Interior and the internal security forces, the police and the gendarmerie, with the aim of helping in their deployment throughout the country’. Furthermore, the ‘mission will provide advice to the CAR authorities at the strategic level to support the sustainable transformation of CAR internal security forces into a coherent and accountable security provider operating under national ownership. The mission will coordinate closely with the military EU Training Mission (EUTM RCA), the UN MINUSCA mission and the international community’\*.

\* Council of the European Union, ‘Central African Republic: Council agrees on a future CSDP mission to support security sector reform’, 21 November 2019 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/21/central-african-republic-council-agrees-on-a-future-csdp-mission-to-support-security-sector-reform/>).

a fictitious hybrid threat environment. The first part of Integrated Resolved ended on 23 October 2020 and it involved the PSC and operation commanders, as well as the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC). Relevant services from the European Commission and EU Member States were also involved. The second phase of the exercise took place in April 2021. Integrated Resolve is the ‘first exercise conducted in Brussels for a military standing command and MPCC achieved this challenge’<sup>(1)</sup>.

2020 was another busy year for civilian crisis management. A new European Centre of Excellence (CoE) for civilian crisis management was unveiled in Berlin and became fully operational in September under the German Presidency of the Council of the EU. The new initiative, which was established in February 2020, brings together experts and offers tailored solutions for the EU, its Member States and CSDP missions. The CoE has 19 members and during 2020 it contributed to the ongoing work on the Civilian CSDP Compact and

(1) EEAS, ‘EU Integrated Resolve 2020 – MPCC, from Planning to the Conduct Phase’, 3 May 2021 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/97683/EU%20Integrated%20Resolve%202020%20-%20MPCC,%20from%20Planning%20to%20the%20Conduct%20Phase](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/97683/EU%20Integrated%20Resolve%202020%20-%20MPCC,%20from%20Planning%20to%20the%20Conduct%20Phase)).



## 'EU Integrated Resolve 2020'

'From 21 September to 4 December 2020, the EU carried out the EU Integrated Resolve 2020 (EU IR20) exercise in order to test its response tools and mechanisms to address a crisis outside the EU. In particular, EU IR20 focused on how to manage a crisis affecting EU assets abroad, such as a military operation and a civilian mission deployed in a fictitious country and its EU delegation on the ground. EU IR20 went from planning a CSDP mission and operation to responding to a request from a fictitious partner country to address a hybrid threat affecting EU assets on the ground. The exercise is led by the EEAS, with the participation of the Council, the European Commission and Member States. As part of the EU's international partnerships, EU IR20 included the participation of NATO staff and EU partners like the US, Canada and Norway. The military operation and the civilian mission [were] planned and conducted respectively by the MPCC within the EU Military Staff and the CPCC'\*.

\* EEAS, 'EU Integrated Resolve 2020 kicks off', 23 September 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85678/eu-integrated-resolve-2020-kicks\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/85678/eu-integrated-resolve-2020-kicks_en)).

the Annual Review Conference (ARC)<sup>(2)</sup>. The ARC was held on 23 November 2020 and the Council of the EU particularly welcomed the strong commitment of stakeholders. It also stressed the need for full implementation of national plans to generate civilian CSDP contributions, increased pre- and in-mission training for civilian CSDP missions and a review of recruitment policy and procedures for missions. In December, the Council of the EU reiterated its commitment to the Civilian CSDP Compact. The conclusions not only stressed the relevance of civilian CSDP for the Union's integrated approach, but it also suggested that civilian CSDP can play an important role in the Strategic Compass process and contribute to addressing the threats facing the EU.

In 2020, the MPCC underwent a strategic review to assess the progress being made to fully operationalise this relatively new structure. Staff shortages impeded the goal of full operational capacity by the end of 2020, and by November 2020 it was estimated that 75 %

(2) European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management, 'CoE's First Anniversary', 25 February 2021 (<https://www.coe-civ.eu/news/article/coes-first-anniversary>).

## European Parliament Annual Report on CSDP

On 20 January 2021, the European Parliament adopted its annual report on the implementation of the CSDP. In the report, the Parliament called on the HR/VP and Council of the EU to 'provide a common formal definition of strategic autonomy and to define its objectives, means and resources for implementation very clearly'. The Parliament also welcomed the start of the Strategic Compass process and it expressed its hope that the Compass, 'as a first step towards the development of an EU independent operational capacity, will pave the way towards a more harmonised strategic culture and thus facilitate the Union's decision-making'. The Parliament also encouraged the further regionalisation of CSDP missions and operations in locations such as the Sahel, but it stressed its concern at the growing disinformation campaigns being directed towards CSDP deployments. Overall, the Parliament acknowledged the ability of the EU to conduct CSDP missions and operations during the pandemic, but it called for EU Member States to enhance their contribution to CSDP and increase their defence spending\*.

\* European Parliament, 'Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – Annual Report 2020', 20 January 2021 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0013\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0013_EN.html)).

of posts in the MPCC had been filled by EU Member States<sup>(3)</sup>. During the informal virtual defence ministerial meeting on 20 November, the HR/VP underlined the importance of the MPCC and called for greater efforts to fully operationalise the structure. He noted the shortfall in staff commitments to the MPCC, but he also referred to gaps with regard to infrastructure. HR/VP Borrell recalled how the MPCC is already the headquarters for three EU training missions to the CAR, Mali and Somalia, but that it could not meet its full potential without becoming fully operational first. A strategic review of the MPCC is expected in summer 2021<sup>(4)</sup>.

On 18 December, the Council of the EU reached a political agreement on the European Peace Facility (EPF). The EPF is designed to

(3) Irish Department of Defence, 'European Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002 – Six-monthly report – German Presidency' ([https://opac.oireachtas.ie/Data/Library3/Documents%20Laid/2021/pdf/DODdocsLaid220321a\\_220321\\_160902.pdf](https://opac.oireachtas.ie/Data/Library3/Documents%20Laid/2021/pdf/DODdocsLaid220321a_220321_160902.pdf)).

(4) Dutch Ministry of Defence, 'Verslag VTC Raad Buitenlandse Zaken Defensie d.d. 20 november', 7 December 2020 (<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:rinf66Bwdsj:https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/12/07/kamerbrief-verslag-raad-buitenlandse-zaken-defensie-20-november-2020/aanbiedingsbrief-met-het-verslag-rtc-rbz-van-20-november-2020.pdf+cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=be&client=safari>).

finance the military and defence aspects of external action under the CFSP. With an off-budget amount of €5 billion for the period 2021–2027, the EPF will be directly funded by Member States and it will allow the EU to complement CSDP missions and operations with additional measures of a military and defence nature for the first time. The EPF will supersede the African Peace Facility (APF) and replace the Athena Mechanism.

# Defence cooperation

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2020 saw further progress on EU security and defence cooperation and there were several noteworthy developments on key initiatives such as PESCO, CARD and the EDF. New initiatives such as the Strategic Compass were also initiated. Throughout the year, there was evidence of closer security and defence cooperation. In November 2020, the Council of the EU underlined that the EDA had supported a range of cooperative endeavours and that the Agency was contributing to European capability development through the CARD and PESCO, as well as supporting efforts such as the Strategic Compass and the EDF. Furthermore, the Council stressed the importance of the military mobility project within PESCO and called on the EDA to continue supporting the project through its two ad-hoc projects on customs and cross-border movement permission procedures<sup>(1)</sup>. Overall, by the end of 2020 the EDA managed 123 ad-hoc Research & Technology (R&T) and capability programmes and projects, plus it engaged in 240 different activities related to capability development, defence industry and R&T.

Several cooperative defence projects outside of PESCO and the EDF received support from the EDA in 2020. For example, in 2020 there was the delivery of the Multirole Tanker Transport (MRTT) to the Multinational Multirole Tanker and Transport Fleet (MMF) operating base in Eindhoven, Netherlands. The MMF project has been initiated by the EDA almost ten years ago. The MRTT will provide 6 countries (Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Norway) with strategic transport, air-to-air refuelling and medical evacuation

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(1) Council of the European Union, 'Guidelines for EDA's work in 2021', 20 November 2020, (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46869/st13184-en20.pdf>).

## Military mobility

The EU continued to work with NATO on the key security and defence project ‘military mobility’. On 21 July, the European Council reached an agreement to allocate €1.5 billion (constant prices) to military mobility under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) – this amount was considerably less than the €6.5 billion initially requested by the European Commission under the MFF. The second Joint Report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility showed that the EU continued to further define the military requirements for military mobility, and an updated gap analysis was submitted to the Council of the EU on 17 July 2020. On the same date, the European Commission sent a draft implementing regulation to EU Member States so that dual-use requirements for military mobility can be swiftly adopted after the CEF 2021–2027 enters into force\*. In 2020, the EDA continued its efforts on the ad hoc programme on customs and a new customs form (EU form 302) was delivered during the year. In 2020, the Agency also continued its work on the digitalisation of customs-related activities and refined its Cross Border Movement Permission (CBMP) project ahead of the new financing period\*\*.

\* European Commission and HR/VP, ‘Joint Report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility from June 2019 to September 2020’, JOIN(2020) 16 final, 19 October 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/military-mobility-report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/military-mobility-report_en.pdf)).

\*\* European Defence Agency, ‘Annual report 2020’ (<https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-annual-reports/eda-annual-report-2020.pdf>).

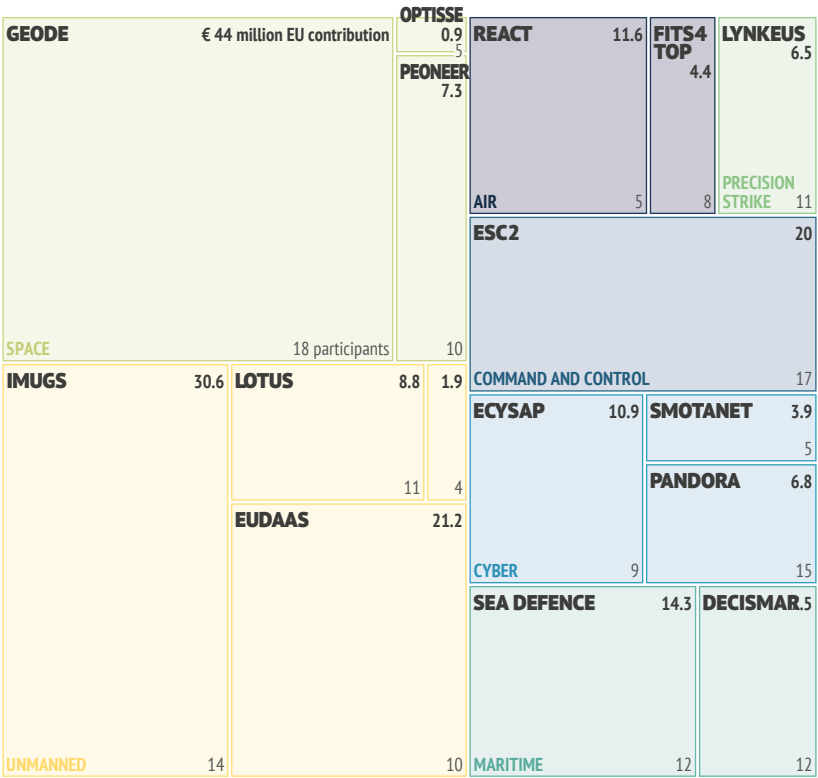
capacity. Furthermore, the EDA continued its support of EU initiatives on space, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), cyber, artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing, emerging disruptive technologies (EDTs), training, energy and personnel recovery. Notably, in 2020 the EDA also made progress on maritime surveillance, with the initiation of the third phase of the ‘MARSUR’ project, and on counter-IED capabilities by launching a smart laboratory project<sup>(2)</sup>.

Finally, one of the other salient issues to emerge in 2020 was a greater focus on the possible application of the EU’s mutual assistance (Article 42.7 TEU) and solidarity clauses (Article 222 TFEU). Here, the Council of the EU called for a series of lessons learned, exercises and scenario-based policy discussions during the year. Following on this request, the EEAS in partnership with the EU

(2) European Defence Agency, ‘Annual report 2020’, op. cit.

EU defence capability development

EDIDP results, € million, 2020



Data: European Commission, 2020

Military Staff, the EUISS and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, conducted several scenario-based policy discussions in 2020 and 2021 focusing on scenarios of a hybrid threat nature. The mutual assistance clause calls for an obligation of aid and assistance from EU Member States in case of armed aggression on the territory of a Member State. The solidarity clause states that the EU institutions and Member States should act jointly if a Member State — that no longer has the state capacity to defend itself — is the object of a terrorist attack or victim of a natural or man-made disaster.

## A roadmap for climate change and defence

On 9 November 2020, the EEAS published its roadmap on climate change and defence. The roadmap outlined a series of EU actions that address the links between climate change and defence, including in the context of CSDP and the wider climate–security nexus. The roadmap encompasses three interlinked areas of short-, medium- and long-term actions including the operational dimension, capability development and strengthening multilateralism and partnerships. The document acknowledges that climate change will effect CSDP missions and operations, and it stresses that the ‘change in weather conditions and the increase in extreme weather events will have an impact on the frequency of deployment, the implementation of CSDP tasks and operating conditions. Climate change and environmental degradation could exacerbate existing tensions in conflict settings, ultimately leading to increased violence and generating additional humanitarian needs, which may lead to a growing demand for military and civilian CSDP missions and operations. In the same vein, large swaths of inhospitable territories may no longer be under an effective state control and become safe haven for adverse forces. Due to more frequent and severe weather events EU Member States’ armed forces may also be called upon more often to support disaster management and relief efforts, both within the EU and beyond its external borders’\*.

\* Council of the EU, ‘Climate change and defence roadmap’, 9 November 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12741-2020-INIT/en/pdf>).

## Strategic Compass

The work on the Strategic Compass officially began following the June 2020 Council conclusions on security and defence. Accordingly, the Council invited the HR/VP to present by the end of 2020 a comprehensive 360-degree threat analysis. The intelligence analysis, which would be conducted by the Union’s Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) and in close cooperation with national intelligence services, would lay the foundation for the Strategic Compass. The Compass itself would enhance and guide the implementation of the EU’s level of ambition for security and defence, as agreed in November 2016. More specifically, the Strategic Compass was launched to provide concrete operational guidance and objectives in the areas of crisis management, resilience, capabilities and partnerships. The Compass would also help create more coherence between existing EU security and defence tools and mechanisms such as the EDF, PESCO and CARD.

The work on the Strategic Compass was also accompanied by a broader political debate on the meaning of strategic autonomy. HR/VP Borrell also contributed to the discussion with the observation that strategic autonomy is ‘a process of political survival. In such a context, our traditional alliances remain essential. However, they will not be enough. Since power gaps are shrinking, the world will become more transactional and all powers, including Europe, will tend to be more transactional too. This is an unescapable truth’<sup>(3)</sup>.

### The EU's common threat analysis for security and defence

‘With a view to advancing a shared EU threat analysis, the informal meeting of defence ministers in Zagreb, Croatia, on 4 and 5 March 2020 resulted in a call for a new initiative labelled the ‘Strategic Compass’. The Compass will be a 2-year process designed to provide enhanced politico-strategic direction for EU security and defence and its level of ambition in this area – it is not designed to replace the EU Global Strategy but to further refine it. The level of ambition – agreed to in November 2016 – called for the EU to: (i) engage in crisis management; (ii) support capacity building for partners; and (iii) protect the EU and its citizens. Yet it did not offer any further clarity on how the EU should fulfil these tasks in operational terms. What is more, the level of ambition clearly needs to be assessed in the light of the shift towards a more competitive geopolitical context and rapidly evolving technological trends. This is the gap the Compass is designed to fill, plus it will seek to better link the EU's strategic, operational and capability needs. On this basis, the first step in the Strategic Compass process will be a threat analysis to identify the nature and severity of threats facing the EU over the short to medium term (i.e. 2025 to 2030).’

Fiott, D., ‘Uncharted territory? Towards a common threat analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU security and defence’, *Brief No 16*, EUISS, July 2020 (<https://www.eiss.europa.eu/content/uncharted-territory-towards-common-threat-analysis-and-strategic-compass-eu-security-and->).

(3) Borrell Fontelles, J. ‘Why European strategic autonomy matters’, HRVP blog, 3 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89865/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en)).



# Permanent Structured Cooperation

On 20 November 2020, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review (PSR) 2020. PESCO was launched in December 2017 among 25 Member States and it is designed to enhance commitments to and develop projects for EU security and defence. To date, 46 PESCO projects are being developed. The PSR started at the end of 2019 and it provided Member States with an assessment of the progress made so far on the binding commitments and PESCO projects for the initial phase of PESCO between 2018 and 2020. The PSR also provided direction for the next phase of PESCO over the 2021–2025 period.

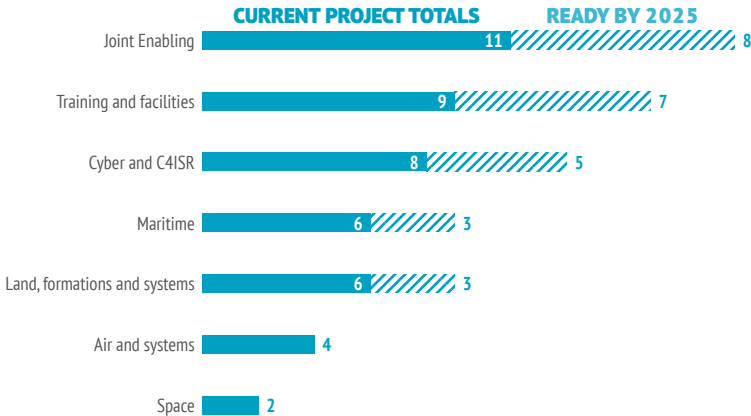
The PSR concluded that greater focus is needed on achieving the 20 binding commitments, and it pointed out that a key objective is to fill recurrent force generation gaps for CSDP missions and operations. In particular, the PSR underlined previous observations that Member States are not sufficiently living up to the commitments (especially those with an operational dimension). In this regard, the PSR called for the ‘possible establishment of indicative measurable objectives with related progress indicators and developing incentives for the fulfilment of the operational commitments’<sup>(4)</sup>. In other words, the PSR called for the introduction of greater clarity and granularity during the assessment of the binding commitments. Given that the National Implementation Plans (NIPs) are the source for Member States to report their progress towards the binding commitments, the PSR called for greater transparency and more detailed information. A digital platform may be developed to help with national reporting, and individual NIPs should be submitted to the PESCO secretariat by 10 March each year. The PSR also introduced the possibility for Member

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(4) Council of the European Union, ‘Conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review 2020’, 20 November 2020, p. 12 (<https://pesco.europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-11-20-Council-Conclusions-on-PESCO-Strategic-Review-2020.pdf>).

## Permanent Structured Cooperation

Projects planned to reach full operational capability by 2025



Data: Council of the EU, 2020; PESCO Secretariat, 2021

States to make a high-level political statement every other year on their main national achievements towards PESCO objectives.

Regarding PESCO projects, the PSR concluded that the focus of capability development should be on both short-term needs and next generation capabilities beyond 2025. During the first phase of PESCO, the PSR acknowledged that the PESCO project reporting system works well but there is also a need for Member States to be realistic about the relevance and/or sustainability of certain projects. In this respect, the PSR remarks that ‘when project members identify that projects cannot provide the expected outputs, those projects should either be revived or closed’<sup>(5)</sup>. The review also called for greater strategic clustering of projects in order to ensure more robust capability packages. Relatedly, the PSR also estimated the status of projects until 2025 and it concluded that 26 out of 46 projects (or 56 %) would achieve full operational capability by this time. It should be noted that in March 2020, a decision was taken to close the PESCO project on the ‘EU Training

(5) ‘Council Conclusions on the PESCO Strategic Review 2020’, p. 13, op. cit.

Mission Competence Centre' (EUTMCC), thereby taking the overall number of projects from 47 to 46.

Of the 26 PESCO projects that should deliver concrete results by 2025, seven are training and facility capabilities, three relate to land and formations, three to maritime, five to cyber and C4ISR and eight to joint enabling. These projects include a cyber academia and innovation hub, a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) defence training range, a crisis response operation core, integrated unmanned ground systems, harbour and maritime surveillance and protection, secure software defined radio, medical command, military mobility, a network of logistics hubs, cyber rapid response teams and more. Among the projects that will take longer than 2025 to reach full operational capability are the Eurodrone, military space surveillance, attack helicopters, a patrol corvette, maritime remotely piloted systems, armoured infantry fighting vehicles <sup>(6)</sup>. Nine of the 46 existing PESCO projects

are also benefitting from financial support under the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) <sup>(7)</sup>.

**During the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, an agreement was reached on exceptional third state participation in PESCO.**

Finally, during the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, an agreement was reached on exceptional third state participation in PESCO. EU Member States in PESCO can invite a third state to participate in a PESCO project, but ap-

proval is subject to a unanimous decision at the level of all 25 PESCO participating Member States. Furthermore, the third state in question must also adhere to a number of conditions, including: sharing the values on which the EU is founded, not working against EU security and defence interests, bringing substantial added value to the project, contributing to PESCO binding commitments and having in place an exchange of classified information

(6) PESCO Secretariat, 'Projects', 2021 (<https://pesco.europa.eu>).

(7) European Commission, 'European Defence Fund: €205 million to boost the EU's strategic autonomy and industrial competitiveness', 15 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1053](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1053)).

agreement with the EU. In addition, participation in the project should not create dependences on the third state in question nor lead to restrictions against any Member State (e.g. export bans, technology control). There is also a review mechanism in place to ensure a periodic assessment of the PESCO project and to take stock of security-related matters <sup>(8)</sup>.

## Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

Work on the CARD progressed in 2020 with the first-ever full cycle (2019–2020) of the review conducted by the EDA and the EU Military Staff. The final CARD report revealed a range of cooperation opportunities for EU Member States and the findings were presented to EU defence ministers in November 2020. The CARD final report identified several capability and technology areas that could be prioritised by EU Member States. In line with the Capability Development Plan (CDP), the report highlighted six essential areas:

- > Main battle tank
- > Soldier systems
- > European patrol class surface ship
- > Counter-RPAS
- > Defence in Space
- > Military mobility

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(8) Council of the European Union, 'Decision establishing the general conditions under which third States could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects', 27 October 2020 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15529-2018-INIT/en/pdf>).

## Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

Data snapshot, 2020

55



Total number of  
collaborative  
opportunities in  
capability development

56



Options to  
cooperate on  
Research & Technology

50%



Participating Member  
States' priorities  
addressing the  
EU High Impact  
Capability Goals

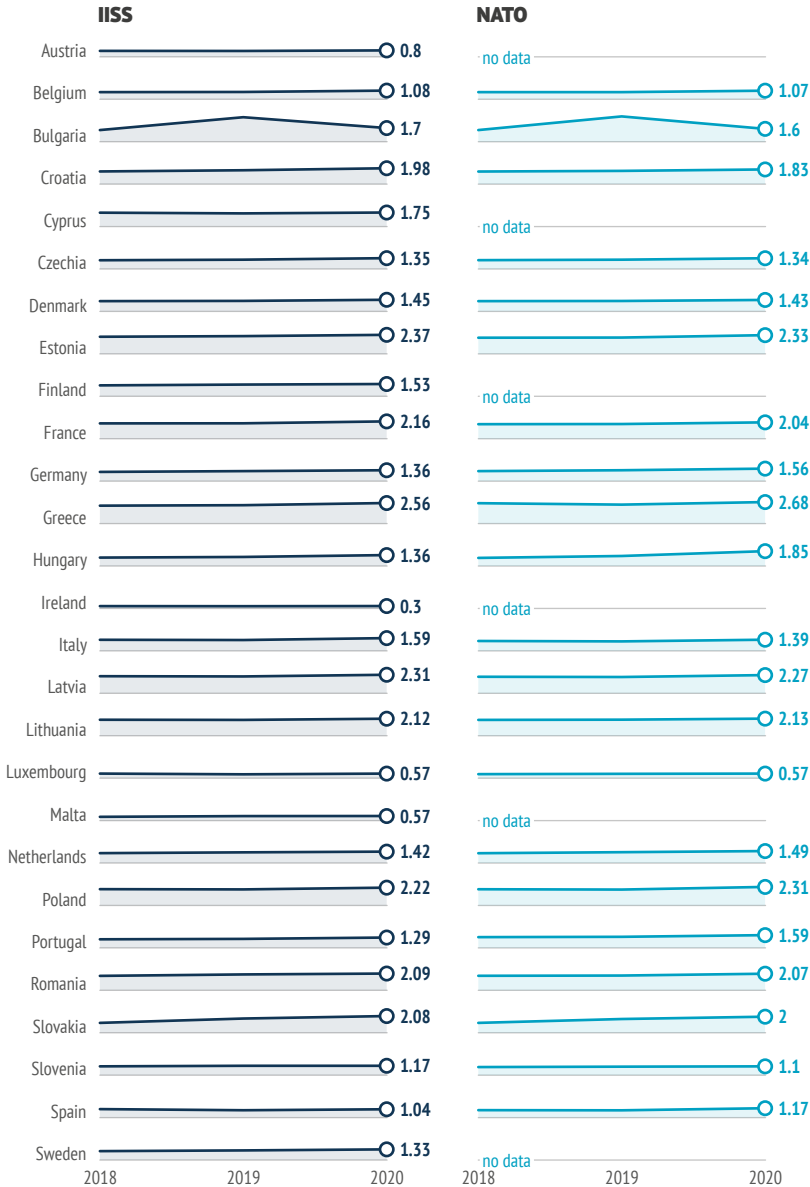
While recognising that the EU still lags behind on collaborative R&T and capability investments, the CARD report nevertheless identified a total of 55 collaborative capability opportunities and 56 options for cooperation in R&T. On emerging disruptive technologies, the CARD report revealed that multinational cooperation in areas such as AI, cyber defence, sensor technologies, emerging materials, energy efficiency, unmanned systems and robotics would have positive payoffs for EU security and defence<sup>(9)</sup>.

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(9) European Defence Agency, 'Coordinated Annual Review on Defence' ([https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-\(card\)\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card))).

# Defence expenditure

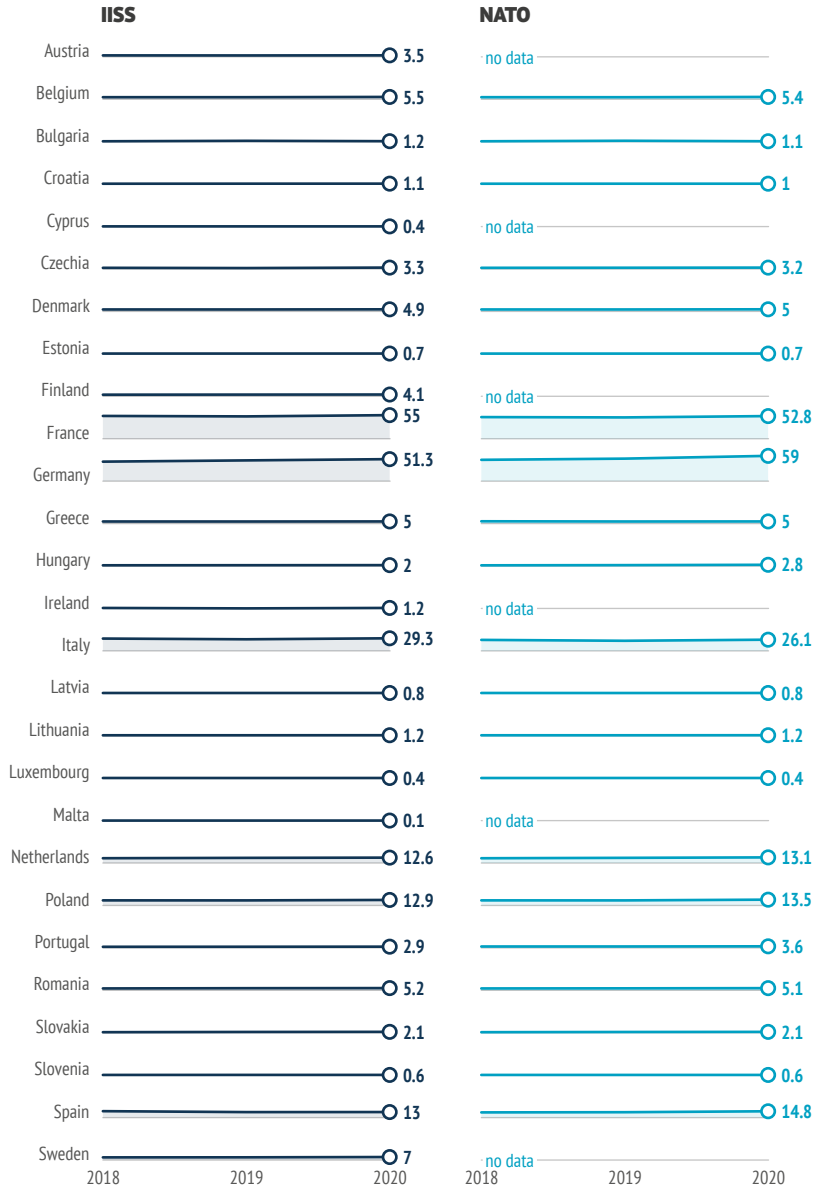
Share of real GDP %, 2018–2020



Data: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2021;International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021

# Defence expenditure

Current \$ billion, 2018–2020



Data: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2021;International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021

# European Defence Fund

The year ended with the news on 14 December 2020 that the Council of the EU and the European Parliament had reached a provisional agreement on establishing the European Defence Fund. The agreement unlocked €7.9 billion (in current prices) worth of investment for defence research and capability development for the period 2021–2027. 2020 also saw continued progress under the two preparatory programmes for the EDF. On 15 June 2020, the Commission announced the selection of 16 pan-European defence industrial projects worth €205 million under the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) and the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR). The projects focused on drones, space technologies, unmanned ground vehicles, high precision missile systems, naval platforms, airborne electronic attack capability, secured networks, cyber situational awareness and next generation stealth technologies. The Commission also published a further call for proposals under the EDIDP in April 2020 worth €160 million<sup>(10)</sup>.

**The agreement unlocked €7.9 billion (in current prices) worth of investment for defence research and capability development for the period 2021–2027.**

The European Commission's nascent efforts in defence investment could be viewed through a wider lens of steps to enhance the Union's digital transition. 2020 was an important year for a range of new EU strategies and legislative proposals, including the EU toolbox on secure 5G<sup>(11)</sup> in January, the EU digital strategy<sup>(12)</sup>, European

(10) European Commission, 'European Defence Fund: €205 million to boost the EU's strategic autonomy and industrial', 15 June 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1053](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1053)).

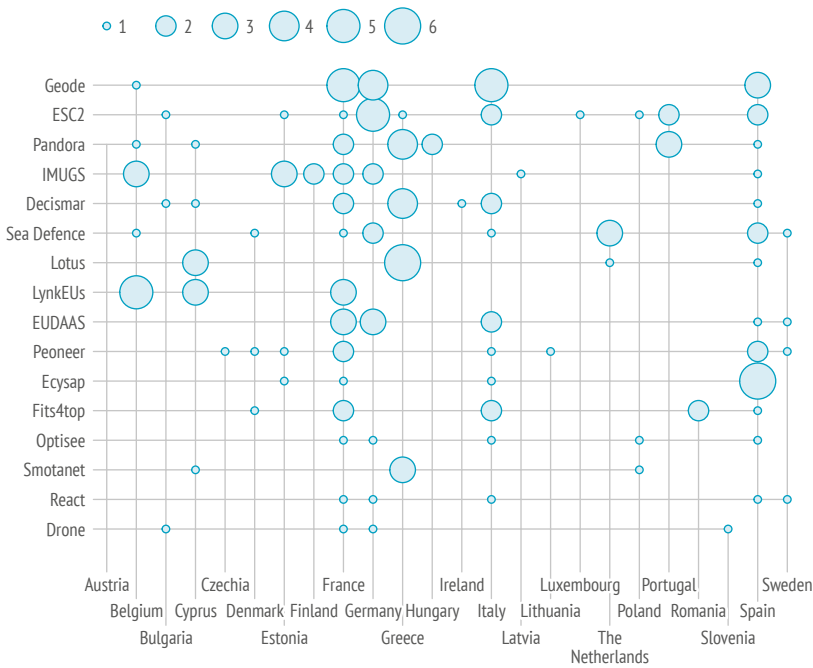
(11) European Commission, 'Communication on secure 5G deployment in the EU – Implementing the EU toolbox', COM(2020) 50 final, 29 January 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0050&from=en>).

(12) European Commission, 'Communication on shaping Europe's digital future', COM(2020) 67 final, 19 February 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0067&from=en>).



Participation in the EDIDP

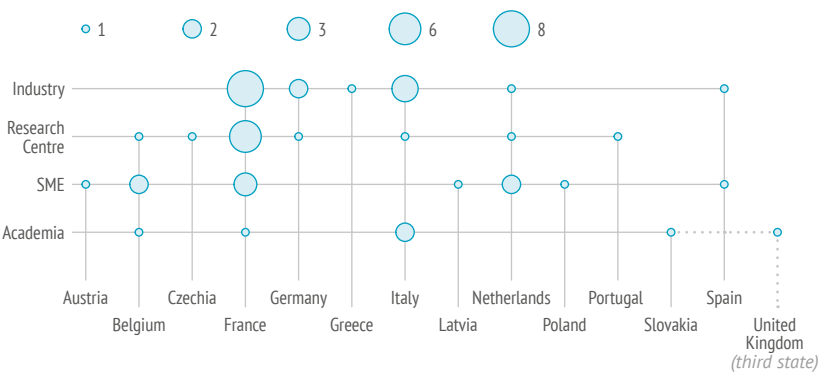
Partners across borders: participation in EDIDP projects awarded in 2020 by country of establishment



Data: European Commission, 2020

Participation in the PADR

Entities and Member States: participation in PADR projects awarded in 2020 by Member State and sector actors



Data: European Commission, 2020

## The digitalisation of the EU's armed forces

'Any discussion about the digitalisation of defence is hampered by the imprecision of associated terms and words. 'Cyber', 'the cloud', 'Internet of Things' (IoT), 'block chain' and 'quantum computing' are widely used but their exact meaning or application can be quite fuzzy. The truth is that we may be intellectually ill-equipped to understand the full intricacies and implications of digitalisation, even if the economic rationale for digitalisation is clear. In fact, some estimates show that the digitalisation of products and services could add more than €110 billion to industrial revenue in Europe over a relatively short time frame of five years, so it is easy to see why the economic rationale for greater digitalisation is so powerful. Yet digitalisation is clearly not just about economics and the geopolitical ramifications of a proliferation of digital technologies is becoming a mainstay of international politics today. The assumption is that the competition to control new technologies (both hardware and associated software and algorithms), and the willingness to use them to gain an advantage over other states, underlines the growing importance of 'digital power'. It is for this reason that the European Commission has stated that it is imperative for the EU to establish 'technological sovereignty' in areas of key strategic importance such as defence, space, mobile networks (5G and 6G) and quantum computing.'

Fiott, D., 'Digitalising defence: Protecting Europe in the age of quantum computing and the cloud', *Brief* No 4, EUISS, March 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/digitalising-defence>).

strategy for data<sup>(13)</sup>, white paper on artificial intelligence<sup>(14)</sup>, and report on AI, the Internet of Things and robotics<sup>(15)</sup> in February, the new industrial strategy for Europe<sup>(16)</sup> in March and the Data

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- (13) European Commission, 'Communication for a European strategy for data', COM(2020) 66 final, 19 February 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0066&from=en>).
  - (14) European Commission, 'White paper on artificial intelligence – A European approach to excellence and trust', COM(2020) 65 final, 19 February 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0065&from=en>).
  - (15) European Commission, 'Report on the safety and liability implications of artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things and robotics', COM(2020) 64 final, 19 February 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0064&from=en>).
  - (16) European Commission, 'Communication on a new industrial strategy for Europe', COM(2020) 102 final, 10 March 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0102&from=en>).

Governance Act<sup>(17)</sup> and Pact for Skills<sup>(18)</sup> in November. Although not defence-specific measures, the contents of each of these documents have a bearing on the defence sector and research and innovation and technology regulation more generally.

## Partnerships

Despite turbulent relations in the transatlantic partnership during 2020, the EU and NATO continued to cooperate on a number of issues. On 12 February, HR/VP Borrell attended his first NATO defence ministerial in his new capacity and shared with the NATO Secretary-General his concerns about the security situation in Europe and in conflict zones such as in the Sahel, Iraq and Afghanistan. The NATO Secretary-General attended the EU foreign ministers meeting in January 2020 and the informal EU defence ministers meeting in March 2020. There were several other EU-NATO meetings during 2020 including with the European Parliament, the EU PSC, the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Staff. As per the fifth EU-NATO cooperation progress report, and despite the disruptive effects of the pandemic, the two partners continued to engage in political dialogue and work on core projects such as military mobility.

In the areas of countering disinformation and strategic communications the EU and NATO made further steps, but both partners acknowledged that it was overall difficult to make progress on the 74 common proposals due to the health crisis. Regarding the pandemic, the EU and NATO coordinated efforts to supply medical equipment and enhance cyber defence. On defence capabilities, EU initiatives such as PESCO continued to prove their worth to the NATO alliance with 38 out of 47 PESCO projects broadly responding to NATO priorities. It should also be recalled that entities from

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(17) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation on European data governance (data governance act)', COM(2020) 767 final, 25 November 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0767&from=EN>).

(18) European Commission, 'The Pact for Skills: mobilising all partners to invest in skills', 10 November 2020, ([https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/pact-skills-mobilising-all-partners-invest-skills-2020-11-10\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/pact-skills-mobilising-all-partners-invest-skills-2020-11-10_en)).

## CSDP partnerships in 2020

During 2020, the EU continued to strengthen its CSDP partnerships with key partners such as Japan. In June and October 2020, the EU and Japan engaged in naval exercises in the Gulf of Aden to jointly train and conduct cross-deck exercises, replenishment at sea, and communication and firing exercises. On 21 June, EUNAVFOR Atalanta flagship ESPS Santa Maria met JS Ohnami and on 5 October a further meeting took place to enhance cooperation in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa.

Canada, Japan and the United States were invited to participate in EDIDP programmes. The fifth EU–NATO progress report also details the collaborative efforts being undertaken for military aviation, airworthiness, standardisation and military mobility<sup>(19)</sup>.

EU–UN cooperation in the area of peace operations remained on the agenda in 2020. On 29 September, the EU and UN signed an agreement to enhance cooperation and strengthen collective response in peace operations and crisis management. The agreement reaffirmed the importance of EU–UN cooperation, especially in the context of ‘the growing scale and complexity of challenges to international peace and security’. The agreement aims to ‘facilitate operational alignment and enhance complementarity between EU and UN field missions in the areas of logistics, medical, and security support’ and it will allow the two partners to build ‘mutual understanding’ of EU–UN procedures and structures for the planning and execution of logistics support in missions and operations in the field. Such steps are important given that the EU and UN continue to operate in places such as CAR, Libya, Kosovo, Somalia and the Sahel<sup>(20)</sup>.

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(19) NATO, ‘Fifth progress report on the implementation of the common set of proposals endorsed by EU and NATO Councils on 6 December 2016 and 5 December 2017’, 16 June 2020 ([https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200615-progress-report-nr5-EU-NATO-eng.pdf)).

(20) EEAS, ‘UN and EU sign agreement to enhance cooperation and strengthen response in peace operations’, 29 September 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86045/un-and-eu-sign-agreement-enhance-cooperation-and-strengthen-response-peace-operations\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86045/un-and-eu-sign-agreement-enhance-cooperation-and-strengthen-response-peace-operations_en)).

## Core documents

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# Security

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## Hybrid threats

**T**he pandemic created a particular challenge in 2020 with the rise of Covid-19-related disinformation. After the initial shock caused by the pandemic, however, there was a notable decrease in mis- and disinformation, and attention turned towards conspiracies and fake news regarding vaccines. On 10 June 2020, a Joint Communication on Covid-19 and disinformation emphasised the growing risks from the flood of information about the virus and the false and inaccurate messages that have spread quickly across social media. In particular, the joint communication brought atten-

**A Joint Communication on Covid-19 and disinformation emphasised the growing risks from the flood of information about the virus.**

tion to the growing challenge that hostile foreign governments were using the pandemic to exploit societal fears and to create divisions between EU Member States and citizens. Conspiracy theories such as 5G installations are responsible for spreading the virus are particularly harmful, and the Commission and HR/VP called for a strengthening of strategic communication inside and outside of the EU, enhancing the existing Rapid Alert System

(RAS) for disinformation, working with international partners and to increase the transparency of online platforms in reporting disinformation and influence operations.

Additionally, an EEAS special report on disinformation covering the period of May to November 2020 specifically referred to the rise in ‘vaccine diplomacy’ by China and Russia with the mobilisation of their respective diplomatic channels and media outlets to promote a positive image for their narratives and messages. In particular, pro-Kremlin media outlets had focused their attention on down-playing the threat of the virus and amplifying conspiracies during the year <sup>(1)</sup>. In Council conclusions published on 15 December, the EU recognised the growing risk posed by disinformation during the pandemic. Hostile state and non-state actors were deploying non-conventional tools to disrupt democratic institutions and to divide populations. The pandemic has made EU Member States and institutions more vulnerable to hybrid threats and the Council reiterated the importance of the Hybrid Fusion Cell of the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN) as the focal point for the Union’s efforts to counter hybrid threats.

In September 2020, the European Commission undertook an assessment of the Code of practice on disinformation. The code, developed in 2018, seeks to provide a framework for structured dialogue with online social media companies and other stakeholders. The code of practice essentially reduces the scope for harmful advertising practices, enhances transparency for political advertising, boosts the disclosure of information about malicious and manipulative actions and techniques, creates features for trustworthy information and engages fact-checkers and research communities tackling disinformation. In its yearly assessment of the code, the European Commission stated that there is a need for more common definitions and more precise commitments by companies. The assessment also regretted the lack of access to data for independent evaluation of emerging trends and threats posed by online disinformation. The Commission stated in the assessment that it was still too difficult to accurately discern the concrete actions undertaken by social media and online companies.

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(1) EEAS, ‘Special report update: short assessment of narratives and disinformation around the Covid-19 pandemic (Update May – November)’, 2 December 2020 (<https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-short-assessment-of-narratives-and-disinformation-around-the-covid-19-pandemic-update-may-november/>).



At the end of the year, the European Commission published a European Democracy Action Plan which underlined the importance of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights as the foundations for the European Union. The action plan stressed that democracy cannot be taken for granted and that hostile internal and external actors were seeking to undermine the EU and its Member States. The action plan noted that democratic systems and institutions are under more pressure and attacks today than in the past, and the integrity of elections has come under threat while false and misleading information is being spread. The European Commission also noted that greater digitalisation would cause concerns for democracy as well as create opportunities. In this respect, the action plan called for a reinforced EU policy framework to promote free and fair elections and strong democratic participation, support free and independent media, and counter disinformation. More specifically, the action plan stressed the challenge of hybrid threats for democracies, focusing particularly on misinformation, disinformation, information influence operations and foreign interference in the information space. To this end, the European Commission called for:

- > strengthening EEAS strategic communication activities and taskforces;
- > creating a common framework and methodology for collecting systematic evidence of foreign interference in democracies and at election time;
- > supporting national authorities to enhance independent media and civil society as a way of detecting and responding to disinformation and foreign influence operations.

The European Democracy Action Plan also emphasised the important role of online platforms and global social media companies, especially regarding the management of personal data, the spread of online hate and radicalisation. In addition, the European Commission referred to the need for a whole-of-society approach to strengthen media literacy and to provide common guidelines for teachers and educational staff for digital literacy and to counter disinformation. Such measures would be required to ensure fair and free elections in the EU, a point reinforced earlier in the year in

the Commission's 19 June 2020 report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament.

## Cybersecurity

In the context of more targeted cyber-attacks during the pandemic, on 16 December 2020, a joint EU cybersecurity strategy was presented by the European Commission and the HR/VP. Given the range of cyber-attacks on democratic institutions such as the French elections in 2017 or the 2015 attack on the German Bundestag, and not to mention the 2017 WannaCry attack, the new EU cybersecurity strategy responds to four major security issues. First, the growing interconnectivity of devices, networks and information systems and the vulnerabilities this can entail. Second, the changing threat landscape and geopolitical tensions where attacks on democratic institutions are perpetrated and the Internet is used for hybrid threats and ideological and political reasons. Third, the targeting of critical information infrastructure marked by the disruption and denial of key services. Fourth, cybercrime and malicious activities designed to fraudulently extract personal data and financial resources.

**A joint EU cybersecurity strategy was presented by the European Commission and the HR/VP.**

To counter such harmful behaviours, the new strategy proposes 20 specific proposals designed to 1) shape cyberspace through the strengthening of international law and confidence-building measures; 2) develop cyber dialogues with key partners and international fora; 3) help build external cyber capacity building; 4) prevent, deter and respond to cyber threats towards the EU from state and non-state actors; and 5) step up cyberdefence cooperation between EU Member States through PESCO and the EDF <sup>(2)</sup>.

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(2) EEAS, 'Make cyberspace a safer place', 17 December 2020 ([https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90747/make-cyberspace-safer-place\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/90747/make-cyberspace-safer-place_en)).

Accompanying the EU cybersecurity strategy was a legislative proposal by the Commission on 16 December 2020 to repeal the Network and Information Systems Directive (NIS 1) and to replace it with an enhanced directive (NIS 2). The aim is to better respond to the growing digitalisation of the societies in the EU and higher levels of increasingly sophisticated cyber-attacks in and outside the EU. This followed an assessment of NIS 1 by the Commission concluding there was a need to address the low level of cyber resilience of businesses operating in the EU, the inconsistent resilience of Member States and the low level of situational awareness and lack of joint crisis response. Overall, NIS 1 was seen as too limited in terms of the sectors it covered and not properly implemented by Member States. The hope with NIS 2 is that more stringent supervision mechanisms could be introduced, administrative sanctions for breaching the directive could be applied, a European cyber crises liaison organisation network could be established, streamlined incident reporting obligations could be enhanced and more.

Days before the release of the new EU cybersecurity strategy on 2 December, the Council of the EU took up the issue of the connection of devices and cybersecurity. In its conclusions, the Council highlighted that the EU's digital sovereignty and strategic autonomy requires the ability to ensure the security of connected devices including machines, sensors and networks. The Council of the EU recognised that the connection of devices will play a key role in shaping the Union's digital future and the prospect of 5G, AI, quantum computing, cloud computing and distributed ledger technologies such as blockchain made it even more imperative to ensure cyber-secure connected devices. To this end, the Council called on the European Commission to develop further technical certification and standardisation schemes, to integrate cybersecurity in relevant future legislation, to build trust in information communication technologies (ICTs) products, services and processes and to support EU-level initiatives such as the EU common criteria on proposed cloud service schemes.

Two initiatives during the year were designed to ensure the resilience of critical entities and networks. First, on 29 January 2020, the Commission endorsed the joint toolbox of mitigating risks from the rollout of 5G. The toolbox will rely on a joint EU risk assessment of 5G services and it will ensure that EU businesses and citizens can

use 5G in a secure way. In particular, the 5G toolbox would allow for infrastructure and supply chain security. Second, on 16 December, the European Commission proposed a new directive to enhance the resilience of critical entities providing essential services in the EU. The proposed directive would obligate Member States to have a strategy in place for the resilience of critical entities and such entities would be required to undertake risk assessments of their own measures and report disruptive incidents. The directive would also see the creation of a Critical Entities Resilience Group to facilitate cross-border cooperation.

Cyberdiplomacy was also a focus of the Council of the EU in 2020. In its June conclusions, the Council stressed the importance of being able to ‘prevent, discourage, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities’ through the Framework for a Joint EU Diplomatic Response to Malicious Cyber Activities (‘the EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox’)<sup>(3)</sup>. Indeed, on 14 May 2020, the Council of the EU decided to extend the cyber sanctions regime until

18 May 2021 to better prepare the Union for deterring and responding to harmful cyber activities from external actors. The EU imposed its first-ever cyber sanctions on 30 July 2020 against individuals and entities responsible for the attempted attack on the OPCW and for the attacks called WannaCry, NotPetya and Operation

**The Council stressed the importance of being able to ‘prevent, discourage, deter and respond to malicious cyber activities’.**

Cloud Hopper. On 22 October 2020, the Council also imposed cyber sanctions on two individuals and one entity that had been responsible for the German Federal Parliament hack in 2015. The Council also underlined the need to enhance the security of communication channels, to shield decision-making processes from malicious activities and to ensure that cyber aspects are more fully integrated within the EU’s crisis management structures and missions and operations. Only a few months into the Covid-19 pandemic, the HR/VP had warned that malicious cyber activities were on the rise and the

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(3) Council of the European Union, ‘Conclusions on security and defence’, 17 June 2020 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>).

health sector was particularly vulnerable given the strains on the system caused by increased medical care.

### The EU and conflict prevention in cyberspace

‘The proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), both the expansion of usage and the increased availability of harmful means, has brought about new ways of power projection. Political and economic contestation between states now involves targeted cyber-attacks against other countries’ utilities, financial networks, election infrastructure and governance systems. Cyber-attacks – a deliberate use of malicious software for exploiting or altering computer code, data or logic to cause harm – offer new methods to target internet infrastructure, telecommunications networks, information systems, as well as computers and computer systems. Such activities might have the objective of destroying or affecting the proper functioning of these systems with adverse effects for their users – whether states, companies, public service providers or individuals. As a result, power projection does not have to involve tanks or missiles; nor does it have to result in direct death and destruction comparable to armed conflict. Confrontation is, however, a constant in states’ ambitions, attitudes and capabilities, blurring the line between war and peace.’

Pawlak, P., Tikk, E. and Kerttunen, M., ‘Cyber conflict uncoded: the EU and conflict prevention in cyberspace’, *Brief No 7, Conflict Series, EUISS*, April 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/cyber-conflict-uncoded>).

## Border management, crime and terrorism

Counter-terrorism remained high on the EU’s agenda in 2020. At the start of the year, the EU updated and renewed its terrorist list of persons and organisations subject to sanctions – terror attacks in France in October 2020 and in Austria in November 2020 served as a reminder of the need to enhance efforts on issues such as radicalisation and violent extremism. On 24 July 2020, the European Commission had published its new EU security union strategy for the 2020–2025 period, an EU action plan on firearms trafficking and it conducted a review of Directive 2016/681 on the use of passenger name record (PNR) data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime. The firearms

trafficking action plan for 2020–2025 sought to increase pressure on criminal networks through enhancing the Union's intelligence picture of illicit trafficking. The review of Directive 2016/681 revealed that the two years of its application had been positive overall, but that the directive could also be applied to intra-EU flights in the future and not just flights arriving from outside the Union. In mid-October, the Council of the EU renewed its sanctions against Daesh and al-Qaeda until 31 October 2021.

The new security union strategy focuses on combating terrorism and organised crime, preventing hybrid threats and protecting critical protection infrastructure, as well as enhancing cybersecurity. The new strategy lays out a number of key strategic priorities for the EU over the coming 5 years including: ensuring the resilience of key infrastructure, enhancing public-private cooperation to protect public spaces from terrorism, completing the review of the NIS Directive, countering identity theft, enhancing digital investigations for criminal activities, developing basic knowledge of security threats, boosting cooperation with Europol, Eurojust and Interpol, countering firearms trafficking and migrant smuggling and more. A first progress report on the new security union strategy was published on 9 December 2020 with an implementation roadmap that documented a range of policy actions to be carried out over the 2020–2021 period.

In June 2020, the Council of the EU published conclusions on the external dimensions of preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. The Council called on the EU to use its diplomatic, development, security and humanitarian tools to stabilise the EU's neighbourhood and to counter terrorism. The Council noted that the evolution of the terrorist threat for the Union is concerning and attacks from Daesh and al-Qaeda and their affiliates remain high despite the successful campaign to scale-back these groups in Syria and Iraq. In this respect, the Council stated that there is a risk that terrorist groups will make more use of online platforms to promote Islamist ideologies and to exploit political vacuums in fragile countries, especially in the Sahel, West Africa and the Lake Chad region. It also reiterated the need to respond to terrorism in the Horn of Africa and Central Asia and to halt its spread in South-East Asia and the Western Balkans. The Council also acknowledged that the

Covid-19 pandemic could have profound effects on counter terrorism strategies.

Additionally, the Council called on the EU to respond to foreign terrorist fighters more effectively by enhancing information sharing between Member States, Europol, INTCEN, Eurojust and Interpol. Here, the Council also underlined the importance of ensuring the conservation and transmission of electronic evidence during cross-border criminal investigations and prosecutions. The Council

**The Council called on the EU to respond to foreign terrorist fighters more effectively.**

of the EU also called for more frequent and deeper dialogues with third countries and partners to stop the spread of extremist and violent ideologies. In that regard, the Council stressed the growing importance of dialogues with global technology companies in order to deal with hate speech,

the spread of radicalisation and extremist propaganda while also protecting freedom of expression. Finally, the Council acknowledged that new technologies such as artificial intelligence, drones, robotics, crypto technologies and additive manufacturing pose a major challenge to counter terrorism strategies and there is a need to maximise the benefits of use for security services while limiting the illegal misuse of these technologies.

In mid-May, the European Commission released an Action Plan for a comprehensive Union policy to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. The action plan stressed the EU's zero tolerance for illicit money in the Union and the need to respond to the recent increase in criminal activities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Commission used the action plan to outline a roadmap of action against money laundering that included actions such as: a supranational risk assessment, country specific recommendations as part of the European Semester, a common risk methodology and information exchange mechanism, etc. In November 2020, the Council of the EU underlined the need to focus on anti-money laundering efforts as a way to stop the financing of terrorism. In conclusions, the Council called on the European Commission to develop an EU single rulebook and an EU level supervision and coordination mechanism for anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism. Although national supervisory authorities remain the central focal point for combating money laundering, the Council highlighted the

Commission's assessment that there remain supervisory shortcomings in national authorities. Additionally, the Council of the EU called on the Commission to focus on a uniform standard for customer due diligence and verification across the EU. Finally, the Council called for clarity on how to reconcile anti-money laundering efforts with data protection legislation and it invited the European Commission to assess the need for future amendments to relevant EU legislation.

On 9 December 2020, the European Commission published a Communication on a counter-terrorism agenda for the EU. Given the recent terrorist attacks on European soil in 2020, and the Union's continued state of high terrorist alert levels, the Commission called on the EU to prepare for further jihadist attacks. The communication stated that threats from new and emerging technologies and the malicious use of drones, AI and CBRN material are a major cause for concern, and so are the spread of radical ideologies and on-line propaganda. The proposed counter-terrorism agenda sought to create a more joined-up approach to combatting terrorism and to promote a whole-of society-approach that includes citizens, communities, faith groups and private actors. To this end, the agenda called for more information exchange between Member States on emerging and existing threats, greater efforts to prevent terrorism through the countering of radicalisation and extremist ideologies,

### Europol annual report on terrorism

Europol's 'European Union terrorism situation and trend report (TE-SAT) 2020' revealed that in 2019 a total of 119 foiled, failed and completed terrorist attacks were reported by 13 EU Member States; 1 004 individuals were arrested on suspicion of terrorism-related offences in 19 EU Member States, with Belgium, France, Italy and Spain reporting the highest numbers; ten people died because of terrorist attacks in the EU and 27 people were injured. The TE-SAT made clear that the pandemic could further fuel the radicalisation of individuals and give extremists of the left and right and jihadist groups an opportunity to further their aims. Overall, the TE-SAT reveals that there has been a downward trend in terror attacks compared to 2018, but the threat from radicalised prisoners could be observed by the terror attacks in London on 29 November 2019. During 2019, there was an increase in violent terrorist attacks by extremist right-wing groups, left-wing groups and anarchists when compared to 2018 levels\*.

\* Europol, 'European Union terrorism situation and trend report (TE-SAT) 2020', 23 June 2020 (<https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020>).



protecting Europeans by more effectively managing data and borders, and responding to terrorist attacks by working through EU agencies such as Europol and Eurojust.

In December 2020, the Council of the EU released conclusions on the European arrest warrant (EAW) and extradition procedures. To enhance the EU's response to cross-border crime, the Council recognised that improvement was required with regard to the national transposition of the EAW framework decision; dealing with fundamental rights evaluations; handling requests to extradite EU citizens to third countries; and strengthening EAW surrender procedures in times of crisis. In particular, the Council of the EU recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic had a dramatic effect on borders, air traffic and social contact, and this had in turn a significant impact on judicial cooperation on criminal matters within the EU, especially with regard to the provisions of the EAW framework decision. For the Council, the Covid-19 crisis had only underlined the need to enhance swift coordination and information exchange between Member State authorities. More specifically, the Council of the EU called for the prompt and comprehensive digitalisation of cross-border judicial cooperation and to invest in secure electronic communication channels between competent authorities.

In the same month, the European Commission proposed a regulation on Europol and the handling of personal data during criminal investigations as well as the agency's role in research and innovation. With the aim of keeping up with increasing digitalisation processes and the risks posed by the pandemic, the Commission sought to reinforce the role of Europol — an agency that is steadily involved in every major counter-terrorism investigation in the EU. As the European Commission stated, Europol should be strengthened through a range of measures including: boosting Europol's ability to cooperate with private actors (e.g. banking, transportation services) and law enforcement agencies, developing big data measures to improve Europol's investigative abilities, boosting parliamentary oversight and accountability of the agency, and increasing

cooperation with third countries<sup>(4)</sup>. Another proposed piece of legislation on 9 December 2020 by the Commission sought to enhance Europol further by stressing the importance of being able to insert information on non-EU foreign terrorist fighters into the Schengen Information System (SIS). Europol had reported that information on 1 000 non-EU foreign fighters could not be inserted into SIS because of legislative loopholes at the national level and restrictions on sharing data sourced from third countries<sup>(5)</sup>.

## Migration and asylum

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission published its New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Based on the experiences learned from the refugee crisis of 2015–2016, the New Pact was designed to develop a more consistent and transparent migration and asylum system that manages interdependence between Member States while also upholding EU values. The New Pact highlighted that in 2019:

- > 20.9 million non-EU nationals were legally resident in EU Member States, which amounted to some 4.7 % of the EU total population;
- > EU Member States issued around 3.0 million first residence permits to non-EU nationals;
- > 142 000 illegal border crossings were recorded at the EU external border compared to 1.82 million in 2015;
- > 698 000 asylum applications were recorded compared to 1.28 million in 2015;

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(4) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794, as regards Europol's cooperation with private parties, the processing of personal data by Europol in support of criminal investigations, and Europol's role on research and innovation', COM(2020) 796 final, 9 December 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0796&from=EN>).

(5) European Commission, 'Proposal for a regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters as regards the entry of alerts by Europol', COM(2020) 791 final, 9 December 2020 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0791&from=EN>).

- > 370 000 applications for international protection are rejected annually but only around a third of these persons are returned home;
- > the EU hosted some 2.6 million refugees, equivalent to 0.6 % of the EU population <sup>(6)</sup>.

The New Pact for Migration and Asylum began by recognising that no single Member State should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that more solidarity between governments is needed. To this end, the New Pact proposed an enhanced pre-entry screening for all third-country nationals for security and health purposes, and registration in the Eurodac database; recognising particular geographical stresses at the EU's borders and a new solidarity mechanism designed to speed up returns and relocation and enhance capacities and operational and technical expertise; specific support for children and the vulnerable, and more. Accordingly, Frontex would play a key role in managing the proposed EU system of returns and the Commission also proposed the appointment of a Return Coordinator and a High Level Network for Return. The Commission placed an emphasis in the New Pact on the need for voluntary returns but it also called for the further development of the Eurodac database as well as enhanced crisis preparedness and response through a new Migration Preparedness and Crisis Blueprint.

## Space

Addressing the European Space Conference on 21 January 2020, the HR/VP stressed the importance of space from a geopolitical perspective and for global security, and the need for the EU to play a greater role in this domain. In June 2020, the Council of the EU underlined the importance of space for the Union's sustainable economic development. The Council recognised space as a key sector of

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(6) European Commission, 'Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum', COM(2020) 609 final, 23 September 2020 ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:85ff8b4f-ff13-11ea-b44f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_3&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:85ff8b4f-ff13-11ea-b44f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_3&format=PDF)).

the EU economy and a means to support the twin digital and green transitions underway. The June conclusions also acknowledged that technological changes in the space domain would have an impact on industrial competitiveness and the innovation capacity of SMEs. The Council also underlined the critical role played during the Covid-19 crisis by the space sector and it recognised that the aerospace sector had experienced dramatic shocks during the pandemic. Stressing the importance of space as an independent critical economic sector, the Council called for increasing usage of Copernicus, Galileo and EGNOS as well as investing in space situational awareness, industrial skills and education (e.g. STEM education programmes), a space data strategy and new and digital technologies.

**The HR/VP stressed the importance of space from a geopolitical perspective and for global security.**

In the context of the political agreement of the MFF, space became another key focus for the EU and Council conclusions in November 2020 underlined the importance of the European space economy. In the face of the Covid-19 crisis and economic recovery measures, the conclusions called for a more competitive European space industry and the need to safeguard critical supply in the sector. Furthermore, the Council of the EU stressed how important it was for the Union to enhance its space autonomy, security and resilience. In this respect, the Council called for greater investments in space traffic management, launcher systems and related technologies, space intellectual property rights, cybersecurity and diplomatic efforts to uphold international space governance. The Council also underlined the importance of space for the EU's digital and green transitions. On 21 November, the joint European-US Sentinel 6 Michael Freilich ocean monitoring satellite was launched. The satellite will help the US and Europe monitor global sea level rises due to climate change. Finally, political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council of the EU was achieved on 16 December 2020, paving the way for €13.2 billion in investments in the space sector over the period 2021-2027.

## EU strategic autonomy and the space sector

‘Today, the European Union can boast a degree of strategic autonomy in space. Projects such as Galileo have not only enhanced the EU’s economy, but they may confer on the Union the ability to amplify its Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defence Policy. While the EU continues to promote the safe, secure and sustainable use of space, it is also true that space is rapidly becoming a political arena that hands over geopolitical competition on earth. Space is crucial for EU security and defence. However, the EU is nevertheless at a crossroads and it needs to develop ways to ensure that it maintains its strategic autonomy in space. Without strategic autonomy in space, there can be no strategic autonomy on earth. The study calls for the Union to invest in its space presence, push the technological frontier in space, ensure that its ground- and space-based critical infrastructure is protected, guarantee that its industrial supply chains are resilient and utilise new initiatives in security and defence to further enhance the EU’s ability to act autonomously.’

Fiott, D., ‘The European space sector as an enabler of EU strategic autonomy’, *In-depth analysis requested by the SEDE subcommittee*, European Parliament, December 2020 (<https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/european-space-sector-enabler-eu-strategic-autonomy>).

## Maritime security and the Arctic

On 23 July, the European Commission launched its new approach to maritime security in the Atlantic region. The communication took a comprehensive approach to maritime security focusing on the blue economy, renewable energy and ocean governance in the region. The first such Atlantic maritime strategy was adopted in 2011 and the revised version of 2020 sought to kick start maritime trade in the region following the pandemic. The new strategy stressed the importance of modernising ports and harbours as part of the Atlantic sea motorways. On 23 October 2020, the EU continued to work on the implementation of the Union’s maritime security strategy action plan. A staff working document outlined that the EU must strive to be a global maritime actor for its economic prosperity and security. The work also emphasised the need for the EU to take the lead on international ocean governance and it stressed the continued need for EU action in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa. The EU recognised the importance of ongoing maritime-related PESCO and EDF projects, and it remarked how the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept would be a key test for the Union to autonomously safeguard its interests and values

in critical maritime areas of interest. The staff working document also highlighted the importance of enhancing the Union's maritime situational awareness capacities, and to better link maritime security with other challenges such as digitalisation, cybersecurity and climate change.

## Great power competition in the High North

'The Arctic is again becoming a region of strategic focus. For three decades after the Cold War, when the region was at the centre of great power competition, successful cooperation transformed the Arctic into a 'low tension' zone and consolidated the perception of 'Arctic exceptionalism', the sense that the region is uniquely cooperative and immune from broader geopolitical tensions. For the eight Arctic states that comprise the Arctic Council – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the US – there has been hope that regional dynamics can be insulated from global geopolitical shifts. However, two phenomena are challenging the notion of Arctic exceptionalism and testing the limits of regional governance. First, climate change is accelerating the melting of polar ice at a historically unprecedented pace. Ever larger swathes of the Arctic are becoming accessible, and with them the region's untapped natural resources, raising the prospect of increased human activity. Second, great power competition between the US, Russia and China *in and for* the Arctic is intensifying, changing regional power dynamics and exposing the region to 'spillover' effects from competition in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.'

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Image: Sambeetarts/pixabay



# ANNEX

# Statistical annex

## Collaborative European defence investments\*

2017-2019, Constant 2019 €

	2017	2018	2019
European collaborative defence equipment procurement expenditure	7,175.89	7,210.35	6,978.80
European collaborative defence R&T expenditure**	147.44	144.11	141.15

Note: \* Figures are for the 26 participating Member States of the EDA; \*\* Collaborative Defence R&T Expenditure includes PADR funds

Source: European Defence Agency, 2021

Link: <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2019-eda-defence-data-report.pdf>

## CSDP civilian missions, 2020

Personnel totals, as at 31 October 2020

CSDP civilian mission	End of current mandate	Budget	Seconded personnel (EU-27)	Seconded personnel	Contracted**
		million €		Third states*	
EULEX Kosovo	14-Jun-21	83,745,000	168	2	261
EUAM Ukraine	31-May-21	54,138,700	130	2	216
EUMM Georgia	14-Dec-22	44,800,000	182	0	140
EUBAM Rafah	30-Jun-21	2,180,000	2	0	10
EUAM Iraq	30-Apr-22	79,500,000	31	0	47
EUPOL COPPS Palestinian Territories	30-Jun-21	12,651,893	37	2	52
EUCAP Somalia	31-Dec-22	87,780,000	43	0	100

CSDP civilian mission	End of current mandate	Budget	Seconded personnel (EU-27)	Seconded personnel	Contracted**
		million €		Third states*	
EUCAP Sahel Niger	30-Sep-22	73,758,441	56	0	134
EUBAM Libya	30-Jun-21	60,038,863	21	0	25
EUCAP Sahel Mali	31-Jan-23	89,100,000	76	5	120
EUAM RCA	30-Jul-22	7,100,000***	19	0	28

Notes: \* The totals do not include temporary staff but do include the Heads of Mission; \*\* Contracted international and local personnel; \*\*\* This total covers the first 8 months of the mission's deployment (until 8 August 2020).

Sources: European External Action Service, 2021; Council of the EU, 2019-2021

## CSDP military missions and operations 2020

Personnel, as of 31 Dec 2020

Mission/ Operation	End of current mandate	Common costs	Contributing nations		Personnel
		€ millions	Member States	Troop contributing nations**	
EUFOR BiH Operation Althea	Council Decision with no end date*	15,400,000	14	6	597
EUTM Mali	18-May-24	133,711,059	21	2	634
EUTM Somalia	31-Dec-22	25,234,700	6	2	178
EUTM Central African Republic	19-Sep-22	36,960,000	9	5	220
EUNAVFOR Somalia (Operation Atalanta)	31-Dec-22	9,930,000	17	4	404
EUNAVFOR MED (Operation Iriini)	31-Mar-21	9,837,800	23	0	748

Sources: EU Military Staff, 2021

Notes: \* UN Security Council Resolution 2549(2020) until 4 November 2021; \*\* Non-EU nations

EU Battlegroups (EUBG)

Offers and commitments, as at 12 January 2021

Year	Semester	Rotation	Member States	Third states	EUBG point of contact	Preferred OHQ
2020	Jul-Dec	First	DE, AT, CZ, FI, HR, IE, LV, NL, SE		DE	DE
		Second	IT, EL, ES, PT*		IT	IT
2021	Jan-Jun	First	DE**, AT, FI*, HR*, LV*, NL, SE*		DE	DE
		Second	IT* & ***, EL, ES, PT		IT	IT
		First	IT****, AT, HR*, HU, SI		IT	IT
		Second	Vacant			
2022	Jan-Jun	First	Vacant			
		Second	Vacant			
		First	ES, PT*		ES	ES
		Second	Vacant			
2023	Jan-Jun	First	PL, CZ*, HU*, SK, LV*	Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine	PL	TBD
		Second	EL, BG, CY, RO		EL	EL
		First	Vacant			
		Second	Vacant			
2024	Jan-Jun	First	FR, BE*		FR	FR
		Second	Vacant			
	Jul-Dec	First	IT*	Albania*	IT*	IT*
		Second	Vacant			
2025	Jan-Jun	First	DE, AT, HR*, HU*, IE*, LU*, LV*		DE	MPCC (TBD)
		Second	PT*, ES*		PT*	ES*
	Jul-Dec	First	DE, AT, HR*, HU*, IE*		DE	MPCC (TBD)
		Second	Vacant			
2026	Jan-Jun	First	EL*, BG, CY*	Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine	EL*	EL*
		Second	Vacant			
	Jul-Dec	First	ES*		ES*	ES*
		Second	Vacant			

Notes: \* SIAF/SILF limited to ops in littoral; \*\* On stand-by until 31 March 2021; \*\*\* No 6 + 4 stand-by; \*\*\*\* No 6 + 4 stand-by  
Source: EU Military Staff, European External Action Service, 2021

# **EU defence research and innovation**

PADR results, 2020

Project	Domain/Aim	EU contribution	Participants
		€ millions	
OPTIMISE	Space	1,499,400	8
METAMASK	Smart materials	1,472,371	4
ARTUS	Unmanned system	1,527,269	4
AIDED	Artificial Intelligence	1,546,000	5
PILUM	Electromagnetic railgun	1,498,822	8
PRIVILEGE	Encryption	1,415,296	4
QUANTAQUEST	Quantum technologies	1,496,979	9
SPINAR	Advanced radio frequency signals	1,444,920	4

Source: European Commission, 2020

Links: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls_en)

# **EU defence capability development**

EDIDP results, 2020

Project	Domain/Aim	EU contribution	Participants
		€ millions	
SMOTANET	Cyber	3,907,724	5
DECISMAR	Maritime	7,499,740	12
DRONEDGE-E	Unmanned	1,949,439	4
ECYSAP	Cyber	10,920,133	9
ESC2	Command and Control	20,000,000	17
GEODE	Space	43,974,166	18
PEONEER	Space	7,253,304	10
SEA DEFENCE	Maritime	14,290,676	12
REACT	Air	11,583,727	5
PANDORA	Cyber	6,813,995	15
OPTISSE	Space	874,958	5
LYNKEUS	Precision Strike	6,452,403	11
LOTUS	Unmanned	8,779,380	11
IMUGS	Unmanned	30,600,000	14
FITS4TOP	Air	4,397,614	8
EUDAAS	Unmanned	21,197,536	10

Source: European Commission, 2020

Links: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls_en)

EU delegations around the world

Staff levels by contractual status, Dec 2020

	EEAS	Commission	Total
AD	416	528	944
AST	196	95	291
AST-SC	2	1	3
Local agents	1,091	2,040	3,131
Seconded national experts	63	29	92
Contract agents	263	1,044	1,307
Total	2,031	3,737	5,768

Source: European External Action Service, 2021

Participation in the EDIDP

Partners across borders, 2020

	AT	BE	BG	HR	CY	CZ	DK	EE	FI	FR	DE	EL	HU	IE	IT	LV	LT	LU	MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SK	SI	ES	SE
Geode		1								5	4				5											3	
React										1	1				1											1	1
Smotanet					1							3									1						
Sea Defence		1					1			1	2				1					3						2	1
Peoneer						1	1	1		2					1		1									2	1
Pandora	1	1			1					2		4	2									3				1	
LynkEUs		5			3					3																	
Lotus					3							6								1						1	
IMUGS		3						3	2	2	2					1										1	
Fits4top							1			2					2								2			1	
EUDAAS										3	3				2											1	1
ESC2				1				1		1	5	1			2		1			1	2					2	
Ecysap								1		1					1											6	
Drone				1						1	1														1		
Decismar				1		1				2		4		1	2											1	
Optisee										1	1				1						1					1	

Source: European Commission, 2020

Note: This visual shows participation in EDIDP projects awarded in 2020 by country of establishment

Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls_en)

# Participation in the PADR

Entities and Member States, 2020

	Industry	Research Centre	Academia	SME
Austria				1
Belgium		1	1	2
Czechia		1		
France	8	6	1	3
Germany	2	1		
Greece	1			
Italy	4	1	2	
Latvia				1
Netherlands	1	1		2
Poland				1
Portugal		1		
Slovakia			1	
Spain	1			1
United Kingdom			1	

Source: European Commission, 2020

Link: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-defence-industry-results-calls_en)

Note: Data shows participation in PADR projects awarded in 2020 by Member State and sector actors.

# Permanent Structured Cooperation

Projects planned to reach full operational capability by 2025

	Current project totals	Ready by 2025
Training and facilities	9	7
Land, formations and systems	6	3
Maritime	6	3
Cyber and C4ISR	8	5
Air and systems	4	
Joint Enabling	11	8
Space	2	

Source: Council of the EU, 2020; PESCO Secretariat, 2021

Links: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13188-2020-INIT/en/pdf>; <https://pesco.europa.eu/#>





	Belgium	China	Dominican Republic	Estonia	France	Germany	Indonesia	Niger	Russia	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	South Africa	Tunisia	United Kingdom	United States	Vietnam
Resolution 2542 (2020) on the extension of the mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) until 15 Sept. 2021															
15 September 2020	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resolution 2547 (2020) on the extension of the mandate of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) until 15 Oct. 2021															
15 October 2020	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resolution 2548 (2020) on the extension of the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) until 31 Oct. 2021															
30 October 2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resolution 2551 (2020) on the extension of exemptions for the arms embargo and enforcement authorisations for the ban on illicit trade and on extension of the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Somalia until 15 Dec. 2021															
12 November 2020	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resolution 2556 (2020) on the extension of the mandate of the UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) until 20 Dec. 2021															
18 December 2020	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	A	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Key: Yes = Y, Abstention = A, Veto = V

Source: United Nations, 2021

Link: [https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&c=Voting+Data&jrec=1&fct\\_\\_3=2020&fct\\_\\_2=Security+Council&fct\\_\\_2=Security+Council&cc=Voting+Data&sf=year;](https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&c=Voting+Data&jrec=1&fct__3=2020&fct__2=Security+Council&fct__2=Security+Council&cc=Voting+Data&sf=year;)  
<https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>

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*“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. My choice in this regard is clear.”*

**Josep Borrell Fontelles**

High Representative for the Union’s Foreign and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

The 2021 Yearbook of European Security provides an overview of events in 2020 that were significant for European security and it charts major developments in the EU’s external action and security and defence policy. The 2021 Yearbook of European Security contains region- and issue-specific sections, timelines of key events, lists of core EU documents, excerpts of relevant EUISS publications and an index.

This year, the book contains a specific section on the EU’s multilateral efforts and response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The health crisis also features prominently in the geographical sections of the book, together with visuals illustrating the impact of the crisis in specific countries and regions.