



EUROPE BETWEEN TWO WARS

EU FOREIGN POLICY IN 2023



JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES



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INTRODUCTION

2023, THE YEAR OF THE TWO WARS

2024 will be the last year of my mandate as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission but the time has not come to reflect on my legacy: we still have a lot to do this year. In particular because of the two deadly wars that are unfolding at our borders: the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the war that has flared up again in the Middle East since the 7 October 2023.

I will focus principally in this introduction on these two wars because of their potential consequences for the European project. If we do not mobilise all our capacities in 2024 to prevent Putin from winning in Ukraine, to end the tragedy suffered by the people of Gaza and to make progress toward the two-state solution, it could be seriously threatened.

However, you will find also in this book a lot of food for thought about many other major issues for our foreign policy, such as our relations with China and the Indo-Pacific region, the impact of climate change on our foreign policy, our links with Latin America or the tensions in the Sahel and the EU-Africa relations...

Europe is in danger

In 2019, at the beginning of my mandate, I already thought that Europe's security would become increasingly a major issue. That is the reason why we set about developing the [Strategic Compass](#), a new strategy for our common security and defence. When I presented this strategy in November 2021, I said that "Europe is in danger".

At the time, many people thought I was exaggerating. They perceived it as just a marketing ploy to 'sell' the Strategic Compass. Back then, most observers still believed that the aim of Russia's deployment of troops along the borders of

Ukraine was merely to put pressure on the West and obtain further concessions. Until very recently, a similar sentiment prevailed regarding the Middle East. For instance, Jake Sullivan, President Biden's security adviser, wrote in September 2023, that "it had rarely been so calm".

Since the beginning of my mandate, I was indeed regularly discouraged from engaging with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. I was told that it was impossible to find a solution to this conflict and that, with the Abraham Accords, the situation was evolving positively between the Arab countries and Israel. Despite increasing violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and the ongoing expansion of illegal settlements eroding the territory of a potential Palestinian state, no one was really paying attention anymore. It was widely assumed that the Palestinian issue would somehow resolve on its own.

However, just weeks after I presented the Strategic Compass, war suddenly returned to the Union's borders, and since 7 October 2023, the situation in our immediate neighbourhood has become even worse with the horrific Hamas attack and the harsh Israeli response.

During the last months of 2023, the dramatic situation in Gaza has become an immediate priority, but the war against Ukraine remains a crucial issue for our foreign and security policy because the Russian aggression poses an existential threat to the European Union. Furthermore, despite differing in terms of actors and origins, these two conflicts are also intrinsically interconnected. The perception of the conflict in Gaza in many of the countries known as the "Global South" could weaken their support for Ukraine against Russian aggression.

Europe's Demosthenes moment

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we set up the [Next Generation EU](#) by issuing a significant amount of common debt. Some [had evoked then a "Hamiltonian moment](#) in reference to the decision taken in 1790 by Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, to take over the debt of the federated States, creating a common federal debt. However, this analogy is debatable, as Next Generation EU was conceived as a one-off operation and did not intend to put together the existing debts of the Member States.

In the current geopolitical context, some have recently spoken of [a Demosthenes moment for Europe](#). It is a reference to the great Athenian orator and statesman

who, starting in 351 BC, rallied his fellow citizens through the Philippics - a series of famous speeches - to defend Athens' independence and democracy against the imperialism of Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. This comparison is probably more accurate: we are indeed now facing the imperialism of a great power that threatens not only Ukraine but also our democratic values and the entire European Union. And the war that has flared up again in the Middle East since 7 October 2023 makes only this situation in our neighbourhood more dangerous.

Let us examine these two wars and their consequences more closely. We have often been told that geography no longer matters, that it has disappeared from conflicts. But these two conflicts are still about territorial issues. In the case of Ukraine, the conflict pits a sovereign state, Ukraine, against an imperialist power, Russia.

Russia has never developed into a true nation-state. It has always been an empire, whether under the Tsars, the Soviets or now under Putin. Unless this imperialist identity is challenged, Russia will continue to be a threat to its neighbours, particularly us Europeans, and its political system will remain authoritarian, nationalist and violent. Many Russian intellectuals have already pointed this out: as long as Russia does not abandon its imperialist project, it will not be able to democratise or reform itself.

Two peoples, one land

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is of a different nature, but it also centres on a territorial issue. Here, two peoples are fighting for the same land, a land to which they both have legitimate claims. This conflict has been going on for a century now. We had a 100-year war in Europe between France and England, but this is now the 100-year war in the Middle East. How can this conflict be solved? There are basically only two possibilities: either these two peoples share this land, or one of them will have to leave, die or become second-class citizens under the domination of the other.

The second option would be totally contrary to our core values and to the rules-based world order we advocate for. Therefore, we need to strive towards the first possibility. This is exactly the aim of the two-state solution that has been on the table since 1947. It was brought back to the forefront in 1992 with the Oslo agreements. However, very little has been done since then to actually

implement those accords despite the fact that the entire international community supports this solution, including all the Member States of the European Union.

The extremists on both sides - Hamas on the one hand, and the fundamentalists of the Israeli right on the other - have done everything to make the two-state solution impossible to the present day. Crucially, the Oslo Accords did not stop the illegal settlements in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank, in other words, as in Ukraine, the occupation of other people's land in contravention of United Nations resolutions. There are now 700,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, four times as many as at the time of the Oslo Accords, with the clear aim of making the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state impossible.

Hamas is opposed to the very existence of the State of Israel. However, regarding a Palestinian state, the current Israeli government has for a long time taken a similar position. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister at the time of writing this introduction, promised to his fellow citizens that with him in power, a Palestinian state would never see the light of day, despite the entire international community being in favour of it. However, other voices in Israeli society, such as that of [former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert](#) or that of [a young survivor of the attack on Kibbutz Be'eri](#), whose testimony touched me deeply, are stressing the need for the creation of such a Palestinian state. I am deeply convinced that the two-state solution is essential not only for the well-being of the Palestinians but also for the long-term security of the State of Israel.

In any case, the tragedy of 7 October signalled the collapse of a status quo that was untenable, even if we did not want to see it. We need to draw lessons from this failure. Firstly, the solution cannot be found only by the parties to the conflict themselves. The international community – with principally the support of Arab neighbours, the United States and Europe – need to set a clear framework. In Oslo, the endpoint of the negotiations was not clearly defined. We need to reverse this process. The international community needs to define an endpoint, the two-state solution, and then, require Israelis and Palestinians to find a way to reach it through negotiations.

The Arab states, including those that have recognised Israel and maintained relations with it, have already made it clear that it is out of the question for them to pay once again to rebuild Gaza if there is no guarantee that the two-state solution will effectively be implemented. Long-term peace will never return to Israel, Palestine and the whole region if this is not the case.

There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

There is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas is first and foremost an idea, although it is a very bad one, and you can't kill an idea with bombs. The only way to kill a bad idea is to propose a better one, one that gives hope and confidence in a future where peace is possible. This can and must be the implementation of the two-state solution.

But let's return to Europe and ask ourselves a fundamental question: what is our capacity to act collectively in the face of these two conflicts? We are not a state and not even a federation of states. Our foreign and security policy is still being defined unanimously, which means that the opposition of only one State is sufficient to make us unable to act.

And we obviously find it difficult to achieve such unanimity on complex issues. If we had a system of qualified majority voting or a decision-making process that did not require complete unanimity, we could motivate everyone to seek a point of convergence. There would be an incentive to negotiate because nobody would want to be isolated.

However, the possibility of blocking the entire Union while remaining isolated nurtures the temptation to use such leverage to obtain concessions from other countries. This is what happened at the European Council in December 2023 when deciding on opening accession negotiations with Ukraine. If one country can impose a veto, the others are obliged to haggle over the return to consensus. Often this haggling is very costly, and above all, it wastes a lot of time.

We react often far too slowly to events, and we pay dearly for it. In moments of truth, our rules prevent us sometimes from acting and our size is not always a strength. The fully legitimate and necessary enlargement of the EU to include Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan countries raises the question of the reform of our working methods. I cannot imagine how we could continue to operate with 37 members if we maintain the unanimity rule in foreign and security policy matters. We need to work with a different set of rules to be able to act quickly and forcefully in the current dangerous environment. I hope that my successor will succeed in changing this state of affairs.

In the case of Ukraine, unanimity was fortunately quickly achieved. In January 2022, before the war began, I visited the Donbas. I met Denys Shmyhal, the Ukrainian Prime Minister. He told me that in a few days, the Russians were going to invade Ukraine and asked me if we would then help them. Not by sending

troops, but by delivering weapons so that the Ukrainians could defend themselves. At the time, I was not able to give a clear answer because I was not sure that we would reach unanimity to do so. But fortunately, when the day came, we did.

A remarkable response to the war against Ukraine

Europe's reaction to the war against Ukraine was indeed remarkable. First, we succeeded in record time in drastically reducing our energy dependence on Moscow, which seemed almost impossible at first sight, with a 40% dependence on Russian gas. Moscow thought that this dependence would prevent us from reacting, but we proved otherwise. This came at a quite high cost. Inflation rose and the economy held back. We also paid a significant geopolitical price because we bought the available gas at a price that many less affluent countries could not afford to pay, thus depriving them of this resource. But, at the end of the day, we largely freed ourselves from our energy dependence on Russia, which was a major constraint on our foreign policy.

We also imposed unprecedented sanctions against Russia. While they have not stopped Putin's war machine because Putin did decide to give to the armament sector a high priority against the needs of the population, they have significantly weakened the Russian economy. Finally, for the first time, we have given military support to a country at war.

We supplied Ukraine with military equipment worth almost €30 billion, in particular by mobilising the [European Peace Facility](#). Although it was not originally designed for this purpose, I am very proud to have succeeded in using it for Ukraine. And we have trained almost 40,000 soldiers on European territory. Thanks to our help, Ukraine has been able to resist. American military aid has been greater, but if you add up the military, financial, economic and humanitarian aid, Europe has provided Ukraine with far more support than the United States.

However, Russia is still capable of mobilising large numbers of troops despite the heavy losses it has sustained so far. In February 2022, there were 150,000 Russian troops amassed on the Ukrainian border. Currently, there are 450,000 in Ukraine. Missiles and drones are still raining on the country and the Ukrainian counter-offensive from summer 2023 did not succeed in breaking through Russian lines. This endeavour was made even more difficult without the air support we promised but have not yet delivered.

Putin was wrong about the capabilities of his army. He was wrong about the resistance of the Ukrainians. He was wrong about the Europeans' unity. He was wrong about the strength of the transatlantic link. But he is still prepared to let hundreds of thousands more Russians to death to conquer Kyiv. His army and his people are suffering, but he does not know the meaning of reversing gear.

Before the war, everyone went to Moscow to try to dissuade Vladimir Putin from invading Ukraine. It was to no avail. And it's the same now. Vladimir Putin is determined to carry on until he achieves what he defines as victory. One need only watch his December 2023 press conference to see that. He has no intention of settling for a piece of Ukraine and letting the rest join the European Union. On the contrary, he is already beginning to threaten other countries in the neighbourhood of Russia, notably Finland. In any case, he is not going to seek any appeasement before the American elections, which he hopes will favour his imperialist plans. The high-intensity war will therefore continue, and we must prepare for it. To start, we need to boost our defence industry, which is nowhere near adequately prepared to meet the challenges we face. Defending Ukraine means defending our own security. If Ukraine were to lose the war, it would encourage Russia to further pursue its imperialist ambitions.

An extraordinarily serious threat to the EU's future

But, not all Member States share this view. Some do not see Vladimir Putin's Russia as a strategic threat. Could disunity on this existential issue threaten the future of the European Union? For my part, I am deeply convinced that if, on the contrary, Europe commits all its strength to counter this threat, it will cement our unity and make us stronger. Europe must do everything in its power to prevent Putin's victory in Ukraine, which would be an extraordinarily serious threat to its future. I will be working tirelessly in this direction until the very last day of my mandate.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the perception of this conflict varies greatly between Member States. This is primarily due to our different pasts and in particular the aftermath of the Holocaust, the darkest chapter in European history. Nevertheless, the European Council had reached in autumn 2023 an agreement among Europeans, stating that Israel has the right to defend itself in accordance with international law and that we call for humanitarian pauses. However, on two occasions, when resolutions calling for a ceasefire were put to

the vote at the United Nations in the last quarter of 2023, our unity wavered, weakening our international stance.

What capacity do we have to influence the actors involved in this tragedy? We are the biggest supplier of aid to the Palestinians, and in particular the biggest funder of the Palestinian Authority and of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), in charge of helping Palestinian refugees in the occupied territory but also in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The European Commission has recently scrutinized the financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority to ensure that none of the funds has been diverted to Hamas. This was not the case and I hope that European aid to the Palestinians will continue because without the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA, the situation on the ground would be even more difficult. The Palestinian Authority should in particular play a central role in the management of Gaza at the end of the current crisis.

Regarding Israel, we are the country's leading trading partner and our association agreement is the closest we have with any country in the world. This means that we would have the means to influence both players in the conflict, should we choose to do so. However, so far we have not exercised this influence, particularly concerning Israel. Until now, we have relied too heavily on the United States in the search for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Europe should be much more involved in resolving this conflict that directly affects our future.

The coexistence of these two conflicts poses to the EU's coherence and credibility issues vis-à-vis the rest of the world. In the case of Ukraine, we defend the country's sovereignty, its territorial integrity and the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. And the international community shared our view: 145 countries condemned the Russian aggression and supported Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly. However, we must be aware that many of these countries agree to condemn this invasion, but their support does not extend to sanctions or other measures. Instead, they are asking us to put an end to this war as quickly as possible because they are suffering from its consequences, notably on energy and food prices.

In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we must recognise that our lack of unity has weakened our credibility when it comes to defending international law. When 144 States support Ukraine at the UN General Assembly, we consider them to be on the right side of history and that the international community is indeed speaking out. However, when 153 countries call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, we struggle to see it the same way.

It is difficult to appeal to the judgement of the international community and the United Nations vote in one case and not in the other. This discrepancy can nurture distrust in our policies, which are supposed to be based on principles, but are sometimes perceived as driven by double standards depending on our interests. This conundrum presents significant political and moral dilemmas for Europe that must be faced with clarity and courage.

The two conflicts are linked

This is one of the main reasons why the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the war in Ukraine are linked, despite their differences in nature. If we do not want to lose our footing in large parts of the world, if we want to prevent the situation in Gaza from undermining support for Ukraine in many countries - not just in the Muslim or Arab world but also in Latin America for example - then we need to defend our position in a way that is much more compatible with the world's perception of what is happening in one place and in the other.

Of course, many other issues have played a significant role in our foreign and security policy in 2023 and will for sure play one in 2024. However, I have chosen to focus in this introduction on the two main conflicts we are facing currently in our neighbourhood because they are posing existential risks to the EU. The European society needs to understand the major issues at stake in their full complexity and European political leaders need to act accordingly and decisively in coming months.

Brussels, 15 January 2023

10

CONTINUING AND
STRENGTHENING OUR
SUPPORT TO UKRAINE



2022, A YEAR OF WAR AND ENERGY CRISIS

2.1.2023 – Blog⁽¹⁾ – At the start of 2023, I summed up 2022, a year marked by the Russian aggression against Ukraine and a serious energy crisis. Despite our major dependence on Russian fossil fuels, we did not give in to Putin's blackmail. Instead, we managed to fill the gap and accelerate our energy transition, strengthening the EU's geopolitical position.

The year 2022 has been dominated by Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. This war has already caused tens of thousands of deaths in Ukraine and multiple war crimes committed by Russian forces. Having failed to conquer Ukraine, Vladimir Putin decided to destroy it and in particular its energy infrastructure, to force its inhabitants to live in cold and darkness this winter.

Russia's weaponization of energy

Beyond Ukraine, this war has also triggered a serious energy crisis in Europe due to Russia's weaponization of energy. Vladimir Putin obviously thought that the EU's heavy dependence on imports of Russian fossil energy, and in particular gas, would allow him to divide the EU, preventing it from supporting Ukraine actively. This is why, as early as 2021, he began to restrict Russian gas deliveries to the EU despite the existing long-term contracts between Russian suppliers and European customers. He then aggravated this blackmail policy after 24 February.

This policy did indeed trigger a major crisis in European energy markets, with gas prices exceeding 300 Euro/MWh last August on the Dutch TTF spot market, compared to around 20 Euro/MWh in 2020. Due to the difficulties of French nuclear power plants and the climate change-related limited hydroelectricity production, it also led to a severe crisis in the EU electricity market, raising fears of blackouts this winter. These combined crises caused a sharp rise in energy prices for households and businesses, creating serious economic and social problems in the EU. This has led in particular to fears that the deindustrialisation process of the EU is accelerating.

(1) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/year-war-and-energy-and-climate-crises_en

Despite this energy crisis, we did not give in to Vladimir Putin's blackmail and EU member states stayed united, supporting Ukraine decisively, including with weapons deliveries. On the energy front, we responded last May by launching the [RePowerEU plan](#) ⁽²⁾. In the framework proposed by the European Commission, EU member states took different short-term measures to alleviate the difficulties of households and businesses. We also decided an [embargo on Russian coal from last August](#) ⁽³⁾ and on [Russian oil from last December](#) ⁽⁴⁾ accompanied by a price cap on Russian oil exports to other countries, leading to a significant decrease of Russia's income from fossil fuel sales.

We managed to compensate for the lack of Russian gas principally with other Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) sources. We succeeded to fill our stocks for this winter and to reduce significantly [our use of gas](#) ⁽⁵⁾ and electricity. It is in particular interesting to notice how quickly Germany reacted. Russian gas imports have been reduced from 55 % of the total at the beginning of 2022 to almost zero and oil from 40 % to zero. It marks a turning point in the EU - Russia relations, which have been very much conditioned until now by the energy issue.

As a result, currently the price of gas on the European spot market is back to its level of last February before the invasion of Ukraine and the price of oil is back to its level of last January. However, energy prices remain still high and 2023 promises to be another difficult year regarding gas supply. We have decided in particular to buy 15% of our gas stocks jointly this year and apply a price cap for the gas we buy to limit excessive speculative expectations on this market. In the midst of this energy crisis, we have also adopted several measures to fight climate change and accelerate the decarbonisation of our economy.

More ambitious target for the EU Emission Trading Scheme

It is in this context that on 18 December, EU legislators, i.e. representatives of EU member states and the European Parliament, reached a deal to reform the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS). The [EU ETS](#) ⁽⁶⁾, put in place in 2005, covers the

⁽²⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131

⁽³⁾ See: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/08/11/eu-embargo-on-russian-coal-comes-into-force>

⁽⁴⁾ See: <https://energyandcleanair.org/eu-ban-on-russian-oil-why-it-matters-and-whats-next/>

⁽⁵⁾ See: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-slashed-gas-consumption-by-20-in-august-november-eurostat/>

⁽⁶⁾ See: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en

high CO₂ emitting sectors in the EU, like power and heat generation, energy-intensive industrial sectors and commercial aviation.

Covered companies receive a yearly CO₂ emission allocation and can eventually trade them with others, thus setting a market price for CO₂. Every year, the EU lowers the permitted level of emissions. This is an efficient way to guarantee an overall decrease in emissions, by ensuring that this is done at the lowest cost.

In the new EU law, the amount of emissions in the covered sectors will be reduced by 62% by 2030, compared to 2005 levels, instead of 43% under current legislation. We will also include the shipping sector in the EU ETS, making the EU the first jurisdiction to do so. Between 2026 and 2034, the EU will gradually phase out free emission allowances currently given to EU companies.

This much more ambitious target under the EU ETS is one of the key elements that allowed the EU to raise its greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets to 57% by 2030 compared to 1990 at COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh.

A new Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

However, the reform of the EU ETS also increases the risk that energy-intensive EU industries will relocate to countries with less demanding climate standards. Such moves, called “carbon leakage”, would not only hurt employment in the EU, but would also cancel out the positive effect of the measures that the EU is taking for the global climate, as GHG emissions would simply increase elsewhere, thus offsetting the decrease in Europe. For the climate, it does not matter where the emissions are coming from as the consequences will be felt globally by people everywhere..

This is why the strengthening of EU climate rules will be coupled with a new Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)⁽⁷⁾. The CBAM will apply to imports of goods whose production is most at risk of “carbon leakage”: cement, iron and steel, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

During an initial period, importers of these goods will only have to report GHG emissions embedded in their imports, without making any payments. The real phase-in of the CBAM will take place between 2026 and 2034, in parallel to the above-mentioned phase-out of free emission allowances to EU companies.

⁽⁷⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7719

Once the permanent system is in place, importers will have to buy CBAM certificates corresponding to the GHG content of the goods imported into the EU. The price of these certificates will be set based on the weekly price average of EU ETS allowances. If a carbon price has already been paid in the country of origin, this amount will be deducted from the CBAM credits to be acquired.

A level-playing field between the EU and its competitors

The CBAM is aimed at establishing a level-playing field between European-based companies and their foreign competitors regarding GHG emissions requirements. It is therefore not a protectionist measure and we have taken particular care to ensure that this legislation complies with the rules laid down by the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

With this reform of EU-ETS, the EU aims to play its full part in implementing the Paris Agreement and limiting global warming to 1.5 °C. It is in the interest of the whole world that we manage to implement these measures together with our partners in the fastest and most effective way. The same can be said about the anti-deforestation legislation⁽⁸⁾ that we approved last December.

In recent months, the US administration has also taken important steps to accelerate the energy transition with the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). However, this legislation is based on a very different philosophy from the one we have favoured. It does not foresee carbon pricing and mainly provides for important public subsidies to companies producing goods incorporating green technologies on American soil.

This type of action penalises European producers in our trade relations and does not respect WTO rules. We do not want and we cannot embark in a competitive fight based on public subsidies because it would harm the world economy. The EU does not have a fiscal capacity comparable to that of the federal state in the US and adopting analogue policies to the US at member states level could fragment our internal market. We are in active discussion with the US authorities to resolve these differences regarding this key issue.

In 2023, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the energy and climate crises and their economic and social consequences will remain key issues for the EU and the world. The EU will continue supporting Ukraine and resisting the weaponization

⁽⁸⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7444

of energy by Russia by accelerating the decarbonisation of its economy. It will require also working with our partners to stabilise global energy markets and help the most vulnerable countries to face the consequences of this new geopolitical environment.

THE WAR ON UKRAINE, PARTNERSHIPS, NON-ALIGNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

1.2.2023 – Blog⁽⁹⁾ – *During my trip to the Southern African region in January 2023, Russia's war of aggression was high on the agenda after the Russian Foreign Minister visited the region just before. What we were asking South Africa and all countries is to stand on the side of the UN charter and international law. Nothing more, nothing less.*

Together with Foreign Minister Pandor, I co-chaired the 15th EU-South Africa Ministerial Political Dialogue, joined by my fellow EU Commissioners McGuinness, Kyriakides and Urpilainen. Our discussions covered a wide range of issues, from political and security cooperation, to trade and economic relations, the energy transition and the fight against climate change, plus health and vaccine production and education. This wide agenda is a good indication of the depth of our strategic partnership⁽¹⁰⁾ established 16 years ago.

In addition to South Africa, I also visited Botswana⁽¹¹⁾. This landlocked country in Southern Africa with some 2.5 million inhabitants is a like-minded partner of the EU. In my meeting with Foreign Minister Kwape, we discussed how to deepen our bilateral ties, and to contribute jointly to tackle regional crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho or Zimbabwe. We focused in particular on the continuous terrorist threat in Cabo Delgado and I commended Botswana's contribution of 350 troops to the Southern African Development Community mission in Mozambique⁽¹²⁾ (SAMIM).

We also discussed multilateral issues with both partners and above all Russia's war against Ukraine. And here, there are significant differences between Botswana and South Africa. While Botswana voted in favour of the UN resolutions in March and in October condemning the Russian aggression and the illegal annexation of

⁽⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/war-ukraine-partnerships-non-alignment-and-international-law_en

⁽¹⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/south-africa/european-union-and-south-africa_en?s=120

⁽¹¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/southern-africa-hrvp-borrell-co-chairs-south-africa-eu-ministerial-dialogue-and-holds_en

⁽¹²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/09/08/european-peace-facility-eu-agrees-support-to-the-southern-african-development-community-mission-in-mozambique/>

Ukrainian territories and while Botswana has engaged with Russia asking to end this invasion, South Africa abstained in both cases.

The multilateral system is under attack

As I expressed in my [joint press conference with Foreign Minister Pandor](#)⁽¹³⁾, we are facing today a high degree of global instability. A combination of challenges of the past and new ones creates tensions that affect all of us. We agreed that to face these threats, we have to work more together to defend and reinvigorate the multilateral system.

I recalled that what Russia calls a “special military operation” is nothing less than a full-scale invasion of a sovereign country. Russia is killing Ukrainian civilians, and destroying civilian homes, hospitals and power plants. Facts are facts: what is happening in Ukraine is a blatant violation of the UN Charter and the international rules-based order.

Despite its proclaimed non-aligned position, South Africa publicly appeared to be rather accommodating of Russia’s positions when Russian Minister Lavrov visited the country a few days ago. During the visit, Foreign Minister Pandor said that it would be “simplistic and infantile” to demand Russia’s withdrawal from Ukraine and in response, Lavrov pointed out how much Russia “appreciates the independent, well-balanced and considerate approach by South Africa.”

Lavrov repeated well-known Russian lies, namely that the war supposedly is a defence against a “Russophobic and fascist Ukraine, supported by the West” and that it would serve “to save civilians and to stop direct threats to Russia’s securities at its borders”. To this cynical caricature, he added the false claim that Europe and its partners are pushing for a military solution to the war, preventing diplomatic efforts.

I recalled a few fundamental points in this regard to my South African counterparts. To start, the easiest way to end this war and the suffering it causes is for Putin to pull out Russia’s troops and to stop his attack against Ukraine. This is a simple key point that we will continue to insist on. It is neither simplistic nor infantile.

⁽¹³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/south-africa-joint-press-conference-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-and_en

Europeans will always remain open to anyone who is serious about seeking a negotiated solution. Unfortunately, however, the reality on the ground is one of persistent Russian escalation accompanied by war crimes. Moreover, everyone who has tried to negotiate with Putin has come back empty-handed.

Secondly, Russia's blatant disregard of international law and principles of sovereignty is as much a threat for Europe as it is for Africa and others. It is happening on European soil, but it affects the whole world. The resulting energy and food crises are also felt around the globe, affecting millions of people.

Thirdly, I stressed that we of course fully respect South Africa's traditional non-alignment stance in foreign policy. In the current circumstances, however, a neutral stance regarding the ongoing war against Ukraine is equivalent to legitimising an unprovoked aggression against a sovereign state. The European Union does not ask South Africa or any of our partners to simply choose sides between Russia and the West and we understand that South Africa has historical reasons to be reluctant to criticize Russia. In this context, conducting naval military drills with Russia and China on the anniversary of Russia's Ukraine invasion is a matter of serious concern, to say the least.

What we are asking South Africa and all countries is to stand on the side of the principles and values of the UN charter and international law. Nothing more but also nothing less. The EU regards South Africa as an important partner in upholding and reinvigorating a rules-based international order. That is the reason why I expressed the hope that South Africa will act accordingly and use its good relations with Russia and the role it plays in BRICS, to convince Russia to stop this senseless war. Being strategic partners, the only one on the African continent, has to mean something.

Russian influence on the African continent

Lavrov's visit in South Africa is part of a wider effort of Russia to counter its international isolation and extend its influence in Africa. The continent is at the heart of a battle of narratives concerning the invasion of Ukraine. Russia is waging massive information manipulation campaigns as to the causes and consequences of their invasion and we see worrying developments in several countries around the Russian mercenary group Wagner: this group has become in many cases the praetorian guard of military dictatorships.

For the EU, it will be a central task during coming weeks to combat more actively Russian information manipulation on the African continent and to explain our partners and their publics why we need to work together against destabilizing Russian efforts in the region and around the globe.

HELPING MAKE UKRAINIAN VICTORY POSSIBLE

2.2.2023 – Op-Ed⁽¹⁴⁾ – *Almost one year after the launch of Russia’s aggression, I confirmed in this op-ed, distributed by Project Syndicate, that the EU was ready to scale up its military support to Ukraine, including by delivering battle tanks, as well as by ensuring a large scale military training for Ukrainian soldiers.*

Almost one year after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the war is entering a new phase. Following the failed attack on Kyiv last spring and the Ukrainians’ stunning counteroffensive that liberated Kharkiv in the north and Kherson in the south, Russian President Vladimir Putin has embarked on a punitive campaign targeting civilians and energy infrastructure with drones and missiles. Stymied on the battlefield, Putin is seeking to maximize the number of Ukrainians forced to spend the winter in the cold and the dark.

The front line has not moved much in recent months. But the fighting remains fierce (with many casualties), and Russia seems to be preparing for a major spring offensive. The Russian economy is on a war footing, and the Kremlin propaganda machine has gone into overdrive, peddling a mix of apocalyptic threats and imperial delusions. Russia’s last independent news outlet, Meduza, and its last human-rights organization, the Sakharov Center, are being forced⁽¹⁵⁾ to close⁽¹⁶⁾. The mood in Moscow is defiant.

Scaling up our military assistance

Under these circumstances, Ukraine’s allies are right to scale up their military assistance, including by providing battle tanks. The goal is for Ukraine to prevail against its aggressor. But we cannot wish for that end without giving Ukraine the means to achieve it. The alternative is a prolonged war of attrition, leading to more deaths in Ukraine, greater insecurity for Europe, and continued suffering around the world (owing to Russia’s weaponization of energy and food supplies).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/making-ukrainian-victory-possible_en

⁽¹⁵⁾ See: <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-outlaws-meduza-news-website/a-64528479>

⁽¹⁶⁾ See: <https://www.rferl.org/a/sakharov-center-eviction-moscow-premises/32241144.html>

Ukraine's partners had already committed to provide advanced air defences like the US-made Patriot missile system, more capable howitzers, and additional armoured combat vehicles. But before the recent big breakthrough, there was an intense debate about whether to supply tanks like the German-made Leopard 2 or the US-made M1 Abrams. I, for one, have long argued that we must provide Ukraine with the means to push Russia out. Tanks are necessary for Ukrainian forces to break through the current stalemate of trench warfare, and to regain the momentum they had last fall when they retook Kharkiv and Kherson.

Reaching the tank agreement

Reaching the “tank agreement” took time and intense discussions, including at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council. The breakthrough came when Germany [agreed](#)⁽⁷⁾ to deliver Leopard 2s, in coordination with the United States, which will provide some 30 M1 Abrams. Although delivery of these assets will take time and require intensive training and maintenance, the result is not confined to the battlefield. We have sent another powerful signal to Russia that Putin was wrong – once again – to doubt our resolve.

Of course, some will argue that more weapons will prolong the war and risk further escalation and that diplomatic negotiations are the only solution. But while Europeans will always remain open to anyone who is serious about seeking a negotiated and just end to the war, Russia so far has made clear that it intends to persist with its war crimes. Everyone who has tried to negotiate with Putin has come back empty-handed. Until that changes, we must conclude that the only way to end the war is to give Ukraine the means to drive out the invader.

The EU's task, therefore, is to do everything in its power to support Ukraine. And that is what we are doing. Together with EU member-state governments, we have already mobilized €12 billion (\$13.1 billion) worth of weapons and related supplies for Ukraine, [€3.6 billion](#)⁽⁸⁾ of which is coming from the European Peace Facility. When also accounting for macro-financial and humanitarian aid, our total support comes close to [€50 billion](#)⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ See: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/bundesregierung-kuendigt-lieferung-von-leopard-2-panzern-an-die-ukraine-an-2160236>

⁽⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference-3_en

⁽⁹⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_22_3862

Moreover, the EU is now the leading provider of military training for Ukrainian personnel. Through the [EU Military Assistance Mission](#) (²⁰) in Poland and Germany, we are on track to have trained 15,000 troops by April, and we are prepared to double the effort and train another 15,000 – including in the use of tanks such as the Leopard 2.

The EU is also working on a tenth package of sanctions, having already cut our dependence on Russian energy imports within the space of just a few months. And make no mistake: the sanctions are working. Russian oil is selling at a \$40 discount (²¹) to Brent, and its daily energy revenues are [expected](#) (²²) to fall from around €800 million to €500 million after our latest measures kick in this month. The war is costing the Kremlin dearly, and these costs will only rise the longer it lasts.

Last January, just before the invasion, I visited the Donbas region and saw the front line. For obvious reasons, that trip has stuck with me. On my way back through Kyiv, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal acknowledged that “the invasion is coming, and we know you will not come to fight on our side.” But, he hastened to ask, “Will you give us the weapons we need to defend ourselves?”

Continue to give Ukraine the means to defeat the aggressor

Frankly, I was not sure how to respond, because I did not know how strong European resolve would be. Today, the answer comes easily. As I travel to Kyiv this week for the EU-Ukraine Summit, no one doubts that Europe has risen to the occasion. Now, we must continue to give Ukraine the means to defeat the aggressor, restore its sovereignty, and find its place in the European Union.

(²⁰) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eumam-ukraine/about-eu-military-assistance-mission-support-ukraine-eumam-ukraine_en

(²¹) See: <https://www.ft.com/content/8a5f4681-9592-469f-b223-a939dcbbf3f3>

(²²) See: <https://energyandcleanair.org/publication/eu-oil-ban-and-price-cap-are-costing-russia-eur160-mn-day-but-further-measures-can-multiply-the-impact/>

PEACE AND DEMOCRACY REQUIRE DEFEATING PUTIN'S INDUSTRY OF LIES

11.2.2023 – Blog ⁽²³⁾ – *In February 2023, we organised an important conference on information manipulation. On this occasion, I underlined the key challenge of fighting against Putin's "industry of lies" for the future of peace and democracy, not only in the EU but also worldwide.*

At the time when war has returned to Europe, when Ukraine counts tens of thousands of victims and millions of refugees, we do all we can to help Ukraine defend itself and regain its full sovereignty. Ukraine's fight for freedom does not only concern Europeans, it concerns all people globally. It is a fight in defence of international law and fundamental values that all countries have signed up to in the Charter of the United Nations.

Putin created a powerful industry of lies

In this context, we need to protect the EU and the world from Putin's industry of deception. Putin did not only start the war, he also created a powerful industry of manipulation to prevent people from understanding what is really happening, to make them doubt everything and to shift the blame. The Kremlin's information manipulation efforts are global and work at an industrial scale. It is a crucial instrument of this war.

Putin's bombs kill people in Ukraine while his information manipulation industry attacks the minds of people in Russia and globally, trying to mislead them from realising who is responsible for the killings, for the electricity bills they cannot pay, the economic hardship they face and for the hunger that has worsened due to the war Russia started. Putin is cynically aiming to deceive people to believe that 'might is right'; and that autocrats can get away with atrocities. Africa is one of the main targets of this "industry of lies", but I also see it when I go to Latin America and Asia.

⁽²³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/peace-and-democracy-requires-defeating-putin%E2%80%99s-industry-lies_en

We discussed these issues at [the conference “Beyond disinformation”](#)⁽²⁴⁾, which the European External Action Service organised gathering leading international experts to debate how best to respond to the threat of information manipulation and foreign interference.

Independent journalism will always be protected within the EU

We have already taken many steps to protect ourselves from this threat. The EU introduced restrictive measures against the Kremlin's industry of deception operating within the European Union. The outlets that the Kremlin developed and mobilised as a part of its war effort are not acting in line with the international ethical code of journalism: they are propaganda outlets. Real, professional, independent journalism is and always will be protected within the EU. And we will continue to support it everywhere in the world.

Accurate information is the fuel of democracy. Without access to facts and independent media, democracy withers and elections are hampered. This is why we should not be treating this as a communication issue: this is a political issue we need to address politically, at the highest level [as I said in my speech](#)⁽²⁵⁾.

At the conference, I presented the EEAS' first [Report on foreign information manipulation and interference threats](#)⁽²⁶⁾, which we have just published. It shows precisely how Russia has mobilised resources to systematically distort reality, shift blame and distract attention from its military invasion of Ukraine. It also confirms that there is a new wave of disinformation techniques and documents worrisome cooperation between actors like Russia and China.

In close cooperation with EU institutions, member states and international partners, the European External Action Service has been quite active since 2015 on these issues. However, we need to go further with better analytics and more precisely tailored responses. For that, we will create the Information Sharing and Analysis Centre to gather information on disinformation and foreign information manipulation threats. It will increase our capacities to exchange best practices and ensure we can more efficiently protect our democracies.

⁽²⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/beyond-disinformation-%E2%80%93-eu-responses-threat-foreign-information-manipulation_en

⁽²⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/disinformation-opening-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-eeas-conference_en

⁽²⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/1st-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats_en

We need indeed to work even closer with our partners around the globe and be more actively present in local languages in different parts of the world. I am looking into options to ensure that we make the EU voice better heard.

FROM MUNICH TO NEW YORK: SUPPORTING UKRAINE AND PROMOTING A JUST PEACE

22.2.2023 – Blog ⁽²⁷⁾ – As the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine neared, I shared in this blog post my impressions from events where we discussed this war with our global partners. These included the Munich Security Conference, the EU Foreign Affairs Council, President Biden's trip to Kyiv, the NATO-Ukraine-EU tripartite meeting, as well as the UN General Assembly and a UN Security Council.

Last weekend, I participated in the Munich Security Conference, which brings together a large number of world leaders every year, and today I am [going to New York to participate in the UN General Assembly](#) ⁽²⁸⁾ where a resolution on the conditions for a just peace in Ukraine will be voted on. I will also address the Security Council on the global geopolitical situation. I will speak of course about the consequences of the war of aggression against Ukraine but also about other global issues.

The [Munich Security Conference \(MSC\)](#) ⁽²⁹⁾ is a kind of strategic Davos, minus the CEOs of the multinationals, plus the military experts. It was, and still is, the forum par excellence for transatlantic debate. But it is gradually expanding to include the rest of the world, which already represents three-quarters of the population and 60% of the world's wealth.

The end of this conflict requires a victory for Ukraine

The dominant issue was the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. For almost all participants and speakers, the end of this conflict requires a victory for Ukraine. This victory does not at all mean the destruction of Russia, but it does require Russia to withdraw from the Ukrainian territory it is illegally occupying. There is a broad consensus on this point in Europe. In Munich, I did not see a war camp on

⁽²⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/munich-new-york-supporting-ukraine-and-promoting-just-peace_en

⁽²⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-nations-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-address-security-council-and_en

⁽²⁹⁾ See: https://twitter.com/eu_eeas/status/1628031793344688128

one side and a peace camp on the other: in order to achieve a just peace, Ukraine must first win the war.

Politically and morally, Russia has already lost this war. However, Ukraine has not won it yet. Because Putin desperately needs a symbolic victory to celebrate the anniversary, the Russian army is ready to sacrifice up to 1,000 soldiers in a week for a few hundred metres around Bakhmut. Unlike Russia, Ukraine cannot afford to send successive waves of soldiers to their deaths in the hope that some of them will eventually cross enemy lines.

Moving up the gear to meet the growing needs of Ukraine

The war has become mainly an artillery duel. The Russian army fires an average of 40,000 shells a day, much more than the Ukrainians. Ukraine does not want to enter into a military bidding war, but it needs to be able to retaliate. To do so, it needs ammunition and in particular 155 mm shells, the calibre used by the weapons supplied by Europe and the US. This is not a new subject and EU member states are already delivering ammunition to Ukraine. However, we need to move up the gear to meet the growing needs of the Ukrainian army. We discussed this issue at the [Foreign Affairs Council last Monday](#) ⁽³⁰⁾ and I am engaging with the EU27 Defence Ministers to ask them to speed up the delivery of ammunition to Ukraine from their current stocks.

The European arms industry must produce much more ammunition in the coming months. And for this to happen, it must have visibility on the production that is required of them. I indicated in Munich ⁽³¹⁾ that we have a suitable mechanism for that purpose: the European Peace Facility, which since the beginning of the war has accumulated significant experience in coordinating and co-financing military aid to Ukraine. It allows matching Ukrainian requests with member states' capabilities. We will discuss how to speed up ammunition production on 7 March at the EU Defence Ministers' meeting in Stockholm.

To avoid any recurrence of such an aggression as the Russian attack, we must also learn to defend ourselves better. If there is a lesson to be learned from the invasion of Ukraine, it is that we were not able to dissuade Russia from acting, not least

⁽³⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference_en

⁽³¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/munich-security-conference-20-february-2022-opening-statement-hrvp-josep-borrell_en

because we underestimated the danger it posed to our security. Some member states had pointed this out, but others did not think so or did not want to believe it. Now things are clear. Russia has its place in the world and no one is disputing this or its borders. On the contrary, Russia contests the existence of some of its neighbours in the name of an imperial, or even neo-colonial, vision that it is struggling to shed. In Munich, there was much talk of the “Russian mourning of the Empire”. As long as Russia has not renounced this imperial vision, it represents a threat to world peace.

We were not able to dissuade Russia from acting

The continuation of this war is also of concern to many states of the so-called Global South. This Global South is far from being united, however. And I know enough about international reality to understand the motives of some states that use this banner to advance their national agenda. But we must reassure these countries and in particular show them that our legitimate interest in Ukraine does not distract us from the other issues that concern the world, in particular for instance the balance between climate change, the environment and development.

I stressed this point also to my Chinese, Brazilian, Kuwaiti, Jordanian and Pakistani interlocutors. With my Chinese interlocutor, Councillor Wang Yi, as well as with my Brazilian interlocutor, I indicated that we were of course open to the peace initiatives that they wished to take with regard to Ukraine. Provided, however, that we did not forget the core: the principles of the United Nations Charter, the right of self-defence, the non-use of force and respect for the territorial integrity of all states, beginning with Ukraine.

Indeed, Europeans aspire to a peaceful solution to this conflict based on the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, as I will have the opportunity to repeat before the General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council. However, under the current conditions, calling for a ceasefire and unconditional negotiations can only result in perpetuating the illegal occupation of Ukrainian territories and giving Russia time to restart the war in a few months. Moreover, any initiative that ignores the Ukrainian peace plan cannot succeed. That is why it was good to see that the Chinese representative held a meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart.

I was also very sensitive to the concerns of many of my colleagues in the Middle East. Iran has been a major source of concern for many Gulf countries since the

freezing of the JPCOA talks was accompanied by an intensification of relations between Iran and Russia. I am also concerned about the worsening situation in the Middle East where the development of settlements in the West Bank can only aggravate tensions and further delay a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The day after the Munich Security Conference, US President Biden paid a highly symbolic and political visit to Kyiv before delivering a speech in Poland on Tuesday on the war and the United States' full support to Ukraine. Transatlantic solidarity is stronger than ever and if Vladimir Putin was counting on Western fatigue to eventually gain the upper hand in Ukraine, this visit sent a clear message that he was once again wrong.

And to reinforce this message, on Tuesday, I met in Brussels with the Ukrainian Minister Kuleba and the Secretary General of NATO ⁽³²⁾ in an unprecedented tripartite format to show our unity and coordinate between NATO and the EU to provide Ukraine with the weapons it needs to defend itself. At the same time, the Russian president was repeating his usual lies and threats in Moscow before the deputies of a Duma that has long stopped being a real and democratic parliament.

The UN is a good mirror of the state of the world

The war in Ukraine has also transformed the European Union, turning geopolitical Europe from a slogan into a reality. We have started to take our responsibilities seriously, but this work has only just begun. We will continue it in the coming days at the UN General Assembly and in the Security Council. The UN is a good mirror of the state of the world: a vast majority of countries still consider that the UN can provide solutions through multilateral action. And many see the need for a stronger role for the EU in the multilateral system. All this makes the UN a good place to show that we are attentive to the legitimate needs and interests of our partners and not only to their votes at this critical moment.

⁽³²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-press-conference_en

ONE YEAR OF RUSSIA'S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE

22.2.2023 – Speech ⁽³³⁾ – *Marking the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I addressed the members of the European Parliament, arguing for increased and faster delivery of military support to Ukraine. My main message was: "To win the peace, one must first win the war."*

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

I am taking part in this debate on behalf of and as the representative of the Council of the European Union, as I chair its foreign affairs and defence configurations.

I am therefore speaking from the intergovernmental perspective – one of the two pillars that drive the work of the European Union. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will then speak from the Community perspective. I will try not to tell you the same thing twice.

As the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, it is also my role, however, to act as a bridge and coordinate the actions and decisions taken by the member states in line with the foreign policy of the European Commission. This role is twofold: on the one hand, there is foreign policy, and on the other, there is security and defence, which are not the same thing, although one sometimes leads to the other.

The growing importance of a common defence policy

The war in Ukraine highlighted the importance of a common security and defence policy. It has been a wake-up call for Europe, a geopolitical wake-up call. And, as the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, said a few days after the invasion started – and I am sure to pronounce this incorrectly in German – this has been a 'Zeitenwende'. But it has been a historic turning point not only for Germany, but for all of Europe. It has been our wake-up call to a new reality: war, something that we had taken off our intellectual radar. We had lowered our guard, as clearly

⁽³³⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ep-plenary-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-one-year-russia%E2%80%99s-invasion-and-war_en

evidenced by our very low military stocks and our defence industry's poor capacity to replenish them.

Indeed, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been an extraordinary wake-up call, because it has plunged us into a new world. A world in which everything has become a geopolitical discussion. The European Union has provided a response to this discussion and it now falls on you to judge and debate this response. I hope that this debate serves that purpose and highlights what we have done: you already know what we have done, so I won't retread familiar ground. As the representatives of the people of Europe, how do you see it? What else could we have done?

What exactly have we done? We have provided Ukraine with as much military, economic, financial and diplomatic support as possible. This is considerable, but in my opinion not enough.

The Ukrainian people defending their freedom and independence

I was recently in Ukraine with the President of the Commission and my fellow Commissioners, where I also attended the EU-Ukraine Summit. There, once again, I saw a people defending their freedom and independence, and leaders trying to confront this dramatic situation, following a path towards Europe.

Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said it here himself a few days ago. The situation in Ukraine today is dramatic, but the Ukrainians look towards Europe, as did the people of so many countries, including my own, and see a promising future. The road ahead may be long – because the war will be long – but we must do everything in our power to ensure that this promise is not just an empty gesture. Rather, we must ensure that the Ukraine that emerges victorious from this war finds the future it needs in our European family, to which it belongs de facto.

The military situation today on the ground is extremely worrying. There are more than 360 000 Russian soldiers: double the number before the war. Russia's counteroffensive has begun, albeit on a small scale. For the first time, Ukraine does not have the advantage of having more troops on the ground.

It is for this reason that Ukraine is still calling on the EU's Member States and on everyone to help them. Yesterday, the countries coordinating military support for

Ukraine met under the Ramstein format to see where we stand, what we have done, what we have provided to Ukraine in support, and what it needs – in particular, more ammunition and more training for its soldiers – so that we can continue to demonstrate that we will not back down in our support for Ukraine.

Honourable Members,

I am going to put the cart before the horse. I can tell you that I dislike war as much as any of you. I am not a warmonger. Je ne suis pas un va-t-en-guerre. I have no appetite for war. I am not a fan of war. Of course, I prefer peace. As almost all of you do. As we all do. There is no need to repeat ourselves.

How peace can be achieved

But what we do need to repeat and discuss is how peace can be achieved. To achieve peace, we must continue to provide military support to Ukraine and step up that support. This is going to be one of my key messages. To win the peace, one must first win the war. And we can support Ukraine militarily while at the same time making every diplomatic effort needed to achieve peace as quickly as possible. These are not two alternatives or two contradictory approaches. These are two things that must be done at the same time. We must provide more support to Ukraine and make more diplomatic efforts. Soon I will have the opportunity to do this, at the United Nations General Assembly, where I will ask the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, to launch a mediation process, if he is willing and able. A dialogue that so far has evaded everyone, since everyone who has spoken to Putin has come back with the message that Putin wants to carry on with this war until he achieves his military objectives.

It is incredibly naive to ask us to stop providing military assistance to Ukraine, in order to shorten the war so that peace can be established more quickly. And I use the word ‘naive’ to avoid using a much stronger word. It is possible, in fact, to do the two things at the same time. If we stop providing military support to Ukraine, the peace that we achieve will not be peace: it will be a Russian victory, which would pose a terrible threat to our security.

So, what exactly have we done? And the Council – which I represent here today – what has it done? Well, first, it has approved an impressive package of sanctions: nine packages, with the tenth on its way – which the President of the Commission will surely mention – with the aim of weakening the Russian economy. We have

succeeded. Many people say that sanctions don't work, that they haven't weakened the Russian economy, and that they have actually had a negative impact on us.

While it is true that the Russian economy has not collapsed, that Russian GDP growth is not what we had expected, and that, last year, Russia had exceptionally high revenues, both from gas and oil, things are changing.

This is thanks to our sanctions, and in particular to the price cap that we placed on oil. Take a look at the three key parameters of an economy. If you look at oil and gas revenues, two days ago the Russian Finance Minister himself said that, in January, they were down 46% compared to January of last year. Yes, Russia did obtain significant revenues in 2022, because prices skyrocketed and we were still dependent on Russian gas and oil, but that is no longer the case. One of our major successes has been to reduce our considerable dependence on Russian energy to almost zero. Russian gas and oil revenues are down 46% on last January. If you look at government deficit, Russia's government deficit is through the roof. It was 14 times higher in January 2023 than it was in January 2022. 14 times higher: going from EUR 2 billion to EUR 1.8 trillion. If you look at Russia's trade balance, you will see that while Russia did have a huge surplus in 2022, caused by, among other factors, a bumper wheat harvest, its trade balance in January 2023 was at its lowest since 2007. Trade deficit, government deficit, oil and gas revenues.

Sanctions are like a slow-acting poison, like arsenic-based poisons: they take their time to work, but they do work. And their effect is irreversible.

Sanctions are having an effect

Russia's technological dependence on Europe is at 45%. Its car and aeroplane factories have lost 80% of their capacity. Yes, the rouble is artificially high, but the Russian economy will pay a very high price for this war. They have lost their main energy customer – us Europeans – and they will not get that customer back. And it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to find an alternative customer for its gas, because China is too far away. Russia's oil is selling for 40 dollars a barrel: half the price of Brent. India and China are buying it at a discount. This is also down to our price cap, which has been a major political success, as it has reduced Russian revenues without affecting the global oil market.

So, yes, our sanctions are having an effect. Slowly but surely. Putting the squeeze on the technological, trade and energy underpinnings of the Russian economy.

Putin has already lost the energy battle. Just as he is losing morally and politically and, so far, even militarily, even though Ukraine has yet to win.

The second thing that the Council has done, in addition to approving the sanctions packages – proposals put forward jointly by the Commission and the High Representative and, in this connection, I would like to thank the President of the Commission for her leadership and drive on this issue – is that we have armed Ukraine. For the first time, the European Union has used not its own budget resources but rather the resources of all the Member States to arm a country for war.

If the amount given to Ukraine from the European Peace Facility is added to the amount each country has given it bilaterally, this comes to around EUR 12 billion, as part of a total aid package of over EUR 60 billion. Around the world, no one has done more to help Ukraine financially and economically than Europe. Our military aid, which is of course less than that provided by the United States, can in no way be considered insignificant.

But, the point I made in Ramstein yesterday, which I would like to reiterate today, is the following: not only do we have to keep on providing this aid, we also have to step it up. And I am calling on all European countries, which have modern, efficient tanks gathering dust on their military bases and serving no purpose, to give them to Ukraine and the sooner the better.

We spend too much time to decide

Because this spring and summer will be decisive. The war will be decided this spring and summer. And we spent too much time discussing whether or not to give them the famous Leopard tanks. Russia, meanwhile, was preparing its offensive. We spent too much time discussing decisions that should have been taken sooner, fearing that our involvement in the war amounted to some kind of pseudo-belligerence. We said that we would supply Ukraine with tanks and this did not lead to the outbreak of World War Three. Of course, the tanks still have not arrived in Ukraine and will take time to get there.

And since time is of the essence, since time is measured in lives, it is my role, as I am responsible for the European Peace Facility and for coordinating the Member States' military support actions, to ask for more and faster aid for Ukraine.

This is the key message that I want to convey to you. But I must reiterate that this military aid is neither a contradiction of nor an alternative to, the search for peace through diplomatic means. The two go hand in hand. Believe me, I do not understand those people who say that, in order to negotiate, we must first stop providing military support to Ukraine. Quite the opposite. We can do the two things at the same time. This is not a debate between doves and hawks. This is a debate where we must be realistic: where we know the situation on the ground and what we can and must do.

It is also a wake-up call for Europe to understand that its military capacity needs to be much bigger than it is now. Our military industry has to be more powerful. Our armies must be more able to deal with a situation like that in Ukraine, because their capacities have been found wanting.

This will be a long war

This will be a long war. And our approach must be rooted in the belief that a war of attrition is essentially a logistics battle, an information battle. We have to see the geopolitical dimension of this war, because the Wagner Group that we find in the Sahel is the same Wagner Group that is fighting in Ukraine. And we have to respond to the same geopolitical game that Russia is playing, using its oil, wheat, civil nuclear capacity and minerals to develop a geopolitical approach that we must confront with greater determination.

Honourable Members, this is the work that you have to do too. Because we have to convince the people of Europe that our resolve cannot be weakened. That the war has a price, but that freedom also has a price. That the price of truth is being paid by Ukraine, that the price that we have to pay is small in comparison and that it would be much higher if Putin won the war.

He cannot win the war. This war must be won by Ukraine, in order to build a stable peace in Europe.

A MOMENT TO STAND AND BE COUNTED

22.2.2023 – Speech ⁽³⁴⁾ – *One year after the launch of the Russian aggression, I condemned before the United Nations General Assembly, Russia's blatant violation of international law and of the principles of the United Nations Charter and appealed to the members of the United Nations to join the EU to vote in favour of, a resolution tabled by Ukraine.*

Mr President, the General Assembly, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

This week marks one year since Russia started its illegal invasion of Ukraine. As everybody knows.

This was and remains a clear-cut case of aggression by a permanent member of the Security Council [of the United Nations]. And this is Russia, everybody knows.

A blatant violation of international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter. The world needs peace in Ukraine and the people of Ukraine deserve peace after so much suffering. But not just any peace.

We need peace grounded in the principles of the United Nations Charter that is why we are [here] in this very hall.

This is what the resolution – presented by Ukraine – is about. It is about reiterating our support for Ukraine and setting out the principles for peace.

The war against Ukraine is not a European issue

I want to stress it: this war against Ukraine is not “a European issue”. It is not about “the West versus Russia”.

No, this illegal war concerns everyone: the North, the South, the East, and the West. The whole world.

⁽³⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-un-general-assembly-emergency_en

We are here today to reiterate our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, as for any member of the United Nations.

Yes. Sovereignty. Territorial integrity: these are the principles that Russia is attacking in Ukraine, every day.

These are also the principles we have to uphold everywhere, every day.

If we do not condemn and stop Russia's actions in Ukraine today, this will increase the risk for any other country, elsewhere in the world, to face a similar aggression.

No one can feel safe in a world where the illegal use of force would be normalised.

And it is article 51 of the United Nations Charter: Ukraine has the inherent right to defend itself, just like any other UN member. Ukraine has the right to defend itself and protect its population against the daily shelling by the Russian army.

Excellencies, colleagues,

The European Union has always been a peace project

The European Union has always been a peace project. We have been quite successful in bringing peace to the European continent and promoting it around the world. It is central to our DNA; it is in our origin.

And when it comes to Ukraine, the real questions today are: what kind of peace? Yes, peace, but what kind of peace? Yes, end the war: how do we end the war? How to achieve this peace?

The first obvious step for peace is for Russia to stop its attacks and [it] must end all hostilities and withdraw its forces and military equipment from Ukrainian soil. And it must be done immediately, completely and unconditionally.

Until then, the European Union will continue to give Ukraine the support it needs to defend its population. It is also in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

We will continue to provide humanitarian and financial assistance. We will work to hold Russia accountable for its actions and war crimes.

As we know from experience, there can be no lasting peace without accountability.

At the same time, we will continue to support Ukraine's wish for a just peace, in line with the United Nations Charter through two tracks: supporting Ukraine and looking for peace. They go hand in hand. They are not "either/or". They are not incompatible. On the contrary, they go hand in hand, they are complementary.

You all know about President [of Ukraine, Volodymyr] Zelenskyy's Peace Formula.

The EU supports Ukraine's Peace Formula

The European Union supports it, and we will work to mobilise the broadest possible international support for it.

Indeed, all of us have a responsibility to work for a just and lasting peace – as this resolution, tabled by Ukraine, sets out.

The United Nations Secretary-General [Antonio Guterres] has offered his good offices to bring an end to this war, and we support him.

Others have also contributed to the diplomatic efforts.

The purpose of this resolution is to support and encourage their efforts to look for peace.

We – the European Union - have been working in close cooperation with Ukrainian partners throughout the whole preparatory process in a transparent and inclusive manner.

We have been as inclusive and as transparent as possible. Amendments and comments made in good faith were duly considered and taken on board to the extent possible.

We thank delegations that engaged with us. This, for sure, has strengthened the text. But, by putting forward additional amendments right now, Belarus is trying to create confusion in the process. When the text before the membership is a simple call for peace in line with the United Nations Charter, these amendments are not made in good faith.

They are manipulative since they do not reflect the situation on the ground, which is the unjustified and unprovoked aggression by one member state against another.

We will vote against these amendments and call on all United Nations member states to do the same and to support the draft resolution tabled by Ukraine.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The text before us today is very much in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's plea at his briefing to the General Assembly on 6 February, and even today in his speech.

As he rightly put it: "The world needs peace. But peace in line with the United Nations Charter and international law".

And for all [these] reasons – simple reasons, evident reasons -, I ask you to join us in co-sponsoring this United Nations General Assembly Resolution and vote in favour.

Because this is a moment for every member of the United Nations to stand and be counted.

WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: ENSURE INTERNATIONAL LAW WILL PREVAIL

26.2.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³⁵⁾ – *In this op-ed, published in several outlets, I argued, one year after the launch of the Russian war that the invasion of Ukraine was and remains a case of pure aggression and a clear-cut breach of the UN Charter. This war is neither ‘just a European issue’, nor is it about the ‘West versus the rest’. It is about the kind of world we want to live in.*

24 February 2022 will forever be recalled as the day when Russia started its brutal, unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. This was and remains a case of pure aggression and a clear-cut breach of the UN Charter. This war is neither ‘just a European issue’, nor is it about the ‘West versus the rest’. It is about the kind of world we all want to live in: no one is safe in a world where the illegal use of force – by a nuclear power and permanent member of the Security Council – would somehow be ‘normalised’. That is why international law must be enforced everywhere to protect everyone from power politics, blackmail and military attacks.

The risk of getting tired and our resolve weakened

One year on, there is a risk that people become inured to the images of war crimes and atrocities that they see – because there are so many; that the words we use start to lose their significance – because we have to repeat them so often; that we get tired and weaken our resolve – because time is passing and the task at hand is hard.

This we cannot do. Because every day, Russia keeps violating the UN charter, creating a dangerous precedent for the whole world with its imperialist policy. Every day, Russia keeps killing innocent Ukrainian women, men and children, raining down its missiles on cities and civilian infrastructure. Every day, Russia keeps spreading lies and fabrications.

⁽³⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/one-year-war-against-ukraine-acting-together-ensure-international-law-will-prevail_en

For the European Union and our partners, there is no alternative to staying the course of our 'triple strategy': supporting Ukraine, putting pressure on Russia to stop its illegal aggression and helping the rest of the world cope with the fallout.

This is what we have been doing for one year now - and successfully so. We have adopted unprecedented sanctions; cut our dependency on Russian fossil fuels; and in close collaboration with key partners reduced by 50% the energy revenues the Kremlin gets to finance its aggression. Working together, we have also mitigated the global ripple effects with food and energy prices declining, partly thanks to our Solidarity Lanes and to the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Ukraine needs the means to defend itself

It is not enough to say that we want Ukraine to be able to defend itself – it needs the means to do so. So, for the first time ever, the EU has supplied weapons to a country under attack. Indeed, the EU is now the leading provider of military training for Ukrainian personnel so they can defend their country. We are also offering significant macro-financial and humanitarian aid to support the Ukrainian people. And we have decided to respond positively to Ukraine's request to join the EU. Finally, we are working to ensure accountability for the war crimes that Russia has committed.

Ukraine has shown its remarkable resilience, partly thanks to this support. And Russia has grown more isolated, thanks to global sanctions and the international condemnation by the overwhelming majority of states in the UN General Assembly. Our collective goal is and remains a democratic Ukraine that prevails; pushing out the invader, restoring its full sovereignty and, with that, restoring international legality.

Above all, we want peace in Ukraine, a comprehensive and lasting peace that is in line with the UN Charter and international law. Supporting Ukraine and working for peace go hand in hand.

History and justice are on the side of Ukraine. But to accelerate history and achieve justice, we need to amplify our 'triple strategy'. We know this is a collective task. That is why the EU is calling on all its partners, to act in a spirit of joint responsibility and solidarity to ensure that aggression fails, international law will prevail and peace is.

THE WORLD IS DEMANDING A JUST PEACE FOR UKRAINE

26.2.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁶⁾ – At the UN General Assembly, in February 2023, an overwhelming majority of 141 members voted in favour of a just peace for Ukraine. Only 7 countries voted against it. This showed, how isolated Russia is. Before the UN Security Council, I underlined that the EU will stay engaged to support multilateralism on the full range of global challenges.

The United Nations was the nerve centre of global diplomacy this week, with many Foreign Ministers in New York. The main purpose was to discuss and vote on a resolution in the General Assembly that put the spotlight on who is responsible for the war against Ukraine as well as set out the principles for a just peace.

The war against Ukraine affects core global principles

On Wednesday at an emergency session of the General Assembly, Ukraine tabled the text and I spoke on behalf of EU member states ⁽³⁷⁾. I stressed that the war was not ‘a European issue’, but affected core global principles like sovereignty, territorial integrity and the right for countries to live in freedom and security. Everyone would be less safe in a world where the illegal use of force would somehow be normalised.

“It is clear that the world wants peace and that Ukrainians deserve peace. But not just any peace”, I said, “we want a just peace, based on international law and respect for the UN Charter”. Supporting Ukraine and searching for peace go together. It is not either or, but both ends.

The next day, the resolution was put to a vote. This was a key moment for every UN member to take a stand and be counted. Frankly speaking, there was a lot of speculation about whether we would be able to reach a similar level of support as previous Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions (in February 2022 condemning the aggression and in October 2022 on the illegal annexations). These had passed

⁽³⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-demanding-just-peace-ukraine_en

⁽³⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-un-general-assembly_en

with majorities of 141 and 143 respectively. Was there ‘Ukraine-fatigue’ and resentment over ‘double standards’ among the so-called Global South, as some argued? Would Russia be able to peel away support with its disinformation campaigns? In the end, the [result](#) ⁽³⁸⁾ was impressive: 141 vs 7 with 32 abstentions. Russia was only supported by Belarus, DPRK, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua and Syria, which is quite a remarkable club...

A resounding success sending a clear message to Russia

The outcome was a resounding success, sending a clear message that the world wants the war to stop – and to stop now. It was a vote for a just peace in Ukraine and for upholding international principles against Russia’s systematic attacks. It was also a success for EU diplomacy: we played a key role in New York but also did outreach around the world, with good coordination among member-states. At the [stake out](#) ⁽³⁹⁾ to the press after the vote, I was glad to be joined by the many EU Foreign Ministers present in New York: showing this was the collective success of ‘Team Europe’.

The next day, which marked exactly one year since the start of the war, there was a special session in the Security Council, again with many ministers present. Secretary General Guterres [opened](#) ⁽⁴⁰⁾ and he did not mince his words, making clear that Russia’s invasion was illegal and a direct breach of the UN Charter. He recounted the horrible costs this war entails, for Ukrainians first, but also for the wider world, through rising prices for food, energy and fertilisers. He recalled the clear call for a just peace as enshrined in the UNGA resolution passed the day before.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba reminded everyone of the Russian lies that had preceded the invasion and the horrors that followed. He underlined how and why Ukraine had resisted and would continue to do so, with the support of all its partners. Ukraine’s victory would also mean the victory of international law, the UN Charter and the principles it contains. He called for a minute of silence to mark the victims in Ukraine. Everyone stood up, apart from the Russian delegation. They said they would only agree to a commemoration of all victims - and only then did they join the rest of the audience in marking their respect.

⁽³⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-demanding-just-peace-ukraine_en

⁽³⁹⁾ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuWc58l3mwQ>

⁽⁴⁰⁾ See: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133877>

The Russian leadership is living in a parallel universe

After that, 13 members of the Security Council echoed many of the points made by the SG, with understandable nuances. Russia for its part launched yet another diatribe, mixing baseless accusations with historical fabrications. It only showed, once again, how the Russian leadership is living in a parallel universe. China introduced its ‘position paper’ on a political settlement. It is not really a peace plan and mostly reiterates well-known Chinese positions, some of which we share while important ones are missing. Of course, we will analyse it, but it is already clear that the key problem is that it does not really distinguish the aggressor from the victim, putting the parties at an equal level.

From my side I underlined (4) two points: why Russia’s war of choice matters to all of us and how we should get to peace, building on the UNGA resolution and President Zelenskyy’s peace plan. I also reiterated that the EU is committed to uphold international law everywhere and that we would continue our global engagement to reduce suffering and work for peace around the world.

These three days in New York confirmed the old saying that the UN is a pretty good mirror of the state of the world. If we look beyond Ukraine, it is clear that global crises are accumulating but the global response is either blocked or inadequate. Leadership and unity are lacking. The Russian war and tensions between China and the US are tearing at the fabric of what we often refer to as the “rules-based international order”.

But equally, a vast major of countries still look to the UN to provide solutions. Like us, they are keen to see multilateral action. Many of them see potential in a stronger role for the EU. They see us as a preferred partner, be it as a counterbalance to China or a more reliable and consistent partner than the US. They see us as more faithful to international norms and the multilateral system and more mindful of the interests of the developing world.

Many also see an international system that they regard as outdated, paralysed and unequal. They want more action on climate finance, reform of the multilateral development banks to leverage more risk and more effective debt relief and restructuring and a better African representation in global decision-making including the G-20, Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions. Many are looking to the EU to help deliver at least on some of this long list. The urgency

(4) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-un-security-council-session_en

with which we addressed the pandemic or the war in Ukraine is seen by many as an example of the kind of commitment they want to see on other, urgent issues.

We need to think hard about what we can do more on this broader agenda. The EU has been flexible on [SDRs](#)⁽⁴²⁾ and has shown leadership on the loss and damage issue at COP27. But how do we move forward with a reform of the global financial architecture that is more equitable, fair and effective? We should not forget that this is not all about solidarity, it is also about our enlightened self-interest and geopolitical positioning. I will put these issues on the agenda of the upcoming informal [meeting of EU development ministers](#)⁽⁴³⁾ in March to forge a joint way forward.

In addition, we need to keep reminding people just how much the EU does to support the UN around the world. When others are backing away from multilateralism, we keep investing in multilateral solutions everywhere, financially and politically. For this reason, I was glad to brief the Security Council on Thursday on the full range of EU-UN cooperation.

No other partner is offering more support to the UN's work

I [pointed](#)⁽⁴⁴⁾ to our track-record of being the largest collective contributor to the UN budget; the biggest source of public climate finance at € 23 billion a year and that we have more than 5,000 women and men deployed on 21 crisis management operations on three continents, always working with the UN as their main partner. The most recent missions we launched are [a partnership mission in Niger](#)⁽⁴⁵⁾ and another in [Armenia](#)⁽⁴⁶⁾.

There are not many crises on which we are not active and that are no other partner is offering more systematically support to the UN's work than we do. Of course, judging against the needs, it is never enough, but it is something and maybe more than we tend to get credit for.

⁽⁴²⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2023/special-drawing-rights-sdr>

⁽⁴³⁾ See: <https://swedish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/events/informal-meeting-of-development-ministers-8-9-3/>

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-nations-address-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-un-security-council-eu_en

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/12/niger-eu-establishes-a-military-partnership-mission-to-support-the-country-in-its-fight-against-terrorism/>

⁽⁴⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/euma/about-european-union-mission-armenia_en?s=410283

I leave New York encouraged by the strong resolve and support that the world has shown for Ukraine. But also convinced that there is a broader global agenda on which we need to be more proactive and attentive to the growing needs and expectations of a world that is full of crises.

SPEEDING UP OUR MILITARY SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

14.3.2023 – Blog ⁽⁴⁷⁾ – *At an informal meeting of EU defence ministers in Stockholm, we discussed how to increase and accelerate our military support to Ukraine, especially on ammunition. I proposed a three-way which included purchasing ammunition jointly for the first time ever.*

One year after having launched his war of aggression against Ukraine, President Putin is obviously not interested in peace. He has not given up any of his imperialistic war aims. Russia continues its systematic destruction of the country's civilian infrastructure. It still seeks to conquer the entire Donbas. Russia has thrown huge numbers of Russian soldiers to try to obtain in Bakhmut a symbolic victory that has eluded Putin for more than a year, even at the cost of thousands of Russians lives, yet so far yielding little territorial progress. Since 24 February 2022, Putin has demonstrated that human lives are worthless to him, whether they are Ukrainian or Russian.

An intense war of attrition

Currently, it is mainly an artillery war that is fought in this region. In this intense war of attrition, a lot of ammunition is used daily and the next weeks will be critical. Against this backdrop, Ukrainian leadership has called for urgent and massive deliveries of artillery shells, air defence equipment, tanks and other forms of much-needed military supplies.

Following up on President Zelenskyy's appeal, the EU leaders discussed at the European Council on 9-10 February, the idea put forward by Estonia to jointly procure ammunition in support of Ukraine. Since then, we have worked hard to put together a concrete proposal. We first discussed the issue at our Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 20 February. We also exchanged on this at our trilateral meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg on 21 February.

At our informal defence ministers' meeting in Stockholm last Wednesday, the Ukrainian Defence Minister Reznikov repeated the message loudly and clearly:

⁽⁴⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/speeding-our-military-support-ukraine_en

the Ukrainian Armed Forces urgently need further military support and in particular artillery ammunition. Time is of the essence: we need to deliver more artillery ammunition and we need to deliver faster.

To that aim, I presented a proposal based on three tracks, building on the work done by the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency together with the Commission:

1. **Ensure the immediate delivery of more artillery ammunition**, notably 155 mm, to the Ukrainian Armed Forces out of existing member states' stocks, or from pending orders. I propose to allocate €1 billion for reimbursement of these ammunitions, using the existing European Peace Facility (EPF).
2. **Aggregate demand in Europe and fast-track the procurement of 155 mm ammunition** to backfill member states' stocks and ensure long-term support to Ukraine. By procuring jointly, we will be able to reduce unit prices and delivery time. I have proposed to mobilise an additional €1 billion through the EPF, for the reimbursement of the ammunitions that member states will procure together for delivery to Ukraine. It can be done using a promising joint procurement project that the European Defence Agency has been preparing with EU member states over the last months.
3. **Support the rapid ramping-up of manufacturing capabilities** of the European defence industry. To meet the massive demand to replenish stocks – both for Ukraine and for EU member states -, the European defence industry needs support to produce more and reduce production time. In the current geopolitical context, this is essential to help Ukraine, but also beyond that, to make up for the significant deficit in the capacities of our defence industry that has accumulated over the past thirty years.

To become mutually reinforcing, these three tracks need to proceed in parallel: EU member states will be more likely to agree to support Ukraine from their existing stocks if they receive the guarantee that they can replenish them; and they will only be able to do so if our European defence industry scale up its capacity to deliver.

In Stockholm, everyone agreed on the urgency to move forward

In our discussion with defence ministers in Stockholm, everyone agreed on the urgency to move forward. However, some issues need to be worked on. My intention is to reach an agreement on a package deal on these three tracks at our

next meeting of foreign and defence ministers on 20 March, ahead of the European Council on 23-24 March.

Buying weapons together is indeed a complex issue because it is a totally new approach in Europe. In 2021, we showed that we could solve a serious European crisis by jointly purchasing vaccines against COVID-19. There are significant differences between the two situations. Regarding vaccines, we have had first to finance research to develop them, before being able to purchase them together. Regarding ammunitions, we need just to add industrial capacities. However, to invest in these capacities, the defence industry needs visibility and certainty. That is what we have to provide now in order to support Ukraine against the greatest threat to peace and democracy in Europe since World War II.

WHY BUYING AMMUNITION TOGETHER WILL HELP BRING A JUST PEACE IN UKRAINE

28.3.2023 – Op Ed ⁽⁴⁸⁾ – *In this op-ed, published in several outlets, I underlined that Ukraine needs more than just political support and money to be able to push out the Russian invader. Crucially, it needs weapons but also many ammunition, as weapons without ammunition are useless.*

Right now, the Russian stocks and use of artillery shells are much higher than Ukraine's – and the price for this difference is paid in Ukrainian lives. We have said repeatedly that the defence of Ukrainian sovereignty is existential – for Ukraine, but also for the rest of Europe. We cannot want this goal without giving Ukraine the means to achieve it.

Since Russia launched its war against Ukraine, the EU has shown that it 'gets' what is at stake and is ready to break taboos when the needs arise. One year ago, we began to finance, for the first time ever, the supply of lethal military equipment to a country under attack. Then in the autumn, we started to train Ukrainian soldiers on our soil, under the EU flag. We are on track to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers by the end of this year. And right now, we are taking another big step, by working together to supply Ukraine with the ammunition it so urgently needs.

A three-track proposal

Last week, European leaders agreed to a three-track proposal that I put forward, together with Commissioner Breton. First, to finance the urgent provision of artillery ammunition from existing stocks or pending orders; second to jointly procure new artillery shells; and third to work with the EU defence industry to increase production capacities, to address our own needs and to sustain our support for Ukraine.

In concrete terms, we will use €1 billion from the European Peace Facility, which is separate from the EU budget itself, to reimburse member states who are ready to deliver ammunition to Ukraine immediately. This part will come from existing

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-buying-ammunition-together-will-help-bring-just-peace-ukraine_en

stocks or pending orders. We will use another €1 billion to reimburse the joint procurement of 155mm ammunition and, if requested, missiles, and do so from the EU defence industry and Norway. This will be done through the European Defence Agency (EDA) or through complementary joint acquisition projects led by a member state. The core objective is to deliver fast. And by buying together, we will give the industry the clear signals it needs to deliver in the shortest possible timeframe.

The third track is about increasing the capacity of the European industry to meet increased demand so that our armies can replenish their stocks while supplying Ukraine. It is easier to give what you have today if you are confident you are able to buy and receive new supplies tomorrow. On this track, the European Commission will support the increase of manufacturing capacities to address bottlenecks and efficient procurement procedures, including through financial incentives.

We need to ramp up defence investment

In the past 20 years, Europeans have reduced their investments in defence industrial capacity, which we now need to ramp up again because of the radically changed security environment.

Concretely, we aim to provide Ukraine with 1 million rounds of artillery ammunition within one year, using a total of €2 billion under the European Peace Facility. With a reimbursement rate of 50% to 60%, this new package will enable us to leverage roughly €4 billion.

This decision demonstrates the EU's ability to act quickly when we need to and it is proof that we remain determined to give Ukraine the means it needs for its legitimate self-defence.

This decision will raise the question of how giving ever more weapons can bring an end to this horrible war. The answer is that to defend itself and end the war, Ukraine needs both weapons and ammunition – for as long as Russia keeps attacking and bombing Ukraine.

Of course we, like Ukraine, want peace. But we do not just seek any kind of peace. We want a just and sustainable peace, based on the UN Charter where Russia withdraws its troops from all the territory of Ukraine that it currently occupies. This is also why we support President Zelenskyy's peace formula.

In other words, how the war ends matters – not just that it ends per se, with Russia making territorial and other gains with its war of aggression.

The need for Russian accountability

We also want accountability and that is why the indictment by the International Criminal Court of President Putin is important: he must pay for the war crimes he is responsible for, including the forced abduction of so many children from Ukraine.

In this war, history and justice are on the side of Ukraine. But we need to accelerate the march of history. Our military support and our decision to buy ammunition together, serve the cause of a just peace in Ukraine. It is the right decision and a necessary one.

SOME CLARIFICATIONS ON THE CIRCUMVENTION OF EU SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

19.5.2023 – Blog ⁽⁴⁹⁾ – *Sanctions are at the heart of our strategy to pressure Russia to end its war against Ukraine. The EU's measures have no extraterritorial effect, meaning they only apply to European entities. Sometimes they are being circumvented, undermining their effectiveness. What should we do about it? Often, the answer lies at home.*

As the EU, we don't want to buy Russia's energy exports, because we don't want to finance its war against Ukraine. We also don't want to sell technological products and components that Russia needs for its war machine. These are our decisions that are binding to EU economic operators. Even if we would like other countries to do the same, we cannot force them, because our 'sanctions', are not extraterritorial. That's why trying to avoid the circumvention of our restrictive measures is a delicate issue. We need to tread carefully and avoid antagonising countries that are not subject to European law.

Sanctions are effective overall

Our restrictive measures have been effective overall. For example, we have almost stopped buying any oil and gas directly from Russia, ending our energy dependence. And we have stopped exporting many critical goods and materials to Russia. But in recent months we have seen an abnormal increase of third countries importing goods that are banned by the EU, including high-tech products. For example ⁽⁵⁰⁾, EU exports of vehicles to Russia reportedly fell by 78% in 2022, while exports from the EU to Kazakhstan surged by 268%.

This week member states discussed the EU's 11th sanctions package ⁽⁵¹⁾ against Russia which is essentially about closing loopholes and how best to address the issue of circumvention and the rerouting of trade in banned products. The proposal under discussion would, among other measures, enable targeted

⁽⁴⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/some-clarifications-circumvention-eu-sanctions-against-russia_en

⁽⁵⁰⁾ See: <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/11th-package-of-EU-sanctions-Focusing-on-circumvention~50d944>

⁽⁵¹⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_2661

measures against entities that intentionally circumvent EU measures while still upholding the principled opposition of the EU against extra-territorial sanctions

This week we also had a discussion on the specific issue of India's growing oil purchases from Russia and the growing exports to the EU of refined products that are most likely based on cheap Russian oil. This is a good example of the dilemmas that this issue entails and the need to base ourselves on facts.

It is a fact that India, but also China, is importing ever larger volumes of Russian oil since the G7 introduced its price cap at the end of 2022 and is doing so at a clear discount. The [figures](#) (⁵²) are clear: India's oil imports from Russia have gone from 1,7 million barrels per month in January 2022 to 63,3 million barrels per month in April 2023. Put differently, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the share of Russian oil in India's overall oil import stood at 0,2%. Last month, that share had risen to 36,4%.

Indian operators are not subject to European law

This is certainly a remarkable increase, but we must be clear: one cannot blame nor question the right of India to do so, because Indian operators are not subject to European laws. The G7 price cap is aimed at reducing Russia's oil revenues and, with that, the financial means of the Kremlin to finance its war machine. As I said in the [Financial Times](#) (⁵³): "That India buys Russian oil, it's normal. And if, thanks to our limitations on the price of oil, India could buy this oil much cheaper, well, the less money Russia gets, the better."

The issue is more about what to do and by whom about another fact that cannot be denied, namely that India is exporting ever-growing volumes of refined products, based on Russian oil, including to the EU which has precisely banned the imports from Russia of these products, as well as the oil from which they are produced.

Here again, the [facts](#) (⁵⁴) are clear: the export of refined products like jet fuel or diesel from India to the EU has risen from 1,1 million barrels in January 2022 to 7,4

(⁵²) See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-india-summit-russia-oil-sanctions-subrahmanyam-jaishankar/>

(⁵³) See: <https://www.ft.com/content/ebb851db-6ff6-4334-a47f-dd176b2adf2f>

(⁵⁴) See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-india-summit-russia-oil-sanctions-subrahmanyam-jaishankar/>

million barrels in April 2023. Logically, we are concerned by this. But, once again, it is not the Indian government that is to be blamed. Once refined, these products are no longer treated as Russian but as Indian and we cannot prevent Indian refineries from selling them to an EU operator, or to an intermediary.

But it is clear that in practical terms this does undermine the effectiveness of our restrictive measures. We in the EU don't buy Russian oil, but we buy the diesel obtained by refining this Russian oil somewhere else. This has the effect of circumventing our sanctions and our member states should take measures to deal with this.

Circumvention raises moral issues

All this also raises moral issues. Oleg Ustenko, an economic adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, had a point when he said⁽⁵⁵⁾: "We have enough evidence that some international companies are buying refinery products made from Russian oil and selling them on to Europe...It's completely legal but completely immoral. Just because it's allowed doesn't mean we don't need to do anything about it."

But who is responsible for this – the seller or the buyer? When I raised the issue of Indian exports of refined products based on cheaper Russian oil, it was not to criticise the Indian government but to say that we cannot close our eyes to how EU companies themselves are circumventing the sanctions by purchasing refined oil coming originally from Russia

This story shows that we first have to look at what economic operators within the EU are doing. If Indian refiners are selling, that is because European companies are buying, directly or through an intermediary. We should be well aware of how complex real life is and try to look for solutions on that basis.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-oil-vladimir-putin-ukraine-war-wide-open-back-door-to-europe-critics-say/>

WHAT CONCLUSIONS SHOULD WE DRAW FROM PRIGOZHIN'S MUTINY?

4.7.2023 – Blog ⁽⁵⁶⁾ – *On 24 June 2023, we witnessed extraordinary events in Russia. In this blog post I drew lessons from the mutiny of Wagner Group leader Prigozhin. It should not lead the EU to slow down support for Ukraine. On the contrary.*

On Saturday 24 June, I was woken up by a phone call telling me that Wagner militia forces had taken control of the regional headquarters of the Russian army in Rostov on the Don and that they had set off towards Moscow.

During a video conference of G7 foreign ministers, we agreed not to comment publicly on these events, to avoid giving Vladimir Putin and his propaganda machine any pretext for trying to blame Western countries for this internal Russian issue. Now that the mutiny is over, we can and should however draw lessons from what happened in Russia that Saturday.

The weakening of Putin's regime

The first lesson is that the war of aggression against Ukraine has weakened Vladimir Putin's regime far more than many observers had thought. Since February 2022, he seemed to have maintained or even strengthened his grip on power despite some crushing defeats of the Russian army in Ukraine. At the same time, many observers argued that the Russian economy had not (yet) been seriously affected by the war and our sanctions.

Prigozhin's mutiny, and the fact that hardly any forces actively opposed the capture of the main Russian headquarters in the war against Ukraine, and the subsequent march on Moscow, showed the depth of the divisions within the Russian army and state apparatus.

On 27 June, Putin publicly admitted for the first time that the Wagner Group had indeed been massively supported and funded by the Russian state. [As I said at our](#)

⁽⁵⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/what-conclusions-should-we-draw-prigozhins-mutiny_en

last Foreign Affairs Council meeting⁽⁵⁷⁾, Putin created a monster, and now the monster has bitten him. The fact that a state-funded group of mercenaries opened fire on the regular state army illustrates the degree of pathology of Putin's Russia.

It was symbolic that Prigozhin on the eve of his attempted coup, challenged the official narrative used by the Kremlin to justify the war, denying any aggressive plans of Kyiv and NATO. Instead, he blamed Defence Minister Shoigu for spreading lies out of his personal ambition. I hope that more and more Russian citizens, but also more people globally, will start questioning the manipulative official narrative used by Putin, Lavrov and others about this war.

A serious loss of authority

Even if this attempted coup ultimately failed, Putin has suffered a serious loss of authority, with real consequences for the future. Putin and his regime may now try to consolidate again their power, clamping down on military bloggers who dared to criticise the army, or purging the military, security and state apparatus. However, it is obvious that the Russian state is in a profound crisis.

The risk of growing instability in Russia is another serious consequence of Prigozhin's mutiny, especially for a country that holds nuclear weapons. But here comes another lesson learnt from the ongoing Russian war of aggression: Putin's Russia represents the biggest threat to European and global security and its nuclear arsenal makes it not less but more dangerous for the entire civilised world.

This is another reason why we must continue supporting the Ukrainian armed forces to drive Russian troops out of the country. A Ukrainian victory is the best way to reach the just peace, based on international law that Ukraine needs and deserves. Such a peace would also open a possibility for Russia to start a process of change, a prerequisite for a lasting peace. Russian history has shown that when change comes, it may come fast. We should be prepared for that.

Then, there is the Belarus angle. Officially, Lukashenko played a prominent role in containing Prigozhin's mutiny. His regime, which is rejected by the vast majority of Belarusians, can only hold together thanks to Russian support, and any challenge to Putin's power would very likely lead to Lukashenko's downfall.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/431150_fr

We are keeping a close eye on developments in Belarus and in particular the installation of Wagner mercenaries in the country. Their possible involvement in the aggressive actions of Lukashenko's regime towards its neighbours would necessarily result in a strong response from our side.

Keeping a close eye on Belarus

Last week I met again with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaia and other democratic and civil society leaders from Belarus (⁵⁸) to assure them of our continued support to a free and democratic Belarus. We agreed to set up a regular Consultative Group to enable a permanent dialogue between the EU and the Belarusian opposition.

Finally, Foreign Minister Lavrov was instructed to reassure the world that Russia "will emerge stronger" after the mutiny. However, I think that close partners of Russia are the first to worry. In particular, China may now realise that its support for Putin's war could have been a miscalculation in terms of its long-term interests. The refusal of the President of Kazakhstan to support Vladimir Putin during these events also marks the further weakening of Russia's influence in his neighbourhood.

The admission that Wagner is in reality a Russian state-controlled entity has also far-reaching consequences beyond Russia and Ukraine, given the multiple crimes committed by the members of this organisation not only in Ukraine but also in all the countries where it operates, in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mali or Sudan.

Alongside the powerful Russian propaganda apparatus, which is constantly spreading lies across the globe, Wagner has been used by the Putin regime as a privileged tool to destabilise countries, particularly in Africa, with very negative consequences for the local populations but also for EU interests. Prigozhin himself has admitted that Wagner's actions in Africa were financed by the Kremlin. In these countries, Russia can however hardly replace these pseudo- "private" militias with regular forces. Here too, we are following developments very closely in Africa and call on leaders to stop relying on these lawless mercenaries.

It is still too early to measure all the consequences of Prigozhin's mutiny but it has become clear already that they will be significant and negative for Putin's regime. We will use this momentum to increase our support for Ukraine. We are

(⁵⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belarus-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-launches-new-consultative-group_en

on track to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers by the end of the year and we have decided on [a €3.5 billion top-up to the European Peace Facility \(EPF\)](#) ⁽⁵⁹⁾ to provide Ukraine with more much-needed arms to defend itself against Russia.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/26/european-peace-facility-council-agrees-on-second-top-up-of-the-overall-financial-ceiling-by-3-5-billion/>

RUSSIA MUST STOP USING FOOD AS A WEAPON

2.8.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽⁶⁰⁾ - In July 2023, Russia decided to not renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) allowing Ukraine to export agricultural goods to global markets. In this Op-Ed published in several outlets, I denounced this decision and recalled that, as underlined by the Secretary General of the UN, this initiative had been ‘a beacon of hope in the world’.

Before Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, a critical global food supplier, a fifth of the world’s barley came from Ukraine, as well as a sixth of the maize and an eighth of wheat. After Russia invaded Ukraine, attacking grain fields and silos and blocking Ukrainian ports, global food prices spiked to record levels and endangered much-needed food supply for many importer countries. The BSGI aimed to re-establish a vital route for agricultural exports from Ukraine and to lower global food prices.

Despite many challenges, it achieved its key purpose. Since August 2022, the export of almost 33 million tonnes of grains and food from Ukraine to 45 different countries played an instrumental role in reducing global food prices by some 25% since the record high reached shortly after Russia’s attack. As public trade data shows, over half of the grain, including two-thirds of the wheat, went to developing countries.

Continued access to grain for the World Food Programme

In addition, the BSGI ensured continued access to grain for the World Food Programme (WFP). In 2023, Ukraine supplied 80% of the wheat procured to support humanitarian operations in the most food-insecure countries like Afghanistan, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Without the Black Sea route, the WFP has to get its grain elsewhere at higher prices and with a longer lead-time at a time when the world is facing an unprecedented food crisis.

Russia’s decision was taken despite the UN Secretary General’s renewed proposals to work to address its concerns. In order to shift blame, Russia claims that its own agricultural exports were not sufficiently facilitated. This is not borne out by

⁽⁶⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/russia-must-stop-using-food-weapon_en

publicly available trade data, which shows that Russia's agricultural exports are thriving. Russia gained also important benefits from the Memorandum of Understanding with the UN on fertiliser exports, which had been brokered in parallel to the BSGI. The UN has worked relentlessly to clarify regulatory frameworks and engage with the private sector to find dedicated solutions across the banking and insurance sectors. These efforts have been conducted in close collaboration with the EU and its partners.

Contrary to the lies spread by Russia, the EU has indeed ensured that our sanctions have no impact on global food security. There are no sanctions on Russian export of food and fertiliser to third countries and the EU has provided extensive guidance to economic operators, clarifying that these transfers to third countries are permitted. We have also worked with the UN to allow related payments.

Russia is endangering the global food supply

Despite these well-known and verifiable facts, Russia decided to pull out of the BSGI, using food as a weapon and endangering the global food supply. Hours after withdrawing from the initiative, Russia started also to destroy Ukraine's grain storage facilities and port infrastructure with daily targeted attacks, not only in the Black Sea itself but also in the Danube. As an immediate reaction, wholesale wheat and maize prices saw their biggest increase since the start of Russia's war of aggression. The increased food price volatility is likely to persist as long as Russia puts the global food supply under deliberate stress, aggravating the global cost-of-living crisis and most acutely for food-insecure people in import-dependent countries. This is unacceptable and should be resolutely condemned.

As the world deals with disrupted supplies and higher prices, Russia is now approaching vulnerable countries, notably in Africa, with bilateral offers of limited grain shipments, pretending to solve a problem it created itself. This is a cynical policy of deliberately using food as a weapon.

In response to Russia's irresponsible actions, the EU is active along three main lines. First, we will continue to support the tireless efforts of the United Nations and Türkiye to resume the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Second, we continue to strengthen our "Solidarity Lanes" as alternative routes for Ukrainian agricultural exports to reach global markets through the EU. These lanes have allowed the export of more than 41 million tonnes of Ukraine's agricultural goods so far, and we are increasing this as much as possible to mitigate the consequences of

Russia's termination of the BSGI. Third, we increased our financial support to countries and people most in need, providing €18 billion to address food security until 2024.

Step up the support to global food security

We call on the international community and all countries to step up their own assistance in support of global food security. We ask all our partners to urge Russia to return to negotiations as the African Union already did, as well as to refrain from targeting Ukraine's agricultural infrastructure. With a clear and unified voice, we can get Russia to resume its participation in the BSGI. The world has a shared interest in responsible stewardship of global food security. We owe it to the people most in need.

YES, THE SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA ARE WORKING

26.8.2023 – Blog⁽⁶⁾ – Since the start of the aggression against Ukraine the EU has imposed 11 rounds of ever-tighter sanctions against Russia. In the summer of 2023, some claimed these sanctions were not working. This is simply not true. They had limited Moscow's options considerably, causing financial strain and significantly degrading Russia's industrial capacity.

Our restrictive measures, to use the technically correct term, are unprecedented in their scope, focusing on key sectors of the Russian economy that are crucial to Moscow's war effort. In addition, the EU has also imposed travel bans and asset freezes on more than 1,500 individuals and almost 250 entities.

These measures are producing hard, tangible effects across Russia's economy, despite the huge oil and gas revenues Russia used as a buffer in the first year of the invasion. And their effects will intensify over time, as the measures have a long-term impact on Russia's budget and its industrial and technological base.

The Russian economy contracted in 2022 by 2.1%. Manufacturing in particular - growing steadily before the invasion - was down 6% at the end of 2022, with high and medium-high technology manufacturing recording a 13% annual loss. The production of motor vehicles was down 48% year-on-year, other transport equipment by 13% and computer, electronic and optical production by 8% while retail trade was 10% lower and wholesale trade 17%.

The outlook for 2023 remains bleak

And the outlook for 2023 remains bleak. According to the latest OECD report, Russia's GDP is foreseen to shrink by up to 2.5%. All the components of Russian private demand, including private investment and consumption, remain depressed. Only public expenditure related to the war effort, i.e. defence spending, is up.

Russian carriers are no longer able to fly to, from and over EU territory. Most modern aircraft operated by Russian carriers are dependent on European and

⁽⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/yes-sanctions-against-russia-are-working_en

American spare parts and technical assistance, which have been banned. The ban on new investment across the energy sector and export restrictions on technology and services for the energy industry has undermined the viability of Russian companies. The credit rating agency Moody's has already downgraded 95 Russian firms (including most energy companies).

Compared to 2021, 58% of total EU imports from Russia were already cut off in 2022 - an unprecedented decoupling. Non-energy imports from Russia have fallen close to 60%, with the most visible drops for iron and steel, precious metals and wood. This movement is accelerating: the decline in imports of non-energy goods is above 75% for the first quarter of 2023, and the fall is even greater for energy goods, at minus 80%.

Since 10 August 2022, EU imports of Russian coal have stopped completely affecting around one-fourth of all Russian coal exports. The G7+ energy sanctions on oil have proven effective. The price of Russian oil has fallen since the start of the EU embargo and G7+ oil price caps. The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports an average Russian crude oil export price of around \$ 60/barrel in April 2023, a \$ 24/barrel discount compared to the global oil price. The IEA also estimates that total Russian oil revenues are down 27% from a year before. At the same time, as was intended by the G7+ countries, despite falling exports to the EU, the overall *volume* of Russian global oil exports held up relatively well, helping to keep global markets stable. On gas, Russia's own decision to cut flows and the EU's strong diversification efforts resulted in a dramatic fall in volumes. Despite this, we have managed to get sufficient gas stocks ahead of next winter.

On the export side, restrictive measures to date cover around 54% of 2021 EU exports, targeting key capital and intermediate goods where Russia has a high dependency on supplies from the EU, United Kingdom, United States and Japan. Overall EU exports of goods were 52% below the annual average before the war in 2022.

The EU exports of dual-use items and advanced technologies, which are essential to produce the equipment and weapons used by Russia to wage its war, dropped by 78% in 2022 compared to 2019-2021. EU trade restrictions so far exclude products, other than luxury goods, primarily intended for private consumption like pharmaceuticals, food, medical devices and some specific agricultural machinery. However, even in many areas that are not under sanctions, many EU companies have stopped trading with Russia and EU exports in non-sanctioned sectors are down by over 10% on average.

Russia's war is the root cause of the global food insecurity

At the same time, the EU is also ensuring that its sanctions do not unduly affect trade in sectors, such as food and energy security, for third countries around the globe, in particular the least developed ones. Specific exemptions and guidance have been established to that effect. Russia's war of aggression is the root cause of the global supply shock in the areas of food and related items by invading Ukraine, one of the main breadbasket of the world. The fact that Russia decided to exit the Black Sea Grain Initiative⁽⁶²⁾ last July, attacking since then massively silos and Ukrainian ports, risks to aggravate again the global food security situation in the coming months. The EU will continue to counter Russia's false narrative on these issues and work closely with partners that are negatively affected by Russia's actions to mitigate these effects.

Russia had an important budgetary surplus for the first half of 2022 due to high oil and gas prices but it has been erased in subsequent months, with the federal budget ending in a deficit in 2022. The fiscal situation is expected to worsen. January-April figures for 2023 showed Russia's oil and gas federal budget revenues, representing 45 % of Russia's budget in 2022, dropping 52%. The government is trying to address the revenue slump by extracting high dividends from state-owned enterprises and levying additional taxes on large businesses but these have their own costs and are unlikely to plug the growing fiscal deficit.

While the Russian government still has fiscal space with a public debt that stood at 17% of GDP at the end of 2021 and accumulated assets in the National Wealth Fund (NWF) that remain sizeable (as of April 2023, \$ 154 billion, or 7.9% of GDP), it squeezed productive and social spending. In 2023, nearly a third of the federal budget is expected to be spent on defence and domestic security while funding for schools, hospitals and roads is slashed further.

In 2023, the current account surplus decreased dramatically as import volumes recovered due to the increase in more costly substitution imports. At the same time, sanctions on Russian exports and the G7 price caps effectively reduced the income from Russia's main exports. Russia has turned increasingly to the yuan⁽⁶³⁾ as a means of transaction and a store of value - a currency with non-transparent capital controls. This in turn has increased the costs of doing financial transactions between Russia and the outside world.

⁽⁶²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/russia-must-stop-using-food-weapon_en

⁽⁶³⁾ See: <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88926>

Benefiting from measures like banning non-residents from transacting in the financial markets and a record current account surplus due to high commodity prices, the rouble appreciated against the euro following the start of the war. The exchange rate thus very much reflected the decoupling of the Russian economy from the global one. With the degradation of the current account, the rouble depreciated again in the second half of 2022 and has further weakened massively in 2023. It is now at its weakest for many years, trading at lower levels than during the pandemic. To try to halt this fall, the Russian Central Bank had to raise sharply interest rates from 7.5% in July to 12% on 15 August. This high-interest rate will put an even greater brake on economic activity in Russia in the coming months.

Large parts of the reserves of the Central Bank of Russia have been immobilised in the EU and other countries (of the € 300 billion assets immobilised, € 207 billion are in the EU). The EU, together with partners, is working to find ways to use revenues of the immobilised assets of the Russian central bank to support Ukraine's reconstruction and for the purposes of reparation, while ensuring this is done in accordance with EU and international law.

Russia is trying to counter EU measures

Meanwhile, Russia is trying to counter EU measures. It is turning to non-sanctioning countries in search of technology and intermediate products. Russia's overall imports fell post-invasion by around 18% from April to November 2022 compared to the same period of 2021. After this slump, Russia's imports from China increased by 27%, in particular for machinery, electrical equipment and cars. Russia has also been introducing measures that have made it more difficult and costly for foreign companies to leave the Russian market.

While it is questionable if others can fully fill the space left by sanctioned EU goods, it underlines the need to act more firmly against the circumvention of EU sanctions. To this end, we are stepping up our engagement with key third countries, urging them to closely monitor and act against trade in EU-sanctioned goods, particularly those found on the battlefield in Ukraine. In this regard, the [EU Special Envoy David O'Sullivan](#)⁽⁶⁴⁾ will play an important role.

Within a year, sanctions have already limited Moscow's political and economic options, causing financial strain, cutting the country from key markets, increasing

⁽⁶⁴⁾ See: https://ireland.representation.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-appoints-david-osullivan-international-special-envoy-implementation-eu-sanctions-2022-12-13_en

the costs of trading and significantly degrading Russia's industrial capacity. Looking at Russia's long-term growth prospects, the technological degradation and the exit of foreign companies will hamper investment and productivity growth for years. The labour market situation was not favourable before the invasion due to Russia's demographics. Mass conscription has worsened it further and the growing lack of opportunities exacerbates the brain drain from Russia. In short: Russia's decision to attack Ukraine has obviously pushed the Russian economy towards isolation⁽⁶⁵⁾ and decline.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See: <https://www.bofit.fi/en/monitoring/forecasts-for-Russia-and-China/latest-forecast-for-russia/>

EU FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL IN KYIV: WE STAND WITH UKRAINE

8.10.2023 – Blog ⁽⁶⁶⁾ – Our informal Foreign Affairs Council in Kyiv marked an important milestone for the EU: for the first time ever foreign affairs ministers convened outside the Union. We wanted to assure our Ukrainian partners of our full support to their fight for Ukraine's sovereignty both financially and in terms of military equipment and training.

I went to Ukraine through Moldova, where I met President Maia Sandu⁽⁶⁷⁾. Moldova is for us a key partner in the region, confronted with a particularly difficult situation – the Russian army is still present in Transnistria, part of Moldova's own territory. We discussed Moldova's candidacy to the EU. We strongly support this endeavour and recognise the efforts already accomplished but quite a lot of work still has to be done, notably on the justice system and the fight against corruption.

Bombing cultural heritage

We continued to Ukraine and the city of Odesa. Odesa is an important sea port on the Black Sea with a lot of cultural and historical heritage. It has been the target of numerous Russian missile and drone attacks in recent months. I visited in particular the Transfiguration Cathedral, hit by Russian missiles last July⁽⁶⁸⁾. It was for sure a legitimate military target...

The night before we went to Odesa, nine Russian drones also struck again the port. We went to the destroyed silos⁽⁶⁹⁾. By attacking Ukrainian ports, Russia wants to stop Ukraine's grain exports, putting global food security in danger and driving up food prices worldwide.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-foreign-affairs-council-kyiv-we-stand-ukraine_en

⁽⁶⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/moldova-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-met-president-maia-sandu_en

⁽⁶⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-after-visiting-destroyed-cultural-heritage-odesa_en

⁽⁶⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-press-remarks-hrvp-josep-borrell-odesa-port_en

However, despite these bombings and the fact that Russia has put an end to the Black Sea Grain Initiative negotiated by the UN and Türkiye last July, ships are again leaving Ukrainian ports transporting grain for Africa and other regions in need, defying the Russian sea blockade. For our part, we have managed to help Ukraine export more than 50 million tonnes of grain so far through the land route via our EU Solidarity Lanes, and we will continue and amplify this effort.

Targeting churches or ports exporting grain to hungry people around the world says a lot about the true nature of Russia's so-called "Special Military Operation". The recent attack targeting [a café and a grocery store in the settlement of Hroza near Kharkiv, killing more than 50 people](#) ⁽⁷⁰⁾ is unfortunately further proof of this.

On Sunday, I participated with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv to the Day of Defenders to honour the men and women who risk their lives, fighting for their country. We met the new Minister of Defence Rustem Umerov for the first time to discuss EU military support and exchanged about the state of the rule of law and the fight against corruption in Ukraine with civil society representatives.

An important highlight of this day was our [visit to the Ukrainian Centre for Strategic Communication and Information Security](#) ⁽⁷¹⁾, supported by the EU. The war of aggression against Ukraine is not only fought with classical warfare, but also with the manipulation of information and [cyber-attacks](#) ⁽⁷²⁾. It is not new, the war of information has always existed, but it is now waged on a massive scale by Russia. We see this not only in Ukraine but also in the EU, in Africa, in Latin America or in Asia.

Russia trying to deflect its responsibility for the war

Through this propaganda and disinformation, Russia is trying to deflect its responsibility for the war, for annexations, for atrocities and for the global food and energy crises. The Kremlin has put this disinformation ecosystem in place to undermine the international support to Ukraine. To counter this hybrid war is a high priority for the EU and for Ukraine: we have to fight and win together this battle about the minds of the people, exposing Russian lies to the entire world.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-statement-high-representative-deadly-attack-kupiansk_en

⁽⁷¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-russia%28%99-information-manipulation-its_en

⁽⁷²⁾ See: <https://ega.ee/news/cyber-classroom-ukrainian-armed-forces/>

In Kyiv, we honoured also in Babyn Yar the memory of the more than 30,000 Ukrainian Jews assassinated at that place exactly 82 years ago. Ukraine's history is tragic today, but it was also particularly tragic during the Second World War: Ukraine was one of the main places where the Nazis persecuted the Jews.

I had finally the opportunity to discuss with the personal working at the EU delegation under particularly hard conditions. One of our Ukrainian colleagues is currently fighting against the Russian army and the husband of another one is missing on the front. I thanked all of them for their courage and dedication.

On Monday, after having honoured the memory of the fallen Ukrainian soldiers at the Wall of Remembrance, we discussed with my friend and colleague Minister Kuleba and [my 27 colleagues EU Foreign Ministers the situation in Ukraine](#) ⁽⁷³⁾ and our support to the fight against the Russian aggression. On that same day, I met also President Zelenskyy and Prime Minister Smyhal.

The EU and its member states are the first supporters of Ukraine

According to [the last figures](#) ⁽⁷⁴⁾, the EU and its member states are the first supporters of Ukraine in this war. Our overall commitments amount to €82 billion including €25 billion in military support. In the coming weeks, we will have achieved to train 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers and we will continue to do so.

As part of the review of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the European Commission has proposed a multiyear € 50 billion facility for 2024-2027 to support the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. I have proposed also a multi-annual envelope in military support under the European Peace Facility (EPF), including up to €5 billion next year. I hope that we can reach an agreement on that package before the end of the year with our member states.

During our mission in Ukraine came the news that, to avoid a so-called "shut down", the US Congress has adopted a bipartisan bill that did not include Ukraine support. Despite the strong engagement of the Biden administration, it fuels uncertainty on future US support for this country. In the short term, we couldn't compensate for the lacking US support, and we hope that our friends and allies will quickly find ways of breaking the deadlock. For the future, this development

⁽⁷³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-after-eu-foreign-ministers-meeting-kyiv%2Ao_en

⁽⁷⁴⁾ See: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

increases the EU's responsibility to rise to the challenge launched by Vladimir Putin, a few kilometres from our borders, against our core democratic values and the international rules-based order to which the European project has always been closely linked since the beginning.

We are also strengthening the cooperation between the EU and Ukrainian defence industries. An important meeting has been held in Kyiv on this issue a few days ago. And we will continue working together on cyber defence and defence against hybrid threats such as disinformation. We need also to increase our support for demining, a key condition for Ukraine's economic recovery and reconstruction. We are discussing strengthening our support to reform the law enforcement sector, for more accountability and resilience via our existing [EU advisory mission](#)⁽⁷⁵⁾, which I had the opportunity to encounter in Odesa. We also exchanged our common work on accountability issues, including the crime of aggression and inhumane actions such as the deportation of children. Russia has to pay for its aggression and for all its crimes.

Finally, we discussed the security guarantees to be given to Ukraine in the future. As a non-military alliance, the strongest security commitment that the EU can give to Ukraine, is EU membership. And we strongly support this prospect. However, EU accession is a merit-based process and we have taken stock with the Ukrainian leadership of the reforms still to be done on that path. In November, the European Commission will present a report on enlargement. And the European Council will then have to decide the way forward.

EU and Ukraine striving for peace together

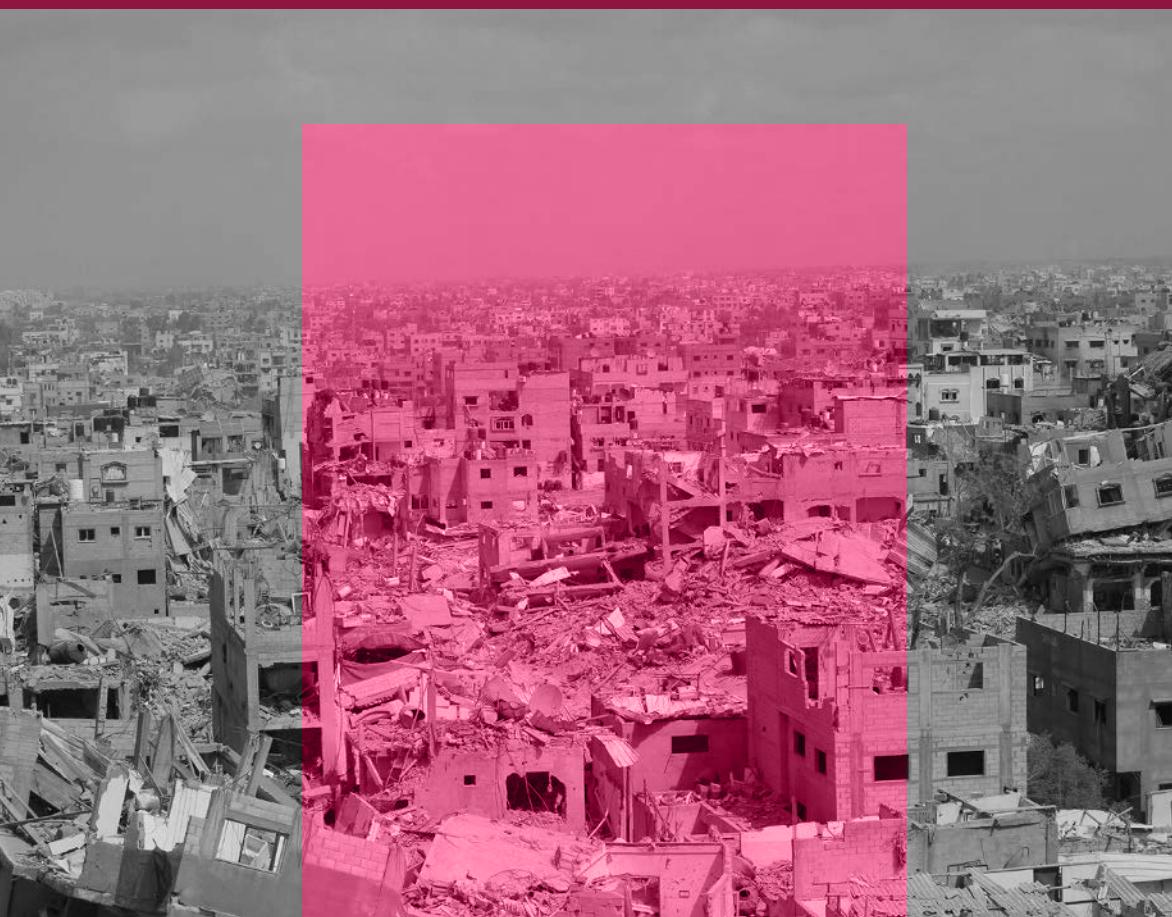
The EU fully supports Ukraine's fight for its sovereignty but also strives for peace and nobody in the world longs more for peace than Ukrainians themselves. President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula is currently the only peace initiative proposed and discussed in the international community. We will continue working with Ukraine to garner more international support for this formula.

With our first of this kind EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Ukraine, we have sent a strong signal to Russia: we continue and will continue to fully support Ukraine's fight for freedom and sovereignty.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ See: <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/>

2

FACING THE RETURN OF WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST



HONESTY CAN ADVANCE THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

9.3.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽⁷⁶⁾ – In March 2023, seven months before the terrorist attack on 7 October, I emphasised in this Op-Ed published in various outlets via Project Syndicate, that, amidst escalating tensions and violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, the situation demanded a renewed international effort to help both sides think through their options.

Too many people are dying every week in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, and millions are living in fear and hopelessness. The world's response has been characterized by too many statements and too little action. That must change. We in the European Union and the wider international community need to do more. We know that people around the world expect us to work for peace, justice, and international law everywhere. But to act successfully, we first must be honest with each other and ourselves.

Extremism is rising on both sides

Being honest means acknowledging that extremism is rising on both sides. Indiscriminate attacks and violence are taking many Israeli lives. Violence on the part of Israeli settlers in the West Bank is increasingly threatening Palestinian lives and livelihoods – almost always with impunity. Moreover, Israeli military operations frequently cause civilian Palestinian deaths, often without effective accountability; illegal settlements are expanding on occupied land; and the delicate status quo concerning Holy Sites is eroding. While Israelis can rely on a strong state and army, Palestinians have no such recourse. This vast inequality in the ability to control one's destiny is visible at every roadside checkpoint. All these facts are obstacles to peace.

To be sure, different actors within Europe often react differently to events in the region. But this does not prevent the EU from acting. We have all been alarmed by recent developments, and we all share the same ultimate goal: to see a safe, secure, globally recognized state of Israel live in peace alongside a safe, secure,

⁽⁷⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/honesty-can-advance-middle-east-peace-process_en

globally recognized state of Palestine. This solution would allow both sides to enjoy freedom, prosperity, and peaceful relations with their neighbours.

Our own interests are also at stake. We want peace because ending the conflict would be much better for international security. We want peace because we acknowledge the right of both Israel and Palestine to exist, and because we stand for the principle of international law everywhere. We want peace because we share ties with all peoples in the Holy Land, and because it would benefit regional stability and prosperity. And we want peace because terrorism is a threat everywhere.

But while the EU, the Palestinian Authority, and a sizable part of the Israeli public support the two-state solution, Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist, and the current Israeli government's coalition agreement [denies](#)⁽⁷⁾ the Palestinians' right to their own state. Indeed, the Israeli right increasingly denies that the occupation even exists.

Neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian side is ready for peace

Clearly, neither the Israeli nor the Palestinian side is ready for peace. On the Palestinian side, there is a lack of unity, as well as insufficient democratic legitimacy. All Palestinian factions will need to renounce terrorism and overcome their political divisions. On the Israeli side, the top priorities must be to stop settlement building and settler violence, and to offer to negotiate an independent Palestinian state.

In recent years, the international community has failed to pursue substantive peace efforts between the parties. Our American friends have long tried to help bring the parties together, and the recent normalization agreements (the Abraham Accords) between Israel and some of its Arab neighbours did make an important contribution to regional stability. But they did not bring Israeli-Palestinian peace any closer. While the United States remains essential for the process, we can no longer leave most of the hard work to American diplomats. Rather, we need a genuinely collective effort that includes Arab states, Europe, the US, and others.

With this honest airing of the facts, what should we do next? Above all, we need more intensive international efforts to create a new peace dynamic. While we

⁽⁷⁾ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/world/middleeast/israel-right-netanyahu.html>

cannot force the parties to the negotiating table, we can prepare the way and help them get ready.

In 2013, the EU offered⁽⁷⁸⁾ an “unprecedented package of security, economic, and political support” if the parties were to reach a peace agreement. With this in mind, I instructed EU Special Representative Sven Koopmans to work with the European Commission and EU member states to flesh out such a proposal. I also asked him to develop (together with our partners) concrete proposals for a comprehensive regional process to achieve peace both between Israel and Palestine and between Israel and all its Arab neighbours.

Working closely with other Arab and international partners

Then, in February, I met with Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al-Saud, and Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, who agreed to revive and build on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and add the European peace package to it. In this effort, we will be working closely with other Arab and international partners.

This process is about sketching out how Israel and Palestine will be integrated into the region if they make peace. We need to consider the kinds of security, political, and economic cooperation that peace would make possible, and how all parties can address common challenges relating to water, energy, infrastructure, and climate change.

This is a moment for exploring what we can all contribute to Israeli-Palestinian peace once it comes. Obviously, neither Europe’s nor anyone else’s contributions would be implemented unless there is an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, and we should not assume that our promises of support will be sufficient to bring about that outcome. Still, something is needed to stop the current downward cycle of violence, and we can play a crucial role in helping the parties to think through their options.

To be clear, I am not announcing a European peace initiative. At this stage, we are simply reaching out to others and considering how we can prepare for the day when Israelis and Palestinians are ready. We can bring that day closer by painting a clearer picture of what regional peace would look like. Honesty requires seeing that we cannot afford to wait any longer.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel-eu-idUSBRE9BF1BC20131216>

WE MUST HELP TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

14.3.2023 – Speech ⁽⁷⁹⁾ – *In March 2023, the European Parliament debated on the “Deterioration of democracy in Israel and the consequences in the occupied territories”. I briefed the Parliament on ongoing efforts, in collaboration with Arab and international partners, to establish conditions favourable for Israelis and Palestinians to return to the negotiation table.*

President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for this opportunity to address you today on these increasingly important issues. Everybody has been following closely the developments in the Middle East in the past weeks, both in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

First, I would like to start by underlining both, the European Union's and my own personal engagement with both parties. I have been in contact with both, Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen – even this morning - and Palestinian Prime Minister Shtayyeh. We invited Prime Minister Shtayyeh to Brussels, where we had a very good exchange at the last Foreign Affairs Council in January.

This has been coupled with public messaging - you have seen a number of my statements. Not my statements, the last one was a statement of 27 Member States. Sometimes people blame me for the statements of the 27 Member States but it is not me, it is the 27 Member States. I am representing the Council, and the Council is composed of the 27 Member States.

Increasing violence and extremism on the ground

This was issued last Wednesday, after we faced a difficult situation on the ground, with increasing violence and extremism. I think it is crucial that the European Union is united and speaks with one voice - not my voice, but the voice of the 27 Member States, all together.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ep-plenary-speech-high-representative-president-josep-borrell-situation-israel-and-palestine_en

We managed to reach an agreement of the 27 Member States and this is the first time it happens in many years that we have a statement of the 27 Member States on this issue.

I spoke this morning on the phone with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, who was not very happy about this debate. He was concerned and asked why the European Parliament is interfering in the internal affairs of Israel - once again, blaming me. I am sorry, I am coming to the [European] Parliament and if the [European] Parliament calls me to discuss something, I have to come, isn't it? It is not me who put this title "Deterioration of democracy in Israel and the consequences in the occupied territories", it is the political groups.

This parliament is free to discuss everything they consider important. And that is what I tried to explain to the Israeli minister in a very friendly way: "Look, it is normal that the parliamentarians are concerned about the growing spiral of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and [there is] the need for all sides to de-escalate the situation."

Call for a proportional use of force

I mentioned this agreement that we - the 27 Member States - reached, where, of course, we condemn terrorism. Of course, we fully recognise Israel's right to defend itself. And we certainly never draw comparisons between operations by the Israeli military and the actions of terrorists. But we have to call for the proportional use of force. Nor do we tolerate any kind of funding activities that could encourage incitement.

Of course, we are a strong believer in the two-state solution, and there is no - we believe - viable alternative to that. With our international partners, we will continue to work for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

And I am using this Parliament to say that - I suppose you agree - the European Union has to engage in looking for peace in the Middle East. And that the Middle East Peace Process is something that matters to us, and we are engaged in that. Maybe someone does not like it, but we do it because we believe that it is our contribution to the security in the region and to our security too.

So, I hope that today will be a good discussion to show Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen that the European Parliament is ready to discuss what is happening in the Middle

East and how we can contribute to the Peace Process, and this is not at all to have an anti-Israeli position - not at all.

Second, we have known Israel for its vibrant democracy, which is true. So vibrant that we have seen five elections in the past three years – very vibrant. Five elections in three years show quite a dynamic electoral process.

A questionable judicial reform

The new government is keen to pursue a judicial reform and that is what we want to discuss today. A judicial reform which has led to a heated internal political debate. And everybody knows because everybody watches TV and reads newspapers that many Israelis have been demonstrating in the streets. And both the government and the opposition are using fierce language. A compromise seems difficult, but as far as I know, talks are ongoing – especially thanks to the efforts of President [of Israel, Isaac] Herzog. And I do not want to prejudge the outcome of this debate. I am not part of this debate, I am just saying that this debate is taking place. And I can remind you what President Herzog himself has said.

We are a close observer because Israel is a key partner, and our shared values are based on a democratic and open society and the rule of law. We expect this to continue.

And if we have concerns, if you have concerns, you will not hesitate in expressing them and conveying them, as you do in any part of the world.

For example, the Knesset is discussing a bill that could re-establish the death penalty. We know that we are strongly, and we are in principle, opposed to the death penalty. And for sure, today I am sure that many members will engage on this clearly.

Third, with full respect to the internal political dynamics with Israel, this chamber is fully empowered to discuss these dynamics and to understand what happens there with respect to our perception of values and interests in the region – nothing is strange with that.

This cannot be seen as an interference but a way of showing our interest and our appreciation for the Israeli democracy.

Then, you present in the title of the debate also the consequences on the occupied Palestinian territory. And I am not inventing a new word if I say that the situation there is grave, and that violence has reached levels unseen since 2005 with an appalling number of victims, including children.

This cannot go on like this. And I made a call, with our EU27 statement, and also with an article published in the Middle Eastern press, asking both sides to act urgently and responsibly.

They need to do whatever they can to allow for a change of course. And we have been clear, and I will be clear once again: settlements are illegal under international law. Is that being anti-Israeli, saying that? No. Settlements are illegal under international law and their expansion must stop, as well as demolitions and evictions of Palestinians from their homes. The Israeli government must seriously counter the violence of settler extremists and hold perpetrators accountable. And military operations must be proportionate and in line with international humanitarian law. It is difficult not to agree on that.

Settlements are illegal under international law

But the Palestinian Authority must act too. They must redouble their efforts in terms of security cooperation, and work to prevent acts of terror that have claimed many Israeli lives. It is equally important that the Palestinians work towards reconciliation in order to reunite the Palestinian territories under one single legitimate authority. Palestinian factions should engage constructively in reconciliation talks. Palestinian people deserve the right to vote in national democratic elections to renew the legitimacy of their leadership. This is important also in view of future peace talks.

The international community must act as well to help bring about renewed perspectives for peace. And we need renewed international efforts to help both Israelis and Palestinians to think through their options.

And in order to contribute to it, on the 13 of February, [I met with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al Saud and with Arab League Secretary-General Aboul Ghei](#) and we agreed to work together towards a viable solution, in order to revive and build on the Arab Peace Initiative, also by adding a European peace contribution to it. And in this effort, we will be working closely with other Arab and international partners.

We have also supported the work of the United States, including on the recent Aqaba Joint Communique. And all parties should now respect the agreement reached in Aqaba in good faith.

We must help to create the conditions where it would be advantageous for Israelis and Palestinians to go back to the negotiation table and talk. And nothing will make me happier than to be able to contribute, from the side of the European Union, to prepare this process.

I think everybody in this chamber agrees that the European Union should do all we can in order to contribute to a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East and to reach peace between Israel and Palestine.

This, and nothing else, is what is moving us, and in particular me.

THIRTY YEARS AFTER OSLO, WE SHOULD NOT GIVE UP ON PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

3.10.2023 – Op-Ed – Just a few days before the tragic events of 7 October, I published this Op-Ed in various outlets to present our renewed efforts to revive the Middle East Peace Process and the two States solution, working closely with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the League of Arab States.

Thirty years ago, on 13 September 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands to seal the “Oslo Accords,” which were supposed to lead to a permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within five years. I remember feeling at that time the hope of finally seeing an end to the already decades-long Arab-Israeli-Palestinian tragedy. In 2023, what is left? There is neither peace nor a peace process. Hope has turned into resentment and despair, and this anniversary went virtually unnoticed.

The conflict is heating up again

On the ground, the conflict is heating up once again. This year already saw more than 200 Palestinian and 35 Israeli fatalities. Terrorist attacks, both by Palestinian militants against Israelis and by Israeli settlers against Palestinians are back at record levels. Israel continues to expand settlements in the West Bank: at the time of the Oslo accords, there were 280,000 settlers; today there are more than 700,000. Settler violence, the separation barrier, demolitions, and other measures are gradually pushing the Palestinian population off their land in many areas of the West Bank, while the humanitarian disaster in Gaza continues unabated, with no end in sight.

Meanwhile, domestic support for the internationally recognised Palestinian leadership is at an all-time low, compounded by a growing lack of funding. In contrast, Israel has become a thriving “start-up nation”, in spite of an imperfect security environment. The need to change the *status quo* is not felt as acutely in Tel Aviv as it is in Ramallah, but the conflict is not going away: the idea that Israel could go forward without making peace with the Palestinians is a dangerous illusion.

The continued violation of UN Security Council resolutions and of some of the most fundamental principles of international law is eroding trust in a rules-based international order, not just in the region but across the globe. It is therefore more necessary and urgent than ever for the international community to reaffirm its commitment to, and mobilise for, peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

There is no alternative to the two States solution

Since years now, we, the EU and the international community, are defending a Two-State Solution with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. Because of Israel's fait accompli policy, this solution may seem less and less viable on the ground. However, which other alternative could allow Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace? Nobody is able to articulate any other plausible answer.

The establishment of diplomatic ties between some Arab States and Israel, vital as it is for regional peace, has so far not brought Israelis and Palestinians closer to peace. Therefore, together with the League of Arab States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, we have decided to make a joint contribution to help revitalise the Two-State solution.

On 18 September, at the United Nations in New York we jointly launched the 'Peace Day Effort'. It was a success with the participation of more than 50 countries and organisations. We intend to 'reverse engineer' the peace, putting together a "Peace Supporting Package", which will maximize benefits for the Palestinians and Israelis if they are able to reach a peace agreement. This initiative builds on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the 2013 EU "package of political, security and economic support", which both have foreseen such incentives to the conflict parties if they achieve peace, while also taking inspiration from existing relations between Israel and some Arab states.

We aim to gather what all of us can contribute, when there is actual peace, real open borders, and substantial regional cooperation in the Middle East. What political, economic and security perspectives could we offer? What energy, climate, water, development, and other projects would we launch? This Peace Day Effort is not just an Arab-European endeavour: all international partners are invited to contribute, and in New York, many offered their support. On 13 and 14

November, we will start to work together in Brussels to make this Peace Supporting Package precise and concrete.

Not a substitute for a genuine peace process

This initiative cannot of course be a substitute for a genuine peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. And the Peace Supporting Package alone will not be sufficient to overcome the many obstacles to peace, but it can provide an incentive to go in this direction – not only by the benefits it offers, but also by reminding the conflict parties that only a negotiated solution is a viable and acceptable strategic option.

While our Israeli and Palestinian friends are not yet negotiating peace, we have embarked on this journey to help keep the Two-State Solution alive, hoping that, together, we can bring it within closer reach. As remote as peace in the Middle East may appear today, echoing the words of Nelson Mandela that “it always seems impossible until it’s done”, we will keep trying. For the sake of the legitimate rights of Palestinians, of sustainable long-term security for Israelis, of peace and development in the region and of the credibility of the international rules-based order, the world cannot afford the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to be forgotten.

WORKING WITH OUR GULF PARTNERS AFTER SATURDAY'S TERRORIST ATTACK

13.10.2023 – Blog⁽⁸⁰⁾ – Only a few days after the deadly terrorist attack of 7 October, we held the EU - Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting in Oman. Despite our differences, we found significant common ground with our Gulf partners. We condemned all attacks against civilians, requested an immediate release of hostages and sought to prevent a regional spill-over.

Since last Saturday, I have of course been almost fully occupied by the consequences of the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel. On behalf of our 27 member countries, we have immediately condemned in the strongest possible terms⁽⁸¹⁾ these attacks and expressed solidarity with Israel, recognising its right to defend itself in line with international law.

Strong condemnation of Hamas terrorism

I spoke in particular to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Eli Cohen, to express the solidarity of the EU, our strong condemnation of Hamas terrorism and the need to respect international humanitarian law to prevent more civilian lives from being lost. I spoke also to the Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh to ask the Palestinian Authority to contribute to the cessation of hostilities

On Sunday, I travelled to Oman to co-chair the 27th Joint Council ministerial meeting between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council⁽⁸²⁾ (GCC), as well as for bilateral meetings with the Omani government and other GCC partners.

The crisis in the Middle East featured prominently in all discussions. Between Europeans and our Gulf partners, it could not have been a business-as-usual meeting. We had an extensive and frank exchange with our GCC colleagues⁽⁸³⁾.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/working-our-gulf-partners-after-saturday%20%99s-terrorist-attack_en

⁽⁸¹⁾ See: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representative-behalf-european-union-attacks-against-israel-2023-10-08_en

⁽⁸²⁾ See: <https://www.gcc-sg.org>

⁽⁸³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-gcc-joint-council-and-ministerial-meeting-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-joint_en

Despite undeniable differences in perspective, we were able to find a significant common ground as reflected in the [Co-Chair Statement](#)⁽⁸⁴⁾, condemning any attack against civilians; requesting an immediate release of hostages and the respect of international humanitarian law – including access to water, food and electricity for the civil population in Gaza.

EU and GCC ministers supported also the efforts initiated before the current crisis to revive the [Middle East peace process](#)⁽⁸⁵⁾ and the two-state solution by Saudi Arabia, the European Union and the League of Arab States in cooperation with Egypt and Jordan. We stressed also the importance of sustained financial support to the Palestinian population through the UN Reliefs and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian Authority.

I took advantage of the presence of many of my European counterparts in Oman to convene an [informal Foreign Affairs Council](#)⁽⁸⁶⁾ after the EU-GCC meeting. Some ministers were already there, others joined from their capitals via videoconference. It was our first meeting after the events on Saturday and it was therefore particularly important to share our views.

A clear distinction between Hamas and the Palestinians

The EU ministers endorsed the main conclusions of our meeting with the GCC. We reiterated our solidarity with Israel and exchanged on the way forward to avoid a regional spill-over and protect civilians. We also discussed the future of our relationship with the Palestinian Authority. All EU colleagues make a clear distinction between Hamas on the one hand, and the Palestinian people and Palestinian Authority on the other.

We consider Hamas a terrorist organisation and what happened last Saturday proves that they are. But it would be of course mistaken to consider all Palestinians as terrorists and any form of collective punishment from our side would be not only contrary to International Humanitarian Law but also to our interests and to the interests of a future peace. It would be a gift to Hamas and jeopardise our partnership with the Arab world and our credibility globally.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/10/co-chairs-statement-of-the-27th-gcc-eu-joint-council-and-ministerial-meeting/>

⁽⁸⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/mepp-european-union-saudi-arabia-arab-league-cooperation-egypt-and-jordan-launch-peace-day-effort_en

⁽⁸⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelgaza-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-after-informal-meeting-eu-foreign-affairs_en

Commissioner Lenarčič, who participated in our EU-GCC meeting, made clear that humanitarian support is in any case not under discussion. Regarding the cooperation for development, the support to the Palestinian Authority and the financing of United Nations agencies which provide services to the Palestinians, an overwhelming majority of EU Foreign Ministers rejected the announcement of an immediate suspension of payments and welcomed the subsequent clarification by the European Commission. They endorsed the proposal of conducting a review to ensure that European taxpayers' money is spent appropriately and in any way doesn't support terrorist activities. Many of my colleagues stressed that it is now more important than ever to strengthen moderate forces committed to a peaceful negotiated settlement of the conflict.

The barbaric attack by Hamas has unsurprisingly provoked a strong reaction from the Israeli Defence Forces. The destruction and casualties in Gaza are increasing rapidly, more than 400,000 people are already internally displaced and the humanitarian situation is dire. With the UN, we support the Egyptian efforts to bring humanitarian aid to the civilian population in Gaza.

The vicious cycle of terrorism and retaliation must stop

It is the fourth time since 2007 that I witness a war in Gaza with its vicious cycle of increasingly deadly terrorism and retaliation. This must stop. For decades now, we have called for a Two-State Solution with the State of Israel and a sovereign State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. Until now, those efforts have failed miserably. Let's join our forces with all relevant regional and international actors to finally find a sustainable political solution.

THE PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE EU'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

18.10.2023 – Speech⁽⁸⁷⁾ – Speaking in the European Parliament, I outlined what should guide the EU's response to the newly flared-up war in the Middle East. My focus was on four key principles: firmness, humanity, consistency, and a proactive political approach to address this conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are times of intense emotion when feelings are running very high.

These are times when we must call on the voice of reason, to transcend the emotions that we all feel as a result of the tragic events that we have witnessed.

We have all condemned the indescribable horror of the attacks suffered by Israel. Those attacks against the civilian population have left so many dead, affecting so many defenceless people at a time when they were celebrating life, but instead they found themselves facing death.

Israël has the right to defend itself

Once again we condemn those attacks. And let us also say that Israel – of course – has the right to defend itself. It has always had this right, and anyone attacked in such a brutal way would have the right to defend themselves. But I think we can all agree that the right to defend oneself, as with all rights, has its limits. And, in this case, the limits are those set by international law and, in particular, international humanitarian law. All this is obvious and we can say it again, but repeating it will not help us move forward to make that necessary reflection, which will guide our actions.

Yes, we condemn those terrible terrorist attacks, but we must also condemn the civilian deaths – the civilian victims – in Gaza, which now stand at 3,000. Because speaking out against one tragedy should not prevent us from speaking out against

⁽⁸⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelgaza-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary-situation_en

another. Extending our sympathy to the dead, the victims of terrorist attacks, should not – and does not – prevent us from also expressing our sympathy for other victims.

In these tragic times, I think the European Union must base its response on four principles: steadfastness, humanity, consistency and a proactive political approach to this conflict.

Being steadfast begins with a clear condemnation of Hamas, – who, as the Minister [for Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel Albares] has stated – is not the Palestinian people. For us, Hamas is a terrorist organisation, and it has certainly proven this with its actions in recent days.

Hamas wants to eradicate Israel

Hamas has been boycotting any attempt at peace. It has opposed United Nations and Arab League resolutions that would pave the way for a possible peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Hamas wants to eradicate Israel. It does not want peace; it wants destruction. But its actions are also making it impossible for the Palestinians to achieve a just peace. They are also the victims of Hamas. And for this reason, we cannot make the Palestinian people and all the inhabitants of Gaza responsible for the terrorist actions of Hamas.

Being steadfast also means calling for the release of the hostages. And this brings me to my second principle: humanity. Wars also have rules. Wars are horrific and what we have seen – what we have explained without yet knowing to whom we should attribute responsibility for the massacre at this hospital – is another terrible manifestation of war. But wars also have rules, which are laid down in international law. And we have said this on several occasions when talking about other conflicts: depriving people of essential supplies and cutting off their water is not compatible with the law of war. Right now, Gaza has no more water. And there are more than 3,000 dead, a quarter of whom are children. We cannot make everyone in Gaza responsible for the criminal actions of Hamas.

The third principle is consistency. And as regards this point, I think we can all agree on what I have just said. That we reject Hamas and that we ask all sides to respect international and humanitarian law. And that these attacks against defenceless civilians, wherever they are, must stop.

We must do this in such a way that the actions of the Member States – each one of them – are consistent with the joint actions of the EU, and that the EU's policies are consistent too. This raises the question of aid to the Palestinian Authority and the question of humanitarian support for the victims in Gaza. The decision of the President of the Commission to increase our humanitarian aid threefold is a good example of this political consistency.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian aid has to get into Gaza, but it cannot get through because all the access roads are still closed. The Egyptian Foreign Minister [Sameh Shoukry] has repeatedly called for the bombing of infrastructure to be stopped, which would allow this urgent humanitarian aid to get into Gaza.

The fourth principle, which perhaps is the one we currently have to focus most of our political energy on, is a proactive approach to resolving the conflict. I was in Gaza when it was bombed in 2008 and I have already seen four more wars since then. And I really fear that if we don't stop this cycle of violence, it will happen again in another four years.

We have to address the conflict between Israel and Palestine, because peace between the Arab countries and Israel, which is good news, does not automatically bring peace between Israel and Palestine, which must also be achieved. As an Israeli reservist who was being drafted told the press: 'The strongest army cannot protect the country the way peace does'. As long as there is no peace, there will be no army strong enough to guarantee Israel's peace.

Peace will not come by itself

But peace will not come by itself; it has to be built. In the international community, which we are part of, we recognise that we did not do everything that we should have done to implement in full the Oslo Accords, which are now 30 years old. Every day we call for a two-state solution, but as the Palestinian representative told me at the United Nations during the General Assembly: 'But, apart from calling for it, what are you actually doing to get it?'

Since Oslo, the number of Israeli settlers and occupied territories has multiplied threefold, while the land making up a possible Palestinian state has been reduced and cut back into a labyrinth of areas that are not interconnected.

Yet, however distant and difficult this solution may seem, it is the only one we have. Because what really is the alternative? If there aren't two states, there can only be one, and how would people live within that state? Under what conditions would the two sides live? If we only have one solution, we must put all our political energy – which Europe has in abundance – into achieving it.

It is not enough to normalise Israel's relations with the Arab countries. Perhaps Hamas's attacks were intended to provoke an Israeli reaction that would make it impossible to normalise relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Perhaps this was one of its strategic objectives. Its action was not total madness. Perhaps there was also an underlying strategy to prevent any progress towards peace.

We have worked with our Special Representative for the Middle East, Sven Koopmans, and with Jordan, Egypt, the Arab League and Saudi Arabia, to launch – or rather relaunch – a process that can lead to this two-state solution. We need to recalibrate and step up our efforts. At the United Nations, we brought together 60 countries, and all of them, or almost all of them, supported this solution.

Here today, we undertake – and this would be the best way to honour the dead on both sides – to build peace between them. This can only be done through a political framework that has already been agreed, which is already set out in United Nations resolutions, and which needs the political impetus that Europe is also in a position to give it.

Today, at the United Nations Security Council, we will continue to discuss a resolution put forward yesterday by Brazil, the voting on which was postponed until today. What we vote for in the Security Council and how we communicate our political position in this conflict will determine the role that Europe will play in the world for many years to come.

It is not a conflict between the Muslim and the Christian world

This morning I heard the voice of the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo. It made me very worried, because, unfortunately, this conflict is turning into a conflict between the Muslim world and the Christian world, which is something that we simply cannot allow. Because the safety of our streets depends on it. And the global geopolitical balance also depends on it. We must make a huge effort to ensure that this does not happen, to ensure that this conflict does not spread beyond the border with Lebanon.

Yesterday I spoke to the Iranian Foreign Minister [Hossein Amir-Abdollahian], as I have spoken with so many other ministers with whom I have been in touch permanently since we reached an agreement in Oman in a [joint communication \(88\)](#) between the countries of the Gulf and the countries of the EU setting out the fundamental steps that I believe should guide our actions. That's right: steadfastness, humanity, consistency and the political will to get out of this situation and build a lasting peace.

Closing remarks

Thank you, Mr President. Thank you to all the members that have participated in this debate.

Ladies and gentlemen, a short time ago – a few weeks ago in fact – I was in Babi Yar. Babi Yar is a neighbourhood not far from Kyiv, in Ukraine, where in 1941 the Nazis shot 33 771 Jews. The Nazis took them there, making them believe that they would then travel to Palestine, and when they got there, they shot them. They joined the 100 000 other victims of Nazi oppression during the occupation of Ukraine.

I took a moment to pay tribute together with the Rabbi who is in charge of keeping the flame of remembrance alive. I told him what I thought: nothing is more hateful to me than to kill a human being simply because he or she belongs to a different ethnic group or religion. Whether you are a Jew, a Muslim or a Christian, we are all human beings and in Europe, we have made this one of our *raisons d'être*: rejecting what the Holocaust was – that dramatic event still present in our minds, and at times in our bad consciences. Because yes, it was us: it was some of us.

In Babi Yar that night, acknowledging our heavy burden of blame with respect to the Jewish people was also a way of showing our support for the existence of Israel. I say this to all of those who may think that, when one tragedy is as reprehensible to me as another, behind the rejection of the two tragedies there lies a kind of distancing with regard to the suffering of the people of Israel, now and in the past.

What has happened in Israel these past few days has been a terrible shock for the people of Israel. Terrible. The figures are clear: 1 300 dead in a single day. This is

⁽⁸⁸⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/10/co-chairs-statement-of-the-27th-gcc-eu-joint-council-and-ministerial-meeting/>

the highest death toll that Israel has suffered since the second Intifada, in 2000. 1300 people dead: if that figure is brought into proportion with the population of France, it would be the equivalent of 10,000 dead. Let us look at things in terms of proportion in order to understand the gravity of the situation.

Until now, Israel had not experienced such severe trauma for a very long time. This is one of the darkest moments in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Unfortunately, it opens a new phase in this conflict. It could be said that we are entering a new – a fifth – phase in this conflict, which dates back to when there were two competing national projects, Palestine and the Jewish State, at the beginning of the 1900s.

Then, the second phase consisted of the clashes during the British Protectorate up until 1947. The third phase was the conventional wars between Israel and the Arab countries between 1947 and 1987. The fourth phase of the tragedy brought the conflict back to Palestine: the Intifadas, the uprisings, the negotiations between Fatah [Yasser Arafat] and [Yitzhak] Rabin – the Oslo Accords.

We are now entering a fifth phase that may turn out to be darker than all the previous ones if the international community does not halt the conflict. The international community must halt it, as it was the international community which laid down the contours of the conflict. From 1917, with the United Nations – sorry, it was called the League of Nations back then – until the vote in the United Nations to divide the territory of Palestine in 1947, it was the international community which laid down the contours of the conflict by drawing the borders and, under (United Nations) Security Council resolutions, dictated what had to be done and what could not be done. And therefore it is in international law that we find the only source of a common language enabling us to deal with the conflict. Because the first thing we need is a common language, otherwise any kind of dialogue becomes impossible.

We are on the edge of the abyss

We have learnt from history that the most difficult decisions are always taken when we are on the edge of the abyss. I believe that is where we are now: on the edge of the abyss. When I hear Muslim religious authorities speaking the language of interreligious conflict and explicitly stating that Europe is a party to this conflict, I feel that the storm clouds are looming, and it is time to stop.

You have seen today how our language is tinged with emotion. We must endeavour to go beyond our emotions, otherwise we will be useless when it comes to resolving this conflict.

Listen: do not add to the horror. Social media are full of fake videos and descriptions of what has happened. We are engaged in intensive work to decode what is nothing more than information manipulation.

Do not add to the horror. Do not talk about decapitated babies because this has not been confirmed, and even the Israeli army has said that they found no sign that this actually happened. Major leaders of the Western world have had to backtrack. There is in fact no need to add to the horror; there is enough already with what has been discovered, which we cannot refute. To kill 1,300 people in 24 hours means cold-bloodedly seeking them out where they are hiding. Do not add to what has already happened – there is no need. We have enough on our plate already.

But in the same way that we can say that it is a terrible tragedy to kill 270 young people who were celebrating life, can we not also say that it is an equally reprehensible tragedy that 700 or 800 children have died in the bombing of Gaza? Can we not say both things? Why should regretting one tragedy not leave me with enough moral strength to regret the other?

On the contrary, it does leave me with enough moral strength. The moral strength to condemn one thing also allows me to condemn another, equal thing carried out in another place, by other people, perhaps closer to me. If we do not understand this, we will be useless when it comes to resolving the conflict.

For this same reason, I want to ask you to stop saying that we are financing Hamas terrorism. Stop saying that our money is paying part of the social welfare funds that go to Palestinians convicted of crimes. This is not true. We have a system to monitor where our funds go – a system called Pegasus, which works well and monitors where our resources go. We are ready to review it, and the Commission will do this. But stop taking for granted something that is not true, because otherwise, all you are doing is stirring up trouble between people.

The first EU-Israël association council since almost ten years

Also, stop criticising me because I have not yet gone to Israel. I think that I have been one of the European political leaders who has done the most to bring the

European Union and Israel closer together. I was the driving force behind the idea of holding a meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council – meetings had not been held for many years, almost ten years. I did this because I thought it was necessary and possible to do it with the Israeli Government at this time.

I have spoken several times with Israeli Ministers of Foreign Affairs. I have invited them to Brussels and they have come – both from the previous and the current governments.

I have taken measures to relaunch the peace process, at the United Nations, during the UN General Assembly to be precise. And I did intend to go to Israel – we had even fixed a date. I still hope to be able to go, but for me there is one fundamental condition: if I visit Israel, I must also visit Ramallah. Unfortunately, the current tensions and the events we are experiencing have made this impossible.

However, you do not solve the problems simply by going there. I am not criticising anyone who has gone there. I am not going to allow myself to be dragged into any kind of interinstitutional debate, because what we need is unity on something that we all agree on. Which is that Hamas is a terrorist organisation that must be fought, that Israel has the right to defend itself and that this right of defence must be carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law. That gives us enough to work on together. If we accept that premise, it is already enough to enable us to work all together.

I hope to be able to visit Israel. But I must reiterate what the Member States are saying, and what they have agreed to state in a joint declaration with the Gulf countries: suspending water supplies to a population under siege is a breach of international law. We cannot accept that: we cannot accept that this should happen, and this is something that must be taken into account when looking at a conflict.

I recommend that you read the Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law, which clearly states that depriving a group of human beings under siege of basic water supplies is contrary to international law, whether it is in Ukraine or in Gaza.

If we are not capable of saying this in these two places, then we lack the moral authority necessary to make our voice heard.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE: WHAT THE EU STANDS FOR

23.10.2023 – Blog ⁽⁸⁹⁾ – *Two weeks into the conflict triggered by the terrorist attack against Israel on 7 October, I took stock in this blog post of what the EU stands for and what it could do to help free hostages, protect civilians, prevent a regional spillover and work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.*

Two weeks ago, on Saturday 7 October, I was hoping to have a quiet day after a trip to Ukraine, where we held an informal EU Foreign Affairs Council. But early in the morning came the news of the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel and the killing of many Israeli civilians in the Gaza vicinity. I had a similar feeling on the morning of 24 February 2022, when Russia started invading Ukraine. We were going to face another decisive moment in history, creating great human suffering and defining the EU's global role for years to come.

Two weeks of intense work on the crisis

Since then I have devoted most of my time and energy to the conflict triggered by this Hamas's appalling terrorist attack on Israel. We issued on Sunday a [statement](#) ⁽⁹⁰⁾ of the 27 member states of the EU and during our meeting in Oman on October 10, we found a [joint position](#) ⁽⁹¹⁾ with the Gulf Cooperation Council, followed that same day by an extraordinary informal Foreign Affairs council where we further defined our common position. Last Tuesday, we discussed intensively the issue in an [extraordinary European Council](#) ⁽⁹²⁾, followed by a plenary debate in the European Parliament ⁽⁹³⁾ on Wednesday.

This conflict was also at the centre of [the EU-US summit in Washington](#) ⁽⁹⁴⁾ on Friday, in which I participated with Council President Michel and Commission

⁽⁸⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelpalestine-what-eu-stands_en

⁽⁹⁰⁾ See: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-high-representative-behalf-european-union-attacks-against-israel-2023-10-08_en

⁽⁹¹⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2023/10/10/co-chairs-statement-of-the-27th-gcc-eu-joint-council-and-ministerial-meeting/>

⁽⁹²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/17/remarks-by-president-charles-michel-after-the-video-conference-of-the-members-of-the-european-council/>

⁽⁹³⁾ See page 111.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/20/u-s-eu-summit-joint-statement/>

President von der Leyen, and of the [Cairo Peace Summit](#) ⁽⁹⁵⁾ on Saturday, where I accompanied Council President Michel. We will also take stock of what the EU stands for, what it is doing and what it could do in the future during our Foreign Affairs Council today in Luxembourg. As already said during the previous events mentioned, I will explain that we must act on the basis of four principles: firmness, humanity, coherence, and proactive political commitment.

Firmness begins with the clear condemnation of the Hamas terrorist attack on October 7. It killed more than 1,400 people, most of them civilians, and more than 200 persons were taken hostage. 1,400 dead in Israel would be equivalent to 67,000 dead in the EU. Hamas wanted to kill as many Jewish people as possible in a sort of jihadist pogrom, the most massive loss of life the country has suffered since its creation. If confirmation was needed that Hamas is a terrorist organization, its recent actions provide it.

As President Biden said during his speech to the US nation, the Jewish people know, perhaps better than anyone, that there is no limit to the pain that people want to inflict on others. During my visit to Ukraine, a few days ago, I was in Babi Yar, where in 1941 the Nazis shot 33 771 Jews. I paid tribute to their memory. As I told the Rabbi in charge of keeping the flame of remembrance alive, nothing is more hateful than killing a human being simply because he or she belongs to a different ethnic group or religion. In Europe, after our sad experiences, we have made this principle one of our *raisons d'être*.

The need to abide by the international law

The second principle is that of humanity. Israel – of course – has the right to defend itself. But, as with all rights, this right has its limits: the ones set by international law and, in particular, international humanitarian law. The cutting off of water and electricity supplies and the pressure on civilians to leave their homes is against international law.

Such norms apply regardless of the identity of the victim or perpetrator. Hamas shouldn't be confused with the Palestinian people and the civilian population of Gaza cannot be held collectively responsible for its criminal actions. We are aligned with our American allies on this issue: President Biden has also stressed

⁽⁹⁵⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2023/10/21/address-of-president-charles-michel-at-the-cairo-peace-summit/>

to the Israeli government the critical need for Israel to abide by the laws of the war.

We immediately condemned the appalling Hamas terrorist attack in the strongest terms, calling also for an immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. But the tragic loss of Palestinian lives is also heart-breaking. Let's not forget that failure to recognize people as human beings is always the prelude to the worst kind of violence. We cannot ignore the humanity of Palestinians civilians who also want to live in peace. Several thousand people a big part of them children have already lost their lives. We are mourning the Israelis who lost their life in horrible circumstances. We mourn also Palestinian children who are innocent victims of this conflict.

Speaking out against one tragedy should not prevent us from speaking out against another. The moral strength to condemn one thing allows – and obliges – us to condemn another, carried out in another place, by other people. Otherwise, we will be useless when it comes to resolving the conflict.

The Commission has decided to multiply by three our humanitarian aid to Gaza⁽⁹⁶⁾. It should be delivered quickly. But this humanitarian aid has to get into Gaza and it is still for the moment a difficult challenge. We have worked intensively during the last week with the UN, the US and our partners in the region to make it possible. Ahead of the Cairo Summit on Saturday, the 20 first trucks were allowed to enter Gaza. This is a first step but much more humanitarian aid would be needed, each day, to cover the basic needs of the civilian population in the enclave. And fuel to run the desalination plants and the power stations should also be included. Hospitals cannot work without water or electricity.

Don't believe fake news regarding our aid to the Palestinians

Regarding our aid to the Palestinian people, it has been said sometimes that it is being used to finance Hamas. It is simply not true. We are monitoring very precisely where our funds go and they go to cover the basic needs of the Palestinian population. We are ready to review it one more time, and the Commission will do this review. But Europeans should not tolerate false accusations nor disseminate fake news that undermines our difficult work on the ground, as happened during last week's debate at the European Parliament.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5001

The third principle that must guide our action is that of political coherence. We cannot appear divided on such a sensitive issue. The EU's position was drawn up at the extraordinary informal Foreign Affairs Council that I had convened in Oman on October 10 and confirmed by the extraordinary European Council (⁹⁷) last Tuesday: "*we condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas against Israel and the Israeli people. We affirm that Israel has the right to defend itself in line with humanitarian and international law. And the European Union has mobilised to provide humanitarian support to the most vulnerable people, to those who are most at risk. We are also committed to a peace process for a lasting peace based on a two-state solution, and therefore based on support for the Palestinian Authority.*" There is no other EU position and all these sentences are part of this position.

It is important to make clarity on this because, during my intense contacts over the last weeks, many Arab leaders and other interlocutors have shared the perception that the EU has double standards, particularly in view of our strong stance on Ukraine relative to our perceived positions on Israel and Palestine. This criticism was already present before October 7, during our discussions about the Russian aggression against Ukraine. But it has become much stronger since then. Both conflicts are very different in nature, but they are indeed related when it comes to their geopolitical consequences.

Our attachment to values and norms should leave no room for this type of criticism. And we need to be able to counter it by our words and deeds. Otherwise, Russia will take advantage of it against Ukraine. In particular, we need to reach a common position on the votes on the resolutions presented in the UN Security Council or UN General Assembly in the coming days.

A proactive commitment to resolve the underlying conflict

The fourth principle is that of a proactive commitment to resolve this conflict.

We have first of course to try to prevent a regional spill over to Lebanon and other neighbouring countries, which would destabilise the entire Middle East region as well as affect Europe. During the last days, I have had many contacts with all relevant regional actors and we have worked with the UN and the US on this issue. We need also to look for an urgent solution for the status of Gaza.

(⁹⁷) See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/17/remarks-by-president-charles-michel-after-the-video-conference-of-the-members-of-the-european-council/>

But we must also address the underlying conflict. Until now, we must admit that we have not been very effective. I was in Gaza after it was bombed in 2008 and this is the fourth major war in Gaza I have had to deal with. And if we don't stop this cycle of violence, it will happen again in the future. The level of trust between Israeli and Palestinian, which was already extremely low in recent years, is now at the level of the Dead Sea. Fear and hatred of the other dominate, collectively and individually.

We are entering a new phase in the hundred year old Israeli-Palestinian tragedy. It could be a very dangerous one for global peace and the international community must mobilise to avoid it. For too long we have tried to dismiss the Palestinian issue as if it no longer existed or as if it would resolve itself.

The international community, which we are part of, did not do what should have been done to implement the Oslo Accords, which are now 30 years old. Since Oslo, the number of Israeli settlers has multiplied threefold in the occupied territories, while the possible Palestinian state has been cut back into a labyrinth of disconnected areas. Every day we call for a two-state solution, but as the Palestinian representative told me during the UN General Assembly: 'Apart from calling for it, what are you doing to get it?'

Peace will not come by itself; it has to be built. The most difficult decisions are always taken on the edge of the abyss. And we are now there. How distant and difficult this solution may seem, the two-state solution remains the only viable one we know. And if we only have one solution, we must put all our political energy into achieving it.

With EU Special Representative Koopmans, we had already worked during the last year together with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Arab League to help revive the Middle East Peace Process and the Two State Solution ⁽⁹⁸⁾. After the recent events, this approach needs of course to be profoundly recalibrated. We will intensify our efforts, together with our partners in the region and beyond.

The way we deal with this crisis will define the EU's credibility and global role for years to come.

⁽⁹⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/mepp-european-union-saudi-arabia-arab-league-cooperation-egypt-and-jordan-launch-peace-day-effort_en

IN THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE

14.11.2023 – Blog ⁽⁹⁹⁾ – At the November Foreign Affairs Council, we discussed the dramatic situation in Gaza and the war against Ukraine. While these two conflicts are very different, they are also interconnected. We need to become more committed to achieving peace in the Middle East and, at the same time, stay united in support to Ukraine.

The EU faces two major tests in Ukraine and in Israel-Palestine. The fire of war has been burning on the eastern border of Europe for nearly two years now, much longer than Putin had thought. He believed that within weeks the Russian army would be in Kyiv and could install a puppet regime, like the one in Belarus. Thanks to the Ukraine's resistance and to the international support, that did not happen.

Europe lived up to its responsibilities

Europe has lived up to its responsibilities: the EU has massively supported Ukraine economically and militarily. We have trained more than 30 000 Ukrainian soldiers and our military support now totals €27 billion. We have put in place 11 sanctions packages and are preparing the 12th. It will include new import and export bans, actions to tighten the oil price cap and to fight sanctions circumvention.

However, we must be realistic: the prospect of Ukraine's victory over Russia is not immediate. Putin's regime needs war because it is the instrument of its political survival. We must prepare for a long conflict which Russia cannot win, but whose end it can delay. With the prospect of a US election, which could, Putin hopes, put US support for Ukraine in jeopardy, he believes that democracies will finally falter. We have to prove him wrong and stay united to continue support Ukraine for "as long as it takes".

The European Commission has recommended last week opening accession negotiations to the EU with Ukraine. We are working also on security guarantees to give to the country. I have proposed to establish a dedicated multiyear fund within the European Peace Facility to secure our military support to Ukraine during the years to come. However, we are not a military alliance and the greatest

⁽⁹⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eye-hurricane_en

security guarantee we can give Ukraine is to make it a full member of the European family.

The second major issue is the situation in Israel and Palestine after the appalling Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October that we have condemned in the strongest possible terms. One month later, a humanitarian tragedy is unfolding in Gaza.

As I explained last week to the Congress of the Party of European Socialists (¹⁰⁰), although these two conflicts are very different in their causes and actors, they are also interconnected. We are seen indeed by many countries in the so-called Global South as applying double standards regarding international law in Ukraine and in Gaza. By our deeds and words, we must demonstrate that this accusation is false.

We support of course the right of Israel to defend itself in the face of the horrible terrorist attacks it has suffered. But, as President Obama said in an inspiring text, the way in which Israel defends itself matters. It must respect international humanitarian law and try to minimise civilian casualties. Cutting off water, food, electricity and fuel to an entire besieged civilian population is not acceptable.

According to the health authorities in Gaza, there are already more than eleven thousand deadly victims, about half of whom are children. A military strategy that ignores human costs for civilians is not going to work because it risks to make a future peace between Palestinians and Israelis almost impossible. Yet peace is the only real long-term guarantee for the security of Israel.

Avoid a spillover in the region

During the coming days, we must avoid a spillover of the conflict in the region and achieve an immediate de-escalation. We need to reach humanitarian pauses, cease-fires, truces... the name does not matter, what matters is to limit the suffering of civilian populations and make it possible for the Israeli hostages to be released.

It is necessary to ensure that a regular flow of humanitarian aid enters each day in Gaza in needed quantities, including fuel. Many trucks are waiting at the border and there is no lack of money. What is still needed, are secure corridors to bring this aid to all people in need and to evacuate wounded and sick persons as well

(¹⁰⁰) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/congress-party-european-socialists-malaga-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell_en

as foreign nationals. We need more terrestrial access to Gaza and we are also studying the Cyprian proposal to open a naval corridor to the enclave. The International Red Cross must also gain access to the hostages held by Hamas, which Hamas has the imperative to free.

What is currently happening in Gaza is the consequence of a political and moral failure of the international community. 30 years after the Oslo agreements, it has not done what it should have done to make the two-state solution a reality. Today the number of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories is almost three times bigger than 30 years ago and this territory has been divided into an archipelago of unconnected areas, making it much more difficult to implement the two-state solution requested by the international community for 76 years. We must defend with equal emphasis the rights of the Palestinians and of the Israelis to their freedom, security and dignity.

The three “yes” and the three “no”

Once the humanitarian truces have been consolidated, which is not the case for the moment, we will have to move from aid to political action. And the immediate political transition will have to be based on the following principles that we discussed in our Foreign Affairs Council. I would sum it up in three “yes” and three “no”.

First, “no” to any forced displacement of the Palestinian people out of Gaza to other countries.

Second, the territory of Gaza cannot be reduced and there should be no permanent reoccupation of Gaza by Israeli Defense Forces, nor a return of Hamas to Gaza.

Third, Gaza cannot be dissociated from the rest of the Palestinian issue: the solution for Gaza has to be framed within the solution to the Palestinian problem as a whole.

And the three “yes” are about the actors to engage in a solution.

First, a Palestinian Authority should rule Gaza, whose nature, role and legitimacy have to be defined by the UN Security Council.

But this authority will for sure need to be supported.

And this is the second yes to a stronger involvement of the Arab countries. Currently, the Arab states do not want to talk about the “day after”, because they are focused on the tragedy that is unfolding today. But there will be no solution without a strong commitment from them, and not only a financial one. It is not only about physical reconstruction but about contributing politically to Palestinian state-building.

The third yes is a greater commitment from the EU in the region.

For us also, the issue is not only to help rebuild Gaza, which we have done already several times, but to help build a fully sovereign Palestinian state, capable of restoring the dignity of the Palestinians and of making peace with Israel.

This has to be our goal and our commitment. Otherwise, we risk staying in a spiral of violence and our security could be more and more threatened: this conflict has the potential to create serious instability in the entire world. We Europeans, out of self-interest, but also out of our moral and political responsibility, have to commit ourselves much more to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine. A significant part of the Union’s future global role, and in particular of our relations with the countries of the so-called Global South, will depend on our commitment to solve this conflict.

In the coming days, I will travel to Israel, Palestine, Bahrein, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan to discuss these issues and proposals with many of the main regional actors.

The need for a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Finally, we also discussed with the EU Foreign Ministers the situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We need to help protect Armenia from any internal or external destabilization. As a first step, we will strengthen our civilian mission in the country. Negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan must resume and a peace treaty needs to be concluded. We are committed to continue the mediation initiated by EU CO President Michel. We have also sent a clear message to Azerbaijan that any violation of Armenia’s territorial integrity would have serious consequences for our relations.

In the EU, we are in the eye of the hurricane, witnessing conflicts in many regions around us. To defend our values and interests and protect the safety of our citizens, we need to think and act principled and strategically.

WHAT THE EU STANDS FOR ON GAZA AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

15.11.2023 – Op-Ed ^(¹⁰¹) – *Prior to visiting Israel, Palestine, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan, I published this article on the Grand Continent website to outline the EU's stance on the dramatic humanitarian crisis in Gaza and propositions to put an end to the vicious cycle of violence in the Middle East.*

A multitude of crises surrounds Europe. On our eastern border, the fire of war has been burning for almost two years. The Ukrainian people, with strong European support, have been fighting with great bravery but the prospect of victory over Russia remains distant.

On 7 October, war flared up once again in the Middle East. The appalling terrorist attack by Hamas, which we immediately condemned in the strongest possible terms, reignited a cycle of violence that escalated into a humanitarian tragedy in Gaza.

Faced with the war against Ukraine, Europe demonstrated unity and quickly lived up to its responsibility. The EU has supported Ukraine economically and militarily, and we will continue to do so as long as it takes.

We need to prove the accusation of double standards false

The two conflicts are very different in their causes and actors. However, they are also interconnected. Mainly because we are suspected of applying double standards regarding international law between Ukraine and Israel-Palestine, particularly from countries of the so-called Global South. By our words and deeds, we need to prove this accusation false.

Europe's influence in the world rests primarily on our soft power. We have taken steps to strengthen our defence capabilities and we have a powerful economy, but we are not yet a hard power. Our global role stems principally from how consistently we defend universal principles and values.

^(¹⁰¹) See: <https://geopolitique.eu/en/2023/11/15/what-the-eu-stands-for-on-gaza-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>

We Europeans must be among the keepers of international and humanitarian law. This is why our partners in the world—and our rivals—are closely following the positions we take on the dramatic developments in the Middle East.

The war in Gaza is the outcome of a collective political and moral failure, for which the Israeli and Palestinian people are paying a high price. This price will continue to increase if we fail to act.

It stems from a failure to solve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. For decades, the international community has formally committed to the two-State solution, but without putting in place a roadmap to achieve it.

The substance of the Israeli-Palestinian question is a national problem: that of two peoples who have the right to exist on the same land. There is therefore a need to share this land. Thirty years ago, with the Oslo Accords, we had an agreement on how to share it. But it has not been implemented. Meanwhile, in both camps, the forces of denial grew continuously under the hubris of some and the desperation of others.

Violence against Palestinians increasing in the West Bank

Violence has increased. The figures are appalling, and not just in the latest terrifying attack by Hamas against Israel and the Israeli response. Already before 7 October, the number of dead and wounded was much too high.

The illegal settlement in the West Bank and violence against Palestinians have been increasing with impunity – and it has become even more brutal after 7 October.

Thirty years ago, there were 270,000 settlers in the West Bank. Now there are more than 700,000. And the Palestinian territory has been divided into an archipelago of unconnected areas, making it much more difficult to implement the two-state solution requested by the international community for 76 years.

Last year, in the West Bank, 154 Palestinians were killed and 20 Israelis. This year, the number is already up to almost 400 Palestinians and about 30 Israelis. In Palestine, the total lack of perspective has led to the marginalisation of moderate forces to the benefit of radicals driven by hatred.

Because of the Abraham Accords, many believed that the Israeli-Palestinian issue could be circumvented even as the situation on the ground continued to deteriorate.

This illusion has contributed to the fire of hatred. On the Israeli side, by extremist forces in the West Bank determined to put an end to the Palestinian question through submission or exile. On the Palestinian side, by Islamist extremists who want to destroy Israel and threaten the West.

The barbarism of Hamas against Israeli civilians on 7 October was absolutely unjustifiable and inexcusable. This was an attack like no other, and it provoked in Israel profound shock and existential fears. But as Barack Obama said, “*how Israel prosecutes this fight against Hamas matters*”.

Former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice explained in 2011 that the clashes in Gaza had a predictable rhythm: “*Hamas would provoke, Israel would respond militarily, and the international community would wring its hands*”. With their overreaction, the Israelis were losing the support of the international community. This is how it happened in 2011; and now, in 2023, we are coming to the same place.

The military strategy of Israel has to abide by international law, including the law that seeks to avoid, to every extent possible, the death and suffering of civilians. Cutting off water, food, electricity and fuel to an entire besieged civilian population is not acceptable. The scale of the bombing is also extremely concerning.

Break the vicious circle of violence

In the short term, the priority is to break the vicious cycle of violence. This is not going to be easy because the human tragedy in Israel was unprecedented. US President Biden has asked Israel “*not to be blinded by rage*”. The best friends of Israel are not those who push for revenge, but those who push for constraint.

According to the health authorities in Gaza, there are already more than eleven thousand victims, about half of them children. A military strategy that ignores the human costs for civilians is not going to work because it risks making future peace between Palestinians and Israelis almost impossible. Yet peace is the only real long-term guarantee for the security of Israel.

In the immediate future, we must avoid a spill over of the conflict in the region. With our US allies and regional partners, we are constantly reaching out to all actors in the region to try to prevent it.

In parallel, we must work on de-escalation in Gaza and a humanitarian solution. All EU Member States back immediate pauses in hostilities. Humanitarian pauses, cease-fire, truces... the name does not really matter, what matters is to limit the suffering of the Palestinian civilian populations and Israeli hostages.

We need to ensure that a flow of humanitarian aid in quantities that meet the needs of the civilian population, including fuel, enters Gaza each day. There is already a shortage of food and the situation is especially dire in Gaza's hospitals. According to the World Health Organization, 20 out of the 36 hospitals in Gaza have stopped functioning due to a lack of fuel, without which the distribution of clean water and electricity is impossible.

According to the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs,¹ an average of 40 trucks entered each day since the reopening of the Rafah crossing, which is about 20% of what it used to be before the war. Transit capacities need to be increased or more border crossings opened. Another possibility is establishing a maritime corridor to supply Gaza with humanitarian aid via the Mediterranean Sea, as proposed by Cyprus. The EU is currently exploring the practicalities of this plan.

We must also establish safe corridors for the wounded, the sick and foreign nationals, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) must get access to the hostages held by Hamas, whose release must be immediate and unconditional.

Building peace between Israelis and Palestinians

Once the humanitarian situation is consolidated, it will be necessary to move from humanitarian aid to politics. Our efforts will have to concentrate on a medium and long-term solution. A plan for a permanent stabilization that allows for the building of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and the entire region.

At the Foreign Affairs Council on 13 November, I proposed to the ministers a set of principles that should guide the EU's actions on Gaza. Principles we need to pursue in collaboration with our regional and international partners.

They can be summarised in three Yes's and three No's.

No to the forced displacement of the Palestinian people. There cannot be an expulsion of Palestinians into other countries.

No to the amputation of the territory of Gaza or its reoccupation by Israel. There must not be a reduction of Gaza's territory, permanent control of Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force, nor a return of Hamas to govern Gaza.

No to the dissociation of Gaza from the overall Palestinian issue. Our objective must be the resolution to the Palestinian issue as a whole.

Yes to the installation of an interim Palestinian authority in Gaza, under terms of reference and legitimacy defined by a unanimous and unambiguous resolution of the UN Security Council and guaranteed by it. We can think of a renewable resolution that encourages the two sides to reach an agreement, first for Gaza but then also for the West Bank.

Yes to a stronger involvement of Arab states if they agree, trusted by both the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority. Currently, Arab states are not ready to discuss the day after the war. Yet, to achieve a lasting solution we need their commitment, which cannot be only financial. They must be certain that their involvement will not be an end in itself, but a step on a clear path towards a Palestinian state.

Finally, yes to a greater involvement of the European Union in the region.

We must help build a fully sovereign Palestinian state, capable of restoring the dignity of the Palestinians and of making peace with Israel while ensuring the security of both, Israel and Palestine.

Reinforce our commitment to achieving peace

We need to work with our regional partners towards a peace conference, to implement the two-state solution. The situation on the ground has certainly made this solution more difficult to realise now than thirty years ago, but it remains the only viable way to bring peace to the region. Therefore, this has to be our goal and our commitment. Otherwise, we will enter into a spiral of violence perpetuated from generation to generation, from funeral to funeral.

We Europeans, not only out of self-interest, but also out of our moral and political responsibility, have to reinforce our commitment to achieving peace between

Israel and Palestine. A significant part of the EU's future global role, and in particular our relations with many countries of the so-called Global South, will depend on our commitment to help solve this conflict.

ARABS AND EUROPEANS NEED TO ENGAGE MORE TOGETHER TO FIND A SOLUTION

18.11.2023 – Speech (¹⁰²) – *At the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain I made a plea for de-escalation and increased humanitarian assistance for the people of Gaza. I also advocated for the two-state solution as the only viable option for peace in the Middle East region. And I urged our Arab partners to participate in this political process, alongside the European Union*

Let me first thank you for your invitation. The Manama Forum is the place to be, in particular in these challenging times. Happy to be here in Bahrain, which means ‘between two seas’. And this goes beyond geography. Bahrain is a country between different forces, different traditions, a country that plays a moderating role in this region, a role that is much needed and much appreciated in this time of extreme polarisation because the rise of emotional polarisation and the gap between people, governments, is one of the most important challenges of our time. A country that is a beacon in the region and in the world, so thank you very much to the Manama Forum and to the authorities of Bahrain for hosting us.

I want to pay tribute to His Excellency the Crown Prince of Bahrain, who took a bold step beyond the official position of Arab partners last night condemning both sides of the conflict, Hamas and Israel, for what has resulted [in] a tremendous loss of human lives, livelihoods, and hope. And hope in a better future.

We have to move from war to peace

We have to move from war to peace. To de-escalation. And for that we have diplomacy, diplomacy is the tool, our most valuable instrument, but we are far from getting results. I am trying to talk with my mind and my heart also, because I am coming from Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ramallah, and one has to be able to say the same things everywhere.

It would be easy here to get your applause, but if my words had to have meaning. [They] have to be the same when I am talking to the Israelis face to face, when I

(¹⁰²) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gazaisrael-intervention-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-manama-dialogue-bahrain_en

am talking to the families of the people being kidnapped, when I am talking to the families of the victims in the kibbutz, and when I am thinking [about] the families of people being killed in Gaza.

I know it is not easy. I know it is not easy to represent here the European Union. Last year it was much easier. It was just necessary to blame Iran to be applauded. Today it is going to be a little bit more difficult, I know. But I will face this challenge. Honestly. And I think that there are two dimensions.

First humanitarian or, if you want to call it, the way the war is being conducted by Israel in Gaza. And from this point of view, I fully agree with you, Minister Safadi, on the data you have been providing, about the number of casualties, I am not going to repeat that.

The suffering of civilian populations will only increase if we are not able to stop this. And we are working on this. We have increased our humanitarian aid. And certainly, we have to do more. But it does not make any sense to give me dinner tonight if you are going to kill me tomorrow. So yes, humanitarian support is needed, but what is more needed is to stop the cause that humanitarian aid is needed.

One horror does not justify another

And the second one is the political stage. In Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, I met with UN agencies, and they painted a dire picture. They know how the situation is in Gaza. And when you go and you visit the kibbutz and you see what is happening there, you can only think one thing: one horror does not justify another horror. And after the humanitarian stage, there will be unavoidably a political stage and the end game is well known. It is the two-state solution.

However, I hesitate to talk about it. Not because I don't believe in it [or] because I see any other solution. I hesitate because we have been repeating once and again for 30 years: two-state solution. Since Oslo's time. 30 years ago. Two-state solution, two-state solution, two-state solution. And doing nothing or almost nothing to implement it. And I think that, by repeating two-state solution while doing nothing to implement it, we have been giving tactical coverage to the strategy of expanding settlements in the West Bank. In Oslo times there were X and now there are 4 times X: 4 times more settlers. And the Palestinian territory

has been reduced to an archipelago of small pieces of land not interconnected which makes much more difficult the two-state solution that we are preaching.

That is why six months ago I started working with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the Arab League in a very enthusiastic way to try to revive this process, to take that in the centre of the stage. Because it is a fallacy that we could solve the problem in the region by thinking we could have agreements between the Arab States and the State of Israel, forgetting about the Palestinians. They are there. And they have to be taken into account. And there has to be also peace between Israel and Palestine. Otherwise, there will not be peace and no security in the region and in the world.

The Europeans and the Arabs have a particular responsibility

And I think the Europeans and the Arabs have a particular responsibility to engage more in looking for a solution. However, what haunts me is that this mantra that has been repeated once and again maybe was a way of washing our hands and keeping them clear. And we have never delivered.

Therefore talking about the two-state solution without defining the progressive and provisional steps to get there, which can one day lead to it, is not useful. And this is an occasion. Maybe it is a wake-up call for the international community in order to take that seriously. And that's why I have been talking about some way of getting out of that. I was in Tokyo also discussing with my friend [UN] Secretary [Anthony] Blinken and others. And certainly, there are some red lines that we have to define.

These red lines are: no re-occupation and no forced displacement of population. Well, but when you say 'forced displacement of population', think about it. When you are being bombed [and are] starving, you will [be] displaced. Serious forced displacement of the population. We mean no forced displacement of the population out of Gaza because Gaza is a Palestinian territory and should remain a Palestinian territory. So no separation from the territory of Gaza from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. There are no three Palestinian territories. There is one Palestinian territory. So no reduction of the territory of Gaza. Certainly no return to the status quo. No more terrorist attacks from Gaza and against Israel, and this means that Hamas cannot be in control of Gaza any longer.

So who will be in control of Gaza? I think only one could do that. The Palestinian authority. I was in Ramallah, they told me they are ready and willing to take this responsibility. In fact, right now, the schools, the hospitals, and the public services in Gaza are being run by the Palestinian authority. They are paying for it. And there are tens of thousands of staff from the Palestinian authority serving the people in Gaza. But they will need international support. It is not a matter of replacing them, it is a matter of supporting and helping them. And this will require a strong involvement of the Arab countries in the economic and political reconstruction of Gaza, not only the physical reconstruction of Gaza.

I was in Gaza in 2008, after the first bombing of the city, and since then we have reconstructed Gaza physically four times. It is not a matter of rebuilding the buildings. It is a matter of building states. Statehood. And the Arab countries need to take their political responsibilities. And in particular, those among you who have good relations with Israel and also have been trusted by the Palestinian authority. I think Egypt and Jordan have a crucial role to play now but also Saudi Arabia and all of you.

The European Union needs to engage more for a solution

And finally, we the European Union we too need to engage more in looking for a solution. We all need peace between Israelis and Palestinians, more than ever, because never has the polarisation between the north and the south, and within our societies, as alarming as it is today. Thousands of anti-Semitic acts have been deplored in Western societies. This has to be fought.

Yes, Israel deserves security and the Palestinians deserve dignity. Yes, Israel deserves security, and the Palestinians in the West Bank too deserve security. More than 400 of them have been killed since the beginning of the year. So I said clearly in the kibbutz, I said clearly in Ramallah, everywhere; one horror does not justify another. And enduring peace and security cannot be delivered without a political process.

People have no responsibility for the crimes committed in the kibbutz. They don't have to pay for it. Peace has never seemed too far away. But maybe this is an opportunity that we cannot miss. As my friend Shimon Peres told me once: 'War is not inevitable, peace is inevitable'. And as European, I can attest [to] you that this is true. Peace is possible. The only question is: how many innocent lives will need to be lost until we get this realisation? This lies in our hands. Let's work for it.

TWO TAKEAWAYS FROM AN INTENSE MISSION TO THE MIDDLE EAST

21.11.2023 – Blog ^(¹⁰³) – Upon returning from the Middle East, I shared two main takeaways in this blog post. On the one hand, a sense of absolute urgency regarding the dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza. On the other hand, a sense of tenuous hope about a shared desire to work towards a lasting peace in the Middle East.

It has been five very busy days. In Israel, I met President Herzog, Foreign Affairs Minister Cohen, and Minister Ganz, members of the Israeli Defence Forces, two groups of family members of hostages held in Gaza and leading figures from civil society. I then travelled to Ramallah, the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, where I met President Abbas, Prime Minister Shatyyeh and Foreign Minister Malki, as well as leading figures from Palestinian civil society. I also discussed with the UN agencies working in the West Bank and Gaza.

During the following days, I participated in the Manama Dialogue ^(¹⁰⁴) in Bahrain, where I met Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan, Bahrain Foreign Affairs Minister Al Zayani and many regional and international actors. I then travelled to Qatar, where I met the Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Al Thani and finally to Jordan where I was received by King Abdullah II.

I am not going to report on each of these activities in this blog. Instead, I would like to share with you two main takeaways from this trip. On the one hand, a sense of absolute urgency, and on the other, a sense of tenuous hope.

Absolute urgency for the civilian population in Gaza

In terms of absolute urgency, representatives of UN agencies and the Palestinian Authority informed us in detail of the dramatic situation of the civilian population

^(¹⁰³) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/two-takeaways-intense-mission-middle-east_en

^(¹⁰⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gazaisrael-intervention-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-manama-dialogue-bahrain_en

in Gaza regarding the lack of water, food, medical assistance, and shelter resulting from the siege imposed on the enclave at a time when rain and cold are arriving.

They also presented us with the figures of death and destruction brought by the bombing and the military operations. More than 40 % of the housing has been demolished in Gaza and more than 12 000 persons have died according to Gaza health authorities, of which nearly 5000 were children. The information received on the situation on the ground in Gaza, unfortunately, confirmed the worst fears we could have had on this subject before our departure.

The Israeli military explained to us their plan to create a small safe area along the sea in the southern part of Gaza to concentrate there the civilian population in order to carry out ground operations in the south of the enclave. This did not reassure me about the future course of events if we fail to achieve a rapid and durable de-escalation of the military operations.

Very moving meetings with families of hostages

My two meetings with families of hostages were a very moving moment during this trip. It made fully understandable the shock that the Israeli society suffered from the Hamas attack. For many of them, the memory of the Holocaust resurfaced again: "They did it to us just because we are Jews".

Some families reported about the health problems from which many hostages suffer. This underlined, if necessary, the absolute urgency of moving forward on their release to have a chance of returning them alive to their families. They asked me to do all that I could to help release them. I have raised the issue with all my interlocutors during this trip.

I also visited [the kibbutz of Be'eri](#) (¹⁰⁵) where we witnessed, particularly in a school, the destructive violence deployed during the terrorist attack perpetrated on October 7. The Israeli armed forces showed us also some of the barbaric videos recorded by Hamas terrorists during that day.

There is of course no doubt that many actions carried out on 7 October by Hamas were war crimes; however, as I told my Israeli interlocutors, one horror cannot justify another. Respect for human life is what makes the difference between a civilised society and terrorist actors.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ <https://x.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1725140125896597650?s=20>

The issue in Gaza is indeed not only to deliver enough humanitarian aid to allow the civilian population to survive for some more days, but to avoid continuing to endanger their lives. As some of my interlocutors told me, it is of course necessary to provide food, water and medicines but it is even more important to reduce the risk of being killed the next morning.

Our sense of urgency was further heightened by what we heard from UN agencies, Palestinian Authority leaders and civil society representatives in Ramallah regarding the situation in the West Bank. They presented us with the dramatic increase in violence against Palestinians by settlers, who have been given weapons by the government, the growing number of evictions of entire villages, the army incursions, the economic disaster triggered by the revocation of all work permits in Israel and the very negative consequences of the massive cuts in the PA budget decided by the Israeli government. Since the beginning of the year, more than 400 Palestinians have died in the West Bank, about half of them since 7 October. And more than 35 villages have been emptied of their Palestinian population since then.

Unacceptable violence against Palestinians in the West Bank

It is creating tremendous tension, which probably cannot be contained for long, despite the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to prevent escalation. US President Biden, as well as several European leaders, have already required the Israeli government to stop the violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

A race against the clock is obviously on to bring about a de-escalation of the military operations in Gaza and of the violence in the West Bank, failing which the conflict could easily degenerate and spread.

On the tenuous hope side of the medal, although it is not yet recognised by the leaders of the country, the events of the last weeks have started to challenge the dominant idea in the Israeli society that, thanks to strict security measures and rapprochement with Arab countries, Israel could avoid making peace with the Palestinians. Israel is understandably going through a period of intense emotions and tensions but there are still forces inside Israeli society already willing to search for a lasting peace with the Palestinians. I was very moved in particular by a video message of a young woman, a survivor of the Be'eri kibbutz that we visited, asking with much conviction for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the end, only peace can indeed provide real and sustainable security to Israel.

The Palestinian Authority showed a firm resolve and readiness to take over the management of Gaza once the military operations ended. However, to do so, this authority will need a lot of additional support in the coming months. It will also need to be re-legitimised in due time by organising elections throughout the internationally recognised Palestinian territory: Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

A widely shared desire to avoid an escalation of the conflict

On the side of the neighbouring countries, the desire to avoid an escalation of the conflict is also strong and widely shared by the leaders from the Gulf region and from Jordan, as is their commitment to help solve the crucial hostages issue. All the people I spoke to in the region shared our concern that this war should be the last by finding the means to finally put in place the two-state solution that the international community has been advocating for decades.

Despite the huge challenges and urgencies mentioned earlier, there may be a window of opportunity to advance towards peace between Israelis and Palestinians and in the region. We must of course first find ways to free the hostages and protect the lives of the civilian population in Gaza, but in parallel, we need to seize this opportunity before another crisis diverts the world's attention once again. The EU is ready to take its full part of this very challenging work.

TIME TO WORK FOR A LASTING PEACE

22.11.2023 – Speech ^(¹⁰⁶) – *Speaking at the European Parliament in November 2023, I emphasized that the truce agreed a few days earlier should be a first step towards ending the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. However, to permanently break the cycle of violence, the implementation of the two-state solution remains the top priority.*

Mr President, Honourable Members, dear colleague Commissioner Lenarčič.

I have just returned from a five-day mission to the Middle East, the Arab countries, Israel and Palestine. I have sensed the intense emotion with which the events there are experienced.

It should be possible to conduct the debate on what is happening, overcoming the emotion and with a view to [making] peace.

It is true that on 7 October the world saw the largest massacre of Jews since the Second World War, and that it then saw the bombing of Gaza, which the United Nations describes as an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. But it is not a natural catastrophe. It is not an earthquake, nor a flood, it is a catastrophe caused by a blockade that prevents the basic elements for the subsistence of the population from getting through. Another massacre, according to... [interruption due to technical issues with translation].

Look forward to try to build peace

Mr President, I was just saying that I have just returned from a five-day trip to the area where this dramatic conflict is taking place. And that we should be able to overcome the emotion that they - the people who are suffering from it - and look forward to try to build peace.

It should be possible because we are seeing how it has happened in the biggest massacre, the biggest pogrom of Jews after the Second World War. We are seeing how the bombing of Gaza has created a humanitarian catastrophe that is

^(¹⁰⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelgaza-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

unprecedented. But not a humanitarian catastrophe of natural origin, but man-made by cutting off the population's access to basic goods. The United Nations itself calls it "carnage".

It should be possible to recognise Israel's right to defend itself, and at the same time be outraged by what is happening to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank.

It should be possible to defend the right of the Palestinians to have a state, without being labelled anti-Semitic.

It should be possible to criticise the policies of the Israeli Government because the governments of any country can be criticised without you being accused of disliking the Jews. Let us not confuse matters. It is one thing to criticise the government of a country, it is another thing to express your rejection of part of the population. But I also say that demonstrations that show the ugly face of anti-Semitism do not help the Palestinian cause, on the contrary.

At the moment, the International Criminal Court has already started investigations to find out what is going on there. Its Chief Prosecutor, Karim Khan - with whom I have been in contact - has issued grave warnings to all parties, pointing out that Israel has clear obligations, too, with regard to the war it is waging against Hamas. These are not only moral obligations, but they are also legal obligations under the law of armed conflict, and they concern the access of the population to the basic necessities of life and that every school, every hospital, every church, every mosque, are protected places. And unless they lose this protected status as a result of their use for military purposes, they have to be respected.

If there is any doubt as to whether or not that territory or property has lost its protected status, the attacker must assume that it is still protected. He must offer proof that it has lost its status, and he must facilitate the exit of civilians trapped there.

Preventing access to water and food against humanitarian law

Likewise, indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza against Israel are also violations of international humanitarian law. Preventing access - I was one of the first to say that preventing access to water, electricity, and basic goods was a violation of international humanitarian law. And, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court - he says it, I do not say it, he says it - has strongly warned Israel of the need

to make visible efforts without further delay to allow the delivery of food, medicines and anaesthetics to civilians.

The European Union is extremely concerned about what is happening. In particular, we have spoken out against the attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, which continue to increase. The Prosecutor has also referred to them at the International Criminal Court.

You know that I represent the Council and therefore all Member States. You also know that this is not easy. Because sometimes the Member States have not been aligned in the same position. Or, for example, in the vote in the UN General Assembly, where eight voted in favour of a pause for humanitarian reasons, four voted against, the others abstained.

There is a common position of the European Council which, yes, advocates pauses - “pauses” in the plural - and humanitarian corridors, and calls on Israel, when exercising its right of defence, to do so in accordance with humanitarian laws and international laws governing war. But, so far, there have been different statements from different European leaders on how Israel’s right to self-defence is being exercised. And when there is no common position, the High Representative cannot represent it.

He cannot represent it, but he has to keep working to build it. He has to keep working to make it possible for member states to converge on a position that allows them to be a geopolitical force in this conflict.

No military solution to the conflict

This is what we are trying to do, with the conviction that there will be no military solution to this conflict. That you cannot kill an idea. That the only way is to come up with a better idea. And the better idea can only be to recognise that two peoples, who have been disputing the same land for more than 100 years, should and can live together if the international community is committed to it. So far we have not done so.

For 30 years since the Oslo Accords, we have been repeating that “the solution is two states. The solution is two states. The solution is two states. But we have done little or nothing to achieve this. We believed that the problem could be

encapsulated and that we could forget about the Palestinians since the Arab states were already making peace with Israel.

The drama that has unfolded shows us that this is not enough. Peace must also be made between Israel and Palestine. And, in order to make peace between Israel and Palestine, it will be necessary for all of us - and in particular us Europeans - to commit ourselves to overcoming the gigantic pain that the events triggered by the Hamas terrorist attack on the border kibbutz in Gaza have caused.

This can be an occasion, this can be a moment when peace can be built. And this is what the European Union aims to be. We have advanced proposals: the 3 "yeses", and the 3 "noes". Gaza cannot remain under the control of Hamas, it cannot be occupied by Israel again. Gaza cannot be divided. A Palestinian Authority must return to Gaza. The Arab states must commit themselves, and not only by financing reconstruction. And we Europeans must also be an active part of a solution that can only come about through an agreement that allows what we have been calling for years, which is the coexistence of two opposing peoples who must be able to share the same land and the same peace.

Closing remarks

Thank you, Mr President,

I warned you at the beginning that it should be possible to see both sides of the scale. And yes, it must be said again and repeated as many times as necessary: what happened on 7 October is absolutely reprehensible and condemnable and cannot be justified in the name of the right to defend oneself against colonisation, nor in the name of the fight to build a Palestinian state. No.

The 7 October was not an act of defence, it was an act of terror

When you ask "Don't the Palestinians also have the right to defend themselves", what happened on 7 October was not an act of defence. It was an act of terror, attacking defenceless civilians in a premeditated manner.

It must be said as many times as necessary because it seems that some people do not want to hear it when some of us say it. It must also be said that the Molotov cocktails thrown at synagogues in Berlin, or the slogans on the other side of the

world, in Sydney, against Jews have nothing to do with solidarity with the people of Palestine. They only represent the old hatred of the Jewish people which has written the worst page in the history of Europe and which we have to fight every day without exception and without question.

Do we have to repeat it again? Let us do it every day, but let us not for that reason fail to recognise what is happening in the West Bank with a colonisation that goes against United Nations resolutions, or to minimise the mistakes that may have been made by some in this tragedy that has been going on for far too long.

If we want to talk about the law and the law, let us listen to what the very person in charge of applying it - the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court - says when he reminds us that his office, his task, must be carried out not on the basis of emotion, but on the basis of objective and verifiable evidence. And, that he is conducting the investigation necessary to respond to what we now perceive as a drama, and which will then have to be turned into action when the case comes to prosecution in the face of a defence.

Let us not trade emotion for reason. Emotions run high in that part of the world. But it is up to us here to try to overcome them in order to see a way forward together in the search for a peace that cannot be built solely on the military destruction of a terrorist organisation but on the hope of the Palestinian people to be able to live in freedom and dignity. Without that, there will be no peace.

Peace is not only needed for moral reasons

And peace is not just something that is needed for moral reasons. Now that it is so fashionable to talk about the need for virtue. It is not only for virtue, it is for absolute necessity. And the one who most needs the existence of a Palestinian state is Israel. Because the best guarantee of peace and security for Israel is the existence of a Palestinian state within the international order that respects just coexistence. And that is what we must invest in.

And now, allow me to descend a little into a small Spanish-Spanish debate. Mr [Antonio] López Istúriz, Spain does not chair the European Council. As far as I know, the European Council is chaired by Mr Charles Michel. It is not chaired by the Spanish Government. The Spanish Government presides over the rotating Council of the Union, which is something else, and transfers in the field of

international policy have been transferred to the High Representative. Therefore, if you want to criticise someone, criticise me.

It is very difficult to find a balance

And I will certainly need your support more than your criticism. Because, believe me, it is very difficult to find a balance at a time when everyone is only looking after their own pain - and rightly so. And where no one wants to talk about the day after because everyone is in today. One wants to wipe out Hamas and the other wants to avoid more deaths among his people.

But there will be a day after. There will be a day after, and on that day after, is when the European Union has to be at the rendezvous with history and be able to contribute more. Not just as the good Samaritan who comes to help and to minimise the damage that has already been done, but to prevent more damage from happening. Not only with all the humanitarian aid that my colleague Janez [Lenarčič] is developing in an admirable way but also with the political commitment so that that humanitarian aid cannot - do not - have to be about healing wounds. Because there is little point in giving dinner one night if you are going to die the next day under bombs.

What we have to do is humanitarian aid and political commitment, to avoid one and the other. I hope that this Parliament will actively contribute to this solution, also overcoming its logical differences.

WHY A PALESTINIAN STATE IS THE BEST SECURITY GUARANTEE FOR ISRAEL

27.11.2023 – Op-Ed (¹⁰⁷) – *Ahead of the meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona, which brought together representatives of the EU and much of the Arab world, I published this Op-ed in the Financial Times. It argued for swift action towards a two-state solution, emphasising that Israel's long-term security requires the creation of a Palestinian state.*

I have just spent five days in the Middle East. Along with Ukraine, it has become one of the world's most volatile regions. There will be periods of calm that may give the impression that tensions are easing, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains more pervasive than ever and it is here to stay. Our political myopia, to think this conflict was manageable by paying lip service to the two-state solution and then leaving it to fester, must end. Not only for reasons of humanity, justice or morality, but because if we do not fix it now, it may trigger displacement of people, including towards Europe, and exacerbate the risk of terrorism and intercommunity tensions.

The region is again haunted by trauma and rage. Israelis are deeply affected by the carnage of October 7, resulting in over 1,200 people killed and more than 200 hostages. Palestinians face a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, another carnage with more than 13,000 victims, primarily women and children, along with attacks by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. A temporary ceasefire and partial hostage release took effect on Friday. I hope this will create a positive dynamic leading to the release of all hostages and an end to hostilities.

The horrors committed by Hamas and other extremists are detrimental to Palestinian interests. The leaders I met in Ramallah acknowledge this. However, for them, the fundamental issue lies in the Israeli occupation. They struggle to explain to constituents why their freedom of movement is restricted, while illegal settlements flourish and settlers are free to attack them. They also cannot ensure security in the occupied West Bank while Israel is withholding Palestinian tax revenues it collects on the Palestinian Authority's behalf.

(¹⁰⁷) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-palestinian-state-best-security-guarantee-israel_en

One horror does not justify another. Yet each side looks only at its own side of the tragedy, at what happened yesterday or what is happening today. But there will be a tomorrow that neither side is yet able to envisage. Israelis believe they need to eliminate Hamas to guarantee their security. Palestinians prioritise ending Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe and settler provocations.

We must keep the possibility of peace open

Despite these challenges, we must keep the possibility of peace open. My recent trip to the region has strengthened my conviction that the best guarantee for Israel's security is the establishment of a Palestinian state. And, in the short term, we should avoid weakening the Palestinian Authority.

Vacuums cannot persist in nature or in politics. If neither Hamas nor Israel governs Gaza, and neither should, the power vacuum will quickly be filled by uncontrolled forces that could turn Gaza into a failed territory and set off another cycle of violence and terrorism. We have known since Hobbes that a society without a Leviathan, a state, is doomed to violence and chaos.

We have witnessed similar situations unfold too many times before. We have seen the flows of refugees escaping Syria's conflict into Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye. These countries cannot shoulder another major influx of Palestinian refugees. In the words of one of my interlocutors last week, we will not survive another Nakba. And Europe and the international community will not and cannot accept another forced mass displacement of Palestinians.

To prevent Gaza from falling into the hands of uncontrolled armed groups that may destabilise the entire neighbourhood, starting with Israel, the territory must be governed by a state representing its people. Israel's own security requires the creation of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

How and when we achieve this will depend on all of us. One thing is clear: all my interlocutors in the Arab world have accepted Israel's existence and want to engage with it. They recognise the immense opportunity that lies in a peaceful neighbourhood, cross-border cooperation and Israel's potential role as a regional economic driver. But all agree that Arab-Israeli cooperation hinges upon resolving the Palestinian question. There is no way around it.

To move forward, we must aim for a solution based on justice and equal rights for both peoples. This means, first and foremost, the need for security in the whole region and in Europe, which faces the immediate repercussions of instability. As neighbours, we must join forces with partners regionally and across the world to reach a viable, lasting political settlement for the benefit of Israelis, Palestinians and the region. This is also in our own best interests. The EU, alongside some Arab countries, initiated efforts towards this goal with the Peace Day Effort, launched at the UN in September, just before the storm started. We are determined to keep working towards this objective.

STARTING TO WORK FOR THE “DAY AFTER”

29.11.2023 – Blog ^(¹⁰⁸) –*Together with the Jordanian Foreign Minister Safadi I co-chaired the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona. We agreed that peace between Israel and Palestine is a strategic imperative not only for the EU but also for the entire Euro-Mediterranean community and beyond.*

In Barcelona, the Spanish Foreign Minister Albares and the Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, Nasser Kamel, hosted representatives of the 43 Member States of this Union. Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia took also part in the meeting and presented the views of the Arab/Islamic Summit. Israel was regrettably absent. It has its full place in the Union for the Mediterranean and I hope that Israel will participate in these meetings again in the future.

A region haunted by trauma and rage

I shared with the participants the impressions from [my recent mission to the Middle East](#) ^(¹⁰⁹). The region is again haunted by trauma and rage after the massacre of over 1,200 people in Israel and more than 200 taken hostage in Gaza on 7 October. As I explained last week in the [European Parliament](#) ^(¹¹⁰), what happened on this day was a pure act of terror, attacking defenceless civilians in a cold-blooded way. Nothing can ever justify killing unarmed civilians, including many women and children, in their sleep, abducting them or parading their dead bodies in the street.

However, one horror can never justify another.

We have witnessed in recent weeks another carnage in Gaza with more than 15,000 victims, primarily women and children. Large-scale bombardments have turned half of North Gaza into rubble – this would correspond to the destruction of half of Barcelona.

^(¹⁰⁸) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/starting-work-%E2%80%9Cday-after%E2%80%9D_en

^(¹⁰⁹) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/two-takeaways-intense-mission-middle-east_en

^(¹¹⁰) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelgaza-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

The United Nations has described the situation in Gaza as a humanitarian catastrophe. However, it is not a natural disaster, but a man-made one, by depriving the population of basic goods and daily bombing of an intensity that can only be described as indiscriminate.

International humanitarian law applies to everyone

Israel has of course the right to defend itself against Hamas, but as former US President Obama recently said in an [inspiring essay](#) (⁹), “how Israel prosecutes this fight against Hamas matters”. International humanitarian law applies to everyone, at all times, and without exception.

It should be possible to recognise Israel's right to defend itself, and at the same time be outraged by what is happening to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. It should be possible to defend the right of the Palestinians to have a state, without being labelled anti-Semitic. It should be possible to criticise the policy of the Israeli government, because governments of any country can be criticised, without being accused of harming or disliking Jews.

Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan of the International Criminal Court has recalled that the rules that all warring parties must abide by are not only moral imperatives but also binding legal obligations arising from the law of armed conflicts. They cover the population's access to basic needs and designate every school, every hospital, every church and every mosque as a protected place. The use of hospitals and civilians as human shields by Hamas is also a clear breach of International humanitarian law, as are the indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israel.

While our attention is necessarily focused on the catastrophic suffering in Gaza, we must not forget that the conflict is also deteriorating in the occupied West Bank. The many attacks perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and the illegal settlements in themselves are a grave breach of international humanitarian law. They are major obstacles to peace and continue to fuel tensions. In reality, they are a security liability for Israel.

I have thanked Qatar, Egypt and the United States for their role in achieving the temporary ceasefire and partial hostage release, which took effect last Friday. For some of the hostages, a horrific ordeal is finally ending. When I was in Israel, I met some of their families. Their pain was unspeakable. The pause also allows bringing

(⁹) <https://barackobama.medium.com/my-statement-on-israel-and-gaza-a6c397f09a30>

to Gaza shelters, food, medicines and other health supplies, which has been piling up on the Egyptian side of the border. But a lot more is needed and humanitarian aid must reach civilians in the whole Gaza Strip without conditions.

I hope the truce will lead to the release of all hostages and that there will be no return to war because there is no military solution to this conflict. Hamas is not just a terrorist organisation. It is also an idea and you cannot kill an idea. The only way is to replace it with a better idea. And this idea must be a credible political prospect for statehood for the Palestinians. Those two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, who have been fighting for the same land for more than 100 years, must and can live side by side, as we do after centuries of bloody wars between Europeans. No army can guarantee a country's safety better than peace. Several decades of peace between Israel and Egypt and Jordan are proof of that.

A credible peace prospect for the 'day after'

A Palestinian State living in peace and security with Israel is the best and only long-term guarantee for Israel's security. Should we fail to bring it about, we will all suffer from the consequences, in the region, in Europe and beyond.

For our Arab partners, the immediate priority is an end to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. But the 'day after' will come.

The meeting in Barcelona, with much of the Arab world present, was the first occasion to start putting in place some cornerstones of the peace process we want to build. With my co-Chair, Jordanian Foreign Minister Safadi, I did not expect that we would see eye to eye on everything, but in our [joint statement](#)⁽¹¹²⁾, we agreed on the essence: the need for a two-state solution to bring peace to both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis.

We will continue our dialogue to define a credible peace prospect for the Middle East. There are already six points on which I believe we can all agree:

- **First**, there must not be a return of Hamas to Gaza. It has brought nothing but harm to everyone, including to Palestinians.
- **Second**, we oppose any change in the territory of Gaza or its military re-occupation by Israel.

⁽¹¹²⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/union-mediterranean-joint-communiqu%C3%A9-co-presidency-after-8th-regional-forum-barcelona_en

- **Third**, illegal settlements in the West Bank must end and the unity of the Palestinian territory be maintained.
- **Fourth**, the return of revitalised Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza. This process will take time and requires a strong involvement from Arab countries, Europe, the United States and the entire international community.
- **Fifth**, the start of reconstruction immediately after the end of hostilities. To build peace, Palestinians need to see immediate improvements in their social and economic situation.
- **Sixth**, a final political settlement based on the two-state solution.

To make it a reality, we have to draw lessons from previous attempts and show political creativity. It is my conviction that we can only succeed with a strong involvement of the international community. We must build a coalition for peace including those Arab states that have the confidence of both parties, Europe and the United States. This time, our commitment to the two-state solution must be more than just a mantra.

3.

STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE



SECURING THE FUTURE OF EUROPE IN SPACE

25.1.2023 – Blog ^(¹¹³) – *Space has increasingly become a strategic domain for our security. Without security in space, there will be no security on earth. At the 2023 European Space Conference, I underlined that we need powerful, EU-level action to safeguard our security in and through space.*

Every year, the annual [space conference](#) ^(¹¹⁴) brings together the main players in this field from EU institutions, member states, industry, journalism and research. Since the start of my mandate, I have attended every edition, which reflects the importance I attach to the issue of space for Europe's future and its foreign and security policy.

Our lives depend increasingly on what happens in space

The word ‘strategic’ tends to be over-used, but when it comes to space its use is fully justified. Our lives depend increasingly on what happens there, not ‘just’ for the transport sector, IT, telecom or research, but also for core security and defence issues. Moreover, the geo-political competition we see on Earth is projected into space, resulting in a growing level of threat affecting our security.

Space [budgets](#) ^(¹¹⁵) worldwide have increased by 9% in 2022, to €103 billion, a record high. What's more, the spending on space in the defence area grew by 16%, to €48 billion. So, space spending is up a lot but spending on space and defence is up by almost twice as much. How people spend their money is usually a good reflection of their priorities and expectations...

In my [speech](#) ^(¹¹⁶), I made two main points:

First, Russia's war against Ukraine has highlighted how crucial space assets and services are in security terms. For instance, satellite imagery and communications

^(¹¹³) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/securing-future-europe-space_en

^(¹¹⁴) See: <https://spaceconference.eu/>

^(¹¹⁵) See: <https://www.euroconsult-ec.com/press-release/new-record-in-government-space-defense-spending-driven-by-investments-in-space-security-and-early-warning/>

^(¹¹⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-space-conference-opening-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell_en

were (and remain) a game-changer for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the entire population. They provided access to information and situational awareness to help resist the attack. And they kept Ukrainians connected to each other and the outside world.

We have also seen how the ability to deny the use of space to an adversary is part of modern warfare. Indeed, the night before the invasion started, the satellite-based telecommunication network, [VIASAT](#)⁽¹⁷⁾, was targeted by a cyber-attack. A simple, unsophisticated, malicious code managed to bring down entire parts of a big space communications network, used by the Ukrainian military.

This cyber-attack also had spillover effects inside the EU: wind turbines in one of our member states went down. And it took time to understand the link between the energy infrastructure and the satellite network commanding it.

This example raises key questions:

- How many pieces of critical infrastructure in the EU depend on space services?
- And how well are these assets and services protected?

This brings me to the second point that I made: we need to answer these questions and do it at the EU level.

The war against Ukraine has given us extra motivation to enhance EU security and defence including space, while the [Strategic Compass](#)⁽¹⁸⁾ gives us a sense of direction and concrete proposals. During the past months, we have been working together with Commissioner Breton on a dedicated EU strategy on space security and defence, to be presented in March. It is built around five key work strands:

1. Improve our common understanding of space threats

We need to reinforce our capacity to analyse space-based risks, threats and vulnerabilities. And get a better insight into counter-space capabilities and intentions of our competitors.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See: <https://www.viasat.com/>

⁽¹⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

2. Protect our space infrastructure and make it more resilient

We need to reduce our strategic dependencies in the space sector, protecting supply chains and developing critical space technologies.

3. Develop our capacity to respond to threats

We must use all space tools, organise regular exercises and develop options for solidarity and mutual assistance.

4. Strengthen our space capabilities for security and defence

We need to make full use of space-based assets for security and defence, including the [EU SATCEN](#) (¹¹⁹); strengthen dual-use innovation and invest more in capability development.

5. Cooperate better with our partners

We must continue to promote responsible behaviour in space at multilateral and bilateral levels and reinforce cooperation with our closest partners, for example with NATO. The [Joint Declaration on EU NATO Cooperation](#) (¹²⁰), signed earlier this month, identifies space as one of the new areas of cooperation. Let's build on that in concrete terms.

Security and space are flipsides of the same coin: without security, there can be no future in space. And without security in space, there will be no security on Earth.

(¹¹⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-satellite-centre-opening-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-exhibition-marking_en

(¹²⁰) See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2018/07/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration/>

WHY WE CREATED THE SCHUMAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE FORUM

22.3.2023 – Blog ^(¹²¹) – *The first edition of the Schuman Security and Defence Forum brought together high-level political and military leaders and think tankers. We discussed how to deepen our cooperation as the EU takes on greater responsibilities on security and defence.*

In a world of power shifts and radical uncertainty, of high-intensity wars and hybrid threats, one thing is clear: we all need partners, to protect global security and achieve common goals. As the European Union, we are well aware that we need to invest in these partnerships - as they do not deliver just by themselves.

So, one year ago, when we adopted the Strategic Compass, we committed ourselves to organise a special forum where the EU would invite its partners to discuss the changing security landscape; what the EU can offer; and what the EU and its partners can do together. This is perhaps a simple idea but one that takes time and effort to achieve. And that is precisely why we created the [Schuman Forum](#) ^(¹²²).

Ministers and Chief of Defence from over 50 partner countries

I am pleased that we had Ministers and Chiefs of Defence from over 50 partner countries and organisations attending from four continents, in addition to many Foreign and Defence Ministers from our 27 EU member states plus influential think tankers and analysts. It demonstrates the genuine interest of our partners to strengthen their cooperation with the EU in the area of security and defence.

The meeting was named after Robert Schuman for a reason. He is famous, at least in Europe, for saying that: “*Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity*”.

^(¹²¹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-we-created-schuman-security-and-defence-forum_en

^(¹²²) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/schuman-security-and-defence-forum_en

What not many people know is that the very first sentence of his [Schuman Declaration](#)⁽¹²³⁾ was: “*World peace cannot be safeguarded without making the creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it*”.

These words by Schuman inspired the creation of the Forum. We all know that today world peace is in danger; that we need creative efforts and partnerships to protect it; and that we must work, step by step, to build concrete solidarity among us.

I stressed in my [opening remarks](#)⁽¹²⁴⁾ that the war against Ukraine and the wider changes in the security landscape left us no choice but to change the EU’s approach to security and defence.

Just a few weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, European leaders adopted the Strategic Compass and this week we published the first annual [implementation report](#)⁽¹²⁵⁾. It shows how we are advancing to build a Europe that can better protect its citizens and, in so doing, becomes more credible and attractive for our partners.

We need to carry a greater share of the security burden

As always in Europe, we have a phrase for this. We call it strategic responsibility. We know that we need to be more active, take more risks and carry a greater share of the security burden. And we know that for all this we need to work more closely with partners. Not just regarding Ukraine but wherever peace and security are at stake.

In the different panels of the Forum, a wide range of challenges were discussed – from emerging threats and the impact of technologies, to the imperative of investing in resilience and prevention, to the privileged role of regional and multilateral organisations. I was struck by the positive tone of the discussions and the shared desire to be ambitious and result-oriented.

⁽¹²³⁾ See: https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/20_69_schuman_declaration1950_as_en.pdf

⁽¹²⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/schuman-security-and-defence-forum-keynote-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell_en

⁽¹²⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-high-representative-presents-first-annual-report-its-implementation_en

A lot of common ground emerged: many Ministers stressed the need for tailored partnerships, avoiding one size-fits-all approaches; or the need to engage for the long-term; to draw lessons learned from past mistakes; to use a broad prism for what security means and recognise that threats are inter-linked; and that partnerships must go beyond governments and involve the whole of society.

In my closing remarks (¹²⁶) I drew some first conclusions identifying some action tracks that we will pursue in the months ahead. We will organise a second edition of the Schuman Forum next year, to review together with our partners the progress made on those conclusions, and discuss the next steps.

My personal conclusion from the inaugural Schuman Forum is that dialogue is the best investment in partnership. And for dialogue to succeed, it is vital to listen. I was struck by how one Minister said that even if we share the same values we do not always share the same priorities - which is only logical given the differences in history and geography. We need to factor in these differences and invest in building bridges as we did during this Forum. Many partners expect more from us and we must keep in mind that the nature of security is global: we are in this together.

As EU we need to deliver on the commitments we have made and the expectations we have raised, not just close to home, in Ukraine and the Western Balkans, but around the world.

(¹²⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/schuman-security-and-defence-forum-closing-speech-high-representative-vice-president-josep_en

GEOPOLITICS OF THE GREEN TRANSITION AND IMPROVING EU'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

28.3.2023 – Blog ⁽¹²⁷⁾ – At the March 2023 European Council, we discussed the Net Zero Industry and the Critical Raw Materials Acts. They have major implications for our foreign policy. We need to avoid that our ambitions to reduce excessive dependencies are seen as 'green protectionism'.

The COVID-19 pandemic – on masks and respirators - and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – regarding gas and oil - have shown how the EU's excessive dependency on certain countries for critical raw materials and key technologies or even ordinary products, can have serious consequences in times of crisis. This is the case even despite existing safeguards, such as long-term contracts, international trade agreements or multilateral rules provided by the World Trade Organisation.

Dependencies can be weaponised

We learned the hard way that over-concentration of our value chains can't always deliver what we need. Dependencies can be weaponised and global markets may not be able to satisfy all demands at all times. As said during the Ibero-American summit in Santo Domingo, looking for the cheapest price may sometimes become very expensive...

In fact, during the last decade, we witnessed the beginning of a backlash against global trade integration that has been accelerated by the pandemic and Russia's war in Ukraine. Governments and multinational companies are adapting their trade links to accommodate the new challenges. The benefits of economic integration are being re-evaluated through the lens of national security, including most notably by China and the US. Economic security must also become an integral part of the EU's foreign and security policy.

This experience has reinforced our decision to accelerate our green transition – not only to take our full part in the critical fight against climate change but also

⁽¹²⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/geopolitics-green-transition-and-improving-eu%E2%80%99s-economic-security_en

to end our excessive dependence on Russia and on fossil fuels more generally, which we have to import more and more at ever-increasing costs. This is what we have undertaken with the [RePowerEU plan](#)⁽¹²⁸⁾.

The need not to exchange one dependence for another

However, we have to be careful not to exchange one type of dependence (on Russian energy imports) for another one, as we currently rely principally on imports for a large number of technologies and raw materials needed for the green transition. We are particularly dependent on China, which has managed to build up a dominant position through a high level of state-directed investments and massive subsidies.

At this time when we are seeking to diversify our supplies, the fear of deindustrialisation in Europe has been further fuelled by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) adopted last summer in the United States. The European Union welcomes of course that the United States, which is still a major emitter of greenhouse gases, is adopting a very ambitious green transition policy.

However our American partners have chosen to achieve this goal through a very different logic than ours based on carbon pricing. It is widely considered an essential element to transition to net zero economies by encouraging greenhouse gas emitters to invest in green technologies, and letting the market actors choose the best way to achieve decarbonisation. It is the logic of the [EU Emissions Trading System](#)⁽¹²⁹⁾ (EU ETS), a cornerstone of the EU's climate policy. EU ETS has been [reformed recently to make it more efficient](#)⁽¹³⁰⁾ and expand its scope.

But if countries scale up carbon prices unilaterally they risk losing competitiveness without reducing global emissions because businesses could transfer their production to other areas with lower carbon prices (the so-called "carbon leakage"). That is the reason why, the EU decided in parallel to introduce a [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism \(CBAM\)](#)⁽¹³¹⁾ on some heavily GHG-emitting industrial products to maintain a level playing field with our partners.

⁽¹²⁸⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_3131

⁽¹²⁹⁾ See: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en

⁽¹³⁰⁾ See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221212IPR64527/climate-change-deal-on-a-more-ambitious-emissions-trading-system-ets>

⁽¹³¹⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_3661

But in the US, this carbon pricing approach has long been politically very sensitive. Instead, with the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act), the current administration proposed to give massive public subsidies to domestic suppliers and consumers of green technologies, reserving the benefit of these subsidies to products manufactured in the US.

It has profound implications for the EU's climate diplomacy. The [EU has engaged in a dialogue with the US](#)⁽¹³²⁾ to limit the effects of IRA's discriminatory measures on European producers. This new context implies also that we have to take additional measures to re-establish a level playing field – with both China and the US – in key technologies and critical raw materials related to the green transition.

That is why, the European Commission presented recently a comprehensive legislative package including a [Net Zero Industry Act](#)⁽¹³³⁾ (NZIA) and a [Critical Raw Materials \(CMR\) Act](#)⁽¹³⁴⁾. These texts have now to be discussed and agreed on by the Council and the European Parliament, as we have begun to do at the last European Council. However, this process will take several more months, so I am not going to detail here the precise content of the package, which is likely to evolve in the future (but see the presentation made by [my fellow Commissioners Frans Timmermans and Thierry Breton](#)⁽¹³⁵⁾).

Re-establish a “level playing field”

I want to emphasise here the general thinking that guides us in this matter and what this means for our external partners. This package indicates a certain paradigm shift for the European Union. The Union has helped build a global economic system based on open and rules-based trade, pushed for respecting and advancing social and environmental sustainability standards, and we remain fully committed to those values. However, the weakening of the WTO and the increasing weaponisation of trade has forced us to equip ourselves with industrial policy instruments, to re-establish a “level playing field” and to reduce excessive dependencies which could be weaponised.

In strategic sectors related to the green transition, actors will benefit from support measures by the EU, including public financing and faster planning procedures.

⁽¹³²⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_23_1612

⁽¹³³⁾ See: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/net-zero-industry-act_en

⁽¹³⁴⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1661

⁽¹³⁵⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_1665

The proposed Acts also set out a range of measures to improve the EU's competitiveness, via investments in research, innovation and skills and introducing the possibility for regulatory sandboxes to test innovative new approaches.

Given our high import dependencies for some critical technologies and raw materials, these changes will affect our partners. However, our Green Deal Industrial Plan is not targeted to any particular country or to embark on any form of 'green protectionism' or 'regulatory imperialism', as some of our critics claim. In fact, our desire to reduce excessive dependencies should create new opportunities to develop our trade relations with many partners.

Regarding critical raw materials, in particular, we intend to promote a trade and economic agenda towards our partners that maximises mutual benefits as opposed to a mere "extractive" approach. We will use the framework of the [Global Gateway](#)⁽¹³⁶⁾ strategy to support projects which contribute to the diversification of the EU's supply chain while also contributing to our partner countries' efforts to improve social standards, pursue twin transition and develop local value added. This is especially important in our relation with the Latin American countries, which have important reserves of critical raw materials, as lithium, and intend to take advantage of it to develop their own industrial capacities.

As High Representative and Vice President of the Commission, I am in charge of ensuring that our internal policies are and stay coherent with our foreign policy priorities. On these topics, like on any other, we remain strong supporters of multilateralism. And in particular, we remain committed to the international rules established by the WTO that protect the poorest countries from the encroachments of the most powerful ones.

It is indeed our firm intention to combine economic security policy measures aiming at reducing our excessive dependencies with the preservation of a global open rule-based trade system, which ensures a level-playing-field. This is in our strategic interest. We will discuss extensively the changes in European industrial policy with our partners and in particular the new opportunities for cooperation that these policies can present for them.

⁽¹³⁶⁾ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

LESSONS FROM THE WAR IN UKRAINE FOR THE FUTURE OF EU DEFENCE

29.5.2023 – Blog ⁽¹³⁷⁾ – *Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call for the EU. In this blog post, I reflected on the lessons we need to draw for EU defence and what our future military capabilities need to look like, as we face the return of large-scale state-to-state conflict to Europe.*

With Russia`s invasion of Ukraine, conventional high-intensity land war has come back to our borders. We have not seen a war between nations of such intensity in decades in Europe. And this war is lasting much more than anyone could have expected, including Putin. The European Union is supporting Ukraine to face Russia's aggression, but also Europeans have to understand the fundamentally changed security landscape and new threats we face – not just on our eastern flank – and draw the right conclusions regarding the military assets we need. This should and will trigger a political debate in our democratic societies on what to learn from the consequences of this war and on how we should face challenges of this nature.

The debate has already started and as head of the European Defence Agency ⁽¹³⁸⁾ (EDA), I shared last week the first EDA analysis of the implications of the war for the future of defence capabilities with EU Ministers of Defence. It is clear that it is not enough to increase our defence spending, but that we must above all increase resources in a more coordinated way. Among member states and in coherence with NATO.

Operational and strategic implications

One of the biggest lessons we can draw from the war, is based on Ukraine's army's remarkable ability to adapt successfully while resisting one of the world's largest armies. It shows once again how much success on the battlefield depends on motivation, proper training and preparation. Only a highly trained cadre of soldiers can carry out combined operations relying on all capabilities, including infantry, artillery and air support. We have seen how Russian commanders have

⁽¹³⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/lessons-war-ukraine-future-eu-defence_en

⁽¹³⁸⁾ See: <https://eda.europa.eu/>

failed to effectively coordinate their in terms of numbers superior capabilities. A professional, educated and trained cadre of officers is what is called in military parlance a true ‘force multiplier.’

Ukrainians have also been very innovative and successful in command and control. We should further invest in existing or new capabilities to ensure command and control systems that allow rapidly assessing the situation and reacting to it. Technology proved important, but the ways it is used are changing. Every day it becomes clearer how well Ukraine has used electronic warfare to degrade enemy radio signals and radars and to disable drones and missiles. Electronic warfare capabilities, including but not limited to cyber, are increasingly relevant. Air and missile defence or precision ground-based fire have also proved to be of crucial importance. Modern air defence systems, in particular, remain essential to protect civilians and critical infrastructure and to ensure freedom of manoeuvre at an operational level.

What we have learnt from the ongoing war is also that high-intensity large-scale protracted operations entail an extremely high rate of equipment loss and must be therefore backed up by large stockpiles. In the recent past, we have often focused in Europe on a limited amount of equipment with the highest possible quality, leaving aside considerations on quantities. While we must obviously keep our technological edge, we should carefully consider how to balance quantity and quality in some areas. As the saying goes, in war, quantity has a quality of its own. Ukraine has also used limited capabilities and older weapons successfully by tailoring them precisely to the threats they face, using also commercial technologies and assets. We can learn from that, too.

Lastly, the war has once again demonstrated the importance of sustainable, flexible and effective logistics – from supplying frontline troops or providing medical support to rapidly repairing or modifying systems and equipment. Military mobility remains critical to react to any threat and achieve operational superiority. As General Bradley famously remarked: “Amateurs talk strategy. Professionals talk logistics”. And this will become even more evident in the coming months.

The need for a more resilient industrial base

Beyond the operational lessons, this war has also made it clear that we need a broader, more resilient and more reactive industrial and technological base. This is indeed a fundamental building block of European defence. Such a base must

help increase the readiness of European militaries and produce weapons that member states can use together, to be interoperable in the NATO framework. We need more innovation for our defence industry and our military capabilities. In that regard, the Council called for me as Head of the Agency to strengthen the role of EDA in fostering defence innovation. As part of the implementation of the [Strategic Compass](#) (¹³⁹), the Agency established a [Hub for European Defence Innovation](#) (¹⁴⁰) and this week the Agency will hold the [second edition of the European Defence Innovation Days](#) (¹⁴¹), bringing together innovators from across Europe to discuss and show-case cutting-edge defence technologies developed at national and European level to make our armed forces better prepared for the future battlefield.

Frankly, today our defence industry lacks critical mass and reactivity, with long lead times that limit our ability to ramp up production. Our recent [proposal for an 'Act in Support of Ammunition Production'](#) (¹⁴²), offers concrete measures to ensure security of supply for ammunition, which is needed to [help bring a just peace in Ukraine](#). (¹⁴³) We need also to tackle the excessive dependency on external suppliers to enhance this security of supply.

There is a lot to learn from what we are witnessing in Ukraine and we should keep this in mind as we work on future defence capabilities. While at this stage these lessons can only be considered preliminary, it is clear that the return of high-intensity conflict to Europe requires a change of mindset. I remain convinced that a joint and coordinated EU approach is the best way to go to achieve more effective, efficient and interoperable military capabilities coherent with NATO. Our discussion in the [EDA Steering Board last week](#) (¹⁴⁴) took us further. It will feed into the revision of the EU Capability Development Priorities later this year and I hope that in the current circumstances, this important analysis will attract the attention it deserves.

(¹³⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

(¹⁴⁰) See: <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2022/05/17/hub-for-eu-defence-innovation-established-within-eda>

(¹⁴¹) See: <https://edid23.eda.europa.eu/>

(¹⁴²) See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_2569

(¹⁴³) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-buying-ammunition-together-will-help-bring-just-peace-ukraine_en

(¹⁴⁴) See: <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2023/05/23/meeting-of-european-defence-agency-steering-board>

EUROPE MUST DEFEND ITS INTERESTS IN SPACE AND PROTECT ITS ACCESS TO SPACE

21.6.2023 – Op-Ed (¹⁴⁵) – *In this op-ed in La Tribune, co-authored with Commissioner Breton, we pointed out that, increasingly, the future of our critical infrastructures depends on what happens in the cyber domain and in space. Europe must be able to better protect its interests.*

As space becomes an area of geopolitical competition, it becomes increasingly cluttered and contested. Take, for example, Russia's decision in November 2021 to test an anti-satellite missile, generating space debris that will persist for decades. Since then, Russia has threatened to attack other satellites. In addition, the night before Russia invaded Ukraine, a cyber-attack knocked out part of the Viasat satellite telecommunications network, affecting many EU Member States. More generally, we know that our competitors are testing and deploying various means of denying access to space systems and services: anti-satellite weapons, spoofing and jamming of satellite signals, cyber-attacks, hostile takeovers of space companies, etc.

In short, our security in space is at risk, which means that our security on earth is just as much at risk. Space services are essential to our economy, the daily lives of our citizens and our security. It does not matter whether these services are provided by EU space systems such as Galileo (for positioning, navigation and timing), Copernicus (for Earth observation) or IRIS (for secure communications) or by other public and private space players operating in Europe. In all cases, the deprivation of essential space services would have dramatic consequences.

Europe must protect its interests

Europe must therefore defend its interests in space and protect its access to space. This is what the EU's strategic compass advocates. That's why last month we presented the very first European Space Strategy for Security and Defence. The new strategy marks a paradigm shift in several respects.

(¹⁴⁵) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/%C2%AB-leurope-doit-d%C3%A9fendre-ses-int%C3%A9r%C3%AAts-dans-lespace-et-prot%C3%A9ger-son-acc%C3%A8s-%C3%A0-lespace-%C2%BB-avec-thierry_en

Firstly, it will give us the means to better understand the hostile actions of our competitors. By supporting national capabilities, encouraging information sharing and drawing on the intelligence community of our Member States, we will improve our common understanding of space threats and strengthen our knowledge of the space domain to detect irresponsible and hostile behaviour at an early stage.

Secondly, we will ensure that essential space services are stronger and more resilient, notably through a new European space law that will define common rules for safety, security and sustainability in space. This new legal framework will promote the exchange of information on security incidents, as well as cross-border coordination and cooperation. The aim is for all Member States to have a common minimum level of resilience for critical space services or to develop coordinated national preparedness and resilience plans and emergency protocols.

We will also reduce our strategic dependencies by protecting our space supply chains and developing critical space technologies. We will do this by boosting our space industry, building on our established industrial base, as well as so-called ‘New Space’ companies.

Organising a response capability

Thirdly, we will organise our capacity to react when our security interests are at risk. While at present the EU is responsible for responding to space threats only when they affect elements of EU space programmes, our ambition is to extend the EU response mechanism to threats to any space service or infrastructure affecting the security of the EU and its Member States.

In addition, like the cyber diplomacy toolbox for cyber-attacks, we will strengthen the mechanisms and frameworks which, on the basis of solid evidence, will enable us to react and take proportionate and timely response measures at the EU level, whether technical, diplomatic, economic or military. Regular space exercises will also help us to test and improve our response mechanisms.

Fourth, we will make the most of our space infrastructures to support defence and security. Satellite imagery made a major contribution to helping Ukraine withstand Russia’s attack. IRIS, our new secure connectivity programme, will ensure the security of government communications, including defence applications. We will also develop new space services in the field of Earth observation while strengthening the EU Satellite Centre’s unique capacity for geospatial intelligence analysis.

Guaranteeing autonomous access to space

We will take steps to guarantee the EU's autonomous access to space in the long term, which is essential to be able to respond rapidly to any incident in space. We will support the development of innovative and responsive launch solutions, such as micro-launchers and reusable launchers, which will meet the needs of the defence community.

Finally, we know that cooperation with our partners is essential. We can count on our partners and allies within NATO, with whom we will continue to develop dialogues on space security and defence.

The EU will also redouble its efforts to promote responsible behaviour in space and prevent any arms race through multilateral norms and rules. Diplomacy remains our first line of defence. As a concrete example, we welcome and support the ban on destructive anti-satellite missile tests recently proposed by the United States and to which some EU Member States have already acceded, in line with the 2022 United Nations General Assembly resolution on this subject.

Faced with evolving and intensifying threats, the EU is adapting its approach to space by fully integrating the issues at stake for our security and defence. This is all part of building the geopolitical Europe that our citizens expect.

ECONOMIC SECURITY: A NEW HORIZON FOR EU FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

23.6.2023 – Blog ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ – *To protect EU interests against the weaponization of economic ties, we adopted a joint communication on economic security. We need to find the right balance between the openness of our economy, which we want to keep and the protection of our values and interests.*

In the current geopolitical context, dominated by increasing technological competition the boundaries between economy and security are increasingly blurred. At the core economic security is about using economic measures and tools for security purposes. Shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have highlighted the risks inherent in excessive economic dependencies. Such risks – unless properly managed – can challenge the functioning of our democratic societies and of our economies by limiting our ability to act. At heart, this is about our freedoms and sovereignty.

This new economic security paradigm is to a large extent driven by the strategic rivalry between China and the US and the challenge it poses to the European economy and security. All types of connections can indeed be “weaponised” by other states to gain leverage and advance economic or geopolitical interests, for example through coercion, market manipulation or deliberate supply chain disruptions. We have observed it recently in our relations with Russia or China.

A European economic security framework

It is therefore crucial for the EU to develop an economic security framework driven by its own objectives and interests, aiming to maximise the benefits of European traditional economic openness, which we want to keep while minimising the risks that stem from excessive dependencies and vulnerabilities. We do not seek to limit the development or prosperity of any country and should not fuel, neither the dynamics towards an increased fragmentation of the world economy nor the potentially self-fulfilling prophecy of a world divided into two different economic blocks.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/economic-security-new-horizon-eu-foreign-and-security-policy_en

But we want to ensure that the EU is well-equipped to protect its own security and interests. We know that it can be a delicate balancing act: de-risking presents its own risks. We must therefore be very selective and use the fundamental principles of proportionality and precision.

Some of our member states have taken action by introducing measures to address strategic dependencies in critical raw materials and other inputs or by taking national measures to address leakage risks for very sensitive technologies. However, no member state acting alone can ensure its economic security.

The Union has already at its disposal different tools to protect its economic security with the Foreign Direct Investments screening, export controls, the recently agreed Anti-Coercion Instrument or the restrictive measures of the EU's CFSP. The EU is also developing new tools such as the Chip Act, the Net Zero Industrial Act or the Critical Raw Materials Act...

The case for using all our respective tools together

With this new economic security strategy, we make the case for harnessing the political will to use all our respective tools together, and do so in a closely coordinated way. In this communication, we have identified a non-exhaustive list of risks that we need to monitor closely:

- risks to the resilience of supply chains, including energy security;
- risks to the physical and cyber security of critical infrastructure;
- risks related to technology security and technology leakage;
- risks of weaponization of economic dependencies or economic coercion.

The next step will be to assess precisely those risks in order to conclude whether using our existing tools effectively can allow us to limit those risks or whether new tools are needed. Far from being a merely technical exercise, this assessment, which should be reviewed every six months, deals with very sensitive issues and may have potentially profound implications for the EU's bilateral relations with third countries.

Regarding potential new instruments, the issue of controlling outbound investment was raised. We would enter uncharted territory and there is currently no consensus among EU member states on this issue. The build-up of a European economic security framework cannot be encapsulated in a single document

discussed at a single moment. It should rather be seen as a process that will necessarily take time to build consensus among member states, involving also the private sector and the different EU institutions. Making clear who does what and establishing the right governance for this strategy will be both essential and challenging.

This new economic security framework does not require to change the competencies of the Union but it requires for sure to change our working methods. It has often been pointed out that we work too much in silos and that staff in the different Directorates-General of the Commission, the EEAS and the member states should cooperate more closely. With the emergence of the economic security conundrum, we can no longer continue to deal with our partners on the one hand about our commercial relations and on the other about questions of security and of international relations. All forms of relations must take into account the security policy dimension and we must urgently reorganise ourselves accordingly.

Intensify cooperation with third countries on economic security

We will also have to intensify the cooperation with third countries on economic security issues. This discussion is naturally taking place in and among other key economies around the globe. The G7 Leaders Statement on Economic Security and Resilience of last May aims to establish close cooperation on issues such as resilient supply chains, resilient critical infrastructure, economic coercion, harmful practices in the digital sphere and leakage of critical and emerging technologies that threaten international peace and security. And we have started to work closely with our like-minded G7 partners on these issues. However, we need also to work on this issue with the broadest possible range of partners.

We have to discuss in depth on economic security issues with our other international partners to avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary twitching. We are and remain indeed strong supporters of an open rules-based world economic order. Multilateralism is in our DNA.

We need to adapt rapidly to a more dangerous environment. However, to really strengthen our economic security, we need to adjust carefully our actions to avoid destabilising our relations with our global partners. As HR/VP, in charge of coordinating our foreign and security policy between the member states in the Council and the Commission, this delicate balancing act will be at the heart of my

work during the rest of my mandate and it will be for sure the same for my successors for years to come.

RETHINKING ‘SECURITY’ IN A WORLD OF POWER POLITICS

3.7.2023 – Blog ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ – *In this blog post, I reflected on the changing nature of security. Today we are facing both classical and new types of conflicts; both visible and invisible wars. As the EU, we need to become fully aware of the whole picture, connect the dots and act united.*

Security used to be mostly associated in people's minds with military threats and defence capabilities. As Russia's war against Ukraine rages, it is clear that this type of conflict is, sadly, far from over. But we also see 'war by other means', as the title of the [book](#) ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ by Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris put it. More countries are using all manner of tools, short of military force, to influence, coerce or otherwise try to get ahead.

In many ways, this is nothing new. To try to coerce and force changes in people's behaviour without going to war is as old as history. I well remember the long economic blockade of the Franco regime in Spain after World War 2 or the even longer US economic blockade of Cuba nowadays. And of course, we ourselves have adopted restrictive measures, often colloquially called 'sanctions', against Russia.

The notion of security is changing and expanding

Nowadays the very notion of security is changing and expanding. These days many adjectives are put before the noun security: we hear about energy and climate security, cyber security, food security, economic security etc..

All this gives renewed importance to the 'security' part of my job as High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy. And it enhances the relevance and role of the [EU Institute for Security Studies](#) ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ as much as the war against Ukraine has enhanced the importance of the work of the European

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/rethinking-%E2%80%98security%E2%80%99-world-power-politics_en

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ See: <https://www.cfr.org/book/war-other-means>

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ See: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/>

Defence Agency. I chair the Board of both organisations and I would like to stress the importance of their work.

Last week we had the annual conference of the EU Institute for Security Studies. This conference is where and when Europe's strategic community gets together and discusses what threats we face – and what we can do about them. For me, it was [a good opportunity](#) ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ to set out what security means and make some links with the Joint Communication on economic security presented the week before (see [my previous blog post](#) ⁽¹⁵¹⁾ on that).

It was also a good occasion to thank the Institute's outgoing Director, Gustav Lindstrom, for his good work during the last 5 years. The Board of the Institute has recently appointed Steven Everts as the new Director of the EU ISS. He will now continue to lead the vital the Institute's vital work to support EU foreign and security policy, making the best use of its intellectual capacities and creativity while maximising its policy relevance and visibility.

In my [introductory remarks](#), ⁽¹⁵²⁾ I tried to explain why and how we should adopt a broad approach to “security” and formulate an integrated response.

As a start one has to look at the factors shaping the new global landscape: the trend towards bipolar US-China strategic competition spreading to all areas, coupled with messy multi-polarity and growing assertiveness and hedging behaviour by emerging countries.

In security terms, we see both old and new wars: brutal, high-intensity wars on our doorstep and arms races worldwide. In Europe, defence spending has gone up by 30% since 2013, but in Asia it has risen by 45% as [I said at the Shangri La Dialogue](#) ⁽¹⁵³⁾. If people spend more on defence, that is because they feel insecure. At the same time, we see the rise in hybrid wars and the weaponization of everything.

From an economic point of view, we see a paradigm shift from the primacy of open markets to the primacy of security; from ‘just in time’ to ‘just in case’. Linked to

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/rethinking-%E2%80%98security%E2%80%99-world-power-politics-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-eu-iss-annual_en

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/economic-security-new-horizon-eu-foreign-and-security-policy_en

⁽¹⁵²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/rethinking-%E2%80%98security%E2%80%99-world-power-politics-speech-high-representative-josep-borrell-eu-iss-annual_en

⁽¹⁵³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/singapore-speech-hrvp-borrell-shangri-la-dialogue_en

this, we have growing competition over critical raw materials, especially those needed for the green transition. Finally, on technology, we see strategic competition over technological supremacy. Technology is both a tool to fight with and an arena to fight in.

If you add all this up, two main conclusions emerge:

1. This is a competitive, power-political world. In a world of giants, you need size and scale to survive: Europe must have the ambition to be a pole – and act as one.
2. We need to see the whole board as everything is connected. We need a broad prism and an integrated security approach. Together with the green and digital transitions, maybe this should be the ‘third transition’ for the EU?

In principle, we as the EU have certain advantages in dealing with this new global landscape. We can cover the full spectrum of threats with a full spectrum of tools: diplomacy, civilian and military crisis management tools, financial and technical assistance, restrictive measures, regulatory powers, etc..

Of course, in practice, we often act in silos. And the need for unanimity means we can be slow. However, the war against Ukraine has accelerated our ability to think and act in geopolitical terms. Take our impressive success in ending our toxic dependence on Russian gas imports in less than 12 months. Nobody thought we could do it, but we have, cutting in half Russia’s 2022 energy revenues.

Or, take our work on countering foreign interference and the manipulation of information. This is a growing threat to our security and democracies with adversaries trying to conquer not territory but the hearts and minds of people. A few years ago, we had nothing in the EU to counter this. Now we have Task Forces in the EEAS, the [EUvsDisinfo](#) (¹⁵⁴) sites and a good network with member states, civil society and the private sector.

Economic security as part of foreign policy

Perhaps the most topical example is the debate around economic security and resilience. It is right at the top of the European agenda and was also discussed by EU leaders at their [last Summit](#) (¹⁵⁵).

(¹⁵⁴) See: <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>

(¹⁵⁵) See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2023/06/29-30/>

The starting point has to be that open markets, economic integration and rules-based trade have been good for our prosperity. They have also helped to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty worldwide. However, clearly we are now in a new historical phase. The time of “*la mondialisation heureuse*” is over. The benefits of economic integration are being re-evaluated through the lens of national security.

We have seen clear examples of how others, including adversaries, are using market-distorting techniques for political purposes as well as economic coercion. We cannot be naïve. And we aren’t.

In recent years, the EU has taken several measures to protect itself from security risks and excessive dependencies. From the 5G toolkit to inward investment screening; from measures on procurement and subsidise to the anti-coercion instrument.

If you add it all up, it is quite a lot. Yet, it is not enough as the landscape around us keeps changing. This is why I as High Representative have, together with the Commission, put forward a set of ideas for a new approach to economic security⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ including possible measures on outbound investment and high-tech exports with national security implications.

In all this, we have to protect EU operators and citizens from economic risks and threats. But at the same time, we must make sure that when addressing these risks we do not unduly harm relations with third countries whose cooperation we continue to need.

We do not want to fuel fragmentation in the world; splitting it into two blocs or eco-systems. We have to look at how our ideas and measures are seen by the rest of the world. What does it mean for our credibility and for multilateralism?

For example, the term de-risking is central to this debate and rightly so. Who likes to run risks? But de-risking is itself not without risks. Cutting our energy imports from Russia and accelerating investment in renewables are good. However, they have increased our exposure to China, which controls 80-90% of the refining, and end products needed for the green transition.

And it is not always easy to say objectively where de-risking ends and de-coupling begins. Where you stand on this, depends on where you sit.

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_3358

The European Council confirmed the strategic importance of this file and the need for a delicate balance between two different requirements: protecting ourselves from new threats and risks from excessive dependencies while protecting our freedoms and expanding our geopolitical influence. Get it right, and then all three go together. If we get it wrong then all three could be in danger.

THE EU SATELLITE CENTRE: THE EU'S EYES IN THE SKY

3.9.2023 – Blog ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ – At the end of August 2023, I convened EU defence ministers at the headquarters of the EU Satellite Centre near Madrid. The SatCen plays a key role in informing EU foreign policy actors with detailed satellite imagery, a task that deserves more resources and attention.

Last week, EU foreign affairs and defence ministers met in Spain to discuss the main current [foreign affairs](#) ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ and [security issues](#) ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾, in particular Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the worrying situation in the Sahel. Ahead of those meetings, EU defence ministers met [for a SatCen board meeting at its headquarters near Madrid](#) ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the key role that the EU Satellite Center is playing in our foreign and security policy.

We visited the operations room of the Centre where Director Ducaru and his team showed us concrete examples of how satellite data are transformed into useful geospatial intelligence. Let's take Ukraine as an example. SatCen is documenting Russia's huge destruction of Ukrainian cities like Bakhmut and Mariupol. It has also assessed the dramatic effects of the flooding after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam. It is constantly analysing the risks around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. And of course, we are sharing these analyses with our Ukrainian partners.

SatCen works wherever EU interests are at stake

SatCen works wherever we have interests at stake. During the crisis in Sudan earlier this year, SatCen was very useful in helping with coordinating the evacuation of European citizens from Khartoum. The Centre also supports EU border management together with Frontex, for example at the border between

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-satellite-centre-eu%20%99s-eyes-sky_en

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/informal-foreign-affairs-council-gymnich-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press_en

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/informal-foreign-affairs-council-defence-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press_o_en

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-satellite-centre-press-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-board_en

Poland and Belarus. Around the world, SatCen is supporting EU missions and operations, from anti-piracy to the combatting of illegal arms trafficking; or helping with humanitarian aid in response to contingencies like the 2020 blast in Beirut harbour.

SatCen now has 31 years of expertise and one could call it an example of EU 'strategic autonomy in action'. It is providing us with our own geospatial intelligence analysis. Thanks to the Centre, EU institutions and member states have access to fast, top-level, autonomous and reliable analyses, based on commercial and governmental satellite data, while working in ever-closer synergy with European space industry. As a result, SatCen is helping us to take better, informed decisions.

A critical juncture

Last week's discussion with defence ministers came at a critical juncture, as the demand for SatCen products has increased massively, notably since the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Just to give a figure: since 2010, SatCen production and output have increased by 10-fold. Only this year, it has already released more than 4,000 products, over 80% of them in less than 24 hours.

In [the Strategic Compass](#)⁽¹⁶¹⁾, we committed ourselves to boost SatCen capacities. Earlier this year, as part of the implementation of this Compass, we presented the first [EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence](#)⁽¹⁶²⁾. In this context, SatCen is called to play a key role in the newly proposed EU Earth observation governmental service, alongside the EU Space Programme Agency.

We need to ensure that SatCen remains at the cutting edge of geospatial intelligence technologies and that it can rely on autonomous and secure access to a variety of data sources. To this end, as High Representative responsible for the operational direction of SatCen, I have signed a framework arrangement with Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and Luxembourg to provide SatCen with imagery from their own governmental satellites. Building on a PESCO project led by Germany, we will develop a Common Hub to receive these images coming from these different sources.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

⁽¹⁶²⁾ See: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-space-policy/eu-space-strategy-security-and-defence_en

Last Tuesday, I also presided together with my colleague Commissioner Breton, over the signature of [an agreement to allow Copernicus, the EU earth observation programme, to support EU external and security actions](#)⁽¹⁶³⁾. It will provide a wider scope for analysis, for example on the impact of climate change on security issues.

After three decades of under-investment in our defence, the war against Ukraine has shown how urgent it is to strengthen our capabilities and to do so together, to maximise cost-effectiveness. This is true in all areas of defence capabilities (ammunitions, tanks, aviation...), but particularly in emerging areas like space and cyber. In the field of geospatial intelligence, SatCen has paved the way for three decades, but as we shape its future development, it is now time to change pace and raise our level of ambition.

⁽¹⁶³⁾ See: <https://www.satcen.europa.eu/News/satcen-signs-the-contribution-agreement-with-the-european-commission-for-the-implementation-of-the-copernicus-service-in-support-to-eu-external-and-security-actions-sesa>

LIVEX, THE FIRST EVER EU LIVE MILITARY EXERCISE

19.10.2023 – Blog ^(¹⁶⁴) – In October 2023, the EU carried out its first military live exercise (LIVEX) Near Cádiz, in Spain. I attended together with EU member states Chiefs of Defence to see for myself how the EU is building a Rapid Deployment Capacity to strengthen its defence capabilities.

The precipitous departure from Afghanistan in August 2021, as well as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the tragic events currently unfolding in the Middle East, have demonstrated, if proof were needed, that Europeans need to invest more in their defence capacities, and above all to do so in a more coordinated way, so as to be ready to deal with any crisis that may arise outside the Union. This is why in November 2021, I presented a Strategic Compass ^(¹⁶⁵), defining the next steps to strengthen European defence, which was approved by all member states in March 2022.

With the close coordination set up via the European Peace Facility to support Ukraine militarily, the arrangements made for the joint purchase of ammunition, and the training of more than 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers that we have organised jointly in many European countries, we have already made serious progress over the last year and a half in getting our armies and, more broadly, our defence apparatuses to work together with EU level coordination.

Serious progress in getting our armies to work together

This week, we took a further step by organizing the LIVEX ^(¹⁶⁶), the first ever joint EU live military exercise, near Cadiz in Spain, which I was able to attend with the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Brieger, and a number of other senior officers, including the Chief of the Spanish Defence Staff. Under the command of the EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the EU military headquarters, the exercise mobilised 2,800 soldiers from nine countries (Austria, Spain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Romania) assisted by six ships, helicopters and two jets. This exercise was based on the

^(¹⁶⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/livex-first-ever-eu-live-military-exercise_en

^(¹⁶⁵) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

^(¹⁶⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-crisis-management-military-exercise-2023-milexlivex-23_en

following scenario: a non-EU country had requested military support from the Union, and the Union had responded positively to this request. Its soldiers landed on a beach, secured a port and advanced inland.

This was a test in particular for the future Rapid Deployment Capacity⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ that we have decided to build over the coming months as part of the Strategic Compass. This exercise has enabled us to get the armies of our member states to work together, and in particular to set up communications systems to coordinate effectively in real time. We plan to organize this type of exercise on a regular basis. The next one will take place during the second half of 2024.

Exchange with the Chief of Defence of EU member states

After witnessing the start of this live exercise, I participated in an EU Military Committee meeting with the Chiefs of Defence from our member states under the chairmanship of General Brieger. We exchanged on the geopolitical situation and in particular on the war in Ukraine and our military support, the difficult situation in the Sahel region, the future Rapid Deployment Capability and the build-up of the EU military headquarter in Brussels, which should become the preferred command structure for EU international missions in the future.

I asked the Chiefs of Defence to convey the message to the political authorities of their respective countries that we need to mobilize more political energy and more resources to meet the ambitious objectives of the Strategic Compass and to rise to the growing geopolitical challenges that lie ahead.

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-rapid-deployment-capacity_en

POWERING UP EUROPEAN DEFENCE

3.12.2023 – Blog (¹⁶⁸) – In December 2023, I addressed the Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency (EDA) gathering more than 1,000 participants from the EU, policymakers, armed forces and defence industry. President of the Council Michel and Commission President von der Leyen also participated, illustrating how high defence is on the EU agenda.

In his opening speech, President Michel recalled the famous Schuman word, “Europe will not be made all at once, but it will be made”, to introduce the work we have to do - “making our security and defence union”. And President Von der Leyen recalled why our dangerous geopolitical environment implies that Europe must assume its full “strategic responsibility”, in Ukraine but also elsewhere.

Debates around defence are as old as the European project

Debates around defence are indeed as old as the European project itself. The Coal and Steel community at the very start of the European integration process had itself a strong defence industry component. In 1950, just months after the Schuman Plan, our predecessors had also the project to build a European Defence Community. A history, in which defence cooperation could have been the sibling of market integration, would have been possible. However, with the rejection of the European Defence Community by the French Parliament in 1954, we chose a different path back then.

Today, the EU finds itself in a geostrategic context that, unfortunately, makes “powering up European defence”, the theme of this year’s EDA annual conference, an urgent imperative. And we have a lot of catching up to do. Two years ago, when presenting the Strategic Compass (¹⁶⁹), I said that “Europe is in danger”. It was before Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, before the major security crisis in the Sahel and before the war that is flaring up again in the Middle East.

Since then, the danger for Europe has only grown. Russia’s war against Ukraine has reminded us how critical traditional military capabilities like tanks, artillery

(¹⁶⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/powering-european-defence_en

(¹⁶⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

or ammunition remain; but also how much hybrid threats on space, cyber, critical infrastructures, information manipulation or security of supply, have become real. With the Strategic Compass, we called for ‘a leap forward’ in European defence. It is obviously time to jump now.

Moving to a sustained defence effort

The EU’s reaction to Russia’s war of aggression was unprecedented on many levels and particularly on the military one. I remember very well on [the first days of January 2022](#), one month before the Russian war of aggression started, I visited the Donbas and I had a meeting with Denys Shmyhal, the Prime Minister of Ukraine. He asked me: “*They will invade us, and when this happens, will you support us? Are you going to provide us with the arms that we will need in order to defend ourselves?*” I could not say back then “Yes, for sure, we will”. Military aid to a country at war was still taboo and I was not certain that we could do what in the end we did.

This taboo has indeed been broken and the EU has for the first time, militarily supported a country at war, including with lethal equipment. So far, the EU and its Member States have mobilised over € 27 billion of military support. More than 34,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been trained nearly everywhere on EU’s soil.

We have used innovative tools with the [European Peace Facility](#) (¹⁷⁰). We used also innovative approaches with the three-track ammunition initiative. Lead countries and the European Defence Agency have pooled Member States’ demand in order to [joint procure of ammunition](#) (¹⁷¹). The European Defence Agency has signed 9 framework contracts, with more to be signed in the coming weeks. Seven member states have already placed orders.

However, we need to step up our efforts regarding ammunition. It is crucial that member states place more orders with the defence industry as soon as possible. And we have to increase our production capacities. To accelerate this endeavour, the Commission, thanks in particular to my colleague Commissioner Breton, has put in place the new “[Act in Support of Ammunition Production](#)” (ASAP) (¹⁷²) and

(¹⁷⁰) See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>

(¹⁷¹) See: <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2023/03/20/eda-brings-together-18-countries-for-common-procurement-of-ammunition>

(¹⁷²) https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/act-support-ammunition-production-asap_en

"European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act" (EDIRPA)⁽¹⁷³⁾.

We have started to discuss the EU's contribution to security commitments to Ukraine and a dedicated financial envelope within the European Peace Facility for long-term military support to the country. In this context, stepping up joint procurement efforts and ramping up industrial production capacity acquire even greater strategic importance.

The need to address our weaknesses

Our mobilisation to support Ukraine has been impressive. However, this war has also exposed the negative consequences of our lack of defence investment in previous decades. It has reminded us how important NATO remains to our collective defence – but also what needs to be done to strengthen the European pillar of NATO, as our American friends have been asking for. All the more so, considering the level of uncertainty regarding the future of US foreign and security policy. We need transformational and sustained efforts to bring a change of mindset in EU defence.

The new EU Defence data report published by EDA illustrates where we stand and the challenges ahead. In 2022, the defence expenditure of the 27 Member States increased for the eighth year in a row, reaching €240 billion, in real terms, + 6% compared to 2021, showing a real effort by member states to sustain the trend. Compared to the historic low of 2014, defence expenditure has increased by €69 billion, or 40% in real terms. Until 2014, Europe has indeed gone through a silent process of disarmament. Crimea's invasion was the first wake-up call and since then we have undertaken the biggest European rearmament effort since the 1950s.

Investments in new defence capabilities reached €58 billion in 2022 - 24% of total defence expenditure. For the 4th year in a row, we are above the 20% benchmark set for defence investment. However, the total defence expenditure still stagnates around 1.5% of the Gross Domestic Product. To reach the 2 % NATO target, Member States would need to spend an additional €76 billion.

Other global actors are allocating a much bigger share of their resources to defence. The US spent on average 3.5% GDP in the past three years, two points

⁽¹⁷³⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/09/edirpa-council-greenlights-the-new-rules-to-boost-common-procurement-in-the-eu-defence-industry/>

more of their GDP than us. Russia increased its defence expenditure from 3.6% of GDP before the war to 4.3% in 2022. And for 2024, it has just approved an increase of 70% of its defence budget compared to 2023.

The EU still lack critical defence capabilities and we still need to invest more in defence. I know that it is very difficult to achieve at a time when the economy is not flourishing but we urgently need to do so. And, most importantly, we need to do it together in a closely coordinated way to fill gaps, avoid duplication and strengthen industrial capacities. I have said many times since the beginning of my mandate that we need to “invest better, together”. It has to stop to be a slogan to become a reality!

How to invest better together?

We have the frameworks needed with the [Coordinated Annual Review on Defence](#) ^(¹⁷⁴), the [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) ^(¹⁷⁵) and the Commission’s instruments to support such efforts, like the [European Defence Fund](#) ^(¹⁷⁶). The 68 projects currently running under PESCO show that cooperation can work but we should be more ambitious. PESCO projects have to touch more the core of the defence capabilities. Why could we not develop, for instance, a next generation of warships through PESCO? The PESCO strategic review we have just launched will be an opportunity to think bigger.

To succeed in developing capabilities together, the starting point is to identify common priorities. The industry has to build the production capacities, but it is up to our armed forces to define what they need. This is EDA’s core job – through the [Capability Development Plan](#) ^(¹⁷⁷). A few weeks ago, the 27 ministers of Defence agreed on a new set of priorities across the five strategic domains - land, air, maritime, cyber and space – as well as across the strategic enablers and force multipliers.

These priorities reflect the lessons learned from Ukraine, but also the need for the [EU Rapid Deployment Capacity](#) ^(¹⁷⁸), one of the flagship projects of the

^(¹⁷⁴) See: [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-\(card\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card))

^(¹⁷⁵) See: <https://www.pesco.europa.eu>

^(¹⁷⁶) See: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

^(¹⁷⁷) See: <https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/capability-development-plan>

^(¹⁷⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-rapid-deployment-capacity_en

Strategic Compass. In some situations, we would need to be able to deploy quickly forces, like in Kabul in August 2021 or more recently in Sudan. In such cases, going together, would multiply our capacities and reduce risks and costs. In October, I was in Cadiz for the first ever EU live military exercise in prefiguration for the deployability of this force as of 2025.

End of November, the new [Multinational Helicopter Training Centre \(MHTC\)](#)⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ in Sintra, Portugal, has taken over the existing EDA training programmes. Thousands of helicopter crews from 16 Member States have already been prepared for multinational deployment. EDA is also supporting effective interoperability on the ground.

We also need to do more to aggregate demand and procure together. With the ammunition initiative, the EDA has proven they can do it. And they will now launch joint procurement also for CBRN and soldier equipment.

A stronger, resilient and innovative European defence industry

Another important lesson from Ukraine is that our defence industry is not strong and resilient enough. EDIRPA and ASAP are immediate responses. But we need to look at the longer term. This is what we intend to do with the upcoming European Defence Industrial Strategy. In her keynote speech, President von der Leyen outlined the main building blocks of the future strategy.

My team and I are working closely with Commissioner Breton and Commission services on this. The defence industry is an area where close cooperation is essential between the intergovernmental bodies responsible for EU defence policy, such as the EDA, and the Commission services in charge of the European budget.

There will not be any European strategic autonomy or strategic responsibility without a strong European defence industry. But today, we have a quite fragmented one in Europe and more than two-thirds of the military equipment bought by the European army is coming from outside Europe.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ See: <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2023/11/28/farewell-flight-eda-transfers-helicopter-programmes-to-new-centre-in-portugal>

The challenge of access to public and private finance for the EU's industrial defence sector also needs to be addressed urgently as stated by [the EU Defence Ministers](#)⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ during our last EDA ministerial board meeting.

I was very surprised when one important European banker told me that the risk committee of his bank would advise not to finance defence projects. Our society needs to understand that we have to invest public but also private money in defence. Defence expenditure is not a waste of money but an existential requirement to face the many challenges of our world. The defence industry can also support the economy, creating jobs and helping boost innovation.

Looking at the longer term, defence innovation is indeed critical. Here, however, the latest EDA data show a rather negative trend: the defence R&T (Research & Technology) expenditure is decreasing in Europe. We urgently need to reverse this trend if we want to be able to develop the state-of-the-art defence capabilities Europe will require in the future. The [EDA's Hub for Defence Innovation](#)⁽¹⁸¹⁾ can play a role in this context. In this area, we work also closely with the Commission on the development of critical dual-use technologies with the support of the European Defence Fund.

Towards a strategic European defence culture

EU defence has come a long way during the last years, but the degradation of our geostrategic environment obliges us to do much more, in a much more closely coordinated way and with a much greater sense of urgency.

We already have the frameworks and instruments to do so and in particular a dedicated Agency – the European Defence Agency – to help set priorities, foster defence cooperation and spearhead defence innovation. Next year we will celebrate EDA's 20th anniversary. It will be a timely opportunity to give the Agency a boost towards a higher level of ambition.

In an age of power politics, "Powering up European defence" must cease to be a slogan and become a call to action to all of us - policymakers, armed forces, defence industry, and EU institutions. The transformation sparked by Russia's war against Ukraine, must be turned into a sustained and strategic European defence culture.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ See: <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2023/11/15/eu-defence-ministers-call-for-strengthening-the-defence-sector-s-access-to-finance>

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ See: <https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/research-technology/hedi>

GULF OF GUINEA: A NEW SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP IN AFRICA

18.12.2023 – Blog (¹⁸²) – *During the last Foreign Affairs Council of 2023, we launched a new initiative to support four countries of the Gulf of Guinea in countering threats stemming from the Sahel. Despite the war of aggression against Ukraine and setbacks in some Sahel countries, we are developing our security cooperation with many countries in Africa.*

The spillover of terrorism and insecurity from the Sahel to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea is not a threat anymore; it is a reality. To limit its impact, the EU is committed to help Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Ghana and Togo reinforce their capabilities to respond to the pressure exerted by terrorist armed groups in their northern regions.

A light and flexible civilian and military EU mission

In line with the new approach proposed in the Strategic Compass (¹⁸³), it will take the form of a light and flexible EU Mission, combining civilian, military and counter-terrorism expertise in conjunction with equipment support. It was already in this context that I travelled to Ghana (¹⁸⁴) last October and handed over to the country's security forces 105 armoured vehicles. This effort will complement our existing humanitarian and development cooperation programmes.

This new initiative will also complement our ongoing security support at sea to the regional organisation of the Yaoundé Architecture through the Maritime Coordinated Presence (CMP), which started in 2021. The Gulf of Guinea is indeed a vital gateway for shipping oil extracted in the Niger Delta, as well as for transporting goods to and from central and southern Africa. It is currently under threat from piracy and organised crime.

(¹⁸²) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gulf-guinea-new-security-and-defence-partnership-africa_en

(¹⁸³) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en

(¹⁸⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/434911_fr

Off the Horn of Africa, [Operation Atalanta](#)⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ has a similar role. Since 2008, its action has led to a massive reduction in piracy on this vital supply route for Europe and Africa. As we celebrate its 15th anniversary, the operation continues to protect maritime traffic and contribute to maritime security in this critical area. I was on board of one of its ships last October when I visited Oman. On land, we have also been helping Somalia rebuild its security and defence forces for over ten years so that the country can retake full control of its own security. I witnessed the extent of the work carried out first-hand in September 2022.

In parallel, while our [Irini naval mission](#)⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ contributes to maritime security and stability in the Mediterranean, controlling the UN arms embargo on Libya, another EU mission is also helping the country to reinforce border management and fight cross-border crime and terrorism. Recently, Libya has asked us to intensify our efforts in this area.

At the other end of the African continent, Mozambique, which is suffering from insurgency activities in the Cabo Delgado region, has also asked us to help its security forces meet this challenge. Since October 2021, we have been training units of the Mozambican armed forces and our training efforts were complemented by equipment support provided under the [European Peace Facility](#)⁽¹⁸⁷⁾. I went there in October 2022 to meet our teams and the country's leaders and witness first-hand the concrete results of our work.

A hostile signal of the military junta in Niger

Our new commitment to the Gulf of Guinea countries comes at a time when, in Niger, the military junta has decided to revoke the legal basis for the EU defence and security missions in the country despite the effective support they delivered. This is another hostile signal sent by an illegitimate military junta, which overthrew a democratically elected president. Recent history shows that expelling partners supporting efforts to improve security in the Sahel results only in leaving more room for terrorism and insecurity.

Our security and defence missions also encounter difficulties in countries like Mali and the Central African Republic against a backdrop of increasing destabilisation

⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/operation-atalanta-european-union-naval-force-somalia-takes-stock-after-13-years-operating_and_en

⁽¹⁸⁶⁾ See: <https://www.operationirini.eu/>

⁽¹⁸⁷⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>

in the region, encouraged by foreign actors hostile to Europe. But, like Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Ghana, Togo, Libya, Somalia or Mozambique, many African countries are willing to work with the EU on security issues, and we are ready to do more in this area in the coming months with those who are wanting to partner with us.

Defence and security is of course not the only field for partnership that we propose to develop with African countries. We are well aware that lasting security can only come from economic and social development, from access for all to education, health services, electricity, etc. That is why we are also establishing numerous partnerships in these areas with countries on the continent, particularly as part of the [Global Gateway](#) initiative.

4.

DEFENDING MULTILATERALISM IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD



LET'S MAKE 2023 A YEAR OF TURNING THE TIDE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

7.1.2023 – Blog ^(¹⁸⁸) – *Last year, the world marked the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Recognising that we face adverse trends and the global human rights situation is getting worse, we must be determined and creative in our defence of this text and of the universality of human rights.*

At the start of 2023, we are facing a sobering situation. The harsh truth is that in 2022 the world became a worse place for human rights. We saw dramatic violations of human rights in multiple countries, conflicts and crises: in Ukraine, Iran, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, China and many other places.

With more geopolitical competition, revisionist powers also actively undermine the human rights *acquis* with new narratives. Such narratives are constructed using familiar language and terminology so that at first glance they may seem innocent, but we should be under no illusion that the aim is to change the agreed international human rights doctrine and to erode the rights of individuals. There are also new technologies used for mass surveillance and the repression of dissent. And we are seeing the undeniable effects of climate change acting as a driver of conflict, with all that this entails for the human rights of the people that are most affected.

The growing geopolitical divisions are particularly worrying, as they seek to give a misleading sense that the world at large no longer has any common ground. But in fact, we do. We need to remember what unites us – more than 8 billion people and 193 members of the UN. And for this, it is good to go back 75 years.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 75

In 1948, after the horrors of the Second World War, scholars and diplomats from around the world and very different legal and cultural backgrounds came together

^(¹⁸⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/lets-make-2023-year-turning-tide-human-rights_en

to produce a landmark document: the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (¹⁸⁹), enumerating the rights that every human being has.

The simple and yet revolutionary idea of that document is that rights cannot be given; they already belong to every single person. But we knew then, and know even more so today, that rights can be taken away. That is why we must protect them. And doing that is both a collective task and a process, not an event; meaning that it is a job that is never done.

Forty-five years later, in 1993, 171 states and 800 representatives of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) adopted the [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#) (¹⁹⁰) (VDPA) at the UN World Conference on Human Rights.

Then, as now, there were intense discussions over whether human rights are universal or culturally relative; whether economic, social, and cultural rights should prevail over civil and political ones; whether development should be considered a right; and whether or not to name states with a record of human rights violations.

Universality and indivisibility of human rights

In the end, the world agreed on the universality, interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. This means that there is no hierarchy of rights, with some taking precedence over others; or that there are cultural or geographic exceptions. All human beings wherever they live, have these rights and are entitled to have them protected.

In 2023, 75 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the world is a different place. More plural, with more countries and people demanding their voices be heard. But also more unequal and with a rise in identity politics amplified by social media that are tearing our societies apart. There are mega existential threats like climate change and developments like the digital revolution that pose new challenges.

We need to remember why these two declarations came about in their time and how they can help us to deal with today's challenges. We need to remember that

(¹⁸⁹) See: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

(¹⁹⁰) See: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/vienna-declaration-and-programme-action>

human rights and democracy are not values which define Europe; they are values which define humanity.

We also need to remember that defending and promoting human rights and democracy begins at home. We can only be credible towards the rest of the world if we are open about our own shortcomings and relentless in confronting those that erode human rights within our own societies. In a similar way, we need to engage with those who accuse us of ‘double standards’, i.e. that we are more concerned with human rights violations in some countries than in others. This is not an easy discussion, given the complexity and historical sensitivities. But we cannot ignore that these accusations of double standards exist and are strongly held by some.

The EU’s human rights agenda for 2023

Human rights lie at the basis of the EU and of our relations with the rest of the world. As I said in my [speech](#)⁽¹⁹¹⁾ at the EU-NGO Human Rights Forum, they are a core priority for EU foreign policy; for what we say; for what we do and for how we spend our money.

So, we systematically condemn human rights violators and put sanctions on the worst offenders. Indeed, we have created a [new global human rights sanctions regime](#)⁽¹⁹²⁾, so we can go after violations wherever they occur. We are now setting up a new Global Observatory on the Fight Against Impunity (around €20 mil budget) to gather information and build a knowledge base about genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations. We lobby constantly at the multilateral level and champion strong resolutions addressing grave human rights situations. We use our bilateral channels to promote universal human rights and support those on the ground who defend human rights and democracy. We offer financial support to [protect human rights defenders](#)⁽¹⁹³⁾ (€30 million for the next 3 years).

While we do a lot as EU, and sometimes more than we get credit for, it is also clear that we must do more and do it better. For instance, we need to stop getting caught in a web of arguments about the importance of some rights over others.

⁽¹⁹¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/human-rights-opening-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-24th-eu-ngo-forum_en

⁽¹⁹²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/12/07/eu-adopts-a-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/>

⁽¹⁹³⁾ See: <https://protectdefenders.eu/>

And we certainly need to quash any rhetoric that inverts the obligations of states and the rights of individuals.

In 2023, I would like us to be more proactive, innovative and creative when it comes to human rights.

For instance, we need to stress that doing so is part of enhancing our security. We need to work harder on fighting impunity and ensuring accountability, for instance through our support to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and our work on Russia's war crimes in Ukraine. We also need to engage with a broader range of actors, including the private sector, and get better at explaining what we mean when talking about human rights.

Other concrete areas include the need to ensure that the digital transformation and surveillance technologies are not used to curtail human rights, to continue to work with those countries most affected by climate change and environmental degradation to address the human rights consequences, and to work with partners on the right to development and on countering racial discrimination.

And we also need to rebuild trust: in institutions, among governments and among generations. The EU will organise a Human Rights Conference in 2023 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – and we will make sure to involve not just government representatives, but also young people, civil society, the private sector and others.

Reconfirm that human rights are international law

Many of the trends we face on human rights are strong and, sadly, run counter to what we want. This only makes it more necessary that we work harder, with our international partners, to make 2023 a year of countering the trend.

We must reconfirm that human rights are the law, international law, not privileges. Nor are they restricted to Europe and other so-called Western countries. No, to qualify for human rights protection, you only need to be human: a global citizen with rights.

We have to try and ensure that by the time we get to the 100th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, people will say that after years of backsliding, 2023 was a turning point for the cause of human rights.

MANAGING MIGRATION IS A KEY ELEMENT OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY

7.2.2023 – Blog ^(¹⁹⁴) – *At the beginning of 2023, migration was back on the EU agenda. At the European Council in February, I argued against a “Fortress Europe” mentality and reminded of the benefits of legal migration. To succeed in managing migration, the EU needs a balanced approach and must work with partners, who have their own interests.*

Migration is as old as humanity. Our cultures, economies and societies have all developed through migration. Millions of Europeans have escaped poverty and hunger by emigrating across the oceans when our population growth exceeded economic growth and opportunities. In one way or another, we are all migrants, and our family histories reflect this. My own grandfather and father lived in Argentina before moving back to Spain where I was born. Indeed, tens of millions of Europeans can trace their roots to other countries and other continents.

Nowadays, in Europe, migration is primarily discussed as a challenge. To some extent, this is understandable. Public opinion is worried about large-scale irregular migration. We all remember the 2015 refugee ‘crisis’ when over a million, mostly Syrians, entered the EU seeking protection. Last year, Russia’s war against Ukraine forced the largest displacement of people in Europe since World War II, with 4 million receiving temporary protection. More widely, the number of people reaching Europe via the Central Mediterranean or the Western Balkan routes increased again in 2022 respectively by 51% and 136%, according to [FRONTEX](#) ^(¹⁹⁵) figures, with a total of 330,000 irregular entries in 2022. As a result, reception centres inside the EU are filled to more than their capacity. The European public rightly sees migration as a common European issue requiring common European answers.

In all this, it is important that we recognise three points:

1. Migration offers numerous benefits;
2. We need to work closely with countries of transit and origin who have their own interests and priorities to define joint interests; and

^(¹⁹⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/migration-key-element-our-foreign-policy_en

^(¹⁹⁵) See: <https://frontex.europa.eu/>

3. We therefore need a balanced approach, where incentives and legal pathways for regular migration flank the necessary work on stronger border management and returns.

The benefits of legal migration

To start, safe and legal migration is beneficial for everyone: migrants help address labour market needs and drive economic growth in their countries of destination. The country I know the best, Spain, would not be able to sustain its socio-economic system without the tens of thousands of migrants coming from Latin America every year. More generally, we all know that demographic trends in Europe are such that we need migrants on the job market – and will continue to do so in the future.

Migrants also support families and communities at home. Just consider the issue of remittances. In 2022 alone, low and middle-income countries received \$626 billion in remittances, according to the [World Bank](#) (¹⁹⁶). This is more than three times the total amount of Official Development Aid! Many countries and communities depend critically on these remittances. In the Middle East and North Africa for example, countries received \$63 billion in remittances in 2022, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, it was \$53 billion.

The presence of foreign students in European universities is also a major factor of both innovation and “soft power” for the countries and regions able to attract these students.

While recognising the benefits of regular migration and mobility, it is also important to accept the basic fact that we can expect more migration in the years to come. On the whole, we in Europe are getting older and fewer, compared to neighbouring countries and especially compared to Africa. The figures are clear: as displacement driven by climate change, conflicts and natural disasters, is reaching record numbers (more than 100 million in 2022 according to [UNHCR](#) (¹⁹⁷)), the level of migration is only going to grow. I have often [pointed](#) (¹⁹⁸) to the

(¹⁹⁶) See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/30/remittances-grow-5-percent-2022>

(¹⁹⁷) See: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/6/62a9d2b04/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend.html>

(¹⁹⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-southern-neighbourhood-closing-gaps-between-and-along-two-shores-mediterranean_en

growing gap between the two shores of the Mediterranean, in both economic and demographic terms and the need to try to close it.

Some seek to respond to these trends mainly by focusing on strengthening borders and building fences. Of course, any country or political community needs to be able to decide who enters its territory. Borders need to be protected, or they are no longer borders. But the walls will never be high enough to just 'keep people out'. And no one can accept the scenes where people drown while trying to cross the Mediterranean – this goes against our common humanity. So, the real issue is not to stop but how we manage migration, in a manner that is politically and socially sustainable and that reflects both our values and our interests.

Ahead of the European Council on 9-10 February, the Commission has put forward a range of operational proposals for the short and medium term covering the internal and external dimensions of migration.

It is certainly true that we need a more robust policy framework to deal with all aspects of irregular arrivals, balancing responsibility and solidarity. To this end, the Commission put forward in 2020 a set of proposals as part of a New Pact on Migration and Asylum (¹⁹⁹). However, it is well known that member states' views on this diverge - and it will take time to find the necessary consensus. Indeed, since the Tampere European Council in 1999, Europe has not been able to agree on a real common migration policy. This enduring lack of agreement among us also means that politically the emphasis is now on what the external dimension can achieve.

How best to work with our partner countries on migration?

By definition, migration requires us to work with countries of origin and transit. And the only way to achieve our objectives is in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. This means finding the right balance between more results in reducing irregular departures and stepping up returns while recognising the interests of partners and addressing the root causes of irregular migration.

This requires us to listen to partners, knowing their interests and taking them into account. For example, many of our partners in the South worry that we are depriving them of doctors, nurses and other skilled professionals (the risk of a

(¹⁹⁹) See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706

'brain drain'). We also need the right incentives to underpin our cooperation and recognise that coercive measures are best used sparingly, kept as a last resort.

If we ask more from our partners, we also need to be able to offer more: not only financially but also by responding to their desire to maximise the benefits of migration for their own growth. Legal migration, mobility and complementary pathways are all important elements. In this context, the commitment of member states to provide legal pathways to protection helps underpin our credibility.

It is positive that, for 2023, 17 EU member states have collectively pledged almost 16.000 resettlement places and 13.200 places for humanitarian admission. This means that the EU will provide almost 29.000 places for safe and legal pathways to protection (in addition to those who enter the asylum process). This is not enough, but it is a positive message that we must build upon.

When comes to our work on tackling the root causes of irregular migration, this includes addressing the complex reasons that drive it, including economic (poverty, inequality, lack of opportunities), environmental (climate change, environmental disasters, pressure on natural resources), security (protracted conflict, crime and gangs) or political (authoritarian systems, human rights violations, absence of rule of law, corruption).

Addressing these root causes is neither easy nor can it be done quickly. But it is absolutely necessary and we do have many EU tools to invest in education, business opportunities and faster job creation ([NDICI](#)⁽²⁰⁰⁾, [Global Gateway](#)⁽²⁰¹⁾) etc). We also need to make the best use our of diplomatic assets including EU Delegations and work as Team Europe with member states, sending clear signals to partners about the benefits of cooperating with the EU on migration.

Some immediate priorities include:

- **Deepening our cooperation with key origin and transit countries**, namely Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Nigeria and Iraq. We should try to reduce the overall number of irregular departures. This in turn will require more ambitious legal migration pathways such as [Talent](#)

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ See: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en

⁽²⁰¹⁾ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

Partnerships (²⁰²), an initiative by the Commission to address skills shortages and enhance cooperation with third countries on migration.

- **Launching new anti-smuggling partnerships with Tunisia and Egypt**, building on the successes in Morocco, Niger and the Western Balkans, with the goal of reducing the number of dangerous crossings and smashing the business model of the smugglers.
- **Working with member states to expand the possibilities for legal pathways** and resettlement along all main migration routes.
- **Using our CSDP operations** (for example EUCLAP Niger and EUBAM Libya) to intensify work on capacity building of host countries' personnel and on border management, in close liaison with FRONTEX.

Migration is increasingly a key element in our overall foreign policy, as I will stress to European leaders this week. To succeed we need a balanced approach emphasising the notion of partnership. And keep in mind that, at heart, this is about human beings moving, as they have done for centuries.

(²⁰²) See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2921

EUROPE'S COMMITMENT TO ADVANCING UNITED NATIONS' GOALS

23.2.2023 – Speech (²⁰³) – *Speaking to the UN Security Council in New York in February 2023, I argued that the EU is not only committed to addressing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but also working within the UN framework in enhancing peace and security worldwide.*

Security Council [of the United Nations], distinguished delegates, Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,

This is my third briefing as EU High Representative [for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy], but it is the first time that I am able to join you in person.

And every time I participated in the briefings, I warned about a “deficit in multilateralism”.

I have described this and how a rise in power politics has led to more distrust, more point scoring, more vetoes - including here at the Security Council. More vetoes and fewer agreements.

And that the price was being paid in terms of problems not solved, conflicts that fester and people left at the mercy of events.

I fear that the situation this year is even worse and will become worse.

The United Nations and the multilateral system are under threat

The United Nations and the multilateral system are under threat like they have never been before.

Earlier this month, [the] Secretary-General [of the United Nations, António Guterres] sounded the alarm bell and he was right in doing so.

(²⁰³) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-nations-address-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-un-security-council-eu-un_en

[The] Secretary-General warned that time is running out for the world to avoid a meltdown. He called on everyone to act decisively before it is too late. And indeed, we are facing a global emergency.

We see a proliferation of conflicts, the climate crisis, systematic attacks on democracy and human rights and ever-deeper global inequalities. The problems are mounting and our collective capacity to find solutions is declining.

And if the problems are mounting and the capacity to solve them is decreasing, certainly we are facing a bigger crisis and we cannot afford it.

The proposal of the Secretary-General, in 'Our Common Agenda', has the potential to deliver the reforms that the world needs, at the Summit of the Future.

But this will only happen if we - all of us - invest in revitalising the multilateral system. It will not just happen by itself, sitting in our position and expecting others to do the job.

No, it will not happen if countries stick to narrow, nationalist agendas.

Peace and security, sustainable development and human rights

The European Union is trying to do its part. We do our part. We have always been a strong supporter, investing in the United Nations, both politically and financially.

Allow me to say that the European Union and its Member States are the largest collective contributor to the United Nations' budget.

We have always backed the three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

What a beautiful set of words: peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights. We know that each [objective] depends on the other two for success. They are not isolated objectives. They are extraordinarily interlinked.

Peace and security [are] a pre-condition for sustainable development, but without sustainable development, we will not have peace and security, and without both of them, we are not going to have human rights.

That is why we need to address all security threats - new and old - in a holistic approach.

But equally, that is why we must counter the worsening human rights situation we see in many countries. We remain committed to all human rights: individual and collective, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Especially this year. This year – as you know – marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Universal. “Universal” means that human rights do not belong to any specific culture, they are universal.

It is a good moment also to recall that human rights are not only universal but indivisible. That they apply to everyone and everywhere.

In the same vein, I think that we need to renew our commitment to the sustainable development agenda. Precisely because we see global inequalities rising.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit later this year will be a crucial moment to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

As a sign of our commitment, the European Union will submit in July its Voluntary Review of the SDGs at the High-Level Political Forum.

This will be an opportunity to share with the broader United Nations membership our efforts to support the achievement of the SDGs, at home and around the world. And also, to point to the challenges as we see them.

So let me summarise how we see them.

First, there is one year of war against Ukraine plus global consequences.

As I said yesterday at the General Assembly, this war was and remains a clear-cut case of aggression, in breach of the United Nations Charter.

Russia’s war against Ukraine is not a “European issue”

And it is not a “European issue”. It is not about “the West versus Russia”.

It is about the kind of world in which we want to live. A world where no one will be safe, and where the illegal use of force would somehow be normalised.

That is why international law must be enforced everywhere to protect everyone from power politics, blackmailing and military attacks.

In one sentence: we need to ensure that aggression fails and that international law prevails.

Many people are asking about peace. Yes, certainly.

But the real questions are: what kind of peace? What kind of peace are we talking about, and how to achieve it?

Yes, we need peace and the Ukrainian people deserve peace.

But not just any peace. We need a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, in line with the United Nations Charter.

The first and obvious step for peace is for the aggressor to stop its attacks [and] withdraw its forces from Ukraine.

Until then, the European Union will continue to give Ukraine all the support it needs to defend its population. And we will do it as long as it takes.

The two tracks – supporting Ukraine and looking for peace - go hand in hand. It is not “either/or”. It is both things.

We count on the entire United Nations membership to show its support for these principles in Ukraine and elsewhere. It is a moment for countries to take a stand and be counted.

Meanwhile, the European Union will continue to help the rest of the world to cope with the fallout of Russia's aggression.

That is what we have been doing for one year now - and successfully so.

Look, food and energy prices are now declining, partly thanks to the Solidarity Lanes and thanks to the vital Black Sea Grain Initiative, brokered by the United Nations, have [enabled] the export of 50 million tonnes of grain from Ukraine.

And let me remind you that this Black Sea Grain Initiative is coming up for renewal in mid-March. It needs to be prolonged. It is the food for millions of people around the world that is at stake.

Jointly with the European Union Member States, we have increased our financial contributions to handle the fallout of the war.

We have provided €18 billion to tackle food insecurity until 2024, and half of these resources are going to go to Africa and the Middle East.

We know it is not going to be enough, but maybe I can say that there is strong support for these people who are suffering the shockwaves sent by this war of aggression affecting the whole world.

It is the war and its consequences which is putting millions of people at risk from the point of view of their livelihoods, facing prices of energy and food [that] they cannot afford.

Let's talk about climate. Climate is a test case for multilateralism, but it is also a security issue.

Let's look beyond the war in Ukraine.

Let's look beyond the war in Ukraine.

Looking beyond the war in Ukraine, we see the climate crisis as a textbook example of where we need effective multilateral action but – [I am] sorry to say – we are not getting it. We need it, but we are not getting it.

We see unprecedented floods, droughts and heatwaves. And every scientific report concludes that time is running out and that we need far more ambitious climate action.

This means accelerating the green transition, but again, in a just way. The green transition will be a just one, or it will not happen.

Because those least responsible for causing the problems are the ones that will be most affected by it. That is why we want to contribute to this just transition.

We are the world's biggest contributor of public climate finance worldwide with €23 billion per year.

And as I said, climate change is also a security issue.

More and more, the climate and security nexus will dominate the global agenda.

This also means the [United Nations] Security Council will have to take its responsibilities on that issue.

Let me continue discussing peace and security beyond the war in Ukraine. It is not the only conflict in the world, unhappily.

Let me turn to the specifics of the European Union and United Nations cooperation on peace and security.

Indeed, all European Union crisis management operations work with the United Nations as their partners, and we are proud of it. We are proud of being a strong partner of the United Nations in any crisis management. Because our strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management dates back at least two decades.

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our first civilian mission, the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM), [which started] 20 years ago.

And 20 years later, the European Union has 21 civilian and military missions deployed around the world, mobilising more than 5,000 people working for peace and security.

The most recent ones include our Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) – obviously – but also [our civilian mission] in Armenia (EU Mission in Armenia), and more recently, a military partnership mission in Niger.

Let me stress that this mission in Niger demonstrates our willingness to remain engaged in the Sahel. The European Union is not abandoning the Sahel, it is working with its partners as much as they want.

This explicit partnership approach of the mission, built on clear demands from Niger's authorities, aims at increasing its effectiveness in this area, which is one of the most endangered areas in the world.

Let's go to the Mediterranean [Sea] and talk about the naval operation [EUNAVFOR MED] IRINI.

[Operation] IRINI contributes to the implementation of the United Nations arms embargo. It is the United Nations that has declared the embargo, but the embargo

has to be implemented, not just declared. Someone has to take care that it takes place, really, effectively, on the ground.

[Operation] IRINI is one of the toughest ways of providing support for this arms embargo through inspections, in the high seas off the coast of Libya, of vessels suspected of breaking the embargo. [Operation] IRINI remains the only actor doing so.

Helping African countries against terrorism is key for the EU

Let's talk about terrorism, and how terrorism affects African countries, and how helping African countries in the fight against terrorism is another key priority for the European Union.

We have several missions that provide military and civilian support to African countries, the latest example being our Training Mission in Mozambique (EUTM Mozambique).

And five of our civilian missions include a counter-terrorism mandate.

As United Nations peacekeeping marks its 75th anniversary, we must use this opportunity to maximise the impact of United Nations operations.

We support the [United Nations] Secretary-General's call for a New Agenda for Peace. We are committed to continue to support African-led Peace Support Operations and the ongoing discussions to use the United Nations assessed contributions for operations authorised by the United Nations Security Council.

Regional organisations, like the African Union or the Arab League, together with us, play a key role in preventing and addressing crises.

I think that we are well-placed as a peace actor by virtue of its wide array of policies and instruments.

Combining mediation, prevention, diplomatic, security, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian tools. All of us together, all these tools together allow us to engage throughout all phases of a conflict if prevention does not succeed in preventing it from happening.

We are currently providing such support in 20 conflicts across the world. We are there supporting civilian people and trying to make the situation better. And we will reinforce our capacities in doing so.

So, it is not only Ukraine. We are paying attention to everything that matters in the world, maintaining our global engagement.

Because we know that yes, war has returned to Europe, but it has not stopped elsewhere.

I want to stress that the European Union will remain fully engaged in all crises around the world, financially and politically.

Let me end my briefing by addressing some specific cases and regional crises.

I want to start with the devastating earthquake in Syria and Türkiye with more than 40,000 victims and hundreds of thousands whose houses are destroyed.

The European Union is providing assistance to both countries in close cooperation with the United Nations.

We immediately sent medical teams and we will organise a Donors' Conference next month to finance the reconstruction.

At the same time, we were sending also people to fight the incredibly big fires in Chile.

We try to make sure that assistance reaches people in need both in regime-controlled and in non-regime-controlled parts of northern Syria. Because human beings deserve assistance whatever [whether] the regime controls or does not control territory.

In the wake of the earthquake, we have decided to introduce an additional, although time-limited, humanitarian exemption to our sanctions regime in order to make sure that humanitarian aid can reach the Syrian population as quickly as needed and possible.

In Afghanistan - do not forget Afghanistan, two years ago Kabul fell, but Afghanistan is still there. Developments have gone from bad to worse, because of the Taliban's actions and inactions.

The systematic – can I say – “gender apartheid” that the Taliban are putting in place against women and girls. This “gender apartheid” in the public life of half of the population is fully unacceptable.

So, we cannot continue business as usual.

But at the same time, we need to avoid punishing Afghan women twice by stopping assistance where it still could be delivered. First, the Taliban punishes them, and then we come and punish them again by cutting the assistance? No, if the assistance can be delivered in full respect of key principles and values, we will continue doing that.

I thank the United Nations for its high-level engagement and coordination on the ground, including with us [the European Union].

In the Sahel, I want to approach the situation in the Sahel from the point of view of the security situation.

Allow me to switch to French, because I know how important the situation in the Sahel is for France.

Oui, au Sahel, la situation sécuritaire continue de se détériorer dans un contexte politique chaque fois plus complexe.

Mais là aussi notre volonté d’engagement demeure. Parce que nous savons que quand nous agissons, nous le faisons de manière à répondre à la sécurité, mais aussi à la gouvernance et aux besoins humanitaires.

Nous nous sommes adaptés à l’évolution de la dynamique, en agissant avec prudence et précaution là où il est nécessaire, au Mali et au Burkina Faso, en rééquilibrant notre action bilatérale avec les partenaires qui sont plus disposés et prêts à travailler avec nous. J’ai déjà cité le Niger et j’ajoute la Mauritanie.

Moving to the Western Balkans, on Bosnia and Herzegovina, I welcome the unanimous extension of Operation EUFOR/Althea’s executive mandate for another year.

Thanks for this decision, because this ensures that Althea can continue to support authorities in maintaining a safe and secure environment for all citizens.

And I know how appreciated is the Althea [Operation] by the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The EU candidate status provided a clear signal that the country's future is in the European Union. I met the political leadership last week and stressed the need to deliver on the necessary reforms in order to advance quicker on this path which is the best way to ensure peace, stability, democracy, freedom and progress for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Working on the EU facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue

I am working on the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, as coordinator of this dialogue mandated by the United Nations, on the normalisation of relations. We are at a crucial juncture, and I hope that in the next weeks, I can offer positive results.

The European Union has presented a proposal to the parties that would put the normalisation process on a solid, forward-looking track.

On Monday, we will have a high-level meeting with the two leaders in Belgrade and Pristina, the President of Serbia and the Prime Minister of Kosovo, in order to see if this engagement is serious, solid and presents a clear way for the normalisation of relations between the two of them.

There are many more countries and crises I could mention but let me leave it here. I have been talking for too long.

Thanks for giving me this opportunity on behalf of the European Union to explain to the world that, beyond [Russia's war against Ukraine], we remain committed to many crises, many people around the world, doing our best in order to improve the [global] peace and security situation.

And I am looking forward, Mr President [Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta], to the comments of the Ambassadors.

I thank you for your continued cooperation.

EUROPE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE UN GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT

31.3.2023 – Blog ^{([204](#))} – *Digital technologies are increasingly shaping our daily lives and it is crucial to address them at a multilateral level. In this blog post, I emphasized the EU's support to the UN's work to ensure that our digital future prioritises human rights and individual needs, rather than solely serving state interests or those of major tech platforms.*

Digital technologies offer opportunities for people to live better, freer and more rewarding lives, by bringing us new freedoms, creating new links between peoples and countries and by creating many new jobs. However, we also know they can do great harm to our democratic societies through disinformation campaigns, by silencing dissenting voices, or worse, as weapons for cyber-attacks. With digital, everything depends on how we use these technologies and what rules and standards will apply.

Our digital future is also a geopolitical issue

Our digital future is also a geopolitical issue with different digital models competing. Some put the ability of the state to control its citizens at the centre. Others allow powerful private companies to concentrate power in a disproportionate way. We in the EU decided to put individuals at the centre, as empowered citizens. That was the main message of the [Council Conclusions on Digital Diplomacy](#) ^{([205](#))} adopted in July last year and the [European Declaration of Digital Rights and Principles](#) ^{([206](#))} in December. As a next step, [we are now putting forward our ideas](#) ^{([207](#))} for how we and our partners around the world can navigate these tricky waters, in the context of the [UN's Global Digital Compact](#) ^{([208](#))} (GDC).

^{([204](#))} See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe%20%99s-contribution-un-global-digital-compact_en

^{([205](#))} See: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11406-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

^{([206](#))} See: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-principles>

^{([207](#))} See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/global-digital-compact-bold-step-towards-digital-transformation_en?s=63

^{([208](#))} See: <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact>

Multilateralism is in the EU's DNA and we want to make it as effective as possible. So we were happy to contribute to the work of the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, when he called for a 'Summit of the Future' to take place in September 2024, to reform the UN and plan how it should operate in the next decades. The UN Global Digital Compact is part of that overall effort and will outline how digital can be part of that.

What does the EU want to see in the UN Global Digital Compact? Our core belief is that the digital transformation must be at the service of humans, making sure that human rights and fundamental freedoms they have offline are also upheld online. We want the digital revolution to be about empowering people and giving them new opportunities. A human-centric approach means also standing for a free, open, secure and non-fragmented Internet and against Internet shutdowns. It means fighting information manipulation and disinformation; and committing to protect people's personal and other data.

Putting humans at the centre

Our commitment to putting humans at the centre also means that digitisation must help improve the delivery of public services, including education and health. All people in the world – regardless of their sex, age and disabilities – should have the right to access government services, and non-manipulated information. At the same time, we must close the digital divide, to help people acquire digital skills by supporting accessible digital education worldwide and ensuring universal connectivity. In other words, the digital transformation will only be successful if it is also socially just, involves everyone and is a part of a human rights-based transformation.

To deal with accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss, digital technologies can and must play a growing role in providing sustainable solutions. This is also one of the reasons why the European Union launched the [Global Gateway initiative](#)⁽²⁰⁹⁾. This year we are launching many other flagship digital projects from data centres to cables, from satellites ([Philippines COPERNICUS hub](#)⁽²¹⁰⁾ connected to ASEAN, Central-Asia satellite connectivity) to terrestrial broadband: submarine

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/global-digital-compact-bold-step-towards-digital-transformation_en?s=63

⁽²¹⁰⁾ See: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/global-gateway-european-space-agency-and-commission-join-forces-earth-observation-philippines-2023-01-24_en

cables in the Mediterranean ([Medusa](#)^{(²¹¹)), in the Black Sea, around West-Africa and Central-America. These are all implemented in the spirit of Team Europe, which means joining efforts from EU institutions and member states. As another example we recently launched the [EU-LAC Digital Alliance](#)^{(²¹²), with the aim to extend the [BELLA fibre-optic cable](#)^{(²¹³) between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, to build secure digital backbone connectivity and bring the research communities of the EU and LAC closer together.}}}

An ambitious Global Digital Compact

These days everybody is talking about the revolutionary potential of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI). Their capacities are truly astonishing and they will change our lives in ways we cannot easily fathom. But people also have concerns about what the ethical and other long-term impacts are. As EU, we say yes to the development of AI, but we believe human identity and human dignity must remain at the centre. The UN's Global Digital Compact can provide essential guidance to guarantee that human identity and human dignity are protected.

Rwanda and Sweden are co-facilitators and coordinate the work around the Global Digital Compact, supported by the UN Secretary-General's [Envoy on Technology](#)^{(²¹⁴). We will support them to get an ambitious and forward-looking UN Global Digital Compact to guide our digital policies for the years to come.}

^(²¹¹) See: <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/2022-11-24> - Factsheet for Media - Medusa.pdf

^(²¹²) See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1598

^(²¹³) See: <https://www.bella-programme.eu/index.php/en/>

^(²¹⁴) See: <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact>

MEETING THE EXPECTATIONS OF A FRAGMENTING WORLD

7.5.2023 – Blog ^(²¹⁵) – *Russia's war against Ukraine has reunited the transatlantic alliance while exposing differences with other parts of the world. There is a risk that this divide grows and turns into a hard rift. The EU must continue to support Ukraine, but we need to do more to heed the legitimate expectations of the rest of the world.*

It is not easy to capture today's chaotic world with neat, mental schemes, for we see many developments and trends at the same time as I explained at the State of the Union ^(²¹⁶) conference in Florence:

First, there is the US-China strategic competition with growing clashes over trade, technology and security, as well as competing models of society and governance. In many ways, this is the main structuring force in the world today.

Second, we see the globalisation model of open markets, trade integration and inter-dependence being challenged by a model built around economic security, industrial policy and state intervention. Security considerations are eclipsing economic integration. Trust and optimism are giving way to distrust and pessimism. Some talk of a new Washington consensus ^(²¹⁷).

We do not know whether our world will be bipolar or multipolar

We do not know whether our world will be bipolar or multipolar. Some are convinced we are heading towards two rival blocs, with different security and IT ecosystems and also different financial and payment systems etc. Others foresee a world of 'complex multipolarity', where alongside the US and China many states are asserting themselves, with key players hedging their bets and acting in transactional ways.

^(²¹⁵) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/meeting-expectations-fragmenting-world_en

^(²¹⁶) See: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/While we continue to support Ukraine%2C we must do more to heed the legitimate expectations of the rest of the world.>

^(²¹⁷) See: <https://www.ft.com/content/42922712-cd33-4deo-8763-1cc271331a32>

The future is unknown but we can try to shape it, taking into account the following:

1. In this new world, **new powers are emerging who have their own interests and viewpoints which they want to defend**, including a desire to make the multilateral system more representative. This is a normal and logical trend that we cannot avoid and should indeed welcome.
2. **The degree to which the world will be rules-based or power-based matters more than whether it is bipolar or multipolar.** So as the EU, we must always stress the imperative of having strong multilateral institutions and agreed, binding rules that govern the relations of all states, big or small. We should insist that democracy, human rights, and respect for international law are in the interest of people everywhere, whether they live in existing or emerging powers.
3. **We must shape the future with the countries and the peoples in the emerging world**, across Africa, the Indo-Pacific and Latin America. The choices they are making on their security arrangements, on how to fight climate change, on how they run their internet or the modalities for their exports of critical raw materials will shape the world as much as the decisions that Washington and Beijing will make.

Transatlantic revival and the expectations of a plural world

This is the backdrop for the third trend that we can observe: more transatlantic and G7 unity but within a fragmenting world.

It is striking to what extent Russia's war against Ukraine has brought greater unity to, and even a revival of, the transatlantic alliance. The squabbles in 2021 over the manner in which the [US withdrew from Afghanistan](#) (²¹⁸) or [how the AUKUS alliance came](#) (²¹⁹) about are gone, never mind the rather fundamental clashes under the Trump administration.

The war against Ukraine has clarified what the US, Canada and Europeans have in common. In addition to what we do together for Ukraine, there has been a wider sense of renewal: a common sense of purpose and a willingness to pay the price to uphold the principles of the international rule of law, freedom and democracy, under attack by the revisionist powers.

(²¹⁸) See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/opinion/afghanistan-europe-nato.html>

(²¹⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-us-relations-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

Of course, as always, policy differences remain. Take the [protectionist aspects of the Inflation Reduction Act](#)⁽²²⁰⁾ or our clashes over the WTO or the different approaches to fighting climate change (subsidies vs. carbon pricing). But on the strategic issues, we are moving in lockstep, at least with the Biden administration.

Regrettably, this transatlantic and G7 unity has been accompanied by a greater political divide with the emerging world. As David Miliband wrote in [Foreign Affairs](#)⁽²²¹⁾ under the telling title ‘The world beyond Ukraine’: “*Western conviction about the war and its importance is matched elsewhere by scepticism at best and outright disdain at worst*”.

He also stresses that the causes are deeper than how people see the war against Ukraine, saying: “*The gap between the West and the rest goes beyond the rights and wrongs of the war. Instead, it is the product of deep frustration—anger, in truth—about the Western-led mismanagement of globalization since the end of the Cold War*”.

The differences in perceptions of the war against Ukraine have their roots in different histories, geography, different policy priorities etc. We should discuss them in a serene manner, explaining also that we are mobilised to address the global consequences of a war we did not start nor want, as was stressed also at the [last Foreign Affairs Council](#)⁽²²²⁾ when we discussed the action plan on the geopolitical consequences of the Russian aggression.

But indeed, the issue goes deeper. There is a widespread sense among many in what some call the ‘Global South’ that the so-called ‘West’ has been missing in action and self-serving when it comes to a number of key issues which fall under the rubric of global justice: debt relief, climate finance, reform of the international financial institutions and, ultimately, seats and influence at the world’s top decision tables.

“The West” and “the Global South” are not really accurate

In all of this, a word on terminology is needed. The terms ‘the West’ and ‘the Global South’ are not really accurate and fitting to describe the new reality: ‘the West’ is a concept that dates from the Cold War and doesn’t allow for the many countries

⁽²²⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/geopolitics-green-transition-and-improving-eu%20%99s-economic-security_en

⁽²²¹⁾ See: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/world-beyond-ukraine-russia-west>

⁽²²²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2023/04/24/>

outside the North Atlantic alliance that do belong to and feel part of the democratic industrialised world (like Japan, South Korea etc.).

Meanwhile, the use of 'Global South' projects a degree of unity on what is in reality a very diverse group with huge differences in conditions, aspirations and alignments. The fact that, for instance, the Saudi Foreign Minister told me his country belonged to the 'Global South' illustrates how far the term has been stretched. In any event, we all have every interest in using language that promotes the search for common ground and avoids bloc-to-bloc thinking.

Terminology aside, we must take the expectations and grievances of the emerging countries seriously. Not simply because we want their support for votes at the UN on Ukraine – although we will never stop making the argument that the war concerns and damages everyone given the principles at stake. But mainly because in this world there is a battle of narratives going on and, even more, a battle of offers.

We have a huge stake and interest in making sure that the international system remains predominantly rules-based and not power-based. That in turn requires demonstrating to hedging states and other partners that the system delivers for them; that it can be reformed to meet new challenges; and above all that equity and justice are concepts that we take seriously.

Much of the 'fence sitting' on the Ukraine war is not driven so much by any support for Russia's destruction of Ukraine. Rather it is driven by perceived double standards and frustration that other issues do not receive the same sense of urgency and massive resources that have been mobilised for Ukraine.

At the Spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, the dominant sentiment from developing countries ran roughly like this, and I paraphrase: "There was money to bail out your banks after the financial crisis; there was money to bail out your companies and citizens during the pandemic and again to cushion the impact of the rise in energy and food prices. But when we ask for money for debt relief or climate finance, you tell us there isn't any left."

The distinguished Indian diplomat Shivshankar Menon put the point sharply in Foreign Affairs⁽²²³⁾ earlier this year: "*Alienated and resentful, many developing countries see the war in Ukraine and the West's rivalry with China as distracting from urgent issues such as debt, climate change, and the effects of the pandemic*".

⁽²²³⁾ See: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/podcasts/india/world-between-orders-shivshankar-menon>

One can debate this point and perhaps wish for greater solidarity by those who have been victims of power politics and imperialism in the past with the current victim of Russian imperialism, i.e. Ukraine. However, there is no point denying that there are unmet expectations and legitimate demands that we in the EU, together with our principal allies, must listen to and act upon.

The UN Secretary-General Guterres has [spoken](#) (²²⁴) along similar lines and it was striking that when he met EU leaders last March, the need to deliver on this global justice agenda was the first point he made.

Time to deliver on global reform and justice

The coming weeks and months will feature a number of key meetings and summits where we will need to deliver. On 22-23 June there will be the [Summit for a new global financial pact](#) (²²⁵) in Paris. There will be the [SDG Summit](#) (²²⁶) and the [Climate Ambition Summit](#) (²²⁷) in September during UNGA. And in December we will have the [COP28](#) (²²⁸) in the United Arab Emirates.

We need to think big and treat this whole sequence as a strategic continuum. We will need to come up with an integrated 'offer' on debt relief and [Special Drawing Rights](#) (²²⁹), reform, on access to private capital, on climate finance and, yes, also on reforms of the multilateral development banks and their decision-making structures.

As usual, the record of the EU and its member states is actually better than others and more than it gets credit for. We are and remain the first source of official development aid and humanitarian aid; we provide 30% of global climate finance; on debt relief, we have been on the progressive wing inside the G20 and with the [Global Gateway](#) (²³⁰) we are making concrete our commitment to work jointly on high-quality investments and connectivity.

(²²⁴) See: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/02/1133192>

(²²⁵) See: <https://focus2030.org/Summit-for-a-New-Global-Financial-Pact-towards-more-commitments-to-meet-the-1030>

(²²⁶) See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023>

(²²⁷) See: <https://climate-diplomacy.org/events/climate-ambition-summit-2023>

(²²⁸) See: <https://unfccc.int/cop28>

(²²⁹) See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733531](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)733531)

(²³⁰) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-gateway-brand-boost-european%C2%Aoaction-worldwide_en

But of course, it is still not enough. The needs and expectations outpace what we have done so far. We also need to better connect the dots inside the EU: decisions on all these issues are spread between different groups and policy communities (finance, development and climate ministers, the EU and member states, public and private sector etc.). We will need to make a heroic effort to see the bigger picture, break down silos and bring people together. We discussed this at the last Foreign Affairs Council with Development Ministers (²³¹) and there was agreement that our credibility is on the line.

In international politics, perceptions and reputations matter, especially at a time when new centres of power are emerging. We need to pay more attention to how we, and our actions, are seen in many parts of the world.

We often say, quite rightly, that we want Ukraine to prevail and that we will do whatever it takes to get there. We need to make a similar level of commitment to prevail in the court of global public opinion. This is essential to build the necessary trust and solve the many global crises we all face.

⁽²³¹⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2023/05/04/>

OUR STAKES IN DIGITAL DIPLOMACY

27.6.2023 – Blog ⁽²³²⁾ – *Our future will increasingly be digital. Who will set the rules in the digital domain is a geopolitical issue. The EU must ensure that our fundamental values are protected and that a rules-based approach triumphs globally over power-driven dynamics.*

In a [recent blog post](#) ⁽²³³⁾, I stated that “the degree to which the world will be rules-based or power-based matters more than whether it is bipolar or multipolar.” Nowhere does this apply more than in the digital space – for three reasons.

First, because the delicate balance that governs the Internet is under threat. Some states want to replace the agreed, multi-stakeholder framework with “might is right”. They are pushing for states to decide alone what happens on the Internet. So far, the governance of the Internet has been a mixture of various stakeholders, all contributing to sustain the online world in which we live and work.

The delicate balance that governs the Internet under threat

This model of pluralism has been behind the Internet’s success, but some powers want to change it. They are often the same countries who want to overturn the global order in other areas. Just a few days before Russia started its full-scale illegal invasion of Ukraine, Russia and China released a joint [declaration](#) ⁽²³⁴⁾ that claimed the “sovereign right to regulate national segments of the Internet”.

This idea that the Internet should be the tool of states leads directly to the Internet as a tool for control of populations, rather than the source of innovation and free speech that we know today. The EU and its partners are right to resist this approach and must continue to do so.

Second, the online world needs rules that are accepted and supported by all. ChatGPT and other similar models have put Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the public eye. Governments, companies and individuals around the world are seeking to harness

⁽²³²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/our-stakes-digital-diplomacy_en

⁽²³³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/meeting-expectations-fragmenting-world_en

⁽²³⁴⁾ See: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>

these technologies for different purposes and their potential to boost innovation is enormous. But there are also well-founded data and privacy protection concerns, prompting some governments and businesses to ban staff from using them. Some authoritative voices (²³⁵) from inside the tech industry are even warning us about possible “existential risks,” and that AI could cause people to be “harmed or killed”. Obviously, Artificial Intelligence has enormous strategic and security implications.

Not so long ago we were told that any attempt by the EU to think about rules for Artificial Intelligence was simply a bunch of bureaucrats intent on killing innovation. Thankfully, that discourse has shifted and many – also in Silicon Valley - are now awaiting the entry into force of the EU's AI Act.

To be a rule settler, Europe must also be a tech leader

Third, to be a rule setter, Europe must indeed be a tech leader. We are used to saying that Europe lacks tech champions and talk of the rare crown jewels like ASML, Schneider or SAP. But did you know that 2 of the top 5 Supercomputers in the world (²³⁶) are Lumi in Finland and Leonardo in Bologna? Both are the result of concerted European action involving the EU, its member states and the private sector in a partnership known as EuroHPC (²³⁷) to develop the kind of computing capacity that we need to work on climate change or make breakthroughs in the fight against pandemics.

European companies produce also already a significant part of the plumbing of the digital world: from undersea cables to 5G mobile equipment. They are globally competitive and present in key markets, from Jordan to Costa Rica. Our partners want trusted providers of connectivity, sustainable in terms of energy use and quality, not posing security risks, and where the price is right.

It is fashionable to say that EU rules and the EU's defence of multilateral approaches are doomed because we lack the industrial firepower of China or the US. However, we are getting closer to a joined-up European policy on digital where we don't simply rely on regulation – the famous “Brussels effect”. We also are pushing the investment we need in the real digital economy.

(²³⁵) See: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tylerroush/2023/05/24/former-google-ceo-warns-ai-could-cause-people-to-be-harmed-or-killed/?sh=1219cec25f3e>

(²³⁶) See: <https://www.top500.org/lists/top500/list/2023/06/>

(²³⁷) See: https://eurohpc-ju.europa.eu/index_en

Last Monday we discussed with EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs the far-reaching geopolitical implications of AI and other digital diplomacy issues. As said, digital technologies can shift the balance of power and as such must become a critically important component of the EU's foreign policy.

Ministers agreed that we must move fast (²³⁸) to protect our strategic interests and promote our human-centric approach. We decided to increase our engagement in international fora and empower the EU as a shaper of the global digital rulebook. We will focus on both innovation and regulation, taking into account our economic security.

Already last year, I pointed out that in the world today there is not only a battle of narratives but a "battle of offers (²³⁹)". And indeed, as EU we are adjusting our digital offer to better respond to the requests from partners for investment. The goal here is to facilitate digital trade, regulatory convergence and support for the deployment of infrastructures and services at scale with concrete, targeted projects as part of Global Gateway (²⁴⁰). Under this banner, the EU is working to support governments to close the digital divide and bring the benefits of a human-centric digital transformation to their population. We do this in close cooperation with EU member states with a "Team Europe" approach.

Promoting a fair model for data processing

In the first batch of Global Gateway projects (²⁴¹) in Africa or Latin America and the Caribbean for example, we have included new submarine and landline fibre-optic cables, digital and green data centres, and a new bi-regional Digital Alliance with Latin America and the Caribbean. These sit alongside our global network (²⁴²) of tech partnerships across East and South Asia and North America, which extend the reach of the EU's human-centric and human-rights-based approach.

In our relations with partners in Africa, we are promoting a fair model for data processing. Just like with our critical raw materials partnerships, we are not aiming

(²³⁸) See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/26/digital-diplomacy-council-sets-out-priority-actions-for-stronger-eu-action-in-global-digital-affairs/>

(²³⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-asean-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-ahead-eu-asean-commemorative-summit_en

(²⁴⁰) See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

(²⁴¹) See: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/publications/global-gateway-2023-flagship-projects-infographics_en

(²⁴²) See: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/international-relations>

simply to grab the data produced in Africa and get value from it back home. Our European model is about helping develop the kind of digital economy that will support local innovation and add value for our African partners.

In a competitive geopolitical context, we will continue to do what we can to safeguard the current multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance. We want to avoid a “splinternet”, with an open, human-centric model on one side and a model with strong state-led control on the other.

In this fight, we are far from alone in thinking that multilateral digital policy is a game worth playing. The United States has finally acknowledged this by deciding to return to UNESCO, which is increasingly involved in pushing rules for artificial intelligence, technology education or for the behaviour of big tech platforms.

Many challenges lie ahead. We need to update our thinking and policies to make the EU fit for the digital era, not just at home but also beyond our borders. Only then will we be a real global digital player and help to shape a rules-based digital future.

THE WORLD NEEDS A FUNCTIONING MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

17.9.2023 – Blog (²⁴³) – *In September 2023 I joined world leaders in New York at the UN General Assembly High Level Week. However, although the world needed a functioning multilateral system, confrontation was everywhere and cooperation rare. We need to reverse this trend.*

The UNGA High-Level Week is an occasion for leaders from all over the world to meet in New York and discuss the most pressing global issues, in the General Assembly itself but also in many side events and bilateral meetings. I will participate alongside the Presidents of the Council and of the Commission, as well as several of my fellow Commissioners and EU Foreign Affairs Ministers.

The EU attaches great importance to the United Nations

The high level of the European delegation reflects the importance we attach to the UN in a difficult time for the multilateral system. Everywhere you look, rifts are widening and global leadership is absent, insufficient or fractured. Paradoxically, the world is becoming more and more multipolar but also less and less multilateral. Confrontation is everywhere on the rise and cooperation is becoming increasingly rare. We must reverse this trend.

The EU wants to not only preserve the UN and the multilateral system but also modernise and strengthen a rules-based world order, rooted in the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At a time when others are attempting to redefine the world order based on illiberal values, the need for the EU and the UN to come together has never been higher.

This week comes indeed at a crucial moment for the world and the multilateral system. With its war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia, a nuclear power and permanent member of the UN Security Council, trampled on the UN Charter. Despite repeated calls by the UN General Assembly to comply with its responsibility, Russia is preventing the Security Council from fulfilling its role, not only in Ukraine but also elsewhere, thus threatening the credibility of the whole

⁽²⁴³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/world-needs-functioning-multilateral-system_en

United Nations system. In order to restore the unique legitimacy of the UN, it is urgent to make the Security Council more representative to reflect the changes that have taken place in the world and in particular give Africa a voice.

We will again use this year's High-Level Week to explain our unwavering support for Ukraine and rally countries from every corner of the world to team up with us in defence of the UN charter and refusal of Russia's neoimperialism. We cannot go back to a world where "might makes right". This would imperil the security of all nations, big and small, particularly of developing and emerging ones.

Coming on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war against one of the world's main breadbaskets threatens global food security and is aggravating the global cost-of-living crisis. This affects all countries but particularly the weakest and poorest ones. In August 2022, the UN played a decisive role in alleviating this pain with the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI). However, last July Russia decided to abandon this deal. We will discuss with UN Secretary-General Guterres the ways and means to revive it.

The Sustainable Development Goals at the centre

As a result, even some well-managed countries are now in serious debt distress and the fiscal space for investments in social welfare, green transition, health or education is shrinking. This dimension will be at the centre of this year's High-Level Week with the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) Summit](#) (²⁴⁴) on Monday and Tuesday. We are at the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda set in 2015 and only 12 % of the SDGs are on target. The Summit will aim to get the SDGs back on track.

Profound reforms in the global financial system are necessary to release the capital required to accelerate the 2030 agenda and the green transition. Many countries consider this system as unjust because fiscal space is available for the richer countries whereas developing countries are increasingly submerged in debt traps. There is an urgent need to help countries escape from this debt trap, allow more [Special Drawing Rights \(SDR\)](#) (²⁴⁵) to flow to developing economies, and discuss serious reform of the global financial architecture. We must offer legitimate and credible global solutions, if we want to avoid that more and more of our developing partners look to China or Russia in search for alternative ones.

(²⁴⁴) See: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023>

(²⁴⁵) See: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/special-drawing-right>

All this takes place also at a moment of “global boiling rather than global warming”, as UN SG Guterres put it a few days ago. Ahead of COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates next December, [the Climate Ambition Summit](#) (²⁴⁶) will be on Wednesday a decisive moment to prepare the bold and swift decisions necessary to keep the promises of the Paris Agreement. Unless there is a strong reversal of current trends, and in particular unless the biggest global emitters raise significantly their ambitions, likely irreversible damage will be done to future generations. In this regard, the EU has made ambitious commitments with the Fit for 55 package. We have now to implement them swiftly.

As ever, I will use also this opportunity to meet bilaterally with many colleagues from all over the world and participate in a Ministerial meeting to prepare next year’s Summit of the Future, co-chair with Egypt the Global Counter-Terrorist Forum and participate in multiple other meetings with global partners.

Focus on the Middle East Peace Process

This year, I will focus on the Middle East Peace Process with in particular a “Peace Day Effort For Middle East Peace” meeting on Monday that I will co-chair with the League of Arab States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan to help revive [the Arab Peace Initiative](#) (²⁴⁷) from 2002. The EU has welcomed the rapprochement between several Arab countries and Israel but a peace agreement between Israel and Palestinians is still missing.

A few days ago, it was the thirtieth anniversary of the Oslo agreements. However, this anniversary passed almost unnoticed due to the total stalemate in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. We are increasingly worried about the situation in the occupied territories due to the extension of Israeli colonisation: settlers have risen from 280,000 in 1993 to 700,000 today. The international community continues to promote a two-state solution, but the situation on the ground is making it increasingly impracticable. We must find ways to uphold international law and UN resolutions and reopen negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. During the High-Level Week, we will explore ways to move ahead in that direction.

The world needs urgently a functioning multilateral system. Throughout this week, EU representatives will be working hard to push in this direction.

(²⁴⁶) See: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-ambition-summit>

(²⁴⁷) See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Peace_Initiative

Multipolarity without multilateralism

24.9.2023 – Blog ⁽²⁴⁸⁾ – During the UN General Assembly in New York, I had the opportunity to discuss the current crisis of multilateralism with Professor Joseph Weiler at New York University. I presented my views on a world that is increasingly multipolar and on how to avoid its fragmentation.

We live indeed in a more and more multipolar world, but multilateralism is in retreat. It is a paradox. Why? Because when the number of participants in a game increases, the natural response should be to strengthen the rules governing the game. However, we are facing the opposite trend: the rules governing the world are running out of steam. We must find ways to overcome this paradox.

The three aspects of multipolarity

This new multipolarity results from the combination of three dynamics. First, a wider distribution of wealth in the world, second, the willingness of States to assert themselves strategically and ideologically and third, the emergence of an increasingly transactional international system, based on bilateral deals rather than global rules.

In 1990, the G7 accounted for 67% of world GDP, today, that share has fallen below 40%. In 1990, China's share of world GDP was 1.6%, today it stands at 18%. Inside of the G7, the United States' share has decreased but much less than that of Europe and Japan and, in the Western world, the United States continues to predominate clearly.

Beyond the G7, multipolarity is first and foremost the result of China's impressive rise. Hence the reconfiguration of global relations around the United States and China. Together they account for more than 40% of global wealth and, as a result, exercise significant power over the international system. In the coming decades, we could have also India catching up on China and the United States.

But multipolarity is not just the result of the distribution of wealth. The new multipolar world is characterised also by a growing demand for sovereignty and identity. Especially in the so-called Global South, although it is a very heterogeneous group of countries.

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multipolarity-without-multilateralism_en

In Latin America, in Africa, in the Middle East and North Africa and, of course, in Asia almost everyone thinks now that there are credible alternatives to the West, not only economically, but also technologically, militarily and ideologically.

This does not necessarily mean that with the rise of China, a new global model is emerging. Nor does it mean that China will try to convince third countries to adopt its model in all its dimensions.

Rather, countries are seeking alternatives to the Western model on a case-by-case basis, as it is currently happening in different countries in Africa. These countries seem to be willing to work with whichever player that looks opportunistically able to replace the old ones. These new players offer the advantage of not asking who is in prison or where the money is really going. This suits many regimes.

This reality is reflected in the reactions to the war of aggression against Ukraine. Most Global South countries share the idea that Russia is the aggressor and voted to denounce its aggression in the UN. But many of them are not ready to go beyond that point.

They do not want Ukraine to dominate the world agenda. For example, they are afraid that funding for the green transition in the Global South could suffer due to the need to finance the reconstruction in Ukraine. For many countries far away from the EU, the Ukraine war looks like a simple border dispute between a large country and its smaller neighbour. Not such a major issue after all.

Beyond that, there is the question of values. We Europeans still react based on a worldview enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, China and Russia are challenging the universal nature of these rights and many countries in the so-called Global South are receptive to this approach. Universalism is seen as a simple vestige of Western domination, forgetting that they are all signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One argument often put forward is that the West itself does not always follow the rules it purports to defend. Clearly, this criticism is not entirely unfounded.

A transactional world rather than a multilateral one

As an alternative, they put forward a form of political culturalism, whereby every society would be entitled to have its own values. With this approach, a country's sovereignty should take precedence over upholding of human rights and civil liberties. China in particular is playing this card for all it is worth.

This new multipolarity triggers a lack of international consensus on almost every issue. At a time when the need for global regulation increases, it fuels dissent. If we give up on a global collective capacity to set rules, everyone will do whatever they can or as they please.

We witness in particular a deadlock on security issues. For nearly 10 years now, the Security Council has been rendered ineffective by Russia's inappropriate use of its veto right, systematically opposing many decisions on Ukraine – naturally – but also on other crises like Syria or Mali. We have a deadlock in the Security Council but also on a reform of the Security Council. No permanent members are willing to give up their veto right.

So, we have at the same time more and more influential players and more and more global challenges, but it is increasingly difficult to reach a consensus to face them. There is no longer a coalition of dominant powers capable of imposing a global order. On the contrary, competing powers tend to neutralise each other. This situation is likely to persist until the balance of power between the dominant players has stabilised.

It could lead to the split of the world order into competing blocs in areas of security, economic integration and technology. The lack of consensus will then fracture the world and force third countries to align on one of the competing systems. It could be the case for example for the Internet where countries like Russia and China could impose their own specific standards and split the cyber world. Such a fragmentation will of course create huge economic costs, and reduce incentives for cooperation on global issues like climate.

In this context, what could we and should we do? First, we must not delude ourselves: it is difficult to imagine a comprehensive overhaul of the world order while there is no consensus on this issue between the major powers, in particular between the United States and China. Traditional 'top-down multilateralism' involving major conferences during which all countries take decisions together on issues is less and less working.

Minilateralism and concerted unilateralism

However, if we cannot find a single global alternative to the crisis of multilateralism, could we find partial ones? A more promising approach would probably be to pursue what is increasingly called "*minilateralism*": agreements on different issues between like-minded states. However, to avoid the bloc-to-bloc confrontation I

mentioned before, we must therefore imperatively adopt an approach that goes beyond the North or the West and attracts the support of key countries in the South. We need to expand the circle of like-minded countries to embrace others gradually and pragmatically.

For example, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations pointed out recently, the G20 members are responsible for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, the G20 countries could decide to break the deadlock as regards the urgent problem of financing the green transition and the necessary commitments to guarantee this transition. Although we saw clearly in Delhi that, while the general principles were restated, there was no consensus on this issue.

This approach could be useful in particular in new areas, like for example AI, where international regulation is still weak. However, we must never forget that regulation ever reflects the balance of power. This is an important issue for Europe, which is often regarded as a normative power that does not necessarily have the means to match its ambitions. In other words, we are more willing to regulate AI than capable of developing a European AI ecosystem. To remain a normative power, we need to develop our technological firepower.

The example of the 2015 Paris Agreement

Another possibility is the so-called “*concerted unilateralism*”. The term may seem illogical since unilateralism is not, by definition, concerted. Nevertheless, after the failure of Copenhagen in 2009, it is already what the world is doing on climate change with the 2015 Paris Agreement. This Agreement is built on what states declare they are ready to do to limit climate change. A reliable global agreement on climate change could hardly result from a top-down approach, but more probably from the sum of national unilateral commitments made by each state. The Sustainable Development Goals agenda is also based on that principle and we could extend this logic to other areas.

Will this way of working be good enough to solve all global issues? Probably not. On climate, for example, the sum of these national commitments is clearly not sufficient and there are still critical bottlenecks, particularly regarding green finance. However, during this critical period of growing multipolarity and decreasing multilateralism, we need to use all practical ways to address global issues. The main risk today is the fragmentation of the world order into political, economic and technological blocs and we must prevent it.

GLOBAL GATEWAY, EU'S PROPOSAL IN THE GLOBAL “BATTLE OF OFFERS”

27.10.2023 – Blog ⁽²⁴⁹⁾ – *Global Gateway is a central element of our outreach to the “Global South”. In October 2023, the European Commission hosted the first Global Gateway Forum, attracting numerous partners from all over the world. Two years after its launch, Global Gateway is starting to yield results, but we need to accelerate its implementation.*

I concluded the [Global Gateway Forum](#) ⁽²⁵⁰⁾ alongside my colleague Commissioner Urpilainen, President Assoumani of Comoros, who chairs the African Union, Mr Dammu Ravi from India, Principal Secretary in the G20, and Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez, whose country currently holds the presidency of the Union, together with other prominent EU Heads of State and Government.

300 billion euro investments in infrastructure, health, education

The [Global Gateway](#) ⁽²⁵¹⁾ initiative was launched in late 2021, after the COVID-19 pandemic. With this project, we intended to mobilise €300 billion in investment to support the economic and social development of our partners by helping build connectivity infrastructure, accelerate green and digital transition and enhance intangible infrastructure, including health and education.

One of our first flagship Global Gateway projects is indeed to [help produce vaccines in Africa](#) ⁽²⁵²⁾. During COVID-19, the absence of vaccine production capacities on this continent has had very negative effects on the African population. Senegal President Macky Sall recalled the importance of this common endeavour during the opening of the Global Gateway Forum.

Global Gateway is an EU contribution to help achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, together with the goals of the Paris Climate

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-gateway-eus-proposal-global-battle-offers_en

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ See: https://global-gateway-forum.ec.europa.eu/index_en

⁽²⁵¹⁾ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

⁽²⁵²⁾ See: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/l-248012>

Agreement. The global green and digital transitions can only succeed if they are just and if they benefit everyone, in particular the poorest and the weakest.

Global Gateway should also contribute to the EU's economic security strategy and help "de-risking" our economy by making the EU's supply chains less vulnerable. It should help improve the EU's access to resources, from energy to critical raw materials that are necessary for the green and the digital transitions, while breaking with old-style *extractivism*, and joining our partners in adding value locally and creating jobs in their countries. We want to "de-risk" our economy, but we do not intend to close it off. On the contrary, we want to develop additional links with new regions and countries.

We intend to achieve these ambitious goals with partners of all continents from Central Asia to Africa, North and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Global Gateway is also a tool to deepen our cooperation with other regional organisations, including the African Union, the CELAC, the ASEAN, the Gulf Cooperation Council... Since the beginning of my mandate, we have constantly worked to reinforce these links.

We also need to work closely with our partners from the G7 and from the G20 to bring a combined response to these international challenges. That is what we have started to do, with the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor project launched during the last G20 Summit in Delhi.

Not only a "battle of narratives", but also a "battle of offers"

Our relations with the countries in the so-called "Global South" are one of the main defining issues for the EU's credibility and the EU's future global role. We must reach out much more proactively to all our partners and Global Gateway can play an important role in achieving this goal. We are indeed not only in a global "battle of narratives" with other powers, but also in a "battle of offers".

When we discussed the geopolitics of Global Gateway at the Foreign Affairs Council in November 2022, I pointed out that the year 2023 would be a credibility test, in which we need to over-deliver instead of over-promising. This forum has proven that we are indeed starting to deliver.

Important projects on green energy are being implemented with Mauritania, Vietnam, Tanzania, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. After the launch of the BELLA Undersea Cable linking Europe with Brazil, we are improving digital connectivity

in Costa Rica, developing digital programs in Senegal and enhancing digital satellite connectivity in Central Asia. The Lobito trade project with Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia will open up an innovation corridor across Africa. The modernisation of the port of Aktau in Kazakhstan will help develop what is commonly known as the ‘Middle Corridor’, connecting Caucasus and Central Asia. We are also beginning to work on a new corridor across Mexico, to provide an alternative route from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Experts from the Port of Antwerp are working with colleagues in Walvis Bay to increase exchanges with Namibia, with whom we are developing a sustainable raw materials partnership. The same is being done with the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. As already mentioned, in the run-up to the Global Health Forum next month, the development of vaccine production in Africa is a clear demonstration of where the EU stands. The EU has signed also during the Forum agreements with partners from Rwanda to Tajikistan, from Senegal to Bangladesh on all types of education from early childhood development to technical and vocational education.

Our future credibility will depend on our capacity to scale up these projects. Two years ago, we set ourselves the target of generating €300 billion of investment for this endeavour; today we have committed to €66 billion, half of which will come from EU grant funding. It is already a huge amount of course, but looking at the world as it is, it is clearly not enough.

Supporting sustainable growth and building long-term relations

We have not been as fast as others have, in this global “battle of offers”. However, it is not about a competition on how quickly we can help build bridges, schools, rail lines or data centres. It is about supporting sustainable growth and helping create an institutional environment that is appropriate and helps develop a common understanding and long-term relationships based on trust.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we developed the [Team Europe](#)⁽²⁵³⁾ concept to help our partners around the world by coordinating the actions of EU member states, the European Commission, and the European and national financial institutions. We want to extend and deepen this approach with the Global Gateway. At the same time, we must recognise that Team Europe is still in its infancy.

⁽²⁵³⁾ See: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives_en

The EU and its member states are by far the biggest providers of development aid to the “Global South”, but we still lack an effective enough coordination on this matter. We must do more together to have the impact that our citizens and our partners expect.

This first Global Gateway Forum has shown to our partners that Europeans are aware of what is at stake and that the EU, its member states, and financial institutions have begun to deliver together. I am sure the second Forum will prove how we have been able to pick up the pace in the coming months.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

6.12.2023 – Blog (²⁵⁴) – *In December 2023, the world gathered in Dubai to seek an agreement at a time when climate change is accelerating. Achieving a fair distribution of efforts is particularly complex as climate change, and its antidote, the green transition, are creating losers and winners and shaking up the global balance of power.*

This negotiation process under the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#), began over thirty years ago in 1992 in Rio. Since then, it has been always conflict-ridden and until now quite ineffective. In 2002, ten years after the Rio Summit, Jacques Chirac, French President at the time, made headlines when he said at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg that “Our house is burning and we are looking the other way”. However, we have continued to do so and greenhouse gas emissions have risen by almost a third since 2002. Since 1992, the EU’s emissions have fallen by a quarter, but at the same time those of China, which now accounts for almost a third of the world total, have increased more than fourfold.

In 2015, in Paris, we thought we had finally reached a global agreement to limit climate change to 1.5°C. However, since eight years, we have not yet finalised its implementation and global emissions have not decreased. Despite growing urgency, rising international tensions make even more difficult to find an agreement today. Yet there is no alternative: global cooperation is the only viable solution to the climate issue, which knows no borders.

The difficulties of fossil fuel-producing countries

Since 1992, the EU has been at the forefront of these efforts. In Dubai, we aim to secure an ambitious Global Stocktake and agree to ban unabated fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies, double energy efficiency efforts and triple global renewable capacity. Additionally, we are also working to increase climate finance for adaptation and a green transition. What makes the task of achieving a fair distribution of efforts between countries particularly complex is that climate

(²⁵⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/geopolitics-climate-change_en

change, and its essential antidote, the green transition, are making winners and losers and shaking up the global balance of power.

Reserves of fossil fuels - coal, gas and oil - are gradually running out and becoming more expensive to exploit. However, there is still enough left to push humanity towards a catastrophic scenario: a world with temperatures exceeding + 3°C that would be largely uninhabitable. In other words, we need to decide not to exploit a large proportion of existing fossil fuel reserves and stop looking for new ones. This obviously poses serious difficulties for fossil fuel-producing countries, which often derive a significant proportion of their wealth from them.

Those countries are of course legitimately concerned about their prospect in a world without fossil fuels. And they have the means to put the brakes on this process, especially as unanimity is required in the UNFCCC process. To gain their cooperation, it is crucial to present a positive outlook for the post-fossil fuel era. For this purpose, we have been proposing partnerships with many of these countries around developing renewable energies and green hydrogen and bilateral trade in non-fossil fuels products.

At the same time, the green transition will require considerable quantities of raw materials such as lithium and rare earths, as well as many specific products and components, such as batteries and photovoltaic panels. The availability of these raw materials and the production of these components will also profoundly reconfigure global geopolitics.

Although China alone still burns more coal than the rest of the planet, it has gained a significant lead in green technologies thanks to massive subsidies for its producers. Since 1992, China has been considered a developing country in the UNFCCC process. However, given the leading role it now plays in the world while being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, it is legitimate to expect that China will assume, alongside industrialised countries, a central role in the fight against climate change. This encompasses ambitious action at home and globally, particularly in helping the poorest and most threatened countries to leap-frog the green transition.

The Inflation Reduction Act, a powerful instrument

With the adoption of the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, the world's other major emitter, the United States, has finally given itself a powerful instrument to

accelerate the green transition and develop green technologies domestically. However, this has not been without raising concerns among its partners, particularly in Europe, due to the protectionist nature of the measures adopted.

Europe, for its part, has few reserves of the raw materials essential to the green transition and has fallen behind in many technologies central to this shift. We therefore need to catch up. We have begun to do so in recent years thanks to [Next Generation EU](#) and [REPowerEU](#). We also need to diversify our supplies to prevent shifting our dependence on fossil fuels, particularly from Russia before the war of aggression against Ukraine, to an over-reliance on China for materials and components critical to the green transition.

This means establishing long-term partnerships with countries producing critical raw materials, particularly in Latin America and Africa. However, we must avoid falling back into the “extractivist” logic of the 20th century: such partnerships must promote the industrialisation of our partners by adding value to the raw materials extracted on their territory under optimal environmental conditions. Therefore the Commission proposed a [European Critical Raw Material Act](#) and we have already concluded [such partnerships with 8 countries](#).

Climate change, even if we manage to limit it, will also radically alter the world’s geography. In particular, the melting of ice and permafrost will make it easier to access and exploit territories that have until now not been settled. This will be particularly true of the Arctic and Antarctic. This risks giving rise to increased rivalry and ecological damages in very fragile territories.

The [European Union is strongly committed](#) to preserving these regions and limiting ecological risks. However, in the context of major tensions between the EU and Putin’s Russia, which shows little concern for ecology and international law and has a clear imperialist mindset, this issue is likely to become a significant additional bone of contention. Melting sea ice is also changing shipping routes, in particular by opening up an ice-free passage north of Russia for shipping traffic from China and Asia, a potentially major game-changer for international trade.

Rising sea levels and water scarcity

At the same time, rising sea levels threaten many coastlines where a large proportion of the world’s population is concentrated, particularly in the poorest countries. Rising temperatures and droughts will also force their inhabitants to

migrate or make major changes to adapt to this new environment. By 2050, over 1 billion people will have insufficient access to water and more than 200 million could have to move. 2022 was already a record year for forced internal displacement due to extreme weather events. This dynamic is already fuelling conflicts in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and many other regions around the world. According to the UN, 12 of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change were in conflict in 2020. Climate change is clearly a major challenge to the stability of our neighbourhood and the security of our borders.

Yet most of these countries bear only limited responsibility for climate change, with low levels of emissions today and even lower ones in the past. 600 million Africans still lack access to electricity. Opposing their increased energy consumption due to climate change concerns is of course out of the question.

To prevent these countries from exacerbating climate change by increasing their greenhouse gas emissions, we need to give them substantial support to adapt to climate change. This includes in particular changing agricultural practices, and embarking on the green transition without repeating our past mistakes. Significant financial and technological transfers are needed in this endeavour. This is indeed the focus of many of the projects we are implementing as part of the [Global Gateway](#). One of the few pieces of good news in recent years will facilitate this work: the cost of green technologies has fallen sharply. Nonetheless, the effort required to help them remains substantial.

Climate finance is key

With €28.5 billion in 2022, the EU, its member states and the European financial institutions are already the largest contributors of public climate finance to developing economies and developed countries are finally on track to meet the goal set at Copenhagen in 2009 of \$100bn annually. Yet, we must now think beyond 2025, when the current pledge ends. We have to go much further.

It is high time to align private and public financial flows with the Paris Agreement and go from billions to trillions of climate finance. International Financial Institutions and Multilateral Development Banks need to be reformed to better support global public goods. The new [Loss and Damage Fund](#) must also acquire the needed financial firepower. The first substantial pledges announced in Dubai are encouraging. Here also, will China be an indispensable partner?

Europe now accounts for only 5.6% of the world's population and 7.5% of global emissions. However, as the first industrialised region in the world, it bears a major historical responsibility for the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere over the last two centuries as a result of the combustion of fossil fuels.

With the [European Green Deal](#), we have strengthened the EU's climate ambition. By 2030, we want to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55%, produce more than 42.5 % of our energy from renewable sources and increase energy efficiency by at least 11.7 %. We want also to become climate-neutral by 2050.

To achieve this, the EU's climate action is based principally on [putting a price on CO₂ emissions](#). However, if this were to result in carbon-intensive activities simply relocating outside Europe, the so-called [carbon leakage](#), it would mean the EU losing jobs without achieving any emissions reduction globally.

That is the reason why the EU's carbon price is complemented by a [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism \(CBAM\)](#) to ensure that the most carbon-intensive goods imported into Europe are also subject to comparable carbon pricing. It is not protectionist. It is simply the necessary counterpart of our ambitious emissions reduction measures to guarantee that they are effectively a win for the planet.

The rationale for EU deforestation law

While we decarbonise our own economy, we cannot wash our hands of the greenhouse gas emissions caused outside the EU by our consumption of imported goods. This is why we are also greening our trade policy. We want to ensure, in particular, that the products we import no longer cause deforestation, one of the greatest threats to climate and biodiversity.

I know that the requirements stemming from [this EU law](#) are creating tensions with some of our partners. We are ready to support them in implementing these measures and address together the common challenge of deforestation.

I am well aware that an additional effort to help developing countries to adapt to climate change and embark on the green transition is difficult to achieve for the EU and its member states. This is particularly true at a time when significant investments are needed for Europe's own green transition, and while we are facing wars at our borders and the need to invest more in our defence.

However, the cost resulting from our inaction would certainly be much higher than this additional cost. The long-term stability of our neighbourhood and the security of our borders will depend significantly on our current efforts to help our neighbours adapt to climate change and embark on the green transition. It will be decisive for Europe's role in the world of tomorrow.

5.

EU FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AROUND THE WORLD





5.1 EU'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

BELGRADE-PRISTINA DIALOGUE: TIME TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

16.3.2023 – Blog (²⁵⁵) – *In March 2023, the meeting with Serbia's President Vučić and Kosovo's Prime Minister Kurti in Ohrid, North Macedonia, centred on the Implementation Annex of the recent EU Agreement. This agreement is pivotal in normalizing the lives of people in the region and paving the way for Kosovo and Serbia towards EU membership.*

The Western Balkans are different from any other region in the EU's immediate neighbourhood. This is what I realised even before becoming the EU's High Representative/Vice-President in December 2019.

One of the steps before becoming the EU's head of foreign policy is a hearing in the European Parliament. During my exchange with the Parliament, special attention was paid to this region surrounded by the EU, and in particular my plans and ideas on the Dialogue on normalisation of relations (²⁵⁶), which at that point, the EU has been facilitating for almost 10 years. I committed myself on this occasion to conduct my first bilateral visit as HRVP to Kosovo and Serbia – a promise I kept.

People living in the Balkans do not want to be stuck in the 1990s

As soon as I officially took office as the High Representative for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission, the Western Balkans naturally became one of the main points of my attention. Every time I meet civil society representatives during my numerous visits to the region, they put one thing clearly to me: the majority of people living in the Balkans do not want to be stuck in the 1990s, constantly confronted with the remittance of the past. They want to look forward rather than backwards, to live in a democracy, governed by the rule of law, in societies that provide opportunities for all. Wishing to be a member of our community of values is not a far-fetched dream, and I support their aspirations as the entire EU leadership does. The Western Balkans

(²⁵⁵) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-time-take-responsibility-and-move-towards-eu_en

(²⁵⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue_en

are part of Europe. And they are certainly not a chip to be used by Putin in his imperialistic dreams.

However, to open the path towards reaching the objective of joining the EU, Serbia and Kosovo need to normalise relations. There is no way around it. The EU has been doing its part and the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue is a central part of my mandate. The Council agreed with my proposal to appoint Ambassador Lajčák as the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, with the first task to accelerate the process. And this is what we did. In 2020, we held several High-Level and Chief Negotiator meetings in Brussels focused on negotiating a comprehensive legally binding agreement on normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo dealing with all outstanding issues.

Nobody ever said a task as monumental as facilitating a normalisation agreement would be easy. There have been ups and downs, and far too often issues considered small and technical proved highly sensitive and political, with the potential of turning violent.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine changed the picture. The Dialogue is not only about Kosovo and Serbia. It must be seen in the current broader geopolitical context, as a defining moment in the European history.

But instead of advancing on the big picture of normalisation of relations to make Europe safer and provide for a better future for the people of the region, our time and energy were absorbed by crisis management, barricades, and threats of violence with one deadline after another in the second half of 2022. It was not easy to defuse the situation and to avoid a full conflict, but we managed.

This vicious circle of crises had to stop

This vicious circle of crises on the brink of escalation or even violence had to stop. Therefore, in September 2022, we – supported by the leaders of Germany and France and our American friends - made a bold proposal to the President of Serbia Vučić and Prime Minister of Kosovo Kurti. A proposal that would put an end to crisis management and instead shift the attention to normalisation and reconciliation, and that would help the entire region leap forward towards Europe.

During the last [high-level meeting](#) (257), between both leaders, which I convened on 27 February this year they agreed that no further discussions are needed on the European Union's Proposal on the path to normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia, a document endorsed by all 27 EU member states at the European Council meeting in February. This is not a small feat and an important step forward. But it is not a done deal yet.

This is why now is the time to focus on the bigger picture and not allow another window of opportunity to close in front of the eyes of the people of the region, as has happened a few times in recent history.

It is now the time for Serbia and Kosovo to agree on the Implementation annex, which is an integral part of the Agreement and share a clear understanding on *how* to put in place their provisions.

The EU is not a simple note-taker nor is it a party in the Dialogue: we are and remain the facilitator in this Dialogue. The EU is the eventual home for Serbia and Kosovo. I will continue to work tirelessly towards eventually reaching a comprehensive agreement on the normalisation of relations that is acceptable to EU member states, is in line with international law and the European *acquis*, and contributes to regional stability. The agreement on the table is an important step towards that objective.

This is the time to demonstrate shared responsibility

This is the time for the leaders of Kosovo, Serbia and of the entire Western Balkans to show courage and to demonstrate shared responsibility for the success of the EU accession process of the region.

"The task of the leader is to get his/her people from where they are to where they have not been", one of my seasoned colleagues said. The task of the leader is also to deliver the quality-of-life people want, I would add, the quality of life, which membership in the EU brings.

(257) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-after-high-level_en

UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN, 15 YEARS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

19.7.2023 – Op-Ed (²⁵⁸) – *In 2023, we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). In this op-ed published in various outlets and co-authored with Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi and the Secretary General of the UfM, Nasser Kamel, we reaffirm our mutual commitment to regional cooperation in the Mediterranean.*

Over the years, the UfM has established itself as the leading multilateral framework in the Euro-Mediterranean region despite the challenges posed by a turbulent regional and international context. More than 60 projects have received the unanimous endorsement of the 43 UfM countries. Those projects, with a combined budget of € 5 billion, aim to benefit more than 10 million people directly, with an estimated indirect impact that includes approximately 100 million people. The organisation has championed job creation and women's rights, enhanced connectivity efforts among countries, and addressed pressing environmental and climate emergencies.

Furthermore, the UfM has prioritised grant schemes and projects to foster entrepreneurship and job opportunities. The Med4Jobs Initiative has helped increase the employability of youth and women. To highlight the cultural richness of the region, the UfM has also launched initiatives to promote diversity, dialogue, and mutual understanding, together with the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures.

Common efforts for common challenges and objectives

The UfM is actively enhancing higher education systems and focusing on youth-oriented projects. 3000 students will be enrolled in 2024 at the Euromed University of Fès, a pioneer academic institution that educates a new generation with a unique Euro-Mediterranean vision. Recognising the potential of young people as agents for positive change, our Foreign Ministers had a fruitful exchange last November with youth representatives, who highlighted their recommendations

(²⁵⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/%E2%80%9Cunion-mediterranean-15-years-regional-cooperation-ayman-safadi-and-nasser-kamel_en

and expectations for the future of our shared region. The UfM is also working to accelerate investments in the blue economy, which has a huge potential to improve both economic growth and sustainability in the Mediterranean basin.

We need to acknowledge that our efforts thus far have fallen short of the target and that challenges persist. Economic integration between the North and the South of the Mediterranean remains largely insufficient. The economic gap between the Northern and Southern shores is widening, with a per capita GDP six times higher in the EU in comparison with its Southern neighbours. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further deepened social fragmentation and socioeconomic inequality.

The combination of the pandemic, the recent geopolitical shifts, Russia's war on Ukraine, the protracted regional crises, particularly the stalemate in the Middle East Peace Process and the continued escalation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the global climate emergency highlight the urgent need for deeper regional integration, particularly in terms of supply chains, clean energy supply and food security.

The Mediterranean region is warming faster than the global average. The region's fast-growing youth population needs prospects for a life of dignity and prosperity. The consequences are increasingly visible for populations and ecosystems on both sides of the Mediterranean. A coordinated approach at a regional level is therefore imperative to address these challenges effectively.

This is precisely where the strength of our Union – the Union for the Mediterranean – could lie. Our members have varying levels of socio-economic development and diverse interests, but we share common objectives. The UfM's unique convening power brings together a vast range of stakeholders (academia, civil society, youth, etc) from all the countries of the region. Its experts' fora, gathering over 8000 stakeholders per year, allow for a rich exchange of ideas and best practices. The UfM's model of governance, placing North and South on an equal footing, and based on the principle of consensus, can increase co-ownership and inclusivity.

The immediate future of the region is challenging

The organisation needs continued commitment from its members to achieve its goal of creating a truly socially, economically and ecologically resilient Mediterranean region. This is why we are working hand in hand with all our members to give it the necessary capacity to deliver more and better, with a

greater impact in the region. The immediate future of the region is challenging, but with the UfM we believe we have the right tool to face the future together.

THE EU WANTS TO SEE GEORGIA SUCCEEDING ON ITS EUROPEAN PATH

11.9.2023 – Blog ^(²⁵⁹) – *In September 2023, during my first visit to Georgia, I conveyed the message that the country is part of the European family. However, to become a candidate country, Georgia must make significant progress in depolarizing political life, de-oligarchizing its economy, reforming the justice and electoral system, and enhancing media pluralism.*

In Georgia, I met President Salomé Zurabishvili, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, Foreign Minister Ilia Darchiashvili, as well as Parliamentarians and civil society representatives.

Three main messages

I wanted to share three main messages with the Georgian people and the Georgian authorities. First: there is no doubt for the EU that Georgia belongs to the European family. Visiting Georgia, you can feel the overwhelming European aspiration of the Georgian people. I have seen more European flags in the streets of Tbilisi than in most European capitals. More than 80% of the Georgians ^(²⁶⁰) want their country to become a part of the European Union. It is for sure an impressive figure and we value fully this commitment. During my stay, all my interlocutors made a plea for Georgia to receive candidate status to the EU shortly. It is a call that we have heard over the past months consistently from the authorities, from the opposition and from the civil society representatives.

It is a call that we do not want to leave unheard. However, there are clear requirements for Georgia along this way, mapped out in the 12 priorities put forward by the European Commission ^(²⁶¹). The next steps on the European path for Georgia will depend on the results achieved on them. As of last June, Georgia has delivered on three of them. But on the other nine, quite a lot of work remains to be done. It concerns mainly depolarisation of the political life, de-oligarchisation

^(²⁵⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-wants-see-georgia-succeeding-its-european-path_en

^(²⁶⁰) See: <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-georgia-poll-finds-support-for-eu-accession-high-weariness-of-russian-presence-lack-of-faith-in-political-parties/>

^(²⁶¹) See: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/georgia_en

of the economic, political and social life, justice reform, electoral reform, media pluralism and human rights.

One of the main challenges on the European path for Georgia is indeed the strong political polarisation. For the country to become an EU candidate, all political forces need to work together constructively. As I discussed with the Georgian Parliamentarians, the majority has to be inclusive and the minority cooperative. The EU accession process is a national endeavour that needs to stand over party politics. The government and the party in power should work on creating an environment that makes this cooperation possible. Launching the impeachment procedure against President Zurabishvili, has further increased this counterproductive polarisation. To be able to go ahead swiftly with Georgia's European path, all institutions of the country have to work together, i.e. cooperate. Georgian leaders should not miss this historic opportunity.

No shortcuts to EU accession

There are no shortcuts to EU accession. Neither for Georgia, nor anyone else. The enlargement process always follows clear criteria. It requires, for sure, hard work, political will and a clear commitment to the European Union's values. But, as I told my Georgian counterparts, I know from my own Spanish experience that EU membership has a big transformative power and is an important security commitment. This hard work is worth it, not only to become a member of the European Union, but, more importantly, to improve the everyday life of citizens. Georgia has a robust administration and a vibrant civil society. It has all the potential to achieve this historic task.

My second message was related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU is supporting Ukraine, and we will support Ukraine for as long as it takes. The EU welcomes the clear position of Georgia in international fora in this regard. It is crucial to coordinate our efforts with our closest partners to isolate Russia internationally. Therefore, I welcomed the close cooperation with Georgia on the prevention of sanctions' circumvention. A lot has been done in Georgia in that respect and I expressed our clear recognition for these efforts.

However, I have had to say also that we regret the resumption of direct flights between Georgia and Russia, making Tbilisi a hub for bringing Russians to Europe. More engagement is also needed to counter Russia's hybrid activities, starting with Russia's war of propaganda and disinformation. The EU will continue

supporting independent media and civil society in Georgia to help build resilience to information manipulation. Independent media and fair access to information are at the core of democracy.

Alignment with our foreign policy is a commitment that we expect from all countries aspiring to become members of the European Union. This alignment is also a commitment that Georgia itself undertook already in 2014 under the [Association Agreement with the EU](#)⁽²⁶²⁾. However, in that regard, I see right now quite a lot of room for improvement.

Unwavering support to Georgia's territorial integrity

My third message was about our unwavering support to Georgia's security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Since 2008, Georgia has been a victim of Putin's neo-imperialist worldview. Our longstanding commitment to stand by Georgia is today as strong as ever in light of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

These are not just words. We are backing this up with concrete actions: we have an active EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Toivo Klaar and our dedicated civilian mission, the [EU Monitoring Mission \(EUMM\)](#)⁽²⁶³⁾ that has been in the country for the last 15 years. The mission patrols along the administrative boundary line with the breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Every day, it plays an important role in ensuring stability in the region by observing the situation on the ground, reporting on incidents, and, generally, through its presence in the relevant areas.

I visited the area adjacent to the Administrative Boundary Line with the breakaway region of South Ossetia [with the EU Mission](#)⁽²⁶⁴⁾. I discussed of course already the situation around the conflict with the Georgian authorities, but I had also the opportunity to exchange with the civilian population living near the Administrative Boundary Line. They told me about their daily hardship and grievances – from divided backyards that cannot be accessed anymore to receiving their pension. They are paying a high price for this conflict.

⁽²⁶²⁾ See: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014Ao83o\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014Ao83o(02))

⁽²⁶³⁾ See: https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/

⁽²⁶⁴⁾ See: <https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1700195923400220758?s=20>

A strong security and defence cooperation

We have established as well an increasingly strong security and defence cooperation with Georgia, which has made remarkable contributions to our military missions around the world. The EU is helping Georgia strengthen its defence forces through the [European Peace Facility](#)⁽²⁶⁵⁾ (EPF). To date, we have provided €62 million for non-lethal equipment vital for rapid response in crises. The first batch has already reached Georgia and more assistance is on the way.

To conclude, I think that my main message to the leaders and citizens of Georgia has been clear: Georgia can count on the European Union and the EU door is open for Georgia. We want to see Georgia succeeding on its European path and hope that Georgian leaders will do their part not to miss this great opportunity.

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ See: https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/european-peace-facility_en



5.2 THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

RELAUNCHING THE COOPERATION WITH MORROCCO

5.1.2023 – Speech - *In the early days of 2023, I visited Morocco for the first time since the start of my mandate. This visit took place in a complicated context for relations with the EU. We had frank discussions that helped relaunch our cooperation. I reported on these discussions at a joint press conference with my Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita.*

Thank you [dear] Minister, thank you dear Nasser [Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad]. You know very well that Morocco is a country that is particularly dear to me for many reasons. But, as a Belgian singer once said, “times are difficult”.

Yes, times are difficult and we face many problems. But despite this, I wanted my first visit [to Morocco] as High Representative to take place at the beginning of the year because it has already been three years - and that was already too long - without visiting Morocco. So thank you very much, dear friend, Nasser Bourita, for the warm welcome I have received.

As you said, we have just had some open and fruitful exchanges between friends who can tell each other what their positions are in a partnership which, as you said, is based on values, not just on interests - also - but on values. And I would like to thank the Head of Government, Mr [Aziz] Akhannouch, for doing me the honour of speaking with me this morning, and I hope I will also have the opportunity to exchange views with the advisor to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Mr [André] Azoulay, and with some of your colleagues in the government.

A solid strategic partnership

As you were saying, over the years the European Union and Morocco have built a solid, strategic partnership based on joint, concrete action, not just rhetoric and pretty words, but on things that count, on facts, on financial resources and technological, sociological and cultural exchanges.

There are almost 5 million Moroccans living in Europe - and in Spain, my country, in Spain alone, there are almost 1 million. How could our links not be fertile? And

let me tell you that we, the European Union, consider ourselves to be a reliable partner of Morocco, and that we consider Morocco to be one of our most dynamic and closest partners. This partnership is based on initiatives. I think it is a driving force in the Euro-Mediterranean area and in the implementation of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. And I must congratulate you, Minister [of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad, Nasser Bourita], for your speeches when the Mediterraneans gather around the table. They are always remarkable and noticed.

There is no doubt that the Kingdom of Morocco is the southern Mediterranean partner that has implemented [some of] the most powerful policies for convergence with the European Union. And the facts are there. Two-thirds of Morocco's foreign trade is with the European Union. We are its biggest trading partner, and more than half of all foreign investment in Morocco comes from Europe. More than half of foreign investment and two thirds of foreign trade. That's a record that's hard to beat.

You are also the biggest beneficiary of European Union cooperation in the region. In the 2014-2020 period, this represented €1.4 billion. And in the 2021-2027 period, we're going to increase that from €1.4 [billion] to €1.6 [billion]. In these times of financial scarcity, the fact that we are increasing our financial contribution by 15% is quite remarkable.

And even when we're going through difficult times, as was the case with the pandemic, and now that Europe is facing a war on its eastern borders, this partnership takes on greater importance. This war is sending shockwaves that affect everyone, that have affected us Europeans and you Moroccans. And I believe that only together can we face up to these multiple challenges in a coordinated and responsible manner.

Move from words to action in many areas

In this context, I would like to reiterate the European Union's strong commitment to this partnership and our desire to broaden and deepen it and to do everything necessary to preserve its legal framework. We are working within a framework of the rule of law. We must respect the decisions of the courts, preserve the legal framework and adapt it where necessary. All this, of course, is in compliance with the rules of international and Community law. I agree with you that we need to build an ever more ambitious vision of our partnership.

But as you also said, we need to implement our commitments. We need to ensure that the letter written on paper becomes something that people can see in their daily lives. We need to move from words to action in many areas: the fight against climate change, the energy transition - with this green partnership that we have just signed - the European Union's commitment to supporting Morocco in its structural reforms, particularly in the areas of social protection, health and education, in line with the vision of His Majesty the King [Mohamed VI], who has expressed himself many times on this subject and his desire to move Morocco forward in these social, health and educational areas; the desire to facilitate the involvement of more European investors in Morocco, to support Moroccan youth, the long-standing partnership already in place to manage migration, and the discussions underway to extend our cooperation to new areas such as digital technology.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate Morocco on its election to the United Nations Human Rights Council. This is an important election, in an important institution. As you [Nasser Bourita, Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad] have said, you are attached to it, we are attached to it, our partnership is based on values, we attach great importance to the protection of fundamental rights, human rights defenders, fundamental rights such as freedom of the press and expression, and we are working together with Morocco on these issues.

We also discussed the old and new geopolitical challenges we face. We talked about the Maghreb and, of course, Libya. Of course, Morocco plays an important role there. We will talk about the Sahel and Iran, but above all about the most important event for Europeans in the year that has just ended, and, I fear, will be again in the year to come. I am referring, of course, to Russia's unjustified aggression against Ukraine. Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, has violated the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. It has invaded its peaceful neighbour for no reason or cause. This war does not just threaten Ukraine or Europe: it is a major challenge for the whole world. It threatens food security. It jeopardises energy for millions of people around the world.

Russian propaganda claims that our sanctions are responsible for these difficulties. I would like to take this opportunity to say once again that this is a lie. Our sanctions do not target Russian grain or fertiliser exports in any way, shape or form. It was Russia that targeted ports, roads and grain silos in Ukraine and [that] continues to launch attacks, missiles and drones against cities and neighbourhoods

where people live, trying to destroy all the civilian infrastructure so that Ukrainians are plunged into cold and darkness.

We will continue to help Ukraine. We have adopted unprecedented sanctions. We have imposed an embargo on Russian coal and oil, and we have freed ourselves practically, totally, from energy dependence on Russia. The little that remains will be eliminated this year.

Morocco's voice counts to help stop Ukraine war

In this context, Minister [of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad, Nasser Bourita], Morocco's voice counts for a great deal in the efforts to stop this war, to mitigate its economic and human impact. It's good to see that Morocco condemned the annexation of several Ukrainian provinces when it came to voting at the United Nations.

Obviously, we discussed the issue of the Western Sahara. I know to what extent this is an existential issue for Morocco and we understand the fundamental importance of this subject for Morocco. I will repeat here that the European Union supports the United Nations process and the initiatives of the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy [for Western Sahara, Staffan de Mistura] aimed at achieving a just, realistic, pragmatic, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution based on compromise in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

We have taken note of and greatly value the serious and credible efforts led by Morocco to this end, and we encourage all parties to pursue their commitment in a spirit of realism and compromise in the context of arrangements consistent with the purposes and principles set out in the United Nations Charter.

Obviously, in the meeting we had with the Minister [of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad, Nasser] Bourita and also with the Head of Government [Aziz Akhannouch] this morning, we obviously discussed the ongoing investigation into allegations of corruption against members of the European Parliament, whose parliamentary immunity has been lifted. We are obviously concerned by these events, which have been reported in the press.

There can be no impunity for corruption

They are worrying and the accusations are serious. The European Union's position is clear: there can be no impunity for corruption, and zero tolerance for it. We must await the outcome of the investigations underway by the judicial authorities, which must shed full light on these events, and we expect everyone to cooperate fully in this investigation.

Finally, I would like to announce that we have agreed to launch two new initiatives that will strengthen our partnership: a high-level security dialogue to be held in Rabat in the near future and enhanced cooperation in multilateral bodies between the European Union and Morocco. Because, without a doubt, the multilateral international architecture needs to be reviewed, and initiatives undertaken jointly by countries in the North and South have their place in this process of renewal. We have many subjects to explore in order to deepen our partnership. Allow me, Minister [of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccans Resident Abroad, Nasser Bourita], to stress once again that we must capitalise on our shared achievements to look towards an even more friendly future.

A POSITIVE VISIT TO ALGERIA

20.3.2023 – Blog ^(²⁶⁶) – *In March 2023, my first visit to Algeria as High Representative took place in a difficult regional context. We had frank and constructive discussions on all subjects of common interest with President Tebboune and Prime Minister Benabderrahmane.*

Algeria has long been an important partner for the EU in many areas. In particular, as a reliable supplier of natural gas to the EU, accounting for between 10 and 12% of total European imports over the last 10 years. This is a crucial issue for the EU in the current geopolitical context. But it was far from being the only reason for my visit, or even the main driving force behind our desire to strengthen our ties with Algeria.

In terms of trade relations, we signed an Association Agreement in 2002. However, the protectionist measures introduced by Algeria in 2015 subsequently had a negative impact on our trade. At that time, fossil fuel prices had fallen and Algeria was seeking to limit its imports. EU exports to Algeria have fallen by 45% since then, and today the trade balance is very unbalanced. Recently, however, we were engaged in a more positive dynamic. This was reflected in the visit by the President of the European Council, Michel, in September 2022, the first high-level visit since 2018.

New tensions have undermined EU-Algeria relations

But since June 2022, following a change in Spain's position on the Western Sahara, new tensions have undermined this dynamic. Imports from Spain have been de facto almost totally suspended. This is having a major impact on EU-Algeria relations as a whole. The current stalemate is in nobody's interest. I hope that, following our discussions, we will be able to work together over the coming weeks to find pragmatic solutions to resolve this situation.

For our part, we want to develop our relations with Algeria on the economic front, not just as a gas supplier, but to work together to prepare for the future, in particular by promoting investment in the renewable energy sector. Algeria has

^(²⁶⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/une-visite-positive-en-alg%C3%A9rie_en

enormous potential in this area, which has not yet been fully exploited. In addition, European technical expertise could help Algeria to diversify its economy and increase its non-energy exports to the EU.

We also discussed migration. We are going to continue our discussions on cooperation in border management and voluntary returns from Algeria to sub-Saharan Africa. In the area of judicial and police cooperation, we are going to speed up the negotiations underway for an agreement with Eurojust and a “working arrangement” with Europol, in particular to help Algeria recover its “ill-gotten gains”, as part of the actions underway in the country against corruption.

With regard to the global geopolitical situation, we naturally discussed the Russian aggression against Ukraine and its consequences. Unsurprisingly, we found that we disagreed on this issue. For my part, I stressed that this was not just an internal European affair. Although this war is taking place on European soil, it represents a major challenge for the whole world, because it is an attack on the very foundations of international law. And I invited my interlocutors to join in the international efforts to obtain the withdrawal of Russian troops. This would be a significant contribution towards peace by restoring Ukraine's sovereignty, because Algeria's voice carries a lot of weight in what some call the “Global South”.

Relaunching the EU-Algeria security dialogue

We also had in-depth discussions on the situation in Algeria's neighbour, the Sahel. In Mali, Algeria plays an important role: it is the guarantor of the 2015 Algiers agreement and leader of the international mediation effort, which also includes the EU and neighbouring countries. But this agreement is now in trouble because of the renewed tension between Bamako and the northern movements. I told the Algerian President of our concern about the development of terrorism in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, and our anxiety about the growing involvement of Russian Wagner militiamen in the region. We have agreed to relaunch the EU-Algeria High-Level Dialogue on Security. The first meetings will be held before the end of the year.

We also discussed the increasingly worrying situation in Tunisia. I asked my interlocutors to lobby the Tunisian authorities in favour of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which is also a condition for European aid to the country.

Finally, I had a long discussion with President Tebboune on the situation in the Middle East, which is of great concern to both of us, with violence threatening to

escalate further in the occupied Palestinian territories. We need to redouble our efforts to ease tensions in the immediate term, but also to reopen the prospects for the peace process. I presented to my Algerian interlocutors the initiative that we have launched with the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, and the Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, to explore ways of relaunching peace efforts and preserving the prospect of a two-State solution.

The issue of freedom of expression

During my visit, I also met representatives of civil society, including Algerian journalists. After the Hirak, there has been a significant reduction in the space for public debate in the country in recent years. The European Union attaches great importance to respect for freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of association, in Algeria as elsewhere in the world. I have discussed this situation, which is of great concern to us, with the Algerian authorities. Algeria's election to the United Nations Human Rights Council means that we must promote and implement the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, the 75th anniversary of which we are celebrating this year.

I hope that our discussions have helped to remove the obstacles that have limited our relationship in recent months. In any case, I will continue to work on this, because closer ties between the European Union and its neighbours on the other side of the Mediterranean are crucial to our shared future.

THE CONDITIONS ARE NOT MET TO CHANGE THE EU'S POLICY ON SYRIA

18.6.2023 – Blog (²⁶⁷) – *The 7th Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria saw pledges worth € 9.6 billion, exceeding those of 2022. This showed that the world had not forgotten the people of Syria. However, there is no sign of progress towards a political solution.*

While normalisation of relations with the regime in Damascus without meaningful progress in implementing [UN Security Council Resolution 2254](#) (²⁶⁸) is not an option for the EU, we will continue to work closely with our Arab and international partners to accomplish our common objectives. I will have the chance to discuss this weekend in Cairo with the Egyptian and League of Arab States leadership how to work together on Syria.

The humanitarian crisis has reached a new peak

After more than twelve years of conflict, Syria was already confronted with a disastrous situation in the country before the February earthquake. This catastrophe has worsened the country's humanitarian crisis, which has reached a new peak since the start of the conflict. Already, nine out of 10 Syrians in Syria live in poverty; 60% suffer food insecurity.

While there has been a relative diminution in levels of violence in Syria, repression and conflict are still the daily reality. The [Syrian Network for Human Rights](#) (²⁶⁹) puts the death toll for 2022 at 1,057 civilians, including 251 children. And a renewed escalation of hostilities is not off the table. As [UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen](#) (²⁷⁰) reported recently to the UN Security Council, the month of May saw ongoing exchanges of mortar fire across front lines, the first pro-government-suspected airstrike in Idlib in over five months, and attacks by listed terrorist groups, in addition to airstrikes by regional actors.

(²⁶⁷) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/conditions-are-not-met-change-eu%20%99s-policy-syria_en

(²⁶⁸) See: <https://press.un.org/en/2015/sc12171.doc.htm>

(²⁶⁹) See: <https://snhr.org/>

(²⁷⁰) See: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/profiles/geir-pedersen>

Syria remains also among the biggest displacement crises in the world, with 6.8 million refugees and 6.7 million internally displaced persons inside Syria, half of the pre-war population. An entire generation has been born and brought up in displacement. Some 5.7 million Syrians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries: Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, creating an enormous strain on the infrastructure and services of host countries.

The Syrian regime and its allies bear the responsibility for a conflict marked by violations of international law and human rights abuses. Because of the Russian military intervention in 2015, the regime now holds about two-thirds of Syrian territory. This has only served to embolden the Syrian regime in stalling progress towards a political solution for Syria. The Syrian-led Constitutional Committee has not met in over a year. Before Russia unleashed its invasion of Ukraine, there had been some hope that Moscow would press its client state to make at least token compromises. Since February 2022 however, Russia has been thwarting to any step in that direction.

Normalisation between Arab states and Syria

Nonetheless, the massive earthquake at the beginning of the year accelerated the process of normalisation of relations between Arab states and Syria. It culminated in the readmission of Syria to the League of Arab States in May, and Assad's subsequent appearance at the League's Summit in Riyadh. Although I remain sceptical that normalisation will make the Syrian regime more accommodating I share the frustration of Arab partners with the complete lack of progress in the political process. Neighbouring countries are indeed more directly affected by the situation in Syria with the export of drugs, crime and instability at their borders and the lack of prospects for the return of refugees.

The Arab leaders I spoke to over the past weeks reassured me that, although our approach may differ, we share the same objectives, namely those formulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2254. I look forward to working with the Amman Contact Group on Syria in order to combine pressure from the EU and like-minded countries with persuasion by the Arab States in order to reach our common goals.

For the EU and its member states, the conditions for normalisation with the Syrian regime are nowhere close to being met. We will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive and credible political transition

is underway, as I underlined last week (²⁷¹). The conditions for the repatriation of Syrian refugees, as defined by UNHCR, are currently not fulfilled. We will not support organised returns to Syria unless there are credible guarantees that those returns are voluntary and monitored by the international community. In all my discussions with relevant partners, I have raised the question of forced returns and have been assured that refugees will not be forcibly returned to Syria until these conditions are met.

While the Syrian regime has so far not provided any grounds for lifting EU sanctions imposed since 2011, it is important to recall that EU sanctions do not hinder much-needed humanitarian aid. The vast majority of economic sectors, including food, medicine and medical equipment, are not subject to sanctions. Last February, the Council modified the Syria sanctions framework (²⁷²) to further facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

EU sanctions do not hinder much-needed humanitarian aid

We have witnessed how essential such swift aid delivery is in the wake of the devastating February earthquake in Syria and Türkiye. For millions of people living in the most affected areas, it is a matter of life and death. The EU works with Turkey and other like-minded partners to achieve the renewal of the vital cross-border UN resolution (²⁷³) guaranteeing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria.

In this dire environment, signs of hope must however not be dismissed. We will continue to support Syrian civil society and encourage them, paying special attention to the crucial role played by Syrian women.

We have to support Syrians living in Syria, who want to rebuild their country – despite the depredations and abuses of the Assad regime - along renewed, democratic and peaceful lines.

We have to support host communities in the region for their continued hospitality. Even as needs rise and tensions mount, these societies have been providing

(²⁷¹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/syria-opening-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-session-vii_en

(²⁷²) See: https://finance.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/230516-faqs-humanitarian-exemption-syria_en.pdf

(²⁷³) See: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15168.doc.htm>

generously for nearly six million Syrian refugees. This is certainly a heavy burden. The Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Safadi explained to me that, in Jordan alone, more than 200,000 children have been born by Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict. While supporting host countries, we also need to resist the scapegoating of refugees for political ends and seek to defuse tensions between refugees and host communities.

€ 9.6 billion pledged for Syrians and host communities

The international community has to continue supporting both Syrians in Syria and refugees and their host communities. At last week's Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria, donors pledged a total of € 9.6 billion in grants and loans ⁽²⁷⁴⁾, 800 million more than in 2022. The EU and its Member States represent 70% of the grants pledged.

Finally, we must continue to support UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen in his efforts to generate momentum for a renewed political process. At the Syria Conference, he concluded that we could be at an 'inflection point', a new chance to move forward. Let us do what we can to give him the backing he needs to seize this opportunity.

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3306

HELPING LIBYA AFTER DERNA

4.10.2023 – Blog ⁽²⁷⁵⁾ – *Libya has faced turmoil since 2011. In September 2023, it was struck in the city of Derna by a severe natural disaster, fuelled by climate change and negligence. This disaster fostered cooperation between Libya's two de facto governments. It is crucial to invest more in helping countries like Libya overcome their political and institutional deadlocks.*

Since 2011, Libya has been in turmoil. Traditional divides between Tripolitania in the West and Cyrenaica in the East have deepened, compounded by foreign interference. Since 2014, Libya has *de facto* two Parliaments, one in Tripoli and the other in Tobruk. As is all too often the case, internal rifts attract outsider meddlers, and the country has repeatedly been flooded with weapons, mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters.

Several unsuccessful attempts to reunite the country

Several attempts to reunite the country under a single authority, brokered by the UN and other international facilitators, have only provided temporary relief before divisions re-emerged. In recent months, tensions have unfolded again, culminating in a new oil export blockade and another outbreak of violence among armed groups in Tripoli in August. This renewed crisis has drawn again attention to the unsustainability of the status quo and the urgency of resolving the current political stalemate.

Then Storm Daniel hit the country leading to the catastrophe of Derna in the East. Extreme rainfall and poor maintenance led to the collapse of two dams upstream of the city. As of 19 September, more than 4,000 persons were confirmed dead, thousands were still missing and over 30,000 displaced. [The EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) ⁽²⁷⁶⁾ has been immediately activated and 10 of our member states have offered assistance via this mechanism accompanied by EU humanitarian funding.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/helping-libya-after-derna_en

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ See: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/libya_en

This disaster has exposed a flagrant governance failure, prompting public outrage and reigniting a ‘blame game’ among Libyan politicians. The Libyan people’s demands are clear and legitimate: greater transparency, and greater accountability of the political class towards the population as a whole.

However, there is a silver lining. The natural disaster has also created an extraordinary sense of national solidarity across the country and prompted new signs of cooperation between the West and the East, which has enabled international assistance, including European aid, to arrive and be effectively distributed. There is some good news on the economic front as well. In July, a High Financial Committee was established, tasked with ensuring an equitable distribution of State resources. Second, at the end of August, the Libyan Central Bank announced the reunification of the current two – East and West – branches.

Libya does not lack resources

These positive developments are crucial steps since the country does not lack resources. As one of the largest oil exporting nations, Libya has the potential of becoming a prosperous country again soon – provided political leaders across the country cease their infighting and make their top priority to meet the legitimate expectations of the Libyan people. West, East, and South need to work together so that all Libyans can benefit from the country’s wealth.

The disaster of Derna has reinforced the need for ensuring accountability, the key challenge that Libyans expect to be addressed. While central institutions are fundamental for ensuring a fair distribution of resources between regions, proximity to those concerned through decentralisation has proven a useful way to enhance the transparency and accountability of decision-makers. The exceptionality of the current circumstances could create the conditions for a national dialogue on the country’s future. In this case, the EU is ready to support this dialogue in any way possible, as we have done in the past.

EU support to Libya will not waiver, be it through direct assistance or through the UN, its agencies and the UN SRSG Bathily. The EU is the largest donor of the [UN joint programme on elections \(PEPOL\)](#)⁽²⁷⁷⁾ We are also funding many other UN programs aiming to help prevent and combat corruption, protect children and young people or strengthen primary health care. Beyond financial assistance and political support, the EU is also the only international actor actively contributing

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ See: <https://libya.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/about-pepol/>

to the implementation of the UN arms embargo through the naval operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI (²⁷⁸), mandated by the UN Security Council to inspect suspect vessels at high seas off the coast of Libya.

Last August, before the UN Security Council, UN SRSG Bathily called for a unified transition government to lead the country to elections (²⁷⁹). This government should be a technical one, exclusively tasked with overseeing the elections. I reaffirmed to my interlocutor that for us, a UN plan – based on dialogue between the main Libyan stakeholders – is the only option for finding a lasting political solution.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

Finally, the lesson we can (re)learn from Derna, both in Libya and in Europe, is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The difficulties Libya has been facing for more than a decade to come back to stability, illustrate that if we, in the EU, want to avoid recurring major crises at our borders like the one we witnessed in Lampedusa end of September, it is essential to invest more politically and financially to help countries like Libya break the political and institutional deadlock in which they are often trapped. By the time an open crisis breaks out, it is often too late to take effective action. We need to act upstream before we are compelled to act when many lives have been lost.

(²⁷⁸) See: <https://www.operationirini.eu/un-security-council-extends-the-legal-framework-for-eunavfor-med-irinis-core-task/>

(²⁷⁹) See: <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/srsg-abdoulaye-bathilys-remarks-security-council-meeting-libya-22-august-2023>



5.3 AFRICA

THE HORN OF AFRICA: A GEO-STRATEGIC PRIORITY FOR THE EU

26.5.2023 – Blog ^{([280](#))} – *During the Foreign Affairs Council in May 2023, we focused on the Horn of Africa. This region, vital to the EU's interests, possesses enormous untapped potential but has been plagued by multiple crises over the last decade, jeopardizing its stability and development.*

At [our Council of EU Foreign Ministers](#) ^{([281](#))}, we discussed again extensively Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. However, this war is unfortunately not the only conflict that threatens to destabilise the rules-based world order. And even if the war against our neighbour Ukraine is naturally very important to us, we need to keep a close eye on the problems in the rest of the world, better understand them and continue to engage globally in helping resolve other crises.

The stability of the Horn of Africa is crucial

This is particularly true for the Horn of Africa, which has been rocked by major crises over recent years. The stability of this region in the East of the African continent is of course crucial for the 300 million people living there, but it is also central for the EU's interests, in particular because more than 20% of EU exports and imports pass off its coast. As geopolitical competition intensifies, other players, like the Gulf countries, China or Russia, focus increasingly on the region. A strong and structured European engagement with the countries of the Horn of Africa is imperative to preserve our interests.

Some pressing challenges warrant our urgent attention: this region concentrates a substantial proportion of the world's most vulnerable populations with nearly five million refugees and 13 million internally displaced persons, [according to the UNHCR](#) ^{([282](#))}. And as the [UN agency summarises it](#) ^{([283](#))}: “*The hunger crisis in the Horn of Africa is reaching unimaginable proportions as 23 million people across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are highly food insecure and face severe hunger and water*

^{([280](#))} See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/horn-africa-geo-strategic-priority-eu_en

^{([281](#))} See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2023/05/22/>

^{([282](#))} See: <https://www.acnur.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/63315aco4.pdf>

^{([283](#))} See: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/horn-of-africa-food-crisis-explained/>

shortages". On 24 May, the UN Secretary-General has convened a High-level Pledging Event to Support the Humanitarian Response in the Horn of Africa. Commissioner Lenarčič participated in this event and we fully support this initiative: nothing can be achieved to help strengthen the stability of the region if we are not able to first help improve rapidly the humanitarian situation on the ground.

The critical situation in Sudan

Regarding crises in the Horn of Africa, the focus is mainly on Sudan currently. In 2019, we saw pictures of these courageous young people overthrowing one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world. Back in February 2020, I remember very well my discussions [with the students of the University of Khartoum](#)^(²⁸⁴) when I visited Sudan during my first mission to Africa as HRVP. Since then, however, none of their aspirations has been fulfilled, to the contrary. After the 2021 military coup, the country was moving again slowly towards a transition to civil power. However, on 15 April, two rival generals threw their soldiers into a pitched battle, putting Sudanese and foreign citizens in the middle of the crossfire. From the onset of the conflict, we rapidly mobilised our entire diplomatic apparatus and evacuated [most EU citizens](#)^(²⁸⁵) (over 1,700 EU nationals) in more than 30 flights in a joint multinational military evacuation.

However, the situation on the ground for the Sudanese population remains desperate. There seems to be no political will to seek a non-military solution, and some external players fuel an already explosive situation. Our short-term objective is to contribute to a sustainable ceasefire to enable civilians to find safety and allow humanitarian actors to deliver much-needed assistance.

Beyond this humanitarian ceasefire, establishing a comprehensive peace framework is crucial and the African Union seems best placed to organise it. We are in close contact with African Union Chairperson Faki to support its mediation efforts and help bridge the gap between the different stakeholders.

South Sudan, one of the poorest countries in the world, is heavily affected by the infighting in its neighbouring country. Combined with the lack of political leadership and the slow and incomplete implementation [of the South Sudanese](#)

^(²⁸⁴) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-visits-ethiopia-and-sudan-first-visit-africa_en

^(²⁸⁵) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/429240_fr

peace agreement (²⁸⁶), it could derail the country's first national elections ever planned in December 2024 and the peaceful transition in February 2025.

In neighbouring Ethiopia, last November's signature of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) (²⁸⁷) has opened a new chapter after two years of devastating conflict in Tigray (²⁸⁸). For now, the conflicting parties have demonstrated their commitment to important progress in terms of disarmament, restoration of basic services and interim administration in Tigray and the opening of humanitarian access. However, the situation remains fragile, notably with escalating tensions in the Oromia and Amhara regions.

After a horrible war with hundreds of thousands of victims, we accompany the peace efforts and intend to gradually normalise our relations. For a full normalisation, concrete action on accountability for human rights violations committed during the conflict will be paramount.

Eritrea has started to withdraw its troops from Ethiopia. However, it remains to be seen whether this country, which has just reintegrated the regional organisation IGAD (²⁸⁹), is really willing to play a more positive role in the region.

A positive momentum in Somalia

In Somalia, which I visited last September (²⁹⁰), we observed a positive momentum under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Three CSDP missions are a clear testament of the EU's commitment to help stabilize the country: since 2008, Operation EU NAVFOR Atalanta (²⁹¹) deters piracy, combats trafficking and contributes to the arms embargo on Somalia. EUTM (since 2010) (²⁹²) and EUCAP Somalia (since 2013) (²⁹³) aim to build the capacity of the Somali armed forces.

(²⁸⁶) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/south-sudan/statement-troika-eu-and-its-member-states-extension-revitalized-agreement_en?s=121

(²⁸⁷) See: <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/422150>

(²⁸⁸) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/time-stop-forgotten-war-tigray_en

(²⁸⁹) See: <https://igad.int/>

(²⁹⁰) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/building-somalia%20%99s-state-and-security-and-stabilising-horn-africa_en

(²⁹¹) See: <https://eunavfor.eu/>

(²⁹²) See: <https://www.eutm-somalia.eu/>

(²⁹³) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eucap-som_en?s=332

The Somali Government is determined to deliver Somali-led security and is currently engaged in a number of operations against Islamist insurgent group al-Shabaab. Somalia's positive voting record in the UN on Russia's aggression against Ukraine demonstrates its commitment to the principles of the international rules-based order. These developments have resulted in a deepening of our partnership with a [Joint Operational Roadmap](#) ⁽²⁹⁴⁾ launched a few weeks ago by EU Special Representative Weber to facilitate further progress in state building and security.

Kenya continues to be a solid ally and an important pillar of stability in the Horn of Africa. [During my visit to Kenya last year](#) ⁽²⁹⁵⁾, I launched a strategic partnership with this country, which we intend to strengthen even further in the coming months. Peaceful elections in August 2022, [observed by an EU observation mission](#) ⁽²⁹⁶⁾, set a new democratic benchmark for the region and beyond. Nairobi is also a key EU ally in the fight against climate change, where the country has high ambitions. Like-minded in multilateral fora, it voted with the EU in the five UNGA resolutions on Ukraine. Kenya is also a key player on the regional scene, building on its engagement in the [African Union Transition Mission In Somalia](#) ⁽²⁹⁷⁾. Its peace efforts in Ethiopia and in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are very much appreciated and will be supported by the EU.

Djibouti, one of the other few anchors of stability in the region, played a very positive role in the recent evacuation of EU citizens from Sudan. It is a hub for [EU Mission Atalanta](#) ⁽²⁹⁸⁾, for European member states such as France, Spain and Italy, but also for the US, China, and Japan. However, Djibouti's stability cannot be taken for granted and we shouldn't underestimate the various challenges this country is confronted with.

Despite the many challenges, a region of opportunity

Despite these major challenges, the Horn of Africa is also a region of many opportunities. We need to intensify our support for regional economic integration

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/launch-somalia-%E2%80%93-eu-joint-operational-roadmap-renewed-focused-engagement_en

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/mission-africa-high-representative-josep-borrell-travelling-kenya-and-mozambique_en

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-kenya-2022/final-report-european-union-election-observation-mission-kenya-2022_en?s=410199

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ See: <https://atmis-au.org/>

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ <https://eunavfor.eu/mission>

as a means to enhance regional cooperation and prevent violent conflict. We cooperate regularly with the [Intergovernmental Authority on Development, IGAD](#),⁽²⁹⁹⁾ which brings together the countries of the region, on peace security and development actions. [The Horn of Africa Initiative](#) (⁽³⁰⁰⁾), launched in 2019 by the Finance Ministers of seven countries of the region, is also a promising vehicle for the EU. It should be further leveraged around resilience, connectivity and infrastructure in the framework of the [Global Gateway](#) (⁽³⁰¹⁾) initiative.

At a time when the continent is [celebrating 60 years of the African Union](#) (⁽³⁰²⁾), we are well aware that, beyond the Horn region, our relations with Africa as a whole are a crucial issue for the future of the EU, [as the last year EU-AU Summit highlighted](#) (⁽³⁰³⁾). One of the decisions taken last Monday was to equip the European External Action Service with a special Task Force to more effectively fight disinformation and better coordinate our

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ See: <https://igad.int/>

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ See: <https://www.hoainitiative.org/>

⁽³⁰¹⁾ See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en

⁽³⁰²⁾ See: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230524/africa-celebrate-60th-anniversary-oau-au-africa-day>

⁽³⁰³⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/02/17-18/>

SUPPORTING POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN SOMALIA

29.6.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁰⁴⁾ – *Somalia's stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are crucial for both the Horn of Africa and the EU. Despite all the challenges that threaten the stability of the region, we also witnessed positive developments, notably in Somalia. In May 2023, the EU and Somalia established a joint Roadmap to strengthen our partnership with the country.*

The Horn of Africa is [a crucial region to our strategic interests](#) ⁽³⁰⁵⁾. Following President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's election in May last year, significant efforts were made to stabilise and pacify Somalia. The country has also committed to an ambitious reform agenda, including reconciliation and macro-economic reforms. When [I visited Mogadishu last September](#) ⁽³⁰⁶⁾, I was impressed by the President's commitment to these reforms.

Mobilise support against the terrorist group Al-Shabaab

The President and his administration engage in particular with the Somali people, the region, and international partners to mobilise support in the fight against the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. Many – too many – civilians and members of security forces have paid the ultimate price in this struggle. Many soldiers of contributing countries to the African Union's Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) have also lost their lives seeking to bring peace to the region. The strengthening of the Somali Security Forces (SSF) is a top priority as part of the transition from ATMIS to Somali-led security.

We are helping Somalia to succeed in this undertaking. The EU has [two CSDP](#) ⁽³⁰⁷⁾ missions on the ground training and equipping the Somali army including in the maritime domain. Further, we have [one operation at sea](#) ⁽³⁰⁸⁾ initially established to fight piracy and safeguard vital humanitarian supplies provided by the World Food Programme; now also tasked to address broader maritime security issues,

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/supporting-positive-developments-somalia_en

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/horn-africa-geo-strategic-priority-eu_en

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/building-somalia%20%99s-state-and-security-and-stabilising-horn-africa_en

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eucap-som_en?s=332

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ See: <https://eunavfor.eu/>

e.g., illegal trafficking, notably weapons and drugs. Since 2008, the EU has invested € 4.3 billion in the security and state building of Somalia. This investment is bearing fruit as progress continues.

Last May, the EU and Somalia adopted [a joint Roadmap](#) ⁽³⁰⁹⁾ based on a common work to define priorities and milestones. It reflects the reinforced partnership the EU has with Somalia. It will not be possible to progress significantly in security in Somalia unless core issues of political and economic instability are addressed.

The commitment to reconcile the Federal Government and the Federal Member States, including by reaching agreements on security architecture, justice model, power sharing and fiscal federalisation is commendable. However, it is essential that this process is truly inclusive and gains are institutionalized: all relevant parties need to engage and participate to develop legislation and eventually finalise the constitution.

Stabilisation in the newly liberated areas will be key, essentially rebuilding the vital social contract between citizens and state. The EU is already a key partner in this area, and we stand ready to engage further to address the needs.

Ending Somalia's financial isolation

Somalia has made great strides towards debt relief under the [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries \(HIPC\) initiative](#) ⁽³¹⁰⁾. I expect and hope that this process will be completed later this year, ending Somalia's financial isolation. However, it will not be the end of the journey. Somalia has to increase domestic revenues and ensure solid financial management. Transparency and accountability are key pillars of state-building to deliver services to Somalia's people.

The general momentum in Somalia's state-building is positive, but the dire humanitarian situation could endanger the progress we are witnessing. The challenge remains huge, with more than 8 million Somali people needing humanitarian assistance including approximately 1.8 million children acutely malnourished.

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/launch-somalia-%E2%80%93-eu-joint-operational-roadmap-renewed-focused-engagement_en?s=153

⁽³¹⁰⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2023/Debt-relief-under-the-heavily-indebted-poor-countries-initiative-HIPC>

The ongoing efforts such as the [High-Level Pledging Event organised in New York in May 2023](#) (³¹¹), mobilising \$2.4 billion for Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya are important. However, the international community must scale up its support to prevent further deterioration and loss of life.

Somalia's overall stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are key for the country, the region and the EU. The challenges currently facing the Horn of Africa and Somalia can only be overcome through closely coordinated action with the countries in the region and like-minded regional and international partners. Somalia shows that positive change is possible through sustained investment and engagement.

(³¹¹) See: <https://www.unocha.org/>

ENERGY: THE FUTURE OF NIGER AND AFRICA WILL BE SOLAR

8.7.2023 – Blog – *In July 2023, I inaugurated the Gouro Banda solar power plant in Niger, supported by the EU, that will supply electricity to 500,000 people. At that occasion, I explored in this blog post the challenges of the green transition in Africa and how the EU could facilitate it.*

I travelled to Niger to meet President Bazoum and the country's authorities in order to develop our partnership. Niger is an anchor of stability in this critical Sahel region, which is marked by the activities of numerous terrorist groups, as well as those of Wagner's mercenaries in the service of authoritarian regimes. This country, which has opted for democracy and cooperation with the EU, is an essential partner for us.

The world's destiny is being played out in sub-Saharan Africa

I'll come back to the other aspects of this mission at a later date, but in this blog post, I'd like to focus on the inauguration of the Gouro Banda solar power plant⁽³¹²⁾ near Niamey, which President Bazoum and I attended last Wednesday. As we all know, a key part of the world's destiny in the 21st century will be played out in sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is growing rapidly. This is particularly true in Niger, where the population has risen from 3.4 million in 1960 to over 25 million today. Although the rate of population growth is now slowing, Niger is still experiencing demographic growth of over 4% per year, the fastest in the world.

This development poses many challenges for Niger and other countries in the region. But one of the most essential challenges, both for sub-Saharan Africa and for the world, concerns energy and the associated greenhouse gas emissions. There is, of course, absolutely no reason why Nigerians and other Africans should not be allowed to use as much energy as Europeans to move around, cook, heat or cool themselves, produce goods and so on.

⁽³¹²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/niger-discours-du-haut-repr%C3%A9sentantvice-pr%C3%A9sident-josep-borrell-%C3%A0-l%E2%80%99inauguration-de-la-centrale_en

Yet in 2020, the average person living in sub-Saharan Africa consumed only 170 kWh per year, 16 times less than a European.

But if Africa reproduces tomorrow the same pattern that we have followed in Europe for the past two centuries, relying primarily on fossil fuels to fuel its economic and social development, climate change will accelerate even further and take on unsustainable proportions. For Africa's much-needed development to be sustainable, the energy sources used must be climate-neutral.

Even if the price of renewable technologies is falling rapidly, they are still often more expensive to deploy than conventional fossil fuel technologies. Ensuring that our African partners choose these green energies means that developed countries, and therefore the European Union, must help them both financially and in terms of technology transfer. In any case, this is only fair, given the historical responsibility of developed countries for climate change. We were reminded of this again recently at the Paris Summit for a New Global Financial Pact: no one should have to choose between reducing poverty and protecting the planet. We need to act on both fronts.

This issue particularly concerns electricity, a central energy source for many essential uses, such as light for studying at school in the evening, access to the Internet and television for information, mobile phones for remote communication and access to a host of public and private services, the cold chain for preserving and transporting food, etc.

Yet 600 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, almost one in two of the population, still do not have access to electricity, even though this number is fortunately falling year by year. And Niger is currently one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa where access to electricity is the most limited, with less than 20% of the population having access, including less than 3% in rural areas.

The difficulty of managing large, complex networks

What's more, even when the inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa have access to electricity, it is not always available on a regular basis because of the difficulties involved in maintaining and managing complex networks and large fossil fuel-based production units. South Africa in particular has experienced major problems in this area in recent months. The sharp fluctuations in fossil fuel prices are also handicapping many countries in the South.

However, sub-Saharan Africa, and Niger in particular, have abundant renewable resources, including one that is virtually inexhaustible: the sun. This is why the electrification of Africa is and will be closely linked to the deployment of photovoltaic solar energy. The advantage of this is that it can be deployed on a decentralised basis, overcoming the difficulties associated with managing and maintaining large, complex networks and giant centralised production units. What's more, green electricity is a powerful accelerator of economic development: it is estimated that investing in renewable energy creates three times more jobs locally than fossil fuels with equivalent installed capacity. Niger will be hosting a major international conference on solar energy in Niamey next autumn.

Gouro Banda will supply electricity to 500,000 people

It was against this backdrop that we inaugurated the new Gouro Banda photovoltaic power station near the capital Niamey in Niger last Wednesday. The 30 MW plant, operated by Nigelec, Niger's public electricity company, will supply 70,000 homes, or around 500,000 people. The population of Niamey has grown exponentially over the last few decades, exacerbating a situation in which there is already a significant shortfall in electricity production, leading to regular load shedding. This power station will enable Niger to increase its electricity production while saving on additional imports of fossil fuels.

This project is part of those supported by the Global Gateway, deployed by the European Union to help our partners make the transition to energy and digital technology. This project, which will cost a total of €30 million, has been financed to the tune of €5 million by an EU grant and €23.5 million by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) in the form of a loan. This partnership between the EU and one of its Member States, in this case, France, which is very committed to supporting the development of Niger, illustrates the Team Europe approach that we want to generalise as part of the Global Gateway, in Africa and elsewhere.

In addition to this power plant, the EU is also involved in numerous energy projects in Niger. We are also contributing with AFD to the construction of a 25 MW power plant (19 MW solar and 6 MW diesel) equipped with 10 MW of storage batteries in Agadez, in the north of the country, for €16 million out of a total cost of €32 million. We are helping to develop the electricity network in the north of the country and to electrify rural areas with the African Development Bank (ADB) and AFD, to the tune of €25.5 million.

The immediate priority, of course, is to ensure that all Nigeriens have access to electricity, but in the long term, the potential for solar energy in the region is so massive that it could also play a significant role in the development of a hydrogen economy, particularly for the European Union.

We have, of course, discussed many other subjects with our Nigerian counterparts, including security and the regional situation, and I will come back to this shortly, but the issue of energy and climate change is so central to our common future that I believe it deserves special attention.

BEFORE THE MILITARY COUP, NIGER WAS A KEY EU PARTNER IN THE SAHEL

11.7.2023 – Blog ⁽³¹³⁾ – *In July 2023, I visited Niger for the first time as HR/VP to meet the then President Bazoum. At that time the country, which had opted for democracy, was an essential partner in the Sahel for the EU. However, within days of my visit, a military coup changed the situation radically and Niger's relations with the EU deteriorated sharply.*

I was delighted to finally be able to honour my promise to come to Niger. The EU attaches great importance to its partnership with this country, and I have great admiration for President Bazoum's leadership in a region in danger. I was able to tell him in person that we are more than ever at his side in the fight he is waging against terrorism, but also in his efforts to promote the economic and social development of the country and the region.

The future of the Sahel is at stake

Because beyond the issues specific to Niger, the future of the Sahel is at stake. The people of the region must be able to believe in a model of democratic governance, peace and inclusive development. The actions taken by the Nigerien authorities to promote dialogue and social cohesion illustrate the “civil and political awakening” that is essential in the Sahel. For the time being, however, Niger is the only country in the region where this surge is materializing. On the contrary, its neighbours Mali and Burkina Faso seem to be turning away from this path.

Covering 1.3 million km², Niger is more than twice the size of France or three times the size of Germany. With its 25 million inhabitants, the country is still relatively sparsely populated, but demographic growth is rapid: at 4% per year, it is one of the highest in the world. This is one of the major challenges facing Niger and its neighbours in the region. Like the other countries of the Sahel, Niger is also suffering more than elsewhere from climate change and desertification. In 2022, its GDP was \$533 per capita, 70 times less than in Europe. Even when the difference

⁽³¹³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/le-niger-partenaire-essentiel-de-l-Europe-aupr-s-C5%93ur-du-sahel_en

in the cost of living is taken into account, the gap is still 1 to 36: when a European has €100, a Nigerien has to make do with less than €3. The country also ranks 189th out of 191 on the UNDP's Human Development Index. 28% of the population of the Sahel needs urgent humanitarian aid, including 4.3 million people in Niger alone.

Sandwiched between Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Algeria and Libya, Niger is also at the heart of the major problems currently affecting the region, between the multiple trafficking routes that cross the Sahara, particularly that of human beings, the atrocities of numerous terrorist groups - the Sahel now accounts for almost half the victims of terrorism in the world - but also those of Wagner's mercenaries in the service of authoritarian regimes and the misdeeds of Russian propaganda, which is very active in spreading false information. As a result, there are 700,000 displaced people in Niger, including 255,000 refugees from neighbouring countries in conflict.

A 7.5% rise in per capita income by 2022

Despite all these difficulties, the country recorded strong economic growth in 2022, with a 7.5% rise in per capita income, helping to lift hundreds of thousands of people out of extreme poverty. This is largely the result of President Bazoum's policies. He has placed good governance and the fight against corruption at the top of his priorities, as well as education - and in particular access to education for girls, a prerequisite for slowing population growth - and the development of solar energy, which today provides just 1% of the electricity in a country where less than 20% of the population has access to this form of energy. Despite this success, the economic and social situation remains very fragile, and the EU is taking action to help the Nigerien government consolidate and sustain this progress.

As I mentioned in my previous blog, President Bazoum and I have inaugurated the largest solar power plant in Niger, which will supply electricity to 500,000 people in the Niamey region. The EU is also helping Niger to improve its education system and to recruit and train teachers. Last February, the EU also organised its first Business Forum to help develop the private sector.

In terms of security, two EU missions are supporting the Nigerien forces. The military mission aims to strengthen the capacities of the country's armed forces in terms of training, building barracks and purchasing equipment. The civilian

mission has been working with the Nigerien security forces for over 10 years to combat terrorism and cross-border trafficking. It has helped them to strengthen their territorial network in the most threatened areas and supported the Niger initiative to improve coordination of police, justice and intelligence between West African states. During my visit, I met the staff of this mission in both Niamey and Agadez.

Agadez, a commercial town hampered by insecurity

What really stood out for me during my visit to Niger was my visit to Agadez, the main town in the north of the country. This city, whose historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, emerges from the middle of the desert. It is at the crossroads of the trade routes linking North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. For a long time, it prospered thanks to this privileged position, but today, the blockage of "normal" trade flows due to insecurity has plunged it into a serious economic and social crisis, particularly for its young people, who are deprived of prospects. The development of tourism has not helped to alleviate this situation, as it remains limited in the current context.

I spoke with the President of the Regional Council of Agadez, Mohamed Anacko, about the fight he is waging against trafficking of all kinds, and I assured him of the EU's support for the security and development of this region. Since 2014, the EU has been helping Agadez on many fronts, and I announced during my visit that we would be providing a further €15 million to support governance and socio-economic development in the region.

I then visited the houses built as part of a European project with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation. The old centre of Agadez is deteriorating due to overcrowding. To relieve the congestion, social housing is being built for the most vulnerable families. This project has led to the creation of 40 companies and 250 masons have been trained in bioclimatic construction. 360 houses have already been built using traditional techniques.

Finally, the Sultan of Aïr, the traditional chief of the Tuareg tribes in the region and responsible for the heritage of the historic centre of Agadez, took me on a tour of the town's magnificent great mosque, which dates back to the 16th century. Built entirely of clay, with an impressive minaret 27 metres high, this building is a testament to the ancestral skills of Niger's architects and craftsmen, adapted to the severe constraints of the region.

I have come back from Niger convinced that the EU must do more to help the Sahel emerge from the serious social and security crisis that the region is currently experiencing. President Bazoum's actions show that development must be based on solid governance and the fight against corruption. Security measures - which are essential - must be accompanied by a strengthening of the rule of law and the development of public services. Security and development necessarily go hand in hand: you can't have one without the other. We are and will be ready to support its action in this area. We will also continue to support Niger's initiatives to find "African solutions to African problems" in the region. My visit was part of the EU's stated desire to become Africa's privileged partner. Together with the Niger authorities, we are making progress along this path.

NIGER: A MOBILISATION TO SAVE DEMOCRACY

1.8.2023 – Blog ⁽³¹⁴⁾ – *In Niger, which I visited a few days before, the democratically elected President Bazoum was the victim of a military coup in July 2023. After those that had already affected Mali, Sudan, Guinea and Burkina Faso, this putsch was an additional threat to the whole region. We have supported the – unsuccessful until now - efforts of ECOWAS and the African Union to restore constitutional order in Niger.*

At the beginning of July last year, I visited Niger. On that occasion, I was able to gauge the difficulty of the task facing the country's authorities, both in terms of security and the economic and social development of one of the poorest countries in the world. I was impressed, however, by the determination of President Bazoum and his government to combine the fight against terrorism with inclusive social development within a democratic framework, an approach that has become all too rare in a region plagued by authoritarian tendencies.

Since 26 July, however, the country has been the victim of a coup initiated by the leaders of the presidential guard. President Bazoum is being held prisoner and the French embassy has been attacked by demonstrators. In the face of this coup d'état, our position is the same as that of the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations Security Council: President Bazoum was democratically elected and is and remains the only legitimate President of the country. He must be released unconditionally and without delay, and the EU holds the coup plotters responsible for his safety and that of his family. The European Union does not and will not recognise the authorities that emerged from the putsch.

The 32nd military putsch in 33 years in Africa

For the time being, we have decided to suspend budgetary support to Niger, as well as all cooperation activities in the field of security. We have also decided to repatriate European nationals and we are in the process of completing this operation. Teams from the European Commission's DG ECHO, which is responsible for humanitarian aid, will remain on the ground and will work with their colleagues

⁽³¹⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/niger-mobilisation-in%C3%A9gale-pour-sauver-la-d%C3%A9mocratie_en

in neighbouring countries to limit the negative effects of the coup on the most vulnerable people in Niger. In the future, we will align ourselves with the decisions taken by the Heads of State of the region within ECOWAS in order to restore constitutional order in Niger.

Coming after those that have hit Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Sudan since 2021, this military coup, if it were to continue, would mark a major turning point in the region. As Jeune Afrique recently pointed out, this is the 32nd military putsch in 33 years on the African continent. It is also the 5th in Niger alone since the country's independence. Despite the votes democratically cast by the people of Africa, their will is all too often brushed aside by these coups d'état. As my friend Mo Ibrahim said, "Once again, we see the military of an African country turning their weapons against their own government instead of protecting their own people and fighting terrorist threats".

Some of these military regimes and their allies are accusing the European Union and its Member States of interference. However, the European Union is only present in the Sahel at the request of the legitimate governments of the countries in the region and always respects their sovereign decisions. The only interference we can talk about today is that of the military overthrowing an elected President and that of an imperialist Russia that wants to use these regimes as pawns in its global chess game. For some years now, Vladimir Putin's Russia has been fuelling these coups de force with its misleading propaganda and has been profiting from the installation of these military regimes with its private militias that are plundering the region's wealth.

The path of military dictatorship can only be a dead end

The path of military dictatorship and international isolation can only be a dead end for the countries of the region, both in terms of their security and their urgent economic and social development. Russia's grandiose economic promises have never been kept, and the facts speak for themselves when it comes to security: in Mali, terrorist attacks and atrocities against the population have multiplied since Wagner's arrival.

It is high time to put a stop to this dangerous drift for the peoples of the Sahel and neighbouring countries. At the time of the coup, President Bazoum said in his last tweet that "the hard-won gains will be safeguarded. All Nigeriens who love

democracy and freedom will see to it". I remain hopeful that I will be able to visit Niger again soon to continue the in-depth work begun with him.

DEMOCRACY MUST PREVAIL IN THE SAHEL

8.9.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³¹⁵⁾ – *Two months after the Niger military coup, I published this Op-Ed in several outlets to support the democratically elected President of Niger Bazoum. While admitting that the EU's policy towards the Sahel has not been as effective as we hoped, I argued that only a united Europe can meaningfully influence developments in this vital region.*

Some events are more memorable than others and serve as landmarks for a term in office. I will always remember attending a ceremony in Paris, in December 2019, to honour 13 French soldiers who had died in Mali. It was my first official act as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

I also will remember my visit to Niger in July. I witnessed the tangible results of EU-Niger cooperation with the inauguration of the Giroux Banda solar power plant near Niamey. In Agadez, I saw also hundreds of social housing units built with EU support. Nigerien President Mohamed Bayou's ambitious vision and action offered real hope in a region that had fallen prey to authoritarian drift. That is why, the military coup on July 26, shortly after my visit, was a shock for me.

After a discussion with my European counterparts, in the presence of the Nigerien Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Commission of the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), I would like to share a few thoughts on the situation in Niger and the Sahel.

Demanding a return to the constitutional order in Niger

We must maintain unwavering support for the democratically elected President Bazoum for “as long as it takes”, demanding a return to constitutional order in Niger. The future of democracy across the region is at stake. The democracy that the people of Niger wants, the one that ECOWAS is promoting, and the one that the EU is defending around the world.

Our support for ECOWAS also must not waver. There is no room for secondary arrangements or parallel mediation channels. As Europeans, we have long

⁽³¹⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/democracy-must-prevail-sahel_en

supported the search for “African solutions to African problems.” At a time when ECOWAS is taking an exceptionally firm and consequential stand, we must put our actions where our mouth is.

In addition to defending its democratic values, the EU also has a major interest in seeing Niger return to the path of constitutional order. Another Sahelian country falling into the hands of a military junta would have far-reaching negative consequences for Europe in terms of security, migration flows, and geopolitical balance of power. It is mistaken to believe that military juntas could effectively combat terrorist movements or human trafficking. The best bulwarks against such threats are democratic states with the ambition, will, and means to create new opportunities for their people.

EU policy toward the Sahel not as successful as we hoped

Certainly, EU policy toward the Sahel has not been as successful as we had hoped in recent years. We have sometimes been too focused on the security dimension alone and our efforts to help strengthen the rule of law and provide basic services have not been sufficient or visible enough. The “strategic patience” we have shown toward the military juntas in the region, has also not had any concrete results other than encouraging new vocations...

Despite this necessary self-criticism, we must not forget that Europe’s roadmap in the Sahel in recent years has been a Sahelian one. We have committed our soldiers, our money, and our political capital to the region because Sahelian countries asked us to do so.

What can we do now? Suspend our budgetary support for, and security cooperation with, Niger; work toward the adoption of sanctions; and show solidarity in response to the unjustified expulsion of the Ambassador of one of our member states. However, we also must go further. Since it would not be reasonable to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result, we must adopt a different approach.

Security cooperation, the issuing of visas, and economic development programs must be reconsidered, and we must move quickly in deciding what needs to change – both with respect to Niger and other countries across the Sahel. We will need to hold this showdown with the military juntas without falling into the traps set by regimes that rely principally on manipulation and disinformation. With little

results to show for their anti-terrorism or economic-development efforts, the region's juntas have found it to be their most effective tools.

The Sahel is a test for the entire EU. No one should be pleased by the difficulties that France is encountering in the region. It has become a convenient scapegoat for juntas to easily manufacture national cohesion while concealing their own failures and abuses. But France is not the problem in the Sahel; the military juntas are because they lack the means to really fight terrorism and the ambition to improve their people's daily lives and future prospects.

We will pay a high price if we fail to remain coherent and united

Those who rejoice, in Europe or elsewhere, at the difficulties encountered by Europeans in the Sahel do not appreciate correctly what is at stake. We will all pay a high price if we fail to remain coherent and united. Only a united Europe can influence the course of events. The coming weeks will tell whether we are up to the task of responding to expectations in this strategic region.



5.4 ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

THREE MESSAGES FROM NEW DELHI

11.3.2023 – Blog ⁽³¹⁶⁾ – In March 2023, The G20 meeting of foreign affairs ministers and the Raisina Dialogue in India were crucial opportunities to discuss with international partners the war against Ukraine and other urgent issues. We must invest more in multilateral solutions to address the numerous global crises.

Last week I was in New Delhi where I attended both the G20 Ministerial Meeting and the Raisina Forum which brings together a substantial number of guests from all over the world. After attending the Munich Security Conference, which is mainly a Transatlantic forum, it was interesting to also know about the way many of our non-western partners around the world perceive today's troubled times.

From these two events, I came back with three conclusions. The first is to take seriously the new ambitions of India and the other countries that consider themselves as part of the so-called “Global South”, the second is to deplore Russia’s persistent denial and continuation of its aggression against Ukraine, and the third is to acknowledge the reality of a multipolar world facing an acute crisis of multilateralism.

The demands of the “Global South” for a leading role

India is already the most populated country in the world and the fifth world economy. As the current Chair of the G20, its geopolitical ambitions are an important element of the new global order. Before the G20 ministerial, it organised a virtual summit of 125 states under the banner of Voices of the Global South. Of course, the so-called “Global South” is far from being a homogeneous group, since it includes the poorest countries in the world as well as dynamic emerging ones and even some of the richest by their natural resources. But beyond its immense diversity, it expresses three sets of concerns: a strong desire to be recognised by the countries of “the North” and the clear will of to take advantage of the contradictions of the global system to promote its own agenda. And finally, a certain number of demands, especially the wish to benefit from better representation in multilateral institutions. They want also the North to recognise

⁽³¹⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/three-messages-new-delhi_en

the principle of common but differentiated responsibility in terms of climate change and fulfil its obligations on financing the energy transition. They also stress the need to prevent a convergence between the climate crisis and the debt crisis in the most threatened countries, and finally, to avoid being the collateral victims of conflicts for which they feel they have no responsibility. These are demands that must certainly be addressed by us Europeans.

In fact, this is actually what we are already doing. In the field of climate change, the EU, together with member states, is the world's largest contributor of public funding with €23 billion per year. In the field of energy transition, we even go beyond our obligations. So if the target of €100 billion per year to which the international community has committed itself is not reached, the fault does not lie with the European Union. Just recently, a member state like Germany proposed to commit €1.3 billion per year to the Indian Energy Transition Fund. We are also working hard to see India join the Just Energy Transition Partnerships. In terms of connectivity, which is essential for India and also for the Global South, we are working to see how the European Global Gateway could be mobilised for Indian projects, particularly in terms of infrastructure.

We must also ensure that the measures that we can take in the fight against climate change do not penalize the Global South. Regarding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), we will have to work with partners to avoid the spread of the idea of European "regulatory imperialism" or "green protectionism". These fears were also expressed at the G20 by some of the representatives present in New Delhi.

It is often said that the G20 is a mere talking shop. Certainly, a discussion among 20+ states, as among 27 EU member states, is not always easy. And the G20 is of course not a formal institution. But I do not share this view. The G20 brings together 85% of the world's GNP, 75% of world trade and 70% of the world's population. It offers an open space to express different points of view, coming from a more and more diversified and pluralist world, on the most challenging issues

Russia's denial of its aggression does not pass

But the freedom of each country to express its point of view does not mean that all points of view are equally acceptable, including those based on lies, areas in which Russia is unbeatable. It was Russia, moreover, that prevented the Indian

chairmanship from producing a joint communiqué since it blocked, with the support of China, any reference to the war in Ukraine. To note, the Indian draft text simply repeated the terms of the Bali Declaration adopted by G20 Leaders in September 2022. This Russian obstructionism is not surprising, however. At the Raisina forum, Foreign Minister Lavrov went so far as to say that Russia was only defending itself against Ukraine's aggression, causing hilarity in the room. He also engaged in the usual diatribe against Europe, which he accused of aggravating the food and energy crisis in the countries of the South to put us at odds with them. He has used this manoeuvre many times before, but this did not make it any more credible. The food crisis is first and foremost a crisis of availability and price. Certainly, if Russia had not attacked one of the main breadbaskets in the world, the situation would be better since Ukraine alone feeds more than 400 million people. And, clearly, it is not Ukraine but Russia that has started this war. So it is the aggressor who must be blamed.

Besides, we have taken immediate action to resolve the food crisis that Russia created. The implementation of the European Solidarity Lines and the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) allowed the export of 51 million tonnes of Russian and Ukrainian grain. This led to a drop in prices, which, according to the FAO, have returned near to their pre-war level. It is Russia that now seems to want to call into question the BSGI agreement, either by deliberately slowing down inspections of ships leaving the Black Sea or by threatening not to renew the agreement, which is due to expire on 18 March.

By doing so, Moscow is deliberately slowing down exports and raising prices, due to high waiting costs. As for the idea that European sanctions would block Russian fertiliser exports, thus starving the countries of the South, it is simply unfounded. According to FAO data, Russian fertiliser exports are almost stable and directed towards large countries such as Brazil, China, India and Türkiye.

As for the World Food Program, to which Ukraine is the main contributor, its deliveries have been directed towards countries threatened by famine such as Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia.

Multipolarity without multilateralism

This brings me to my third message: the crisis of the international system. Why is multilateralism in retreat when the world is increasingly multipolar? It is a paradox. Because if in the global game, the number of actors is increasing (multipolarity),

the cooperative logic (multilateralism) should prevail. But the opposite is happening. The most important explanation for this paradox is that in a multipolar world everyone wants to express his or her own truth and beliefs when they are strong enough to do so. This can be a good thing provided that there is a common base of values and principles on which we agree.

But this common base is now being challenged by revisionist powers. We even see states questioning the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which they subscribed and which they now tend to consider as products of the West. Yet the UN Charter remains the agreed common basis for the international community. And Russia has been condemned at the UN General Assembly by 141 states for its aggression against Ukraine. Will this vote at the UN change its attitude? Probably not. Some countries of the Global South underline that the Russian aggression against Ukraine, although perfectly condemnable, is only one war among others and they feel that the West only cares about Ukraine and is forgetting the other conflicts.

In New Delhi, my remarks both at the G20 and at the Raisina forum explained why the invasion of Ukraine has turned a page in the history of this century. And even if it affects primarily the security of Europe, its reproduction elsewhere is a major risk if this aggression is not stopped and those responsible are not held accountable. Many territorial conflicts may resurface if the invasion of Ukraine continues. Our rather weak reaction to the invasion of Crimea in 2014 has cost us dearly. For it gave Russia the feeling that it could act with impunity in Ukraine. Respect for international legality is therefore an obligation for all and life insurance for the weakest.

Dismissing Ukraine is not helping to solve other problems

Certainly, there are many other problems in the world apart from Ukraine. However, dismissing the Ukrainian issue will not help to solve them. All problems are interrelated and I honestly think that the European Union is not willing to act as a hegemonic power. We are linked with many countries of the Global South by important economic and commercial relations. We are most sensitive to the global imbalances that affect the most vulnerable countries. We want to be a partner on which they can and do rely. But this responsibility is fully compatible with defending the principle of territorial integrity of States, which is now clearly violated in Ukraine.

ON CHINA AND EU-CHINA RELATIONS

13.4.2023 – Blog ⁽³¹⁷⁾ – *I had planned to visit Beijing in April 2023. Unfortunately, due to testing positive for COVID-19, I had to cancel this trip. However, there is the speech I intended to deliver at the Centre for China and Globalization on EU China relations.*

My first visit to China was in 1987 when, as Spain's Secretary of State for the Treasury, I came to sign the first agreement on double taxation for our companies. At that time, China was beginning its impressive economic take-off and its opening to the world. I returned in 2006 as President of the European Parliament. It was already another China, the one that was at the heart of the shift in the centre of gravity of the world economy from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It had in the meantime joined the WTO and was emerging as a central player in global economic relations.

I had a long conversation with President Hu Jin Tao, who then invited me to speak at the Chinese Communist Party Leadership School. At that time, China already had a large number of foreign exchange reserves invested in US government debt. I remember that in my lecture I pointed out that the irony was that the dollar exchange rate depended on the decisions of the Chinese Communist Party. But these decisions were double-edged because a depreciation of the dollar would automatically reduce the value of these reserves.

Later, in 2019, I also visited Beijing as Spain's Foreign Minister, invited to the celebration ceremonies of the “Belt and Road Initiative”. During all this time, China has continued its economic development. It is no longer a simple producer of low-cost goods with cheap labour, but a technological powerhouse that has achieved the historic feat of lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty over the past 50 years. This is a great achievement of mankind and was made possible by the policy choices of the Chinese authorities, being also in favour of open markets and free trade.

The Chinese and US economies have been deeply and increasingly intertwined. So does the European economy. 20% of our imports come from China, which is the destination of 9% of our exports; our trade represents €2.3 billion per day.

⁽³¹⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/my-view-china-and-eu-china-relations_en

However, the imbalance is continuously getting bigger and our trade deficit has doubled in the last two years. This is of course unsustainable and needs to be addressed, principally through the removal of the myriad of market access barriers that European companies still face in China. As the president of the European Commission said in Beijing only a week ago, we need transparency, and reciprocity. In short, a level playing field.

The world has changed and so has China

However, since then, the world has changed and so has China. The time of the *"mondialisation heureuse"* is over. The benefits of the economic integration are being re-evaluated through the lens of national security. We have to face the climate emergency, the consequences of the pandemic, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

This war has fuelled shocks on supply chains, and a food and energy crisis. In this context, we believe that China must exercise more responsibility, also for security and peace. It cannot avoid this. If we want an international order where cooperation prevails over confrontation, everyone must fully exercise their responsibilities to ensure respect for international law.

I strongly believe in the importance of public diplomacy, in personal and human exchanges and that both sides gain from knowing each other better. This is why cultural and personal exchanges between Europe and China must be resumed as soon as possible after three years of interruption. The primary foundation of our relations should be mutual knowledge and respect. The Covid-19 crisis and recent international tensions have widened the knowledge gap between Europe and China. We must work together to reduce this gap.

I know that the functioning of the EU, which is a kind of confederation of states, may seem complex. However, when it comes to foreign and security policy it is based on simple principles. The European Council, which brings together the heads of state and government of the member states, defines the strategic choices of the Union, The ministers and the European Commission implement them and the European Parliament monitors its activity.

In this system, the member states retain responsibility for their foreign and security policy. My role as High Representative is to build a common policy, which becomes the external policy of the Union, whether it is in relation to China or any other country, and to represent it in the world at the ministerial level.

All this may seem complex. But this complexity has the advantage of creating a supranational and democratic European system that has ensured peace and prosperity among Europeans. And this is what counts.

In the face of the recent extreme challenges, the EU has been able to show remarkable unity in its foreign and security policy. As a response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, it immediately took ground-breaking initiatives in record time, providing military and financial support to Ukraine and adopting ten packages of sanctions against the Russian war machine.

How do we see China?

The EU's current position on China, endorsed by the European Council in 2020, is based on the known triptych: partner, competitor and systemic rival ⁽³¹⁸⁾. A lot has happened since then. Bilateral relations between the EU and China have deteriorated in recent years, due to a growing number of irritants (like China's disproportionate response to the EU's targeted restricted measures, China's trade measures against Lithuania, with a direct impact on our EU single market, and China's position on the war against Ukraine).

But at the same time, we have remained committed to engagement and cooperation and recognise China's crucial role in solving global and regional problems. On climate change, for example: despite China's growing efforts in the fight against CO₂ emissions, China still burns as much coal as the rest of the world combined. There is no chance of finding a solution to global warming without a strong partnership with and engagement of China.

Having said that, I will come to my main point. And this comes down to two fundamental questions: how do we see China? And under what conditions can we learn to work together?

How do we see China? We see it as a power with a large population, the rise of which is part of the long history of humanity. With an average annual GDP growth rate of 9% over the last fifty years and a massive eradication of poverty.

However, we know from experience that as soon as a country achieves economic power it also naturally wants to project itself on political and strategic levels. If

⁽³¹⁸⁾ See: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-and-hrvp-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en

China has made great progress, it is thanks to its industrious and creative people, but it would not have happened without the introduction of market principles, the economic opening and the existence of an open multilateral system guaranteed by rules such as those of the World Trade Organization.

It is in the interest of all of us to respect these rules. But it is also in our interest to update them. Because between the beginning of the 2000s and today, the world has undergone fundamental changes. Many issues as important as export subsidies, energy transition, digitalisation, cyber security or intellectual property protection, which were not as pressing at the time, have become so since then.

And in this new world there are new powers emerging. They demand their place in the world order. We must accept the reality of the advent of a more multipolar world, in which claims with often different and sometimes divergent meanings are expressed. This reality is therefore imposed on us as on others, including of course China.

The need to reduce imbalances

We do not fear China's rise. However, we know that the history of tomorrow's world will also depend on how China uses its power. We do not fear the changing world. Even more because, while we are aware of the new realities, as Europeans we also have important political, industrial, scientific and cultural assets. Our normative influence is strong and often original. Our social and political model reflects this originality and strength. It does not blindly trust either the market or the state. It always strives to combine market efficiency with individual protection, good governance and political pluralism. In addition, there is indeed a European voice and a European way. In this, what remains vital is that we all respect the core rules and norms of the international system to which we belong.

As I said, China and the EU have strong economic relations, especially as to trade. The total amount of our trade has reached nearly €850 billion in 2022. But these exchanges are increasingly unbalanced to our disadvantage. Our trade deficit has reached a record of €400 billion, or 2.3% of our GDP.

This imbalance must therefore be reduced. They must also be addressed by allowing much better access to the Chinese market for Europeans. We all have an interest in maintaining an open system. If imbalances are not corrected, we have to react. Europe will remain the most open major market in the world, but we will

not hesitate to take measures to protect ourselves against practices that we consider unfair. Neither will we permit harmful activities that place at risk the national security of our member states.

The weaponization of technology and interdependence is a reality to which we have become very sensitive. The pandemic and the Russian energy blackmail have taught us that we cannot be dependent on a single country. We know, for example, that we depend excessively on certain countries, including China, for certain raw materials such as cobalt, manganese or magnesium. In the end, our real dependence stems from the integration of these products in manufactured imports. Hence, the need to diversify our value chains because the strategic importance of a product does not only depend on the place where it is produced but also on the place where it is refined or manufactured. We must also prevent our sensitive technologies from being used for military purposes.

Our ability to quickly get rid of our energy dependence on Russia shows that we are able to react quickly and strongly when our vital interests are threatened. We have done this successfully, something Russia thought was impossible. We have diversified our supplies, reduced our consumption, increased the share of renewables and supported Ukraine. Europe is not threatening anyone. But it will not let anyone intimidate it.

As agreed by the European leaders at their Informal Summit of Versailles in March 2022⁽³¹⁹⁾, Europe must now assume its responsibilities in all areas in order to assert its sovereignty by increasing its defence capabilities, reducing its dependencies and designing a new model of growth and investment by 2030.

You can call it as you prefer: increasing our strategic autonomy or de-risking, but it all comes down to the same thing. But let me emphasize that these measures that we are adopting to defend ourselves are not directed against a country and are compatible with WTO rules.

Work together for the common good

I also believe that there is a multilateral space in which the European Union and China can manage to work together for the common good. For instance with the agreement of the Kunming Montreal Framework⁽³²⁰⁾ to protect biodiversity and

⁽³¹⁹⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2022/03/10-11/>

⁽³²⁰⁾ See: <https://www.unep.org/resources/kunming-montreal-global-biodiversity-framework>

terrestrial and maritime ecosystems, or with regard to tackling the excessive debt of the least developed countries in the framework of the [G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative](#) ⁽³²¹⁾. This will also be the case with the [draft international treaty on pandemics](#) ⁽³²²⁾ proposed by the European Union. And above all, we need to work together on the crucial issue of climate change, where we do need a higher level of ambition on China's side to progress. Working together concretely to tackle such global issues is one important way to restore the trust that has been eroded between us.

But this trust will only return if we manage to understand each other on major international political issues and make progress towards a peaceful resolution of conflicts. I know that from your point of view, a key issue is Taiwan. I am fully aware of this. On this subject, you should know that the European Union's position is consistent and clear. It has not changed. We remain fundamentally committed to the EU's One China Policy. We see no reason to question it. We must lower the tension; avoid verbal outbursts or provocations that can only fuel mistrust. However, any attempt to change the status quo by force would be unacceptable.

For our part, we have a major security concern, Ukraine. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of a European country have been brutally and flagrantly violated by Russia. It has been condemned by 141 member states of the United Nations, which shows how Russia has seriously damaged the international order.

Take on responsibility and help Russia to listen to reason

I am not here to give lessons or advice to China. I have too much respect for its independence and sovereignty. However, I would like to say this in all friendship: it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the European Union to maintain a relationship of trust with China, which I would like to see, if China does not contribute to the search for a political solution based on Russia's withdrawal from the Ukrainian territory. Neutrality in the face of the violation of international law is not credible. We do not ask anyone to align with our own position. We simply ask you to admit and recognise that in this case there was a serious violation of international law. This is why I believe that it would be helpful if President Xi spoke to President Zelenskyy, and if China provided more substantial humanitarian aid to the battered Ukrainian people.

⁽³²¹⁾ See: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/FAQ/sovereign-debt>

⁽³²²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/pandemic-treaty/>

Russia is in great difficulty. The lightning war that Putin imagined has ended in failure. And because it is in trouble, it obviously wants to involve China on its side. Right after committing with China not to deploy nuclear weapons outside its territory, it announced that it would do so in Belarus, increasing the nuclear risk. China rejects the block mentality. So do we. This is why we will be particularly attentive to any steps that China might take to finally make the Russian leaders listen to reason. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has major responsibilities. We hope that it will take on more of them, as it has for instance done in the Middle East by facilitating the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Europe is defending Ukraine and prepares to welcome it one day in its family. But today, Europe's security is also at stake in Ukraine. This is why we will continue supporting Ukraine in every conceivable way: militarily, financially, politically, diplomatically and humanitarian. Our support is in no way the expression of a form of allegiance or submission to another great power, as I hear some say, but the expression of our own will. Please, understand this. It is our own destiny we are fighting for.

Come to Europe, you will see how much spontaneous support there is for Ukraine and its people. Near my home for example, in Madrid, surrounded by Ukrainian flags. It was not the government that demanded this. It is the people and the municipalities that have spontaneously mobilised alongside the Ukrainian people.

Human rights are universal

I have not the space to discuss here in detail all the relevant issues, some that bring us together and some that separate us. The issue of human rights, for example. We have deep and serious differences here. We must not hide this fact. However, this is also why we must speak frankly, calmly and resolutely. We have resumed the dialogue on human rights between the EU and China ⁽³²³⁾ after a four-year interruption. For us, human rights are universal and should be respected everywhere.

It was not my ambition to deal exhaustively with the whole of Sino-European relations, but I hope I have touched upon some essential elements of EU-China relations. Europe respects China, it admires its history, its culture and its impressive

⁽³²³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-38th-human-rights-dialogue-european-union-takes-place-brussels_en

economic trajectory. We know the world's problems cannot be solved without China. In return, Europe expects to be taken seriously as a geopolitical actor, capable of defending its interests and values and assuming its strategic responsibilities.

The real challenge before us is how best to make our relations work and how to manage our differences. This will be in the interest of China and in the interest of the European Union. We owe it to the world.

A COLD LOOK AT CHINA

23.4.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³²⁴⁾ – *While China may not pose a direct threat to our security, it does represent a multidimensional challenge for Europe. How will China use its power and how can we deal with it? These are the two questions we face. My Op-Ed in Le Journal du Dimanche.*

Since 2019, the European Union has adopted a China strategy that makes Beijing a partner, a competitor and a rival. A partner, because on a wide range of issues such as biodiversity, climate change, the indebtedness of poor countries and pandemics, there is an absolute need to cooperate with China, given the global nature of these issues. In particular, it will be important to encourage China, which burns more coal than the rest of the world, to raise its level of climate ambition. But this cannot be done without dialogue. Otherwise, it will rally the South against us.

If all we had to do to solve our problems with China was not talk to them, we would know. On the other hand, recognising its growing role in no way implies complacency towards it. We have profound differences with Beijing on a great many issues.

China's vision of human rights is opposed to our own

On values, China's vision of individual rights and fundamental freedoms is totally opposed to our own. We will therefore not hesitate to make life difficult for China in international bodies where, with the support of a number of countries in the South, it is seeking to call into question the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which it has signed and ratified.

On economic imbalances, our disagreements are just as serious. Our companies are increasingly at a disadvantage on the Chinese market, not because they are uncompetitive, but because they are faced with restrictive measures and massive subsidies granted to their Chinese competitors, which reduce their chances. This is why we are making reciprocity a concrete principle in our relations with China. This is why we have decided to implement European measures to ensure that our

⁽³²⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/un-regard-froid-sur-la-chine_und_en

strategic sectors are protected by foreign investment control instruments. Happy globalisation is over. However, it must not give way to a closed economy or to a decoupling that would be extremely damaging for Europe. This balance between openness and security is essential. But it will not be an easy task. We are now faced with the emergence of two blocs, each trying to draw the rest of the world to its side," said Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB. And this may lead to the formation of two blocs organised around the two major world powers". We want to reduce our risks without seeking to decouple our economies from China. We will therefore have to specify how to achieve this in concrete terms.

On Taiwan, our position is simple and constant. In our view, there is only one China. But not under any conditions. And certainly not through the use of force. Europe must in fact be very present on this issue, which concerns us economically, commercially and technologically. This is why I am calling on the European navies to patrol the Taiwan Strait to demonstrate Europe's commitment to freedom of navigation in this absolutely crucial area. At the same time, we must be vigilant against provocation and one-upmanship. The vast majority of Taiwanese people believe that the peaceful status quo is the most appropriate solution. So let us be firm in upholding this principle.

It is not in the interest of China to support Russia in Ukraine

Finally, there is Ukraine. We have said it again and again to the Chinese: it is not in your interest to support Russia. All the more so because by supporting Russia you will only increase the polarisation of the international system that you claim to want to combat. This is the message I will be sending to my 27 colleagues tomorrow.

EUROPE AND THE INDO-PACIFIC: PARTNERS FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES

15.5.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³²⁵⁾ – *In May 2023, ministers from the Indo-Pacific region and the European Union convened in Stockholm. In this Op-Ed, co-authored with Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström, we argued that never before cooperation between our two regions been so important.*

On 13 May, at our initiative, ministers from the Indo-Pacific and the European Union and partners gathered in Stockholm. Our meeting is a call for action as much as it is a demonstration of the EU's continuous commitment to the Indo-Pacific region.

We meet as the world grapples with aggression, geopolitical tensions, economic turbulence, and the climate crisis. In these consequential times our partnerships are essential, and never before has the case for cooperation between our regions been so convincing.

The region holds the larger part of the earth's economy

The Indo-Pacific region is of strategic importance. The region holds the larger part of the earth's population and economy. Through its waters passes the major share of world trade. Stability and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific are vital for our prosperity. The fate of climate change and the health of oceans are largely decided there. When fundamental freedoms and openness are threatened, be it in Europe, the Indo-Pacific or elsewhere, the European Union is not indifferent.

We live in a world of shared security. The rise of tensions in parts of Asia has global consequences. Correspondingly, developments in Europe reverberate also in the Indo-Pacific. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is felt through its flagrant breaches of the principles of the UN charter and through food and energy price hikes. We have a common interest in addressing these challenges and upholding the UN Charter and international law. Indeed, the aims of Ukraine – to protect its freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity - are of fundamental importance for all.

⁽³²⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe-and-indo-pacific-partners-facing-similar-challenges_en

In the challenges we face, there are many notable parallels between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Supply chains are stretched, inflation destabilising, energy insecure, technology competitive, disinformation proliferating, and cyber security threatened. In short, the futures of Europe and the Indo-Pacific are inextricably linked, and our interests align in many ways.

Together, the European Union and the Indo-Pacific are strong enough to make a real difference on free trade and supply chains, technology and climate change, and broad security. We account for more than two-thirds of global trade, GDP, and population. Through closer relations, we can further influence cooperation on key global challenges.

The proposition of the European Union is clear

In the European Union's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, we pledge a growing engagement and invite our partners to join us in addressing common challenges. We envision deeper partnerships on sustainable prosperity and the environment, digital connectivity, and security, including human security. Our Indo-Pacific Strategy is above all an invitation to our partners in the region to dialogue and to address the issues at stake.

The proposition of the European Union is clear. We are ready to act on a broad palette of cooperation reflecting our extensive and long-term commitment to the Indo-Pacific. The latter is exemplified through our Free Trade Agreements, where we have active negotiations with Australia, India, Indonesia, and Kenya, having relaunched negotiations with Thailand and expect to sign an agreement with New Zealand soon. We engage in infrastructure, development cooperation and ocean conservation stretching from the African coast well into the Pacific.

Importantly, the European Union's approach constitutes an open and inclusive partnership model for the Indo-Pacific where we cooperate based on common interests and the protection of shared values and principles. This design allows us to address the challenges we face more effectively. Our goal is to build strategic trust and promote joint leadership in addressing global challenges.

As we welcome participants to the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum in Stockholm on 13 May our discussions will focus on our common interests, challenges and values with the goal of supporting closer coordination and integration. It is a clear message of the long-term European commitment to the Indo-Pacific.

HOW TO DEAL WITH CHINA

17.5.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³²⁶⁾ – *In this Op-Ed, published in several outlets, I discussed the EU's approach to China. The EU's political and economic systems significantly differ from China's. However, China is nearing 20% of the global economy and expanding. The best way to shape China's choices is through robust engagement and by reducing strategic risks.*

The economic, political, and financial influence of China is considerable, and its military power continues to grow. Its ambition is clearly to build a new world order, with China at the centre, becoming by the middle of the century the world's leading power.

The EU must be aware that many countries see the geopolitical influence of China as a counterweight to the West and therefore to Europe. And in a world that is becoming more fragmented and multipolar, most of the emerging countries are becoming hedgers, strengthening their room for manoeuvre without picking sides.

The EU has to recalibrate its policy towards China

In this context the EU has to recalibrate its policy towards China for at least three reasons: the changes inside China with nationalism and ideology on the rise; the hardening of US-China strategic competition; and the rise of China as a key player in regional and global issues.

This is putting growing pressure on the EU and sometimes creating uncomfortable dilemmas. Europe was built on the idea of shared prosperity and today is a power of peace. So we do not want to block the rise of emerging nations, be it China or India or others. But logically we want to ensure that it does not harm our interests, does not threaten our values or jeopardize the international rules-based order.

Last week we discussed EU-China relations with EU Foreign Ministers and we agreed that there is no viable alternative to the triptych of treating simultaneously China as a partner, competitor and systemic rival, depending on the issue. But it is necessary to adjust the relative weights among these three items and this

⁽³²⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/how-deal-china_en

adjustment depends in large part on China's own behaviour and the issue concerned. EU ministers underscored that we must continue to engage with China wherever possible, and at the same time reduce strategic risks and vulnerabilities by re-calibrating our stance across three clusters of issues: values, economic security and strategic security.

On values, our differences are hardening. In all international fora, China has constructed a narrative subordinating fundamental rights to the right to development. The EU must counter this discourse and uphold the universality of human rights.

In spite of those substantial differences, European and Chinese societies need to know each other better. The obstacles to the free flow of ideas and to the presence of Europeans in China must be removed. Otherwise, China and Europe will become more foreign to each other.

Our trade relations are unbalanced

On economic security, it is obvious that our trade relations are unbalanced. At over €400 billion a year, the EU's trade deficit is at an unacceptable level. This is not due to the EU's lack of competitiveness but to China's deliberate choices and policies. European companies face persistent obstacles and discriminatory practices. Moreover, the EU faces a growing risk of excessive dependencies on certain products and critical raw materials.

Hence, the importance of reducing risks and building up resilience, also for reasons of national security. This will require the diversification and reconfiguration of EU value chains, a more effective export control system, the control of inbound investment and possibly outbound investment, and the smart use of the anti-coercion instrument. But our international partners can rest assured that all measures we take will remain in line with WTO rules. The multilateral system must be revitalized, not abandoned.

The third cluster concerns essentially Taiwan and China's position on Russia's war against Ukraine. On Taiwan, the EU's position remains consistent and based on its 'One China policy'. Any unilateral change of the status quo and any use of force would have massive economic, political and security consequences. The EU must prepare for all scenarios and engage with China - in maintaining the status quo and work to de-escalate tensions.

On Ukraine, our message is clear: EU-China relations have no chance of developing if China does not push Russia to withdraw from Ukraine. Faced with a conflict involving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of an independent state, any so-called neutrality amounts in reality to taking the side of the aggressor. We welcome positive moves from China aiming at finding a solution to contribute to a just peace in Ukraine.

The message of all 27 Foreign Ministers last week was clear: the best way to shape China's choices is through robust engagement and by reducing strategic risks.

WHAT CAN THE EU DO AS SECURITY TENSIONS RISE IN ASIA?

9.6.2023 – Blog ⁽³²⁷⁾ – *At the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore in June 2023, the focus was on the competition between the US and China which played out especially in Southeast Asia. The EU can contribute to promoting stability and respect for established rules. We need to engage more with this region, where, in many respects, the future of the planet is being shaped.*

There is a paradox when it comes to South East Asia. In economic terms, the region is full of dynamism, growth, technological innovation and optimism. A country like Singapore had a nominal GDP of around \$1,000 per capita when it became independent in 1966. This figure has since then multiplied to \$72,000 (the EU average is \$46,000). However, in security terms, the region is marked by growing tensions, arms races, military incidents and attempts at coercion. The rhetoric is getting shrill and the mood more pessimistic.

This was on full display during this year's Shangri La Dialogue ⁽³²⁸⁾, the most important security conference in Asia taking place in Singapore. Every year an impressive array of Prime Ministers, Defence Ministers and various security experts discuss the outlook for Asian and global security.

The focus was on US-China tensions

Even more than in previous years, the focus this time was on US-China tensions. The stage was set by China's refusal, already before the conference started, for its Defence Minister Li to meet with US Defence Secretary Austin. And even though the two shook hands at the opening dinner, throughout the rest of the conference the growing strategic competition was evident. Indeed, the speeches of Secretary Austin ⁽³²⁹⁾ and General Li ⁽³³⁰⁾ laid out radically different visions for the region.

⁽³²⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/what-can-eu-do-security-tensions-rise-asia_en

⁽³²⁸⁾ See: <https://www.iiss.org/events/shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2023/>

⁽³²⁹⁾ See: https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library--content--migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2023/final-transcripts/p-1/lloyd-j-austin-iii-secretary-of-defense-us---as-delivered_sld23.pdf

⁽³³⁰⁾ See: <https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library--content--migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2023/final-transcripts/p-5/general-li-shangfu-state-councilor-minister-of-national-defense-china---as-delivered.pdf>

When it comes to Europe, despite the regular presence of European Defence Ministers at the SLD for many years, we are largely seen as an extra-regional actor with limited impact on the regional security dynamics. And the war against Ukraine has reinforced the feeling that Europe is turning inward, limiting its global engagement despite our messages asserting the opposite.

Europe and Asia have a direct stake in each other's security

I wanted to reaffirm the reasons for our regional commitment and set out our contribution. So in my speech⁽³³¹⁾ I stressed that Europe and Asia have a direct stake in each other's security. We need to defend core security principles whenever and wherever they are threatened, from Ukraine to the South and East China Seas and beyond. The EU is committed to enhance its security cooperation in and with Asian partners. In fact, many Europeans expressed this message at the SLD - and it is acted upon. The security component of our cooperation with ASEAN is expanding rapidly. Our member states navies are engaged with naval exercises and we are ready to do more. But we need to make sure our cooperation is as operational as possible and a two-way street.

I also explained how the war against Ukraine is changing Europe. We are offering important help to Ukraine in terms of military supplies and training but we are also beefing up our defence capabilities across the board. This strategic transformation of the EU also makes us a more capable partner for Asia.

As always for this type of conference, the bilateral and conversations in the corridors were as important as the proceedings in the plenary ballroom. I had a chance to meet Acting PM of Singapore Lawrence Wong, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hang and the country's Foreign Minister, my good friend Vivian Balakrishnan. I also had official meetings with the Defence Ministers of China and South Korea, as well as many informal conversations with regional leaders and experts.

It is not easy to summarise the main conclusions from these discussions over several days. But I would like to stress three main reflections:

- 1. US-China strategic competition is the main force driving regional dynamics** and it affects all areas: economics, security, technology and ideology. The strategy of many regional states of developing deep economic ties with China while seeking security from the US, is getting harder to sustain. Logically, many

⁽³³¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/singapore-speech-hrvp-borrell-shangri-la-dialogue_en

in the region want to avoid having ‘to pick a side’ and instead emphasise the need to promote respect for rules and norms, multilateral agreements and regional integration (hence, ASEAN centrality). When the big powers are throwing their weight around, many see the EU as a factor of balance in the region and a strong supporter of multilateralism. We need to seize on that demand for ‘more EU’.

2. **There is a strategic continuum and in a global world there is no ‘far away’.** The war against Ukraine affects everyone. Similarly, Europeans need to act when coercion and unilateral moves endanger stability in the Taiwan Strait or the South and East China Seas. What this means in concrete terms will depend on the circumstances and on the capabilities we have available. But we cannot be parochial or provincial. And just as Asian partners rightly ask us to do more on security in the region, to ‘not leave them alone’, we are right to stress that Ukraine deserves global solidarity and support because of the underlying principles at stake. If sovereignty is no longer respected and the use of force and coercion is normalised, we are all in danger, also countries that are geographically far away from Ukraine.
3. **Looking beyond ‘hard security’, there is a clear trend, also in Asia, towards a new geo-economic paradigm**, where open markets and ‘just in time’ supply chains are giving way to security and state-driven, ‘just in case’ approaches. The buzzwords are resilience, diversification and, above all, de-risking. In different ways, China, the US and the EU⁽³³²⁾ are all advancing in this direction. But many regional partners ask what this means in concrete terms. What are the risks of de-risking? And where does de-risking end and de-coupling begin? Will the EU, they ask, become more protectionist and turn its back on the WTO? It is normal for a region that has done so well out of entering into the global economy to ask these questions. It is a reminder that, as we in the EU are gearing up for a new ‘economic security strategy’ to be released later this month, we must take into account the impact our choices have on our partners. And we need to get the balance right between protecting ourselves from growing risks stemming from the weaponization of inter-dependence and, on the other hand, preserving the immense benefits that rules-based trade and investment have brought to the EU and our partners.

Overall, I came away convinced that despite the war on our doorstep and many pressing priorities at home, we need to pay more attention to the strategic shifts

⁽³³²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/geopolitics-green-transition-and-improving-eu%20%99s-economic-security_en

in the Indo-Pacific and especially South East Asia. It really matters whether the region stays open, plural and rules-based, or descends into ever-stronger great power competition, competing blocs and binary choices.

THE EU AND ASEAN MUST FACE TOGETHER RISING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

17.7.2023 – Blog ⁽³³³⁾ – *Southeast Asia stands at the heart of the world's economic growth and is a focal point of intense geopolitical dynamics, driven by the US-China rivalry. The EU needs to increase its presence in this critical region, by intensifying our strategic partnership with ASEAN.*

At the end of last week, I was in Jakarta co-chairing the ASEAN-EU Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) (called as such because it takes place after the ASEAN Ministerial Conference) and attending the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

This visit took place in an environment where Southeast Asia, the centre of the world's economic growth, is facing intense geopolitical dynamics, driven by the increasing US-China rivalry. This confrontation constitutes an overarching concern for Southeast Asian countries, as they face a growing polarisation and an economic and technological threat of decoupling between the two major global powers. At the same time, security tensions are on the rise in the East and South China Sea, where the deployment of assets, overlapping territorial claims, and the conduct of naval exercises create tensions between neighbours. ASEAN and China are negotiating a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea, but it seems unlikely that these talks will conclude any time soon. In parallel, the US is becoming ever more active in the region, also with a steady pattern of "freedom of navigation operations" in the South China Sea.

ASEAN countries want to avoid having to make binary choices

ASEAN is far from being a monolithic block and there are important differences between its members, not only due to their systems of governance. While some countries are historically, politically and economically close to the US, others are closer to China. However, what they have in common is that they want to avoid choosing one camp, by choosing closer integration. The key to this is also the so-called "ASEAN Centrality": not only does ASEAN have an extraordinary convening

⁽³³³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-asean-must-face-together-rising-geopolitical-tensions_en

capacity, but it also embraces a neutrality that prevents its ten members from having to make any binary choice between the two powers.

While the concerns about geopolitical rivalry and tensions in the Indo-Pacific theatre are felt everywhere in the world, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is not an issue of prime concern in the region except when it comes to the price of food, energy, and fertilisers. Not all ASEAN countries voted in favour of the UN Resolutions condemning Russia and no ASEAN statement on Ukraine has been adopted for over a year. Due to its heterogeneity, the principle of consensus does not allow ASEAN naming or condemning the aggressor. There also has been no attempt to exclude Russia from ASEAN-led meetings. And most ASEAN members view Russia's invasion through the prism of the global economic consequences and their own historical experiences. Another major internal challenge that hampers ASEAN unity: Myanmar. Since the military coup over two years ago, there has been little, if any, progress in implementing the Five-Point Consensus agreed by ASEAN members and there are increasingly diverging views on how to handle Myanmar. Another crisis that is in everyone's mind is the one caused by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which does not cease to threaten the entire region with its ballistic missiles and nuclear capabilities.

The EU's partnership with ASEAN and my visit to Jakarta

The EU and ASEAN are the two most advanced regional integration organisations in the world. They understand each other at many levels, even if some of the ASEAN members are not like our multi-party democracies. Both organisations stand together in promoting effective multilateralism, free trade, the green and digital transition and connectivity.

The EU-ASEAN relationship has enjoyed several successes in the last years (e.g. the conclusion of [the Strategic Partnership](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-asean-elevate-relations-strategic-partnership_en)⁽³³⁴⁾, the [Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement \[CATA\]](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_6125)⁽³³⁵⁾], the extensive [Plan of Action 2023-2027](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/plan-action-implement-asean-eu-strategic-partnership-2023-2027-o_en)⁽³³⁶⁾), culminating in the [Brussels EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December 2022](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/12/14/)⁽³³⁷⁾, which cemented a growing political momentum in the EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership.

⁽³³⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-asean-elevate-relations-strategic-partnership_en

⁽³³⁵⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_6125

⁽³³⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/plan-action-implement-asean-eu-strategic-partnership-2023-2027-o_en

⁽³³⁷⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/12/14/>

My presence in Jakarta on behalf of the EU at the two ASEAN meetings provided an opportunity to strengthen our bonds, to profile the EU as a trusted partner, to discuss regional and global developments, and to pursue our political and economic interests.

The EU-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC), which I co-chaired in person for the second time (last year being in Cambodia), is an annual meeting that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers hold with their Dialogue Partners (the EU is one among eleven). It is held in a 10+1 format with each one of the 11 ASEAN Dialogue Partners, and it provides an opportunity to review cooperation initiatives, and exchange views on matters of common concern. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) focuses on security cooperation. The entire membership (10 ASEAN members + 17 partners) is represented and it was chaired this year by Indonesia.

Regional tensions were reflected in the meeting

In both meetings, I stressed that the EU is committed⁽³³⁸⁾ to ASEAN Centrality and aims to step up our cooperation in ASEAN-centred fora. We might be geographically distant but Europe is economically interdependent with the Indo-Pacific and we have a direct stake in each other's security.. Reflecting the need for Europe to "de-risk" politically and economically, through diversification and closer relations with more partners in this dynamic region of the world, it is natural that our cooperation expands rapidly.

At the ARF, I focused on five global and regional issues⁽³³⁹⁾: the link between the climate crisis and security, the Korean Peninsula, Myanmar, Taiwan and the South China Sea, and on Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. These topics were widely discussed and regional tensions and diverging views were clearly reflected in the focus, conduct and atmosphere of the meeting.

Like-minded partners like the US, New Zealand, Canada, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and others conveyed similar messages concerning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia's foreign minister Lavrov repeated his well-known twisted and often absurd views on the so-called root causes of his country's attack against its neighbour. He put forward a skewed and aggressive anti-Western rhetoric

⁽³³⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-asean-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ministerial-meeting-indonesia_en

⁽³³⁹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-asean-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-30th-asean-regional-forum-arf_en

portraying Russia's ill-fated activities as actions that make the world a better and more stable place. US Secretary of State Blinken put the facts straight. China was less confrontational portraying itself as a peace and prosperity-driven stabilising actor with support for concrete economic development.

I held very constructive bilateral meetings with Asian partners, including one with China's top foreign affairs Director Wang Yi ⁽³⁴⁰⁾. As my two planned missions to China in April and June had to be postponed for health reasons on both sides, it was important that I could meet with him. The focus of our meeting was on recent developments in EU-China relations, and on how we can manage these responsibly. We exchanged extensively on what "de-risking" means and I elaborated on why it is important for Europe to decrease excessive dependencies- not only towards China- but in our overall external economic relations. I also expressed the EU's expectations as to China's role to help ending Russia's war against Ukraine. I urged Director Wang Yi to use China's influence on Russia and to provide more humanitarian assistance to Ukraine in a visible and effective manner. We also discussed Taiwan, and I reiterated the EU's One China policy, which means in concrete terms that we will not recognise the independence of Taiwan. Preserving stability and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait is of major importance to all of us, and we need to deepen mutual engagement on common global challenges. I look forward to holding soon our Strategic Dialogue in Beijing to elaborate on these issues and prepare the next EU-China Summit.

ASEAN centrality should not be underestimated

In my other meetings with Foreign Ministers from India, Indonesia, Laos, The Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye or the new ASEAN Secretary General, I could sense the strong need to preserve ASEAN as a fundamental pillar in today's uncertain world, no matter the challenges it is confronted with, including Myanmar, DPRK, South China Sea.

I am afraid that not everyone in Europe is fully aware of the significance of the Asian Regional Forum, which would be a mistake. How often do we have Antony Blinken, Wang Yi, and Sergey Lavrov, in addition to the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Japan, North and South Korea, India and Pakistan and others sitting in the same room? In short, ASEAN Centrality should not be underestimated, and we should support it if we want to be a credible player in today's world structure.

⁽³⁴⁰⁾ See: <https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1679845409080868865>

EU-CHINA RELATIONS: A CANDID EXCHANGE ON OUR DIFFERENCES

20.10.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁴¹⁾ – *In October 2023, I co-chaired the EU-China Strategic Dialogue with Director/Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Our relationship with China comprises both significant divergences and potential convergences. Given China's global role and the scale of the EU's relations with China, we need to make our interdependencies less confrontational.*

I went to China to hold a candid exchange on the obstacles faced by EU-China bilateral relations and to consider ways and means to improve them. This visit was already postponed twice this year: in April because I tested positive for COVID-19 and in July because China's then Foreign Minister was removed and his successor was not designated.

This time, it coincided with the dramatic events resulting from Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel. During my visit to China, I discussed the situation in the Middle East with numerous interlocutors around the world. The time difference between Beijing, Europe and the Arab World allowed me to work intensively on this crisis while fulfilling my China programme.

The long over-due EU-China Strategic Dialogue

The main, and long overdue, purpose of this visit was to co-chair the EU-China Strategic Dialogue, to prepare the next EU-China Summit. I also had the opportunity to meet with Vice President Han Zheng and to give a speech at Beida, China's prestigious Peking University. In Shanghai, I spoke with European business representatives and had a long and substantial exchange of views with eminent Chinese scholars at Shanghai's Institute of International Studies.

Our interlocutors tried repeatedly to convince us that China and the EU are not rivals and should be partners. I explained the EU's view that we are simultaneously rivals, competitors and partners. We are indeed rivals because our values and beliefs are very different on many subjects, including democracy and the universal character of human rights.

⁽³⁴¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-relations-candid-exchange-our-differences_en

Being rivals on values doesn't mean that we are enemies. I explained to my interlocutors that we don't see multipolarity as a problem. It reflects the legitimate desire of non-western countries to become more active globally and have more of a say. And we respect that.

The EU is not afraid of China's rise, nor does it want to stand on its way. On the contrary, we would like China to become more involved in collective efforts to tackle global issues such as climate change, global health, or restructuring the debt of developing countries. And we are ready to be partners with China in those fields.

I explained to my interlocutors that the position China will adopt at COP 28 – especially if it features more ambitious climate-related targets – will send an important message to the rest of the world, given China's global influence and its position as the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter. Although China is massively developing renewable energies, it is still burning as much coal as all the rest of the world together.

At the same time, I also reminded my Chinese interlocutors that it would be a mistake to underestimate Europe's capabilities and its global role. One of the biggest errors made by President Putin in invading Ukraine was to believe that Europe has become so weak and so dependent on Russian gas that it will be unable to react to Ukraine's invasion. We proved him wrong with our strong and united response.

Our economic relations are imbalanced

Regarding our bilateral economic relations, it is currently far from satisfactory. The EU is a major export market for China, but this relationship has for many years been an imbalanced one, and that imbalance is worsening, in part because of market access obstacles faced by European companies, as the European business community in China told me. They see the Chinese market as a huge source of opportunities and innovation where they must be present. But at the same time, they are concerned by the obstacles they face to access this market and these obstacles are not only originated in tariffs. They face, for example, difficulties in getting European expatriates to come to China. The percentage of foreigners living in the country is currently very low. If human exchanges do not increase, it will be difficult to restore trust between China and the EU. As a result of these

difficulties, we have recently witnessed a sharp downturn of new European investment in China. Firms are diverting towards alternative markets.

I warned my interlocutors that the European public often thinks that trade imbalances with China are endangering jobs in strategic sectors such as the automotive or the chemical industries and demands more protective measures. European elections are taking place next year and this issue will be one of the topics of concern in the public debate.

China is currently planning to amend its legislation on the transfer of data by foreign companies. This would be a useful step. Gestures of this kind are needed to restore trust with the EU.

We discussed also at length the notion of de-risking. The Chinese authorities seem to consider that de-risking is only another name for decoupling. It is not the case and I explained its meaning. During the COVID-19 pandemic and after the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, we were obliged to diversify our supply of critical goods and materials at an incredible speed and high cost. To avoid this from happening again, we must be more cautious when almost all our imports in key sectors come from a single source.

It is therefore a matter of common sense for the EU to want to widen its base of supplies to increase its resilience. I reminded my Chinese counterparts that President Xi expressed a similar idea when he said in 2020 that "*China must build a domestic supply system that is independently controllable, secure and reliable so that self-circulation can be accomplished at critical moments*". This translates into a policy of de-risking with Chinese characteristics.

Our concerns on security issues

Security is an important aspect of our bilateral relationship. This means that we must clearly express our concerns to China. And that's what I did during this mission.

Since the outbreak of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, China's ambivalent position has been difficult to understand in Europe, given the fact that the situation is quite clear: one country is being attacked and the other one is attacking. This is a flagrant breach of the UN Charter. Until now, Europeans have felt that China has not been using its unique influence to persuade Russia to halt

its aggression. We are not asking China to adopt the same standpoint as the EU. But as Russia seeks to demonise Europe, China should engage further and act concretely for the sake of the UN Charter's and Europe's security.

Taiwan is another major security issue in EU-China relations. We know how important this issue is for China. Our One China Policy remains unchanged. We believe that the status quo should be maintained. This means that China should not erode it, whether by coercion or force. It also means that Taiwan should not embark on any unilateral declaration of independence. Our bilateral ties with Taiwan, which exclude any diplomatic recognition, will continue and we keep calling for all tensions to be resolved through dialogue. We have consistently asked our interlocutors – on all sides – to avoid any actions that could lead to an escalation.

Scope to work together for a better world

As already said, my visit took place as the dramatic events in Israel and Palestine unfolded. Logically, a significant part of our discussions with Director/Foreign Minister Wang Yi focused on the Middle East crisis. I explained to our Chinese counterparts: that we condemn in the strongest possible terms the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel and that Israel has the right to defend itself, in the framework of international law and in particular humanitarian law. With our Chinese interlocutors, we agreed on the necessity of a political settlement based on a two-state solution, otherwise the cycle of violence will never end.

Finally, we also discussed our differences on the issue of human rights. I recalled our clear positions on the situations in Xinjiang and Tibet and mentioned several individual cases which I am hoping can be reviewed.

Europe takes China seriously. We hope and expect that China also takes Europe seriously. Despite our significant differences, I am convinced that there is scope for us to work together for a better and more peaceful world.

EU-CHINA SUMMIT - OF RIVALRY AND PARTNERSHIP

12.12.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁴²⁾ – In December 2023, I participated in the EU-China summit in Beijing. With President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, we delved into our multi-faceted relations. We discussed foreign policy and human rights, trade and investment, areas where we are facing growing imbalances, and climate change, where China is an indispensable partner.

Together with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the President of the European Council Charles Michel, I participated in the EU-China Summit, the first held in person since 2019. It followed the [Strategic Dialog](#) held in Beijing two months ago. We had frank and candid meetings with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi.

After the [last EU-China Summit](#) in April 2022, I spoke of a dialogue of the deaf. This time, the tone was different. There was recognition on both sides of the importance of our relationship and the need to manage our differences. We have come through a sensitive period marked by tensions due to sanctions and counter-sanctions.

We covered the full breadth of our bilateral relations, including areas of disagreement such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – where we also addressed the role of some Chinese companies in circumventing sanctions against Moscow; the situation in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea; human rights issues and the ongoing sanctions against members of the European Parliament. In contrast, on the war in the Middle East, we found some further convergence of our positions during a lunch with President Xi Jinping.

Addressing trade imbalances

At the forefront of our discussions, however, were two policy areas that mirror the complexity of our relations. On the one hand, trade and investment, where we are facing growing imbalances and competition and, on the other hand, climate change and the green transition, where the EU-Chinese partnership is key to the future of our planet.

⁽³⁴²⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-summit-rivalry-and-partnership_en

With a daily trade of goods worth €2.3bn, the EU and Chinese economies are deeply interconnected. However, this trade relationship has become critically unbalanced. EU imports constitute two-thirds of this trade, while our exports account for just one-third. After consistently growing over the past two decades, our trade deficit with China more than doubled in just two years, between 2020 and 2022, reaching nearly €400bn. It is necessary to study whether this upsurge is an exceptional occurrence due to the end of the COVID pandemic, or if it represents a structural trend, which would be both worrisome and unsustainable.

This disparity is in any case not the result of European businesses lacking competitiveness; it is rooted in systemic trade distortions, including limited market access for foreign companies in China and major subsidies granted by Beijing to its producers. China has built up massive overcapacities, particularly in sectors like electric vehicles, solar panels, batteries, and wind energy. By 2030, an estimated 60% of Chinese manufacturing in clean energy technologies will be destined for export. Some other major economies have already taken actions to shield themselves from these overcapacities, which will further divert them to the European market. This is already happening for solar panels.

A direct challenge to the EU's industry

These developments pose a direct challenge to the EU's industry, especially during a critical period of technological transformation. They have led to increasing calls across Europe to protect our market. In Beijing, we have been very clear that China has to act to address those distortions or the EU will have no choice but to take action, as we began to do when launching the anti-subsidy investigation on Chinese electric vehicle imports in October.

While we achieved some acknowledgement from the Chinese leadership that trade should be balanced, our assessments of the causes of the imbalances differed significantly. Beijing views its trade surpluses as stemming from the innovative strength of Chinese industries and points to European export restrictions on advanced technologies, of which China would be willing to import more. They claim that Europe also has overcapacity, in some sectors.

Our Chinese partners also pushed back against being labelled a 'systemic rival' in certain areas, and questioned the European de-risking strategy, which they tend to view as similar to decoupling. They argue that Europe and China have different socio-political systems and that China does not wish to engage in a systemic

rivalry. To them, the word “rival” might convey a sense of “enemy”, a connotation that it does not have in English. We are indeed rivals, not enemies.

The summit provided an opportunity to explain our stance: De-risking is not an anti-Chinese move, but a matter of common sense and risk management. It is not the EU's goal to decouple from China, but we must safeguard our economic security by addressing excessive dependencies and diversifying our supply chains. This became evident during the pandemic when, for instance, we realised that Europe didn't produce even a gram of paracetamol. Our goal is to keep an open economy while minimising risks. Recent export restrictions by China on raw materials, such as gallium, germanium, and graphite, have only intensified the EU's focus on this approach.

China itself has a longstanding policy in that domain, as I explained at [Peking University](#) in October. In the words of President Xi Jinping: “China needs to build a domestic supply system that is independently controllable, secure and reliable so that self-circulation can be accomplished at critical moments without having strong dependencies on others.” The EU's de-risking strategy does not aim at achieving independently controllable supply chains, but only at diversification of supplies.

At the Summit, the EU proposed several areas where improvements should be made to re-establish trust and avoid a downward spiral in EU-China relations. These include discouraging practices that could amount to dumping in the wind turbine sector, easing cross-border data flows, regionalizing the approach to trade in food products, and ending discrimination in market access for procurement, particularly in sectors such as medical devices.

Furthermore, we emphasized the importance of China's engagement in a credible WTO reform process, including on trade and state intervention in industrial sectors.

Climate change: a shared responsibility

Against the backdrop of COP28, we asked our Chinese partners to build on the positive cooperation on climate and environment that we already have, both bilaterally and in multilateral fora. At the climate conference in Dubai, global contributions and commitments must match the needs of our planet and of developing countries to adapt to climate change.

This is first and foremost the responsibility of major emitters like China, the US, and the EU. With the European Green Deal, the EU intends to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55%, produce more than 42.5% of its energy from renewable sources, and increase energy efficiency by at least 11.7% by 2030. We intend to become climate-neutral by 2050.

China, for its part, has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions [intensity per unit of GDP](#) and recently begun to tackle methane emissions. Its ongoing expansion in renewable energy is remarkable. According to the [IEA](#), almost half of all the renewable capacity added globally last year was installed in China. In 2024, China is expected to account for almost 55% of new global deployment of renewable energy capacity.

Nevertheless, fossil fuels, particularly coal, continue to play a major role in China's energy mix. Currently, China accounts for more than half of the world's coal use and this is not expected to change in the short term. [Coal demand in China](#) grew 4.6% in 2022 and is expected to increase by another 3.3% this year. Furthermore, China is still constructing new coal power plants, accounting for more than 70% of the new world's coal power projects. With China contributing 28% of greenhouse gas emissions, the world needs China to take more substantial actions.

At the Summit, we have agreed to enhance cooperation on Emissions Trading Systems and to continue dialogue on circular economy. We have also encouraged our interlocutors to commit to two critical initiatives at COP28: the Global Pledge to triple renewable capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030, and the Global Methane Pledge to reduce methane emissions by at least 30% by 2030.

Continued engagement, managing differences

The EU and China have important differences on many issues, notably on trade and political matters, which need to be carefully managed. It is important that we stand up for European interests and values. At the same time, China remains a pivotal partner for the EU in addressing many global challenges, including climate, biodiversity, debt, health, and international stability. We will continue to engage at all levels and push for progress across both the bilateral and global agendas.



5.5 LATIN AMERICA

RE-ENERGISING THE EU PARTNERSHIP WITH BRAZIL

3.1.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³⁴³⁾ – At the beginning of 2023, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva was inaugurated as President of Brazil, marking Brazil's return to the international stage. This development was warmly welcomed by Europeans. As I could not attend, I extended my best wishes for President Lula's third term in this op-ed in *La Folha de São Paulo*.

Last October, more than 120 million Brazilians went to the polls. The winner of these elections, under difficult and polarized circumstances, has been Brazilian democracy. Now, President Lula is sending a clear message to the world: Brazil is back. He intends to heal the wounds of society, defend democracy, fight inequality, and boost the economy while fighting climate change and deforestation. After a period of isolation and disengagement, the new administration returns to the international stage to act as a committed global and multilateral player.

The world needs Brazil

These commitments have been received very positively by Europeans. In the current geopolitical context, characterised by threats to the rules-based international order and Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the world needs Brazil. With its powerful diplomacy, it can make a difference. And by acting together, the EU and Brazil can be a force for good around the world.

Together, the EU and Brazil represent almost one-fifth of the global GDP. The EU is the biggest investor and the second trade partner of Brazil. However, our economic relations have not lived up to their full potential in recent years. Others, like China in particular, are expanding their role as a commercial partner and a source of investment in Brazil and Latin America. We need to re-energise our strategic partnership.

An obvious area where we should join our forces is the fight against climate change. Brazil can become a green superpower driving global efforts to protect our planet. During President Lula's previous terms, the deforestation rate fell significantly. In the future, robust traceability systems can restore trust in our

⁽³⁴³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/reenergising-eu-partnership-brazil_en

bilateral value chains. These efforts must go hand in hand with social justice and the fight against inequality: environmental policies need to be flanked by strong measures for a fairer and more inclusive economy, so we do not risk leaving vulnerable communities behind. Brazil is also already a giant in the field of renewable energies, but we can also develop our cooperation in this area, including on green hydrogen.

The EU is also ready to step up cooperation on the digital transition. We share the same understanding of the importance of a human-centric digital transformation and its enormous potential to foster development, create jobs and advance social inclusion. After installing the submarine Bella cable to connect our two continents, we intend to launch a digital alliance between the EU and Latin American and Caribbean countries in the coming months.

We stand ready to step up EU investments in Brazil

I have no doubt that President Lula's rule will help Brazil to return to a sustainable growth path. It offers an opportunity to expand our economic ties. Under the Global Gateway strategy, we stand ready to step up EU investments in Brazil in the green, digital and fair transitions.

In addition, we should join efforts in areas like health and education, research and innovation, human rights and security, including the fight against illegal mining and the protection of indigenous peoples. In all these areas, we have a huge potential for cooperation – not only between states, but also between regional and local authorities, the private sector and our societies at large.

Finally, it is critical we make decisive progress with the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement. This agreement would seal a strategic alliance between two regions, among the world's most closely aligned in terms of interests and values.

On both sides of the Atlantic, we intend to improve our economic resilience by reducing excessive dependencies. However, we both know that autonomy does not mean isolation. Rather, it requires more cooperation with reliable economic and political partners. Mercosur countries strive to develop their own productive capacity, adding value to natural resources through innovation and technology, while adhering to high social and environmental standards. We are ready to accompany Brazil and the other Mercosur countries on this road.

Bringing together two of the world's largest trading blocs – with a combined population of more than 700 million – the EU-MERCOSUR agreement would generate real opportunities for businesses on both sides, supporting the creation of high-quality jobs in Europe and in Latin America. Recognizing an economic asymmetry in our situations, the agreement specifies that trade would be opened up progressively, thereby giving relevant sectors time to modernise and become competitive. A shared commitment to fight climate change and stronger environmental policies brings us closer to help overcome the remaining concerns.

Revitalising the links between the EU and Latin America

2023 should also mark the revitalisation of the cooperation between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean through an EU-CELAC summit. Our common agenda is clear: to counter geopolitical tensions, succeed in the global digital, green and fair transitions and build the multilateral order of the future, we need to deepen EU-Brazil cooperation and finalise the EU-Mercosur agreement. Let us roll up our sleeves and start working together.

AFTER THE NEW ATTACK ON DEMOCRACY IN BRASILIA, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

12.1.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁴⁴⁾ – *On 9 January 2023, a mob stormed the Presidential Palace, Supreme Court, and Congress in Brasília. The tactics employed bore striking resemblances to the January 2021 assault on the US Congress. It is crucial to understand the motives behind this and to intensify our efforts to defend democracy both domestically and internationally.*

Sunday 8 January will go down in Brazil's history as one of its darkest days. My first phone call with the new Brazilian Foreign Minister, Mauro Vieira, was not only to congratulate him, but above all to reiterate the European Union's full support and solidarity to President Lula and his government ⁽³⁴⁵⁾ in the face of this vandalism. The images of the rampage were also particularly appalling for me, because I had the opportunity to visit in 2021 the Planalto Palace, the seat of the Brazilian Presidency, and admire its architecture and the artworks, which have now been destroyed.

The attack on Brazil's democracy did not start on January 9

However, the attack on Brazil's core institutions did not start last Sunday. They are the outcome of years of political polarisation. During the term of former President Jair Bolsonaro, the foundation of a pluralist society and democratic institutions were continuously attacked. Political parties were demonized, the judiciary was harassed, the press vilified, and civil society was set aside in the main debates. Social media have put such trends on steroids, aggravating the division in Brazilian society. We know that such information bubbles feed "culture wars" and identity politics.

Just after his election, President Lula announced that he wanted to "heal the wounds of society" and unite the country again. This is now more necessary but probably also more difficult. As we have seen, there are political forces ready to feed radicalization and chaos in a blatant effort to force the intervention of the

⁽³⁴⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/after-new-attack-democracy-brasilia-what-should-we-do_en

⁽³⁴⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/brazil-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-anti-democratic-storming-government_en

armed forces. However, fortunately they seem to have learnt the lessons of previous coup attempts.

The meeting with the heads of the executive, legislature and judiciary powers and the governors of Brazilian federal states on Monday 9 January delivered a strong message about the solidity of Brazilian democratic institutions. However, uniting around democracy requires more than simply condemning violence and extremism. All political forces carry the responsibility to engage proactively to prevent radicalization and defend democratic processes on a daily basis, also by creating the conditions for dialogue and compromise.

Order seems to have returned to Brasilia. However, there are many questions about the causes and responsibilities of these events. What has happened in Brasilia looks very much like the assault on the Capitol in Washington in January 2021. The fact that two big democracies of the Americas have experienced a physical attack against the main institutions embodying their constitutional order should make us pause and reflect. In Latin America as a whole, support for democracy has fallen from 63% in 2010 to 49% in 2020 according to the [Latinobarometro](#) ⁽³⁴⁶⁾.

Why have the societies become so polarized?

Why have societies become as polarised as the American and Brazilian ones, even though, according to the first polls, 90% of Brazilians condemn the coup attempt? How is it possible that political views and concerns are expressed in such a violent and non-democratic way?

Conspiracy theory and information manipulation clearly play a central role in these processes, and the oversight and regulation of social networks and digital platform contents were once again lacking in the run-up to the events of last weekend.

It is no accident that the US and Brazil are very unequal societies also marked by discrimination. Beyond a certain threshold, inequalities can threaten to empty democracy of its substance and destroy confidence in the common good. Even if European societies are less unequal and polarised than Brazil and the US, it would

⁽³⁴⁶⁾ See: https://www.latinobarometro.org/LATDC/DCoo692/Fooo11665-Latinobarometro_Informe_2021.pdf

be wrong and complacent to believe that we are immune to these dynamics. In fact, we see already similar ones at work in our societies too.

We also know that these illiberal dynamics are often fed from the outside by powerful and well-targeted information manipulation efforts carried out by authoritarian regimes. This includes in particular the Russian regime, whose objective is quite simply to destroy democracy in Europe and elsewhere. But other players also wish to weaken our societal cohesion and undermine our democratic life. We are indeed witnessing concerted attacks on democracy by far-right parties and authoritarian regimes on a global scale.

How should we respond? First by recognising the scale and urgency of the challenge – this is not ‘just’ a problem for Brazil or the US, but for all democracies, including ours. Second, by fighting information manipulation. As the EU, we have taken measures to make social networks and digital platforms accountable, notably with the [Digital Service Act](#)⁽³⁴⁷⁾ and the [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#)⁽³⁴⁸⁾. We are ready to cooperate with Brazil on these issues. Third, by fighting against excessive inequalities and discrimination, both of which feed “us versus them” politics. We also need to revitalise our democracies and strengthen citizens’ participation at all levels. This is particularly important for the European Union institutions, which are often accused of having a democratic deficit.

Fight disinformation from authoritarian regimes more actively

Finally, we need to work more with democratic partners around the world to fight information manipulation by authoritarian regimes more actively. The defence of democracy requires more democracy - and making sure that democracy is seen as the most efficient way to build just and cohesive societies. What has happened in Brazil shows that democracy is under attack everywhere, from within and from outside. Having lived under a dictatorship, I know democracy is not a given. So it is time to roll up our sleeves and defend it, both at home and around the world.

⁽³⁴⁷⁾ See: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>

⁽³⁴⁸⁾ See: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>

EU AND LATIN AMERICA: FROM NATURAL TO PREFERENTIAL PARTNERS

24.3.2023 – Op-Ed (³⁴⁹) – *2023 was a key year for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. I attended the 28th Ibero-American Summit in Santo Domingo in March, a meeting that tied in with the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels in July. These two summits underscored our mutual interest in revitalizing the ‘other transatlantic relationship’.*

For the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean are much more than a market of growing importance. They are a young continent where crucial EU values and interests are at stake for decades to come.

We must turn on the high beams and update our approach to adapt to a new geopolitical context. The strategic competition between the US and China, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the rise of the so-called "Global South" are driving the world towards a messy and unstable multipolarity. This is not an invitation to isolation, but an opportunity to strengthen our cooperation at a time when global commons are needed more than ever.

On both sides of the Atlantic, avoid excessive dependencies

On both sides of the Atlantic, we want to strengthen our autonomies, avoiding excessive dependencies and diversifying value chains. That is why we need more cooperation and agreements between reliable economic and political partners. If we cannot agree among ourselves, with whom can we agree? The complementarity between these two close and related regions is crucial for our interests and respective roles as global players.

The starting point is obvious: the relationship between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean is a positive one, based on deep human, political, economic and cultural ties. We have one of the densest networks of political, cooperation and trade agreements between the EU and 27 of the 33 countries in the region. The EU is the third largest destination for Latin American exports, and the first

(³⁴⁹) See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-latin-america-and-caribbean-natural-partners-preferential-partners_en

source of investment in the region. The EU is also the leading contributor of development aid.

True, our relationship is based on solid foundations but, perhaps because of this, we had rested on our laurels and other partners, China in particular, have taken advantage of this. It is not enough to recognise what unites us as “natural partners”. We must look to the future and work together as “preferential partners” who dialogue and consult based on shared interests. We must shift the focus from the problems of our respective regions to finding joint solutions to common problems.

This requires more dialogue at all levels, preventing problems or disagreements on either side from overshadowing the potential for cooperation. This is something that citizens recognise. A survey conducted in September 2021 by Latinobarómetro in ten Latin American countries reveals encouraging data. When asked which region of the world their country would benefit most from strengthening ties with, 48% named Europe, 19% North America, 12% Latin America and 8% Asia-Pacific.

The Caribbean deserves greater political attention from the EU

The Caribbean, moreover, as an economically, geographically and culturally recognisable sub-region, deserves greater political attention from the EU. Part of the response must be to develop a more structured relationship and dialogue.

The aim is therefore to build a new positive and pragmatic agenda for cooperation around the three major axes that will shape the destiny of the 21st century: climate change, the digital revolution and social justice. Latin America and the Caribbean are a key partner in achieving global environmental goals and the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The region is home to 60% of terrestrial species and the Amazon alone accounts for 56% of the world's rainforests. Without the colossal natural heritage of the Americas, the world will not be able to protect its ecological balance. The region is also key to ensuring that the digital transformation is put at the service of people, respecting their privacy, rights and freedoms, and expanding access to public and private services. That is why we have just launched, on 14 March in Bogota, a Digital Alliance to promote a just and people-centred digital transition.

The social dimension is indispensable: green and digital transitions will be just and democratic or they will not be. Democracy is in retreat around the world and, at the same time, Latin American societies are crying out in the face of poverty,

inequality and violence. It is estimated that, by the end of 2022, one in three Latin Americans was living in poverty and one in six in extreme poverty. In Europe too, the risk of poverty and social exclusion affects more than one-fifth of the population. It will not be possible to defend our democracies and overcome the autocratic threat, neither in America nor in Europe, without forging a fairer and more sustainable social contract. To develop this agenda, we have new instruments such as “Global Gateway”, the European strategy to support sustainable and transformative investments by bringing together the financial muscle of the EU, Member States, financial institutions and the private sector.

Finally, and now even more so, we must together promote peace, democracy and human rights through a fairer and more inclusive multilateral order. We always say that Latin America and the EU are strong defenders of multilateralism, and this is true. Together we have voted and demanded respect for the principles of international law, such as respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states. But we must go further to strengthen cooperation on peace and security. Our regions must play a key role in reforming the international financial and security architecture.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO SOLVE THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS

28.4.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁵⁰⁾ – In April 2023, I participated in an international conference in Bogotá, aimed at reactivating the Venezuelan-led negotiation process to hold elections in 2024 in accordance with international standards. The EU was ready to play its part in supporting the progress achieved in the dialogue between the Venezuelan government and the opposition in Mexico.

Since the start of my mandate, I have been engaging in many efforts to help find a Venezuelan-led political solution to the Venezuelan crisis (see [here](#) ⁽³⁵¹⁾ and [here](#) ⁽³⁵²⁾). In particular, we have sent [an EU mission to observe the regional and municipal elections in 2021](#) ⁽³⁵³⁾. But sadly, these efforts, like those of many other actors, have not been successful so far. That is why we support President Petro's initiative to break the current deadlock and create a new dynamic.

The humanitarian situation remains dire

The humanitarian situation remains dire in Venezuela, despite some improvement in 2022 due in particular to an increase in oil revenues. According to the latest figures shared by EU partners, around 20 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance out of a population of 29 million. And more than 7.2 million Venezuelans have had to flee their country, most of them living in Latin America and Caribbean countries, which have shown exceptional solidarity despite the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation. Since 2018, the EU has provided €540 million to alleviate this migration crisis, principally in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. Last March, the Solidarity Conference with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their host countries, organised jointly by the EU and Canada in Brussels, raised a total of €815 million. However, the needs are much bigger and the Venezuelan refugees deserve to be able to go back to their homeland.

⁽³⁵⁰⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/window-opportunity-solve-venezuelan-crisis_en

⁽³⁵¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/international-donors-conference-solidarity-venezuelan-refugees-and-migrants-o_en

⁽³⁵²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/venezuela-clear-urgency-political-and-democratic-solution_en

⁽³⁵³⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/venezuela-municipal-and-regional-elections-and-eu-electoral-observation-mission_en

Venezuela is potentially one of the richest countries in the world, given its oil and gas resources. Venezuelan oil production reached almost 3 million barrels per day in 2002. Currently, Venezuela produces four times less oil and would need \$12 billion in investment a year to upgrade its infrastructure. Venezuela also has 197 trillion cubic feet of proven reserves of natural gas, a figure that ranks it in eighth place worldwide. However, it has not resulted in major gas production yet. On the contrary, Venezuela is the world's largest emitter of methane in the atmosphere and burns 1.5 billion cubic feet of gas per day, equivalent to the consumption of medium-sized countries, which is catastrophic from both an economic and environmental point of view. The world must radically reduce the use of fossil fuels in coming years and the EU is doing its homework on this track. However, in the short term, it would obviously make sense to use this Venezuelan gas to replace Russian gas in Europe.

The Mexico negotiation process

To find a political solution to the Venezuelan crisis, a negotiation process was launched two years ago in Mexico City between the Maduro government and the Unitary Platform of the opposition but it stalled a few months later. This process resumed last November and a humanitarian agreement was signed by the parties to channel \$3 billion from Venezuelan frozen assets abroad to an UN-managed Trust Fund to finance humanitarian needs in Venezuela.

However, since then, this agreement has not been implemented, blocking the next round of negotiations on political matters. It is however urgent to cut a deal to hold free, fair and inclusive elections for the upcoming presidential and legislative ballots foreseen in 2024. Our [2021 Election Observation Mission made recommendations](#)⁽³⁵⁴⁾ to ensure a transparent electoral process in line with international standards. The implementation of these recommendations would help secure next year's elections.

If these elections do not take place in conditions where their results can be recognised by the Venezuelan people as well as the international community, it would mean that the political crisis that started in 2015 is set to last another 5 years. And neither the Venezuelan people nor their neighbours could bear this.

⁽³⁵⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-venezuela-2021/final-report-moe-ue-venezuela-2021_en%3F%26ved%3D2ahUKEwiToeXvt8r-AhUaUqQEHUWLArQQFnoECAoQAO%26usg%3DAOvVaw3tib87y_SA6AEzWKA7BogT

The international community must therefore do everything it can to ensure that the Venezuelan government and the Unitary Platform reach an agreement on this matter quickly. The international community must also be ready, and above all coordinated, to support this agreement when it is reached.

A more favourable regional context

Given the current impasse and Colombia's major interests in its relations with Venezuela, President Petro's initiative to try to revive the Mexico negotiation process makes sense and is welcome. It is the first time that a country in the region has organised an international event to help Venezuela emerge from its crisis. With the election of Presidents Petro in Colombia, Boric in Chile and Lula in Brazil and the recent reopening of borders and re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela, the regional context has become more favourable to a constructive dialogue with Caracas.

The region is now in a position to exert a positive influence on the Venezuelan-led negotiation process and put the country on the road to democracy and respect for human rights. These changes have opened a window of opportunity to solve the Venezuelan crisis. However, this window will close if an agreement is not reached on the 2024 elections in the coming weeks. We must seize this opportunity.

Urgent, genuine and reciprocal commitments are required from all actors involved. All stakeholders must play their part with compromises that are difficult, but necessary, to achieve the re-institutionalisation of Venezuela and the well-being of the Venezuelan people.

During the conference, I stressed again that the EU is ready to play its part, supporting progress made at the dialogue table in Mexico through its diplomatic and cooperation instruments. If there are genuine steps towards free and fair elections in Venezuela, we are also ready to review our sanctions, which are aimed exclusively at those responsible for acting against fundamental human rights and not targeting the economy and the ordinary Venezuelan people.

In Bogota, I met bilaterally with Jon Finer, Deputy National Security adviser of the US, and Senator Chris Dodd, Special Presidential adviser for the Americas to discuss these issues. The United States is indeed one of the main foreign actors and its contribution is essential to break the current deadlock. The US representative announced during the conference that his country is willing to engage with the Venezuelan government.

I also met Celso Amorim, special advisor to President Lula. We exchanged views on Venezuela, of course, but also on the war of aggression against Ukraine after President Lula's comments on this issue in recent days. I welcomed Brazil's votes against this aggression at the United Nations and all Europeans want of course peace, as does President Lula. The Ukrainians are the ones that want peace in the first place. However, this peace must be just and there can be no equidistance between the aggressor and the aggrieved. If Russia withdraws from Ukraine, the war will stop. If we stop helping Ukraine and Ukraine stops defending itself, Ukraine will disappear. To be just and lasting, the peace we must seek, must be in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

I also discussed with Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of San Vicente and Grenadines, who is currently chairing CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which brings together 33 countries, our preparations of the EU-CELAC summit that will be held in Brussels in July.

The beginning of a coordinated effort

The Bogota conference did not bring a breakthrough on the complex Venezuelan issue but it marked the beginning of a coordinated effort by a group of 20 countries to revive the Venezuelan-led negotiation process. Most of the work will now take place behind the scenes, as is necessary for any effective diplomacy.

WHY COLOMBIA MATTERS FOR THE EU

4.5.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁵⁵⁾ – *Colombia, a crucial nation in Latin America, is striving to emerge from 60 years of terrible violence. In May 2023, I visited the country to express our support and strengthen our bilateral relations. Colombia can rely on the EU in its pursuit of “Paz Total,” or total peace.*

With its 50 million people, the third country after Brazil and Mexico, and its 1.1 million km² surface, three times Poland or Germany, twice France or Spain, Colombia is a key country in Latin America. Colombia is also a bridge between South and Central America and between Latin America that looks towards the Pacific and the one that borders the Atlantic and the Caribbean. However, for more than 60 years, this country has also been subject to terrible violence that has claimed close to 250,000 lives and left more than eight million victims.

Violence is rooted in a high level of inequality

This violence is deeply rooted in a very high level of inequality, especially in rural areas where the issue of land ownership is central. At the same time, violence sustains these inequalities by obstructing economic and social development. It is a vicious circle. Like in other Latin American countries, these inequalities are also connected to patterns of discrimination towards Afro-descendant and indigenous communities. Taking advantage of this weakness of the State in many peripheral areas, the country has become one of the main global bases for cocaine production and trafficking and the “war on drugs” has registered little success in the last decades.

This state of affairs is well known, but it is quite another thing to be confronted directly with the victims – which I was, when I visited the photo exhibition “El Testigo” ⁽³⁵⁶⁾ and the Benposta project ⁽³⁵⁷⁾, which takes in children and young people threatened by this violence, including being forcibly recruited into armed groups. When these young people tell you about their lives, the gravity of the situation becomes very tangible. I was impressed by the quality of the work done

⁽³⁵⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-colombia-matters-eu_en

⁽³⁵⁶⁾ See: <https://eltestigocoleccion.com/en/>

⁽³⁵⁷⁾ See: <https://benpostacolombia.org/>

by Benposta, with hundreds of these young people in whole Colombia, with the support of the EU and several member states.

After the [2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC](#)⁽³⁵⁸⁾, the main guerrilla movement, violence has decreased. However, it persists: other armed groups remain active in about a quarter of the Colombian territory. During my visit, Colombia's [High Commissioner for Peace, Danilo Rueda](#)⁽³⁵⁹⁾, gave us a comprehensive overview of the situation and the major difficulties that remain.

The implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement permitted progress on transitional justice and the reintegration of 13,000 FARC ex-combatants. It paved also the way of last year's election of Gustavo Petro, a former member of a guerrilla movement, as Colombian President. However, significant parts of this agreement have not been implemented yet, especially concerning land reform.

President Petro has set the goal [to reach "Paz Total"](#)⁽³⁶⁰⁾, or total peace, by negotiating with all existing armed groups and fully implementing the 2016 Agreement, including land reform. This goal has been an important part of my discussions with him and with members of his government.

Enthusiasm and scepticism about "Paz Total"

The EU has been actively supporting peace efforts in Colombia for more than twenty years. Since 2016, the EU has invested over €650 million, principally through the [EU Trust Fund for Peace in Colombia](#)⁽³⁶¹⁾, which allows combining support from the European Union and member states. There were plans to phase out this instrument but our Colombian interlocutors asked us to continue funding it. [Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights](#)⁽³⁶²⁾, has been also the EU's Special Envoy for the Colombian peace process since 2015. He will be in charge of supporting the new Colombia's negotiations towards "Paz Total". I asked him to travel to Colombia in two weeks' time to discuss this support with the Colombian authorities.

⁽³⁵⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/historical-peace-agreement-colombia_en

⁽³⁵⁹⁾ See: <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/alto-comisionado-para-la-paz>

⁽³⁶⁰⁾ See: <https://www.mininterior.gov.co/presidente-gustavo-petro-sanciono-la-ley-de-la-paz-total/>

⁽³⁶¹⁾ See: <https://www.fondoeuropaparalapaz.eu/en/about-eutf/>

⁽³⁶²⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/02/28/human-rights-eu-appoints-a-new-special-representative/>

During my stay, I discussed the issue of violence and peace with many interlocutors: Afro-descendent and indigenous representatives, women and youth organisations, the Catholic Church, victims' representatives and, of course, political leaders. I heard enthusiasm but also a fair amount of scepticism about the ability to achieve "Paz Total", given the complexity of the task.

One element could help this endeavour: the price of coca and cocaine has been plummeting over the last few months, reducing the incentives to cultivate it. To succeed with "paz total", Colombia will however have to build an efficient state capable of being present throughout the country - not only in the form of police officers or soldiers, but also in terms of health, education, justice and other public services. This requires a significant increase in public spending. With a tax-to-GDP ratio of only 20%, [Colombia ranks 37 out of 38 OECD countries in 2021](#) ⁽³⁶³⁾. Increasing public spending implies increasing taxes. Having had to carry out this kind of reform in Spain a few decades ago, I know how difficult it is. However, a functioning public sector is instrumental in consolidating peace. The EU will keep doing everything it can to help Colombia to achieve this.

The Venezuelan crisis was another topic that featured prominently during my visit. This crisis has a heavy impact on Colombia, which shares more than 2,000 kilometres of borders with Venezuela. On 25 April, I took part in [the International Conference organised in Bogota by President Petro](#) ⁽³⁶⁴⁾ to help revive the Mexico negotiation process between the Venezuelan government and the Unitary Platform of the opposition. This topic also featured prominently in my subsequent bilateral exchanges.

The heavy impact of the Venezuelan crisis

[2.6 million Venezuelan refugees live in Colombia](#) ⁽³⁶⁵⁾, a figure equivalent to 23 million refugees in the European Union, 23 times the number of Syrian refugees received in Europe in 2015. I visited [the Scalabrin migrant reception centre](#) ⁽³⁶⁶⁾ in Bogotá, supported by the EU and Germany. Here again, it is one thing to know the data and quite another to talk to a 25-year-old woman explaining that she had to leave Venezuela with her young child because she could no longer feed her

⁽³⁶³⁾ See: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/data-insights/tax-to-gdp-ratios>

⁽³⁶⁴⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/window-opportunity-solve-venezuelan-crisis_en

⁽³⁶⁵⁾ See: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/colombia>

⁽³⁶⁶⁾ See: <https://scalabrinicol.org/>

family, how many days she had to walk to get to Colombia, and how many assaults and extortions she suffered on her way.

In response to the refugee crisis, the EU has supported Colombia with €58 million since 2015. During my visit, I [announced a €10 million complementary action for integration of migrants](#)⁽³⁶⁷⁾. Colombian society has shown exemplary solidarity facing this huge challenge, but the Venezuelan crisis contributes without a doubt to Colombia's difficulties and to the persistent violence in the border regions. Therefore, the resolution of this crisis is one of the conditions for the success of "Paz total". In this area too, Colombia can count on the full commitment of the EU on its side.

[With President Petro, Vice-President Marquez and Foreign Minister Leyva,](#)⁽³⁶⁸⁾ we also discussed extensively the [EU-CELAC Summit](#)⁽³⁶⁹⁾, which will be held in July in Brussels. It will be [the first one since 2015](#)⁽³⁷⁰⁾. We share the will to relaunch our bi-regional relations in this moment of geopolitical tensions, which call into question our capacity to solve global crises and produce the common goods that the world needs, particularly, as is felt strongly in Colombia, in the fight against climate change. The EU continues to defend a rules-based world order, while it also agrees to adapt the multilateral system to new global realities. In this respect, we are very much in line with Colombia and the Latin American and Caribbean countries. Latin America and the EU do not want to return to the Cold War or to bloc politics, but to promote a pluralist vision of the international community based on rules that protect weaker states from interference and attacks by more powerful countries.

Latin America has condemned the Russian aggression

In this context, we also discussed the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. This war is taking place in Europe, but it affects the whole world. If Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, were to succeed in invading Ukraine with impunity, many countries in the world would be vulnerable and threatened by more powerful neighbours. This blatant violation of the UN Charter

⁽³⁶⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/colombia/la-un%C3%B3n-europea-invertir%C3%A1-50-mil-millones-de-pesos-en-la-integraci%C3%B3n_en

⁽³⁶⁸⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/colombia-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-concludes-visit-country_en

⁽³⁶⁹⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/07/17-18/>

⁽³⁷⁰⁾ See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/celac-summits-and-earlier-eu-lac-summits/product-details/20170715DPU10565>

was condemned again last February by an overwhelming majority of 141 UN member states. Among them are Colombia and 23 other of the 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries. In the so-called “Global South”, this is the region that has most widely condemned this aggression.

By doing so, Colombia and the LAC region have not chosen the “European side”, but the side of international law, of the UN Charter, of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Of values that unite us in peaceful and respectful coexistence.

In the face of Russia’s aggression, the EU supports Ukraine with sanctions against Russia and by providing aid, including arms. These measures have sometimes been criticised in Colombia and Latin America. However, it was Russia’s aggression against one of the world’s main breadbaskets that drove up world food prices, not our sanctions ⁽³⁷¹⁾, which were never directed against Russian agricultural exports. Our arms deliveries serve to enable Ukraine to defend itself ⁽³⁷²⁾ and protect its territorial integrity. If Russia stops its aggression and withdraws from Ukrainian territory, the war is over. If we stop to deliver arms to Ukraine, the country will cease to exist. If something similar were to happen in Latin America and the Caribbean, would the countries of the region not show solidarity with the country under attack and give it all possible support?

Like Latin Americans, all Europeans want peace, and first and foremost, the Ukrainians. But there can be no ambiguity or equidistance between the aggressor and the aggrieved. To be lasting and not to threaten global stability in the future, this peace must be based on the UN Charter. It cannot endorse the acquisition of territory by brute force. The Russian war is avowedly an imperialist war.

A strong plea for a relationship among equals

We also discussed other bilateral matters: we proposed to strengthen our cooperation in the fight against deforestation as well as for the digital transition and to complement the trade agreement that we already have with a modernized cooperation agreement on environment and climate change, defence and security, police co-operation, science and technology, academic co-operation...

⁽³⁷¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/battle-narratives-around-food-crisis%C2%A0_en

⁽³⁷²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-buying-ammunition-together-will-help-bring-just-peace-ukraine_en

To conclude this mission, we held a seminar organised by [the EU-LAC Foundation](#)⁽³⁷³⁾ in Cartagena with a broad range of Latin American and European experts to exchange on the main issues for our two regions. At the start of this meeting, Colombian [vice-president Francia Marquez](#)⁽³⁷⁴⁾, the first Afro-descendant elected leader of the country, made a strong plea for a relationship among equals.

From this seminar and my mission, I am bringing back to Brussels many ideas, examples and proposals to address the challenges and opportunities ahead of us in relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, also with a view to preparing the EU-CELAC Summit next July.

⁽³⁷³⁾ See: <https://eulacfoundation.org/en>

⁽³⁷⁴⁾ See: <https://fmm.vicepresidencia.gov.co/gobierno>

A NEW EU AGENDA WITH LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

11.6.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁷⁵⁾ – *Ahead of the EU-CELAC summit in July 2023, I set out a new agenda for strengthening relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). While we already have strong ties with the region, the new geopolitical context demands a leap forward, from “natural partners” to “partners of choice”.*

Since I became HRVP in 2019, I made it part of my mission to strengthen our “other transatlantic relationship”⁽³⁷⁶⁾, the one with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). This region has traditionally been a foreign policy priority for some of our member states, such as Spain and Portugal, who have strong historical ties, but I am determined that it become a strategic priority for the Union as a whole.

We already have a dense network of agreements with 27 out of 33 countries in the region. Our economic ties are also strong: European Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the LAC region is bigger than our FDI in India, China and Japan combined. Millions of people from the LAC region live in the EU and vice versa and our two regions are also closely aligned in terms of interests and values. However, in recent years, other actors, notably China, have been very active in strengthening their economic and political footprint in the region.

We cannot just rely on our traditional ties

We need to speed up and cannot just rely on our traditional ties. This was already true before Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, but it is all the more true today when the quality of our bilateral relations with the so-called “Global South” has become so crucial for our future and the future of the rules-based world order.

Paying more attention to the region also makes a lot of sense at a time when we are seeking to diversify our value chains and reduce our excessive dependencies, by working with reliable partners. Latin America and the Caribbean are central in

⁽³⁷⁵⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/new-eu-agenda-latin-america-and-caribbean_en

⁽³⁷⁶⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/lets-strengthen-our-%E2%80%9Cother-transatlantic-relationship%E2%80%9D_en

the fight against climate change and represent a global power in terms of biodiversity, renewable energies and strategic raw materials for the green transition. However, the region does not want to return to the past. It wants to take advantage of these transitions to industrialise and add value to its exports.

Since 2019, I have invested quite a lot of energy to strengthen our ties with the region. I have travelled to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru and Uruguay, to promote closer relations and stronger collaboration. Last October, I co-chaired the first CELAC-EU ministerial meeting⁽³⁷⁷⁾ since 2018 in Buenos Aires. We are now in the final stage of preparations for the EU-CELAC summit that will take place on 17 and 18 July⁽³⁷⁸⁾ in Brussels, the first since 2015 and a major milestone to set a common agenda.

It is in that context that last Wednesday I presented with the Commission a New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean⁽³⁷⁹⁾. We want to open a new era of cooperation in today's fast-changing global context. To achieve this goal, we need renewed political engagement at all levels: between the two regions, with individual LAC countries, with sub-regions and in multilateral fora. We also need a more structured relationship, with regular summits and a permanent coordination mechanism between the EU and CELAC to ensure continuity and follow-up. Regular high-level political dialogue is indeed key to provide focus, agree on priorities and joint actions, and to address differences if they arise.

Moving from “natural partners” to “partners of choice”

We propose to move from being “natural partners” to being “partners of choice”. Being “partners of choice” is about political will: the will to work together to address global challenges and strengthen the rules-based order - with the ultimate goal of promoting peace, security and democracy. The upcoming EU-CELAC Summit offers a great opportunity to build trust and inject momentum into our relationship. Reinvigorating the EU-LAC relationships will be one of the key achievements of this geopolitical Commission.

⁽³⁷⁷⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/lets-strengthen-our-%E2%80%9Cother-transatlantic-relationship%E2%80%9D_en

⁽³⁷⁸⁾ See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/07/17-18/>

⁽³⁷⁹⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3045

EU-CELAC: LET US AVOID ANOTHER LOST DECADE

25.7.2023 – Op-Ed ⁽³⁸⁰⁾ – Since 2019, renewing the community that unites Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has been a top priority. The EU-CELAC Summit in July, the first since eight years, relaunched our partnership. Europeans must commit themselves not only to solve their own problems, but also to help solve the problems of our partners.

A feeling forged by the movement of millions of people from one side of the Atlantic to the other, united by a common history, languages and cultures. And for this, the recent III EU-CELAC Summit that has brought together in Brussels the leaders of sixty countries, almost a third of the members of the United Nations, 14% of the population and 21% of the world GDP, has relaunched our strategic partnership.

Overcoming a long period of disagreement

This essential Summit has been a great diplomatic step promoted together with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. We have overcome a long period of disagreement since the previous Summit, held 8 years ago. The world has changed dramatically since then, with the emergence of China, the devastating effects of the pandemic, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We now have a lot of work to do to push forward a mutually beneficial shared agenda for both regions.

Neither in the EU nor in LAC do we want to return to the Cold War or to a policy of blocs. On the contrary, we want to promote a pluralistic vision of the international community based on norms, cooperation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. This vision is in jeopardy, and in a world of giants, each of us cannot defend it alone. Let us not forget that beyond trade or diplomacy, the strongest bridges that we can build between the EU and LAC are those that reinforce political rights and freedoms.

Despite the pandemic, I have travelled to LAC six times and I have clearly perceived the resentment for the negligence attributed to Europe in its approach to LAC.

⁽³⁸⁰⁾ See: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-celac-let-us-avoid-another-lost-decad...en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-celac-let-us-avoid-another-lost-decade_en)

And this is despite the fact that European companies continue to be the largest investor in the region, with a level of direct investment that exceeds that invested by the EU in China, Russia, Japan and India combined.

China, however, has become, thanks to its scale, the first trading partner of almost all LAC countries. In the meantime, our draft association and commercial agreements have remained stalled or awaiting urgent modernization. Added to this impasse is the feeling that, although we share values, our priorities do not always coincide.

For this reason, the Summit has decided to modernize our relationship to adapt it to the great global challenges with regular summits every two years, a permanent coordination body and a bi-regional roadmap, with concrete actions until the meeting in 2025 in Colombia.

A €45 billion investment agenda

At this summit we have presented, together with the member states of the EU, an investment agenda that amounts to €45 billion until 2027 in renewable energies, digital transformation or pharmaceutical innovation and the strengthening of health systems. We have also signed a Digital Alliance with 20 countries in the region to advocate together for a human-centred digital transformation, especially important for a region with high levels of inequality and stagnant productivity.

The objective of this investment effort is to modernize and strengthen ties, not dependencies. LAC wants to take advantage of the new transitions to industrialize key sectors and add value to their enormous potential in biodiversity, renewable energy, agricultural production and raw materials. It wants to grow, but with greater equality and sustainability. Our relationship must be fundamentally political and cannot be summed up in a list of investments, but Europe can provide technological capacity and it also needs alliances with reliable partners to diversify its supply chains.

For Europeans, it is urgent to understand that we must commit ourselves not only to our problems, but to the problems of our partners. LAC asks us to find solutions to key issues that fall under the rubric of global justice: debt relief, climate financing, green bonds and attraction of private investment, reorganization of value chains (avoiding extractivist policies), taxation on a global scale, joint fight

against drugs and organised crime, among other issues. This also implies being willing to reform the multilateral system and international financial institutions to make them more just and representative. In short, the region asks for its influence at the main decision-making tables in the world.

The Summit has not represented progress in the negotiations with Mercosur, but neither was it expected to be. Negotiations concluded in 2019 with an “agreement in principle” are continuing in order to achieve a final agreement.

Our relationship should contribute to a new decarbonized social prosperity, in the apt phrase of the President of Colombia, making the defence of the planet compatible with material progress and social equity. We must also overcome our geopolitical differences. The vast majority of LAC has condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the United Nations. But the relative importance of this aggressive war is not perceived in the same way. The discussion of the final communiqué well reflected this tension between the close European unity in the face of an existential question and the different nuances within LAC. The issue ended with the exclusion of Nicaragua, but not Cuba or Venezuela, from the final wording that makes clear reference to a war “against” Ukraine and not “in” Ukraine.

My conclusion from the Summit is that the defence of the principles of the United Nations Charter and of a rules-based international system in a time of authoritarian tendencies and populist dynamics requires more than ever a strong partnership between the EU and LAC. We cannot afford another lost decade.

THE EVENTS IN ECUADOR MATTER FOR EUROPE

14.8.2023 – Blog ⁽³⁸¹⁾ – In August 2023, Ecuador was plunged into disarray with the assassination of Fernando Villavicencio, a leading presidential candidate and outspoken critic of corruption. To improve the lives of citizens and protect democracy in Europe and Latin America, we must cooperate more in combating organised crime. Their fight is also our fight.

Villavicencio's assassination has brought international attention to the growing challenges of transnational organised crime in Ecuador, a country of 18 million people on the Pacific coast of Latin America. I immediately called my Ecuadorian counterpart to express solidarity and the EU's commitment ⁽³⁸²⁾ to reinforce its support in the fight against violence and for peaceful democratic elections.

Ecuador has become an important export hub for drugs

Like other Latin American countries, Ecuador has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has had lasting effects, resulting in higher poverty rates, widening inequalities and rising unemployment. Sharing borders with the world's largest cocaine producers, Colombia and Peru, Ecuador has become an important export hub for drugs bound for North America and Europe, departing from the port of Guayaquil to Antwerp, Rotterdam or Valencia. Drug seizures have soared. According to UNODC ⁽³⁸³⁾, in 2021 Ecuador was the country with the third most seizures of illicit drugs in the world (7%) after Colombia (41%) and the US (11%). In 2022, close to 200 tonnes were seized in the country, the second highest amount in the history of Ecuador. Recently, Ecuador has also increasingly become a consumption country, which has further accelerated local criminality and violence, particularly amidst the acute economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

Major cartels from Mexico and criminal groups from other faraway places like Albania have penetrated the prison system and built alliances with local gangs. This has led to an unprecedented wave of violence. The homicide rate reached 26 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2022, the second highest in South America,

⁽³⁸¹⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-events-ecuador-matter-eu-o_en

⁽³⁸²⁾ See: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ecuador-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-assassination-presidential-candidate-fernando_en

⁽³⁸³⁾ See: <https://www.unodc.org/>

behind only Venezuela. This translated into 13 homicides per day last year. Since the beginning of 2023, the situation has worsened further with the rate rising to 17 murders per day. Other criminal activities like money laundering, smuggling and trafficking of arms and persons, have also developed, often in connection to the drug traffic. The country has witnessed a series of horrific prison riots, resulting in hundreds of killings of prisoners. Inter-gang violence has plagued prisons and corruption has permeated the state. Government efforts to regain control of the prisons and contain waves of violence in the coastal regions have started to become effective, but a lot remains to be done.

Last May, in a context of extreme political polarisation exacerbated by the growing security challenges, President Lasso faced a possible impeachment by the Ecuadorian Congress. He decided to make use of Article 148 of the Constitution, dissolving the National Assembly and triggering snap presidential and legislative elections that will take place on 20 August. Organising general elections in such a short space of time has been a big challenge for the authorities, aggravated by organised crime's violence against political leaders. Even before last week's atrocity, ten attacks against mayors and municipal officials had already been registered this year, including [the assassination of Agustín Intriago](#) (³⁸⁴), the mayor of the city of Manta, on July 23, which caused a public uproar in the country.

Villavicencio's assassination and the political violence that is developing in Ecuador make it urgent to restore public confidence in the country's institutions and democratic system. This will be the task of the new government and the new national assembly, who must, much more than in recent years, learn to work together, beyond their differences, in the interests of the country.

The EU is supporting actively the security sector in Ecuador

This starts with the need for citizens to have confidence in elections. This is why the EU has been supporting the relevant institutions by deploying an [independent EU mission of electoral experts](#) (³⁸⁵) to observe the electoral process and assisting in training hundreds of independent domestic observers.

The EU and its member states are also supporting actively the security sector in Ecuador through regional programmes aimed at fighting transnational organised

(³⁸⁴) See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-66289355>

(³⁸⁵) See: <https://www.cde.ual.es/en/european-union-election-experts-mission-to-accompany-elections-in-ecuador/>

crime ([ELPacCTO](#)⁽³⁸⁶⁾, [Copolad](#)⁽³⁸⁷⁾, [Eurofront](#)⁽³⁸⁸⁾, [Seacop](#)⁽³⁸⁹⁾, etc.). In addition, we have developed specific cooperation activities such as [emergency support for prison security in Ecuador](#)⁽³⁹⁰⁾ and, soon, support for port security in Guayaquil. The signature, expected in autumn, of a data exchange agreement between Europol and its Ecuadorian partners will further strengthen real-time cooperation. This strong EU commitment on security was confirmed in February by the visit of my colleague Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, accompanied by her Belgian colleague Annelies Verlinden.

The security response is key but so is tackling the factors that make people more vulnerable to crime, such as widespread poverty and lack of employment opportunities for young people. In this area too Ecuador can count on the support of the EU through [our trade agreement](#)⁽³⁹¹⁾, which generates a trade surplus for Ecuador of over €1 billion per year, and our development cooperation.

A comprehensive bi-regional agenda

On 17 and 18 July, the EU and CELAC held a summit in Brussels, the first in eight years. Strengthening the links between our two regions is currently one of my main priorities. To achieve this, we have developed [a comprehensive bi-regional agenda](#)⁽³⁹²⁾ to be implemented following the summit. As several Latin American and Caribbean leaders highlighted at the summit, strengthening our cooperation in the fight against organised crime must be a key part of this agenda. Leaders agreed to strengthen the [EU-LAC Partnership on Justice and Security](#)⁽³⁹³⁾ and improve the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs.

In that matter, “su lucha es nuestra lucha”. The same international gangs and their local affiliates, are at work on both sides, generating the same forms of crime. Record cocaine seizures by the Ecuadorian authorities over the last years have

⁽³⁸⁶⁾ See: <https://www.elpaccto.eu/en/about-el-paccto/what-is-el-paccto/>

⁽³⁸⁷⁾ See: <https://copolad.eu/en/>

⁽³⁸⁸⁾ See: <https://programaeurofront.eu/en/page/que-es-eurofront>

⁽³⁸⁹⁾ See: <https://illicitflows.eu/projects/seacop/>

⁽³⁹⁰⁾ See: <https://www.elpaccto.eu/en/news/contribution-of-2-5-million-euros-from-the-eu-to-help-ecuadors-prison-crisis/>

⁽³⁹¹⁾ See: <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-colombia-peru-ecuador-trade-agreement>

⁽³⁹²⁾ See: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_3924

⁽³⁹³⁾ See: <https://www.elpaccto.eu/en/agenda/launch-of-the-team-europe-initiative-for-justice-and-security/>

been matched by record seizures in European ports. In 2022, 110 tonnes were confiscated in the port of Antwerp alone, 60% of which came directly from Ecuador.

Drug trafficking and the other forms of illicit trafficking intimately linked with it, are a threat to all societies, not only in Ecuador and Latin America but also in Europe. The corruption they fuel undermines democracy everywhere. To be able to improve the lives of citizens on both sides of the Atlantic and defend democracy in Europe and Latin America, we need to fight drug trafficking together more effectively.

Ecuador may seem very far away from Europe but a part of our future depends on the fight waged in this country to defend democracy against organised crime.

ANNEX

GLOBAL EVENTS AND KEY ACTIVITIES DURING 2023

Grouped by month and by topic, region or country, this timeline presents a selection of key global events that were of relevance to EU foreign and security policy. It also features key meetings that I attended and visits that took place.

JANUARY

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – Russia intensifies its missile and drone strikes on Ukraine's critical infrastructure. A Russian missile attack in Dnipro hits a residential building, killing 40, among them children. Russian MFA Lavrov accuses 'the West' of seeking a 'final solution' for Russia, in a totally misplaced and disrespectful reference to the Holocaust. Foreign Affairs Council reassures FM Kuleba that the EU will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes and expresses support for Ukraine's initiative for a just peace. Council prolongs by six months, until 31 July 2023, the restrictive measures targeting specific sectors of the Russian economy first introduced in 2014 in response to Russia's destabilising the situation in Ukraine.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The Foreign Affairs Council establishes a civilian CSDP European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA) to contribute to stability in the border areas of Armenia.

WESTERN BALKANS – I received the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, as well as North Macedonia Foreign Minister Bujar Osmani in Brussels.

IRAN – The Foreign Affairs Council condemns the brutal repression of protests and executions taking place in Iran and extends the restrictive measures under the existing Iran human rights sanctions regime to 18 individuals and 19 entities.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL – Nine Palestinians are killed and over 20 injured during an Israel Defense Forces operation in Jenin. Terror attack near a synagogue in Neve Yaacov, an East Jerusalem settlement, leaves at least seven people dead.

AFGHANISTAN – A terror attack strikes Kabul, claiming at least 20 casualties outside the foreign ministry.

CHINA – Qin Gang is appointed the new Foreign Minister of China.

NORTH KOREA – The DPRK raises military tensions with missile launches and drone incursions outside its borders.

MALI – Council extends EUCAP Sahel Mali mandate until 31 January 2025 and allocates it over €73 million. In light of the volatile situation in Mali, the Council also decides to adapt the mission's mandate.

SOUTH AFRICA – I travel to South Africa, where I co-chair, together with Foreign Minister Pandor, the 15th South Africa-European Union Ministerial Political Dialogue. We discuss the causes and consequences of Russia's war of aggression, a few days after Russia FM Lavrov visited South Africa. Together with Commissioner Urpilainen, the EU also launches the *Just and Green Recovery* Team Europe Initiative for South Africa as part of Global Gateway. I also visit an EU-funded project on service delivery in informal settlements, including a community approach to xenophobia, and the Apartheid Museum.

BOTSWANA – In Botswana, I meet with Foreign Minister Lemogang Kwaape, as well as with Elias Magosi, Executive Secretary of the South African Development Community (SADC). I also visit the EU-funded Corridor Trip Monitoring System (CTMS) to facilitate cross-border transit and a diamond-cutting factory.

BRAZIL – An anti-government mob ransacks the Presidential Palace, the Supreme Court and the Congress in Brasilia following Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva's investiture as President of Brazil. I hold a call with Foreign Minister Vieira, reiterating the EU's solidarity and full support to President Lula.

FEBRUARY

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The EU adopts the 7th package of assistance measures under the European Peace Facility bringing the EU support to the Ukrainian army to €3.6 billion. The College of Commissioners travels to Kyiv to boost EU support and sectorial cooperation with Ukraine. EU-Ukraine Summit takes place in Kyiv. Putin announces that Russia is suspending its membership in the New START Treaty. UN General Assembly votes on the Peace Resolution (141 for, 7 against, 32 abstentions). The EU adopts its 10th round of sanctions against Russia. I attend the Munich Security Conference, where I deliver a speech on the European Security Architecture. I participate in the first trilateral coordination meeting with FM Kuleba and NATO SG Stoltenberg at NATO HQ

in Brussels. I travel to the United Nations in New York, and deliver a speech at the UN General Assembly Emergency Special Session on Ukraine, which voted overwhelmingly in condemnation of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The Foreign Affairs Council launches the EU CSDP civilian mission in Armenia (EUMA).

WESTERN BALKANS – In Albania, thousands of opposition supporters rally in front of the Prime Minister's office accusing the government of corruption. I meet with Serbia President Aleksandar Vučić and Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti at the Munich Security Conference. I host a high-level meeting of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in Brussels. An EU proposal leads to an agreement on the path to normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. I receive Bosnia and Herzegovina's Presidency chair Zeljka Cvijanović, and Presidency members Željko Komšić and Denis Bećirović in Brussels.

TÜRKİYE/SYRIA – A powerful earthquake of magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale hits the region of Gaziantep in Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. I speak on the phone to the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. One minute of silence is held at the Foreign Affairs Council to pay tribute to the over 40,000 victims of the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. The EU mobilises its emergency support to both countries through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and emergency humanitarian assistance worth €6.5 million.

IRAN – I speak with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Hossein Amirabdollahian, underlining the EU's position on Iran's human rights violations and its support to Russia's war of aggression. The Foreign Affairs Council decides to adopt additional sanctions related to violations of human rights in Iran.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – East Jerusalem suffers a terror attack, killing a six-year-old child and a young man, and injuring other people. Israeli authorities approved plans for advancing more than 7,000 housing units in illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank.

SAUDI ARABIA – I meet with the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Faisal bin Farhan and the Secretary General of the League of the Arab States Aboul Gheit in Brussels to discuss ways to revive the Middle East Peace Process.

CHINA – The 38th session of the Human Rights Dialogue between the EU and China and the 13th annual EU-China security and defence consultations are held.

NORTH KOREA – The DPRK launches a long-range missile and short-range ballistic missiles.

NIGER – I express my solidarity with the people and authorities of Niger following a terrorist attack against a detachment of Niger's armed forces. I receive President Mohamed Bazoum in Brussels. Foreign Affairs Council launches a CSDP military partnership mission in Niger (EUMPM Niger) to support the country in its fight against terrorist armed groups.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – I attend the Munich Security Conference and deliver a speech on the European Security Architecture.

MARCH

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The International Criminal Court issues an arrest warrant against President Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of President Maria Lvova-Belova, in connection with alleged crimes of unlawful deportation and unlawful transfer of children from Ukraine. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is extended for two months. The European Council welcomes the three-track approach for the provision of 1 million rounds of artillery ammunition to Ukraine. A new joint assessment by the Government of Ukraine, the World Bank Group, the Commission and the UN estimates that the cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine has grown to US \$411 billion (equivalent to €383 billion).

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – Armed clashes result in servicemen being killed or injured on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

WESTERN BALKANS – I travel to Albania, where I meet with Prime Minister Edi Rama and chair the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Council held for the first time in Tirana. I also travel to North Macedonia, where I facilitate a High-Level meeting of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue in Ohrid. An agreement is reached on the Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia. I meet with Prime Minister Kovacevski and lead the EU-North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council held for the first time in Skopje. I also meet with the President of North Macedonia Stevo Pendarovski, and Defence Minister Slavjanka Petrovska. Republika Srpska National Assembly votes in favour of amendments to the criminal code reintroducing criminal penalties for defamation.

TÜRKİYE – The European Commission and the Swedish Presidency of the Council announce that they will host an International Donors' Conference to support the people in Türkiye and Syria affected by the recent devastating earthquakes.

LIBYA – Foreign Affairs Council extends the mandate of operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI until 31 March 2025.

MIDDLE EAST – Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to resume their diplomatic relations.

IRAN – The Foreign Affairs Council decides to impose sanctions against 8 individuals responsible for human rights violations in Iran.

IRAQ – EU-Iraq Cooperation Council takes place in Brussels.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – A terror attack by Hamas in Tel Aviv leaves three people injured.

INDIA – I travel to India to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers meeting and in the Raisina Dialogue. During my visit, I also meet with the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

ASIA – A Summit between Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol in Tokyo marks another step in the *rapprochement* between the two countries.

NORTH KOREA – North Korea launches another intercontinental ballistic missile.

ETHIOPIA – The EU joins the US' condemnation of atrocities committed in Ethiopia and calls for transitional justice and accountability.

NIGER – Council adopts new assistance measures under European Peace Facility worth €40 million to support the Nigerien Armed Forces.

NIGERIA – Mr Bola Tinubu is declared President-elect, following the 25 February general elections.

ALGERIA – I travel to Algeria and meet with Algerian Prime Minister Aïmene Benabderrahmane and with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN – The EU-LAC Digital Alliance is launched, with an initial contribution of €145 million from Team Europe, including €50 million from the EU budget to boost digital cooperation between both regions. I travel to the Dominican Republic to attend the Ibero-American Summit.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – I present the Joint Communication by the High Representative and the Commission on an enhanced EU Maritime Security Strategy. The Council increases the financial ceiling of the European Peace Facility to €7.98 billion until 2027. I present the first annual report on the implementation of the Strategic Compass. The Schuman Security and Defence Forum takes place. The first ever EU-US joint naval exercise is conducted.

APRIL

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – Russia takes over the UN Security Council presidency. European Council agrees on €1 billion support for ammunition for Ukraine under the European Peace Facility. The Council decides to add the Wagner Group and RIA FAN to the EU's sanctions list. A video is published showing Russian soldiers decapitating a Ukrainian prisoner of war. During my mission to Colombia, I call FM Kuleba to discuss the long overdue call by Chinese President Xi Jinping to President Zelenskiy.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – Azerbaijan unilaterally establishes a checkpoint on the Lachin corridor. The EU calls for reducing tensions.

WESTERN BALKANS – A Belgrade/Pristina Dialogue meeting is held at the chief negotiators level, where an agreement is reached on the text of the Declaration on missing persons. The Kosovo by-elections take place in the north of the country, with very low turnout, in particular among Kosovo Serb citizens. The EU calls to urgently boost KFOR troops in Bosnia amid secession threats. Jakov Milatović is elected President of Montenegro in 2nd round of presidential elections.

SYRIA – Foreign Affairs Council decides to sanction 25 individuals and 8 entities responsible for the production and trafficking of narcotics within a regime-led business model.

AFGHANISTAN – The Taliban decide to ban Afghan women from working for the UN and its agencies, funds and programmes.

CHINA – My mission to China is postponed after testing positive for Covid-19. Chinese Ambassador to France makes a statement about ex-Soviet countries not having an effective status under international law.

PAKISTAN – EU and Pakistan hold Counter Terrorism Dialogue.

SUDAN – Tensions rise in Sudan amid prolonged military rule, with violent clashes erupting between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). I call the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League. I also talk with President of Kenya, William Ruto to express support for his efforts to mobilise the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and contribute to the resolution of the crisis in Sudan.

UNITED STATES – I co-chair with Commissioner Simson at the EU-US Energy Council Ministerial Meeting in Brussels with the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, and the US Deputy Secretary for Energy, David Turk. I hold a bilateral meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

COLOMBIA – I travel to Colombia, where I participate in the International Conference on the political process in Venezuela. The European Union commits to invest 50 billion Colombian Pesos (COP) in the socio-economic integration of migrants and host communities. I meet with President Gustavo Petro and discuss the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the democratic transition in Venezuela and the upcoming EU-CELAC summit.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – Finland becomes a member of NATO. The NATO Foreign Affairs Ministerial meeting welcomes Finland into the alliance.

MAY

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The UN General Assembly adopts a resolution on UN-Council of Europe cooperation by 122 votes, including China's, Brazil's and Indonesia's, where the war in Ukraine was clearly qualified as an “aggression by the Russian Federation”. In an EU effort to speed up ammunition deliveries to Ukraine, Member States agree on the “track 2” that would allow €1 billion from the EPF to be used in joint procurement. I participate in the State of Union 2023 Conference in Florence, discussing the EU's work to end the war in Ukraine, building a just peace and how to deal with global crises. I participate in the EU Military Committee with the 27 Chiefs of Defence. Council announces restrictive measures against three Moldovan individuals for their efforts to undermine the territorial integrity of Ukraine by supporting Russia's war of aggression.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The EU welcomes an intensification of the normalisation process of ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN relations.

WESTERN BALKANS – The 4th High-Level Ministerial Conference on the Regional Roadmap for Comprehensive Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control in the Western Balkans takes place in Brussels, as well as a Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue high-level meeting. President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti agreed on a joint declaration on missing persons. Violence erupts in northern Kosovo against citizens, media, law enforcement and KFOR troops, as newly elected mayors try to enter municipality buildings. I call NATO SG Jens Stoltenberg to discuss the situation in the north of Kosovo and welcome NATO's decision to deploy additional troops to Kosovo.

IRAN – Swedish-Iranian national Habib Chaab is executed. I welcome the release of Benjamin Briére and Bernard Phélan, two EU nationals arbitrarily arrested in Iran. Foreign Affairs Council decides to impose sanctions on an additional 5 individuals and 2 entities responsible for serious human rights violations in Iran.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – Violence escalates in Gaza following Israeli air raids. Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad finally announce a ceasefire.

ASIA & INDO-PACIFIC – The EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum takes place in Stockholm.

INDIA – EU-India Trade and Technology Council takes place in Brussels. 4th EU-India Strategic Partnership Review Meeting takes place in New Delhi.

SOUTH KOREA – 10th EU-South Korea Summit takes place in Seoul.

PAKISTAN – Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan is arrested.

MALI – Malian government forces and the Wagner group commit acts of violence against civilians in Moura.

SOMALIA – Somalia and the EU launch a Joint Operational Roadmap. Terrorist group Al-Shabaab attacks the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

SUDAN – The Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces sign a declaration of commitment to protect civilians three weeks into the conflict.

CUBA – I travel to Cuba, in my first visit to the country as High Representative. I co-chair the EU-Cuba Joint Council, and meet with President Miguel Díaz-Canel, the Cuban Episcopal Conference, the Cuban private sector and members of civil society.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – The Commission adopts the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), announcing €500 million to boost the EU defence industry capacities. Council agrees on a new Civilian CSDP Compact to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond to crises, threats and conflicts. I welcome Denmark to PESCO and to the country's first EDA Steering Board meeting.

JUNE

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – I meet with Ukrainian Minister for Defence Oleksii Reznikov in the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue. Russia destroys the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant dam in Ukraine and shells rescuers of innocent civilians after the flooding in Kherson region. The European Commission and the European Investment Bank agree to make available an EU guarantee enabling the EIB to provide €100 million of new loans to Ukraine for fast recovery. Russia decides to hold “elections” in September in the occupied territories of Ukraine. European Council adopts the 11th package of economic and individual sanctions against Russia. Russia launches a

barbaric missile attack against civilians in a restaurant and shopping centre in Kramatorsk.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – Daily shooting incidents take place along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and in the Karabakh Line of Contact.

WESTERN BALKANS – The European Commission launches an additional €2.1 billion investment package for the Western Balkans under the Economic and Investment Plan. I meet with Prime Minister Edi Rama and discuss the country's European path. I meet with Serbian President Vučić, Kosovar President Osmani and Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti to discuss the dangerous situation in the North of Kosovo. I then participate in the NATO-EU Defence Ministers Meeting to discuss the same issue. The Republika Srpska National Assembly decides not to apply the decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

IRAN – Foreign Affairs Council imposes a 9th package of restrictive measures on 7 individuals for serious human rights violations.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – An Israeli Defence Forces military operation in Jenin leads to several civilian casualties. Eli settlement in the occupied West Bank suffers a terrorist attack.

SYRIA – The EU hosts the VII Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”, and pledges €1.5 billion in support to Syria and host communities.

CENTRAL ASIA – EU-Central Asia High-Level Political and Security Dialogue is held in Astana.

AFGHANISTAN – More than 60 girls are poisoned in their school in northern Afghanistan.

CHINA – I meet with Minister of Defence Li Shangfu in the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue and discuss common strategic concerns.

SOMALIA – The Foreign Affairs Council confirms a new partnership between the EU and Somalia.

SUDAN – The UN Security Council takes a unanimous decision to extend the mandate of UNITAM until December 2023.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN – I present the Joint Communication by the High Representative and the European Commission setting out a New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. I meet with Latin American and Caribbean Ambassadors, together with Commissioner Urpilainen, ahead of the EU-CELAC Summit to be held in Brussels in July.

COLOMBIA – A ceasefire agreement is reached in Cuba between the Colombian government and the ELN.

JULY

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine started its operations in the Hague, hosted by the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation. The Council and the European Parliament agree on a deal (ASAP) to boost ammunition and missile production in the EU. Wagner leader Prygozhin and his forces mutiny against the Russian government. Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko brokers an agreement with Prygozhin, who finally withdraws his troops. Russia terminates the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The EU and Norway sign a transfer agreement for a voluntary financial contribution of Norway to the EPF assistance measure for supplying military equipment to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

WESTERN BALKANS – Kosovo commits towards de-escalation after the violence that erupted in Northern Kosovo. The EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina Stabilisation and Association Council takes place in Brussels and I meet with Borjana Krišto, Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the margins. I receive Bosnian Foreign Affairs Minister Elmedin Konaković and discuss Bosnia and Herzegovina's territorial integrity, sovereignty and constitutional order.

IRAN – The Council establishes a new framework for restrictive measures in view of Iran's military support of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and also lists an additional six Iranian individuals for providing military support to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine (drones) and to the Syrian regime (air defence systems).

IRAQ – Following the burning of the Quran in Sweden, I reiterate in a statement the EU's strong and determined rejection of any form of incitement to religious hatred and intolerance. An attack against the Swedish Embassy takes place in Iraq.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – An Israeli military operation in Jenin leaves 10 dead. Tel Aviv suffers a terrorist attack.

AFGHANISTAN – The EU lists two acting Taliban Ministers for their role in depriving Afghan girls and women of their right to education, access to justice and equal treatment between men and women.

CHINA – I meet with Director Wang Yi and discuss China's role to help stop the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the stability and status quo of

Taiwan. Hong Kong's Legislative Council adopts further changes to the electoral system of the District Councils, going against the commitment to democratic representation set out in Hong Kong's Basic Law.

JAPAN – EU and Japan hold their 29th Summit in Brussels.

NORTH KOREA – The DPRK launches another intercontinental ballistic missile.

PAKISTAN – The EU mobilises more than €16.5 million in humanitarian aid for those affected by conflict and climate-induced disasters.

PACIFIC – The Council gives the green light to the new Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States.

NIGER – On 5 July, I travel to Niger to meet President Mohamed Bazoum and visit the EU civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger. I then inaugurate the Gouro Banda solar power plant and meet EUCAP Sahel Niger. I also visit the social housing project “Desert”, meet with the Sultan of Aïr and visit the old town of Agadez. On 26 July, a mutiny by part of the presidential guard takes place. The EU condemns strongly the coup d'état in Niger and does not recognise the authorities resulting from the putsch in Niger.

TUNISIA – The EU and Tunisia sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN – EU-CELAC Summit is held in Brussels, gathering Heads of State and the Government of the EU Member States and of the 33 CELAC states for the first time in eight years.

AUGUST

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – Russia continues its air attacks on Kyiv, Odessa and on Ukrainian Danube Ports, aggravating global food insecurity. Leaders from more than 40 countries – including China, but excluding Russia – gather in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the prospects for peace in Ukraine. Russian strike on Chernihiv University and theatre causes the death of at least seven civilians, including children.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – I call Armenian Foreign Minister Mirzoyan to discuss the humanitarian situation affecting Karabakh Armenians. PEC Michel undertakes intensive diplomatic work to advance the normalisation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. A step-by-step approach is proposed to find a solution for the unblocking of the Lachin corridor and the opening of the Ağdam route.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – Two terror attacks in the occupied West Bank claim the lives of three Israeli civilians and leave one injured.

CHINA – Director Wang Yi is re-appointed as Foreign Minister.

GABON – A military coup takes place in Gabon. The EU rejects the takeover and calls on all actors to exercise restraint.

NIGER – The EU strongly condemns the attacks carried out by armed groups which cause the death of at least 17 Nigerien soldiers. The putschists decide to expel the Ambassador of France. I share the EU's support to ECOWAS and call for an immediate return of the constitutional order.

ECUADOR – Presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio is murdered only ten days before the presidential elections.

GUATEMALA – Bernardo Arévalo is elected as the new President.

SEPTEMBER

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – Cesar Rodriguez, a colonel with Cuba's Interior Ministry, declares on national television that 17 people have been arrested for trafficking men to fight for Russia in Ukraine. Russia continues its attacks against Ukrainian civilian targets and on key facilities for the export of Ukrainian grain. Russia organises illegal regional and local elections in Ukrainian territories under Russian occupation. I exchange with Rustem Umerov, the new Defence Minister of Ukraine. I travel to Ukraine, to Odesa. I visit the port and the destroyed cultural heritage in the city. I also visit the military training mission EUMAM Ukraine. I participate alongside President Zelenskyy and Foreign Minister Kuleba in a ceremony honouring the fallen defenders, in Kyiv. I also meet with Ukrainian NGOs and have a meeting with Defence Minister Umerov, Prime Minister Shmyhal and Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Stefanishyna. I convene the EU Foreign Ministers in Kyiv, for the first-ever meeting of all 27 Member States outside the EU.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – A military escalation in the region ends with the departure of nearly Armenian people from Karabakh. EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar travels to the region. UN Security Council asks Azerbaijan to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to the civilian population in need and to engage in a comprehensive and transparent dialogue to ensure the rights and security of Karabakh Armenians. The EU boosts its humanitarian funding with €5 million and activates its Civil Protection Mechanism upon the request of Armenia.

WESTERN BALKANS – In the margins of UNGA in New York, I convene Western Balkans leaders for a working lunch. EU signs Frontex Status

Agreement with Albania. A high-level meeting of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue takes place in Brussels, focusing on the implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation agreed by the parties in March. We express our concern over the lack of implementation by the Parties of their commitments and urge them to engage constructively and in good faith. Kosovo Police officers suffer attacks in the north of Kosovo. I speak to Prime Minister Kurti and President Vučić following the attack. Republika Srpska makes legislative initiatives and announcements that run counter to the EU path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including a draft law labelling NGOs as “foreign agents”.

LIBYA – Heavy storm and rain hit eastern Libya, resulting in massive floods and extensive damage. The EU strengthens its support to Libya by releasing €5.2 million in humanitarian funding. I meet with Mr Abdoulaye Bathily, UN Special Representative, with whom I hold an exchange on the situation in Libya.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – In the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, I co-host a Ministerial meeting on the Middle East Peace Process and launch the ‘Peace Day Effort’, together with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the League of Arab States.

IRAN – The Council imposes a 10th package of restrictive measures on four individuals and six entities responsible for serious human rights violations in Iran. A letter is sent by the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and the United Kingdom to recall that Iran is not meeting its commitments under the JCPOA and express their intention not to take steps regarding the lifting of further sanctions. Iran decides to withdraw the official designation of several experienced IAEA inspectors to monitor and verify its nuclear programme.

INDIA – India orders a senior Canadian diplomat to leave the country after Canada expelled an Indian diplomat in a rift over the killing of a Sikh separatist.

PACIFIC – In New York, I host a meeting with leaders from the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

SOMALIA – Al-Shabaab perpetrates terrorist attacks against civilian targets.

TUNISIA – Tunisia officially refuses to authorise the visit of the European Parliament’s AFET delegation to the country.

GUATEMALA – The attempts to undermine the election results continue. Raids carried out by the Special Prosecutor’s Office Against Impunity (FECI) in the offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) lead to serious concerns.

OCTOBER

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – Russia launches another illegal conscription campaign in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. A Russian attack targets a café and a grocery store in the settlement of Hroza in Kupiansk, killing at least 50 people (including a child) and injuring many others. The European Political Community meeting takes place in Granada. The Granada declaration indicates, among other things, that the EU will continue to support Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. Malta hosts the third Peace Formula Summit, in Russia's absence, with close to 70 participants (44 at the meeting in Jeddah).

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The Commission announces €10.45 million in humanitarian aid and other immediate support measures for Armenia. Additionally, the Commission allocates €15 million from its annual programme for Armenia as budgetary support. On the sidelines of the European Political Community Summit in Granada, PEC Michel, Chancellor Scholz, President Macron, and myself as High Representative meet with Prime Minister Pashinyan.

WESTERN BALKANS – The European Commission presents a new Growth Plan for the region. In the margins of the European Council, I chair a meeting with Serbian President Vučić and Kosovo Prime Minister Kurti, joined with the President of France Macron, Prime Minister of Italy Meloni and Chancellor of Germany Scholz in Brussels. A European proposal for the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities is put on the table.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – Thousands of Hamas fighters launch an incursion via sea, land and air into the Israeli territories near Gaza, carrying a violent terrorist attack against Israeli civilians in the neighbouring Kibbutz, at a music festival and Israeli Defence Forces bases. Over 1,200 people are killed, and close to 240 hostages are taken back to Gaza by Hamas. It takes over 24 hours for the Israeli Defence Forces to regain full control. I speak to Foreign Minister of Israel Eli Cohen to express the solidarity of the EU and its condemnation of violence and terror. I call the Foreign Minister of Egypt Ahmed Abu Zeid, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Jordan Ayman Safadi and Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia Prince Faisal bin Farhan. I issue a statement on behalf of the EU condemning the attacks in the strongest possible terms and calling for an immediate cessation of Hamas' senseless violence and for an immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. On the margin of the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting, I convene an emergency meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Muscat, to address the situation in Israel and in the region. The Commission announces an urgent review of its financial

assistance for Palestine – which does not suspend due payments. I travel to Egypt for the Cairo Summit for Peace to discuss the situation in Gaza and risks of regional spillover. I support Egypt's call to deliver much-needed international humanitarian aid via El Arish airport and the announcement that the Rafah crossing remains open and operational. The first convoy of humanitarian aid arrives in Gaza through the Rafah crossing. The Commission triples its humanitarian aid for Gaza to over €75 million. At the European Council, leaders agree on condemning Hamas for its terrorist attacks and calling for the immediate release of hostages and for "humanitarian corridors and pauses". The upsurge of settler terrorism in the West Bank leads to very high numbers of civilian casualties and Palestinian communities being forced out of their homes.

CENTRAL ASIA – European Union-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting takes place in Luxembourg, which endorses the 'Joint Roadmap for Deepening ties between EU and Central Asia'. All 27 EU Foreign Affairs Ministers participate, for the first time.

AFGHANISTAN – A suicide attack on a Shia Mosque in Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan province causes the death of seven worshippers.

CHINA – I travel to China to co-chair the EU-China Strategic Dialogue with Minister Wang Yi. I also deliver a speech at Peking University and meet with Han Zheng, Vice-President of China, as well as with scholars from the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS).

INDIA – India orders the removal of 40 Canadian diplomats from India.

GHANA – I travel to Ghana, to deliver 105 armoured vehicles to the Ghanaian armed forces, as part of a €20 million package for support to the region. I also meet with President Nana Akufo-Addo.

NIGER – New terrorist attacks hit Niger and Mali. During the Foreign Affairs Council, Ministers adopt a framework for restrictive measures in view of the situation in Niger.

SUDAN – The Council adopts the new framework for restrictive measures in Sudan.

UNITED STATES – I attend the EU-US Summit in Washington, together with the President of the European Council Charles Michel and of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – From 16 to 22 October, the EU carries out MILEX 23, its first-ever live exercise from the Rota Naval Base located in Cádiz, Spain. 19 Member States participate in MILEX23.

DEVELOPMENT – The first Global Gateway Forum takes place in Brussels with many high-level representatives of our partners from all over the world.

NOVEMBER

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Force of Ukraine, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, admits the war is at a stalemate in an interview with the Economist. I discuss with Foreign Minister Kuleba the EU path of Ukraine and the upcoming enlargement package and invite him to join the next EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting. Russia signs into national law the revocation of its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and a bill cancelling Russia's obligation to notify the Council of Europe Secretary-General of martial law in Russia. Russia sinks a civilian ship entering a port in the Odessa region, killing its captain and injuring 4 others. Jointly with the European Commission, I submit a proposal to the Council for the 12th package of sanctions against Russia with sanctions over 120 individuals and entities for their role in undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, new import and export bans, as well as actions to tighten the oil price cap and to counter circumvention of EU sanctions. 10th year anniversary of the Maidan uprising. PEC Charles Michel travels to Kyiv to commemorate the anniversary. The most extensive drone attack on Kyiv since the beginning of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine causes widespread devastation and casualties. The Council decides to provide an additional funding of €194 million for the training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces under EUMAM Ukraine.

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN – The International Court of Justice rules that Karabakh-Armenians have a right to return to Nagorno-Karabakh.

WESTERN BALKANS – The European Commission adopts annual Enlargement package and launches new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. I chair an EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Meeting in Brussels.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – I go on a regional tour in the Middle East, travelling to Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan. I visit Kibbutz Be'eri and Re'im with Foreign Minister Eli Cohen where I reiterate my strong condemnation of the actions of Hamas. I meet with families of hostages abducted by Hamas on 7 October. I then go to the occupied Palestinian territories where I meet with Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority as well as with Riad Malki, Foreign Minister. In Bahrain, I participate in the ISS Manama Dialogue and call for the two-state

solution to be swiftly implemented. I travel to Qatar, where I meet with Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani. The 8th Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) takes place in Barcelona, co-chaired by myself as High Representative and Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, and hosted by the Spanish Foreign Minister and the SG of the UfM. Nearly all EU and partner countries attend at ministerial level. The Commission increases its humanitarian aid to Gaza by €25 million and step up its support to UNRWA by €10 million. An agreement is reached between Hamas and Israel, under the auspice of Egypt and Qatar, on a pause in the conflict in exchange for the release of 50 hostages from Gaza, as well as the release of Palestinian prisoners.

AFGHANISTAN – EU releases €61 million in humanitarian aid for people in Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

CHINA – 16th EU-China Political Director's Dialogue is held in Beijing.

PACIFIC – Succeeding the Cotonou Agreement, a new Partnership Agreement with the Members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) – the “Samoa Agreement”.

GULF OF GUINEA – The Council launches a new civilian and military mission in support of military actors and navies of four Gulf of Guinea coastal states involved in maritime security operations with the support of EPF.

SUDAN – More than a thousand members of the Masalit community are killed in Ardamta, West Darfur in two days during major attacks carried out by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its affiliated militias.

ARGENTINA – Presidential elections in Argentina result in the election of Javier Milei as the new President.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE – An OSCE Ministerial meeting hosted by North Macedonia takes place in Skopje. The European Defence Agency (EDA) publishes its annual Defence Data report for 2022, detailing for the first time defence spending from all EU Member States. The European Commission announces that it will present a European defence industrial strategy in early 2024.

DECEMBER

RUSSIA/UKRAINE – The Council adopts a 12th package of economic and individual sanctions against Russia, targeting in particular Russian diamonds. European Council agrees to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. Russia launches one of the largest attacks since its full-scale

invasion of Ukraine against cities and the population. The Biden administration sends the US Congress an urgent warning about the need to approve a new military and economic assistance package to Ukraine. I deliver a speech at the Le Grand Continent Summit on the EU's support of Ukraine.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE – Hostilities resume in Gaza. Settlers in the West Bank launch violent attacks against Palestinian communities and demolish an EU-funded school in the village of Zamuta. I ask the EU members of the UN Security Council and like-minded partners to support UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's call for a humanitarian ceasefire after he invoked Art.99 of the UN Charter. The UN General Assembly votes in favour of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza: 153 countries, including 17 EU member states, voted in favour of the resolution, 10 against, 23 abstained. French, German and UK Foreign Ministers point out that 'far too many civilians have died in Gaza'. The ground offensive in central Gaza continues with the deadly bombing on Maghazi refugee camps which leads to the displacement of a further 150,000 Palestinians.

IRAN – The Sakharov Prize is awarded by the European Parliament to the memory of Mahsa Amini and to the "Woman, Life, Freedom" Movement.

CHINA – I travel to China to attend the EU-China Summit, alongside Presidents Charles Michel and Ursula von der Leyen.

NIGER – The junta denounces the agreement establishing the legal basis for the deployment of the EUCAP Sahel Niger mission and the EUMPM military cooperation mission.

SAUDI ARABIA – The 3rd EU-KSA Human Rights Dialogue takes place in Brussels.

KUWAIT – The EU-Kuwait Human Rights Dialogue takes place in Brussels.

YEMEN – Houthis conduct missile and drone attacks in the Red Sea, targeting Israeli-connected vessels and Norwegian tanker "Strinda".

CENTRAL ASIA – The EU and the Republic of Tajikistan hold the 14th round of the annual Human Rights Dialogue in Brussels.

NORTH KOREA – North Korea launches an intercontinental ballistic missile.

MYANMAR – The EU agrees on an 8th package of sanctions against four persons and two entities, in view of the continuing grave situation in Myanmar/Burma.

ASIA AND INDO-PACIFIC – The European Union expresses its concern over the behaviour of the Chinese Coast Guard and Maritime Militia against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea on 9 and 10 December.

GULF OF GUINEA – The Council launches the EU security and defence initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea, for an initial duration of two years.

ANGOLA – Angola and the EU hold the 6th Ministerial Meeting organised under the Angola-EU Joint Way Forward (JWF) in Luanda.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO – The European Union's electoral mission, initially invited by the DRC to observe the general elections on 20 December 2023 throughout the country, is reduced to a Mission of Electoral Experts due to obstacles posed to its deployment by the DRC government. The Council renews its restrictive measures in view of the gravity of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for an additional year, until 12 December 2024. The ceasefire in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is extended.

MALI – The Council renews its restrictive measures in view of the situation in Mali for a further year, until 14 December 2024, and delists one individual.

SUDAN – The EU welcomes the unanimous decision of the UN Security Council to extend until December 2023 the mandate of UNITAM.

CLIMATE – COP 28 takes place in Dubaï, in the United Arab Emirates. Despite the fact that no phase-out of fossil fuels has been decided, the results were rather positive COP. The first global stocktake has been made, the new global for losses and damages has received an important amount of funds (more than half from the EU and its member states) and an agreement has been found on the way forward.

EUROPE BETWEEN TWO WARS

EU foreign policy in 2023

2023 was mainly dominated by the two wars raging in the EU's neighbourhood.

Ukraine managed to liberate half of the territory occupied by Russia in 2022 and unblock the Black Sea. However, Russia continued to attack and destroy the country. Ukraine must prevail because the core principles of the United Nations Charter and EU's very security are at stake. That is why the EU stepped up its support.

On 7 October, the terrorist attack by Hamas has triggered a new war in Gaza, with serious risks of spill over in the region. The EU has called on and acted for putting an end to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, free the hostages and implement rapidly the two-state solution, the only way to bring a just and lasting peace to the region.

Many other topics were also on EU's agenda in 2023: the EU-China relations, the coups in the Sahel, the EU-Latin America summit, European defence, multilateralism...

This book brings together blog posts, op-eds and speeches by HR/VP Josep Borrell Fontelles, addressing the most pressing issues for EU's foreign and security policy during the year 2023.

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