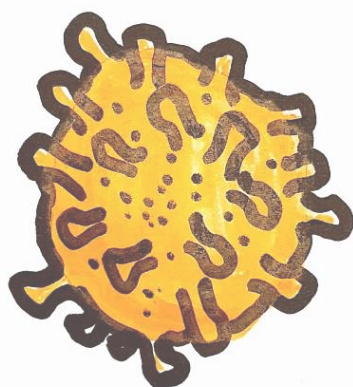


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The EU and the UN: partners for a purpose

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If there is one thing that 27 EU member states agree on it is that we all believe in rules-based multilateralism. We repeat, almost mantra like, that we want a strong UN as the beating heart of the multilateral system. The Security Council is the world's highest multilateral authority and it has the last word on matters of peace and security. I was very pleased to address the Security Council on the EU-UN cooperation and to express the EU's strong support for the UN's work, with concrete contributions in many areas and especially on peace and security. At the same time, it was an important occasion to call on those that sit on the Security Council to take their responsibilities. At a time of global crisis, we need a Security Council able to take the necessary decisions and not one that is paralysed by vetoes and political infighting.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 is a test of our humanity, but also of the multilateral system itself. The crisis demonstrates that global challenges require collective action: COVID-19, climate change, these are not problems that any one country can solve on its own. Indeed, the rules-based international order – with the UN at its core – must be upheld and strengthened. There is no other option.

The pandemic is shaking the very foundations of our societies, exposing the vulnerabilities of the most fragile countries. It risks unravelling progress achieved over recent years in achieving the SDGs and pushing millions back into poverty.

It can deepen existing conflicts and generate new geopolitical tensions. That is why the EU was one of the earliest and strongest supporter of the call by UNSG Guterres for a global ceasefire. We regret that only in very few cases has there been a reduction in violence: in fact, only 2 out of 43 countries, according to the report of the Armed Conflict Location and Data Project. We also support the appeal by Human Rights Commissioner Michele Bachelet to ensure that sanctions do not hinder humanitarian aid, as is fully the case for the EU.

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

The EU is doing whatever it takes to combat the coronavirus crisis. We know our battle at home can only succeed if we defeat the virus around the world. For this reason, the EU, its Member States and European financial institutions combined resources for a €36 billion “Team Europe” package, to support partner countries and the most vulnerable.

We fully agree with Secretary General Guterres that the socio-economic recovery packages must aim to “build back better”, by investing in sustainable and resilient societies.

¹ This paper is based on the briefing that HR/VP Josep Borrell delivered to the UN Security Council on 28 May 2020.

In these troubled times, emergency measures are necessary. But they must be proportionate, temporary and in compliance with the rule of law and international obligations. Respect for human rights remains essential, especially for the most vulnerable parts of our society.

When others may be backing away, the EU remains a staunch supporter of a strong UN as the beating heart of the multilateral system. Secretary General Guterres is right to say that “multilateralism is under threat precisely when we need it most.” We therefore support his efforts advance the UN reform process and to use the Organisation’s 75th anniversary, to work for a rejuvenated UN.

At a time of growing scepticism, we must demonstrate the UN’s added value and relevance. This is why the EU and its Member States support UN reform and are the largest financial contributor to the UN system. We pay our dues in full and on time. Also in the area of peace and security, the EU is a generous, reliable partner. All of the EU’s 17 crisis management missions and operations cooperate closely with members of the UN family. Indeed, eleven of those EU missions and operations share the same theatre with a UN mission. In some cases, we even share barracks and camps.

We know that women play a crucial role in securing peace and security – and we need to harness their role and contributions. This was the central reason for adoption, 20 years ago, of the ground-breaking resolution UNSC 1325. We have made clear progress since then, but much work remains, to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. So let us pursue this agenda with determination.

REGIONAL CRISES – THE EU AND UN PARTNERING FOR PEACE

Africa is our sister continent, and a major strategic priority for the EU. From the Sahel to the Horn, from the Central African Republic to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the European Union is actively backing political processes, providing financial support, and contributing to peacebuilding and stabilisation and development.

We do so with one motto: African solutions to African problems. We cooperate very closely with the African Union, including the Commissioner for peace and security Smail Chergui. Of course, we cannot substitute our partners. What we can do and what we are doing is to accompany their efforts.

Let us look more closely at the situation in the Sahel. It is a test case, with all elements of the modern foreign policy agenda at play: security, extremism and terrorism, governance, sustainable development, migration and climate change are all driving the conflict dynamics and explain why we need an integrated approach.

Since 2014, the EU and its Member States have provided massive financial support to the Sahel region, for a total of €8,5 billion. The EU has recently broadened the scope of its work and has three missions deployed to help build regional capacity of military and security forces.

But the hard truth is the situation in the Sahel keeps deteriorating at an alarming pace. A few figures: 4000 lives lost to terrorist attacks this year; 800,000 displaced in Burkina Faso (seven times more since Feb 2019); around 50 million people at risk of food insecurity due to terrorism and COVID-19.

So, we must be ready to do more and better. As EU we are fully engaged, also together with the G5 and the African Union. The same can be said about the Horn of Africa where EU cooperation with the AU

and UN is also crucial. Our analysis of the situation is the same. Our commitment to work jointly is strong. Together with our partners, we must stay the course.

A major crisis right on the European Union's doorstep is that of Libya. We have seen the absurd situation of fighters wearing masks to protect themselves against COVID-19 while exchanging fire. The EU is working hard to create the conditions for a ceasefire; it is not easy and there are many agendas at play. There is no alternative to an inclusive political solution. But to find a political solution, we need to stop the flows of weapons into Libya and create the space for real dialogue.

With this objective in mind, we have launched a new operation in the Mediterranean: Operation Irini. Its core task is to implement the UN arms embargo through naval, aerial and satellite assets. The operation builds on the achievements of Operation Sophia, which so far has been the only operation actively implementing the UN arms embargo and reporting accordingly to the UN.

Only a few weeks after it started activities at sea, the operation has already proved its added value, by sharing valuable information with the UN Panel of experts and having a deterrent effect, including on oil smuggling.

As EU, we know that the broader Middle East has a major impact on European and global security. We need to adopt an approach that addresses the individual conflicts and crises including Yemen and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where any unilateral action could threaten the stability in the entire region and where the EU remains ready to work with both parties and its partners on a solution based on internationally recognised parameters. But also one recognises the inter-related nature of the region's conflict dynamics. Over time we should work towards a genuine regional, cooperative security framework.

In Syria the situation in Idlib remains fragile. The ceasefire must continue to hold and, extended all across Syria, in line with UN Special Envoy Pedersen's appeal. It is imperative that this Council renews the authorisation of cross-border humanitarian operations and deliveries into North-West Syria.

The fourth Brussels conference on Syria on 29 - 30 June will be an opportunity to show our continued support to the Syrian people. The humanitarian needs are enormous so we must maintain the level of pledges we had in previous years. The conference will also aim to consolidate international backing for a political solution of the crisis, in line with Security Council Resolution 2254.

As EU we remain fully in support of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. It remains essential to ensure the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. This is why decision by the US not to prolong the waivers for the JCPOA-related nuclear projects is regrettable.

Regarding Europe itself including the Western Balkans, it is important to stress that we want to see the whole region advance on the path of reform, reconciliation and integration into the EU. I have recently appointed Miroslav Lajcak as EU Special Representative to work on the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue which remains one of my top priorities. Also in Europe, it is important to highlight Ukraine, where the illegal annexation by Russia of the Crimean peninsula and the unfulfilled commitments of Minsk have brought a major disruption in EU-Russia relations.

Support for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity will remain key elements of the relationship of the EU with its Eastern partners. The principles enshrined in Helsinki cannot be forgotten while working for a cooperative, more secure and cohesive European continent.

On a continent close to my heart there is Venezuela. Here the political crisis compounded by the measures related to COVID-19 has turned into a catastrophic economic and humanitarian emergency,

affecting the stability of the whole region. On 26 May, we mobilised €2,5 billion with €595 million of grants at a pledging event hosted by the EU and Spain to step up emergency assistance, including to the displaced population in the region.

The final specific case I want to mention is that of Hong Kong. As EU we are deeply concerned with steps taken by China regarding National Security Legislation in Hong Kong. This is not in conformity with international commitments, nor the Hong Kong Basic Law.

CONCLUSION – THE NEED FOR MULTILATERALISM TO DELIVER

Beyond these specific situations, it is important to close with some wider more strategic reflections.

The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the fragilities of a hyper-globalised and interdependent world. We must learn the wider lessons and take seriously how human health and planetary health are linked - and how existing inequalities are making us more vulnerable. If we want to “build back better” we must recommit to the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The EU is doing its part – and we count on others to meet their obligations too.

We also know that climate change is affecting security around the world, acting as a threat multiplier. That is why we fully support efforts to put this climate and security nexus on the agenda of the Security Council.

My main message to the UN Security Council was this: the EU remains deeply attached to the rules-based international order, to multilateralism and to the UN. We support the UN, not only with words, although they do matter. But with concrete actions and contributions across the three pillars of the UN - and especially on peace and security. Precisely because we believe in multilateralism, we want the Security Council to be able to act. All states should uphold the founding values of the UN, starting from those bearing the special responsibilities of Security Council membership.

Multilateralism must deliver results for the people who need it most. Otherwise, it loses legitimacy, while unilateralism and power politics gain the upper hand. The world needs a revitalised multilateral system. But this will only happen if we all invest in it. The EU is doing this – we count on those who sit on the Security Council to do their part.