



EUROPE IN THE 'ARC OF FIRE'

EU FOREIGN POLICY IN 2024

JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES



European Union
★ EXTERNAL ACTION



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JOSEP BORRELL FONTELLES

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

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EUROPE IN THE 'ARC OF FIRE'

We have given this title to this book dedicated to the year 2024 because the events we have had to face during the last several months have – unfortunately – confirmed the diagnosis made earlier: Europe is in danger.

Our geopolitical environment is deteriorating, and conflicts and crises are multiplying on our doorstep. From Ukraine to the Middle East, via South Caucasus, the Horn of Africa or the Sahel. Not forgetting, further afield but with major potential consequences for our economies, the rising tensions in the South China Sea. All of this against a backdrop where the future US commitment to European security is becoming much more uncertain.

As for the two open conflicts raging on our doorstep, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East, we struggled this year in making progress towards a just and lasting settlement of each of them.

We have continued our financial, humanitarian and military support for Ukraine. We have now committed €122 billion for this purpose, including €45 billion in military support. We have also just decided to use the revenues from frozen Russian assets to guarantee this aid to Ukraine for the future. But despite all that, we have not managed to provide Ukraine with sufficient resources to protect itself from the constant air attacks on its civilian and energy infrastructures. The winter is going to be very harsh for Ukrainians, with massive power cuts. Nor have we managed to provide sufficient support to Ukraine, particularly on the ammunition side, to enable it to prevent the Russian army from continuing its advance into Donetsk, let alone take back lost territory. In the autumn, the direct intervention of North Korean soldiers on the Russian side marked a dangerous escalation, and constitutes a very worrying step towards the internationalisation of the conflict.

Russia's war of aggression is an existential threat to the EU

I have already said it many times: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is an existential threat to the European Union. If Vladimir Putin's Russia were to win in

Ukraine, it would inevitably pursue its imperial policy against other neighbours, particularly in Europe. And we have already seen the effects of this aggressive policy in Georgia and Moldova. Beyond Europe, if we fail to help Ukraine defend its sovereignty, the entire rules-based world order that we have sought to promote globally will be brought down.

Many have been saying over and over again since February 2022 that Russia's aggression against Ukraine was a wake-up call for Europe. But as political scientist Ivan Krastev rightly said a few weeks ago, in a debate in which I took part, there is a difference between being awake and getting out of bed to act. And it seems that many in Europe have certainly been woken up by Vladimir Putin's aggression against Ukraine, but have not yet really got out of bed.

Yet it is all the more urgent to do so now that the commitment of the United States, not only in Ukraine but for Europe's security as a whole, has become more uncertain for the future with the re-election of Donald Trump to the White House. We have no choice: it is imperative that we become capable of ensuring our own security. Our well-being and future cannot continue to depend on the mood of US voters in the Midwest every four years. This means, in particular, revitalising our defence industries, which have been greatly weakened by 30 years of 'silent disarmament' since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Our defence budgets have already increased significantly in recent years, particularly our spending on equipment, which has risen by one third since 2022. Nevertheless, despite Russia's aggression against Ukraine, progress has been slow to date in coordinating our supplies of military equipment: only 18 % of our purchases are currently made in a cooperative manner, whereas several years ago we had already set ourselves a target of 35 % – twice as much. What is more, our defence industry has not been able until now to keep pace with our rearmament effort, either quantitatively or qualitatively: since 2022, almost 80 % of additional military equipment has been purchased outside the EU.

Consolidating and boosting our defence industries

If we want to be able to replenish the stocks of our armed forces, support Ukraine at the necessary level, reduce our excessive external dependence and prepare for the future by developing the defence equipment of tomorrow, we urgently need to boost our defence industries.

Since 2022, we have already doubled our artillery ammunition production capacity, thanks in particular to the efforts of my colleague Commissioner Thierry Breton, but we still need to do more in this sector and duplicate this effort in others. We have a quantitative but also a qualitative problem in many domains that will be decisive for the future, like artificial intelligence and drones.

That is why, in spring 2024, we prepared and presented, with the European Commission, the first-ever European defence industry strategy. But we still need to find the means to implement it. The Draghi report puts the effort required at €500 billion over the next 10 years. To mobilise these resources, we first need to remove the existing obstacles to private financing of defence industries and enable the European Investment Bank to provide greater support for defence projects. But this will not be enough: significant amounts of European public money will also be needed.

The urgent need for financial support for our defence

Can we wait until 2028 and the next European multiannual financial framework to start supporting our defence industry more substantially than we do today? I do not think so. As we decided in the face of the major emergency represented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the existential threat posed to Europe by the aggression of Putin's Russia would, in my view, clearly justify issuing European common debt to deal with it, to support our defence and our defence industry. I am well aware of how politically sensitive the subject is, but at a time when the US commitment to European security is becoming more and more uncertain, I do not see any possible alternative that is equal to the needs.

In the new Commission, there will be a dedicated Commissioner for Defence. In practice, however, it will be more a Commissioner for the defence industry, which indeed needs better coordination and an active boost. For this effort to be effective, this Commissioner will have to work in close cooperation with the HR/VP who is in charge of EU security and defence policy. It is indeed essential to coordinate precisely what we do on the demand side of European armies, managed by the HR/VP via the European Defence Agency in particular, and on the supply side, via the specific industrial policy of the Commission.

As far as the Middle East conflict is concerned, the fighting has continued, while moving towards a just and lasting settlement to this century-old conflict remains more elusive than ever. Throughout the year, we have consistently called for a

ceasefire and the unconditional release of the hostages, and we have increased our humanitarian support to Gaza.

But in the end, we have not made a real difference. We failed to prevent the civilian death toll from rising month by month, to prevent the humanitarian situation in Gaza from becoming catastrophic, to prevent tensions from escalating in the West Bank and the Palestinian Authority from teetering on the brink of collapse, to prevent Israel from taking catastrophic decisions for the Palestinians by severing all ties with UNRWA, to prevent the war from spreading in the region with the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and the successive Iranian strikes and Israeli retaliation. We could not, in particular, avoid the fourth invasion of Lebanon, accompanied by widespread destruction and a massive exodus of people in a country that was already on the verge of collapse.

At the end of 2024, it is hard to be optimistic about the future of the Middle East. Support for a two-state solution has weakened across the region. Both sides are now dominated by those who believe that only a military solution can bring peace. But this is an illusion: war and violence can only fuel an endless spiral of revenge, with ever more deadly confrontations.

Europe should play a greater role in the Middle East conflict

I am absolutely convinced that Europe could and should play a greater role in both stopping the current conflict and achieving a negotiated peace in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We are the leading provider of international aid to the Palestinian people, through our support for UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority. We are also Israel's leading trade, investment and people-exchange partner under an association agreement that is the most extensive we have in the world. Some of our Member States are also major suppliers of arms to Israel. In other words, if we wanted to influence the players in this conflict to bring about a ceasefire and resume peace negotiations, we have the means of doing so, even if we are obviously not as powerful as the Americans in this region.

But for the time being, we have essentially given up using these levers because of our deep divisions on this very sensitive issue. In any of the UN General Assembly votes on Gaza and the Middle East issue, the EU Member States have been divided between three different positions. The consequences of this failure and of our resulting passivity could be very serious for the Union. This conflict is already heightening tensions within our own societies, as illustrated by the disastrous events in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in November 2024. It could

trigger a new wave of refugees seeking to reach Europe and threaten our fossil fuel supplies, which, since the start of the war of aggression against Ukraine, have been even more dependent than before on the stability of that part of the world.

Above all, the contrast between our passivity in the face of events in the Middle East and our strong commitment to supporting Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression, even if it remains insufficient, is very often perceived outside Europe as the expression of a double standard: non-EU citizens often believe that for us the life of a Palestinian child is not worth as much as that of a Ukrainian child. This is obviously not true: the vast majority of Europeans absolutely do not think this way. But the reality of our actions on the one hand and our inaction on the other can give such an impression, which is widely exploited against us by Russian propaganda and disinformation in the countries of what is now known as the Global South. And this does not just concern Muslim countries. I have been struck by the vigour with which this criticism is regularly levelled at us in Latin America or sub-Saharan Africa.

We must avoid the consolidation of the 'rest against the West'

There is a serious risk that this conflict could help to solidify a coalition of the 'rest against the West', as unfortunately illustrated in October by the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia. We have also seen such a risk materialise in the Sahel region in recent months. After 11 years of presence in the region, our last cooperation mission had to leave Mali last spring.

Of course, it is still too early to assess what the foreign policy of Donald Trump's second presidency will be, but in a way, the United States could afford a truly isolationist policy. It is independent in terms of fossil fuel production, has plenty of raw materials on its territory and has only two neighbours, Canada and Mexico. This is not the case for the European Union. We could not at all afford a combination of the existential threat posed by Vladimir Putin's authoritarian and imperialist regime in the East of Europe and a widespread hostility from our neighbours in the southern Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa.

Europe's leaders naturally tend to focus mainly on the internal problems facing our economies and societies and the reactions they provoke among Europe's citizens. And of course nobody can blame them for that. But we need to ensure that this does not lead to actions that could damage our relations with the rest of the world. That would be a mortal danger for the future of the European Union.

It is on the contrary my job to improve these relations, and I have continued to work relentlessly in that direction throughout this year. Even if the results have not been sufficient at this stage in the Ukrainian conflict or in the Middle East, as I have just pointed out, they have been more positive elsewhere in 2024.

During my whole mandate, I have worked hard to develop our other transatlantic relationship and to bring the European Union closer together with Latin America and the Caribbean. And I am satisfied that this year, after 19 years of negotiations, we should be able to finalise the trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur, with the necessary adjustments to better protect the environment and fight climate change. This is about much more than just trade; it is above all a geopolitical issue. Europe has long-standing and close ties with this part of the world; however, over the last few decades we have rested on our laurels. And other global players have taken advantage of this to become privileged partners of this part of the world.

The world's centre of gravity is shifting to Asia

Similarly, even though the Russian war of aggression and the conflict in the Middle East continue to focus our attention, we have never lost sight of the fact that the world's centre of gravity is shifting towards Asia and the Indo-Pacific, and that the European Union had to become more involved in this part of the world, even if it is far away from our borders. North Korea's direct involvement alongside Putin's Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine has just reminded us how closely linked all the crisis theatres are in this globalised world.

Against this backdrop, this year I pursued our commitment to strengthening our links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations during a visit to Vientiane in Laos in July, and in November we were able to conclude two new security and defence partnerships, the first outside Europe, with Japan and South Korea. The European Union was not born as a military alliance but, in the current context, it can and must become a global security provider and a security partner in areas such as maritime security, the fight against cyber threats or foreign information manipulation and interference.

My term of office is coming to an end in a few days. In 2019, during my confirmation hearing, I told the Members of the European Parliament that my priority would be for Europe to learn to 'speak the language of power'. I am well aware that this learning process is still far from complete. But I have worked for that to the best

of my ability over the last five years, and I am very grateful to have had this opportunity to serve the citizens of the EU.

Brussels, 11 November 2024

1.

WORKING FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THE URGENCY OF PUTTING AN END TO THE FIGHTING IN GAZA

13 January 2024 – Blog post. *In the first days of 2024, I travelled to Lebanon and Saudi Arabia to discuss with our regional partners ways to put an end to the fighting in Gaza and prevent the conflict from spreading in the region.*

Having already been to the region three times since 7 October, I chose to start 2024 with a new mission to the Middle East. The ongoing tragedy in Gaza and the risks of this conflict spreading are indeed the most urgent geopolitical issues we have to deal with.

With 23 000 Palestinians dead – the vast majority of them women and children – according to the Palestinian health authorities, and an increasingly catastrophic humanitarian situation for the more than 2 million inhabitants of the enclave – almost all of whom are now displaced – there is an urgent need to put an end to the fighting and release all hostages. All the more so as heightened tensions on the Lebanese border as well as the attacks carried out in the Red Sea by the Yemeni Houthi rebels are exacerbating the risk of the conflict spreading. The EU needs to become more united and proactive in helping to solve the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians – and to do so in close coordination with our regional partners.

Lebanon is in a deep political, economic and social crisis

My first stop was Lebanon, where I met [Prime Minister Najib Mikati](#), [Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri](#), [Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib](#), [Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces Joseph Aoun](#) and Member of Parliament Mohammad Raad, head of the Hezbollah parliamentary group. I also [met Lieutenant General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, who commands the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon \(Unifil\)](#), the UN force responsible for monitoring the Israeli–Lebanese border.

Even before 7 October, Lebanon had been going through a deep political, economic and social crisis. The country also continues to host more than [2 million Syrian refugees](#). Given Lebanon's total population of 5.6 million, it is indeed a heavy burden, despite the significant assistance provided to refugees and their host communities by the EU and other partners.

Unfortunately, [since my last visit to Lebanon in 2021](#), the political crisis remains unsolved – the country is still without a president and has only a caretaker government – and the economic and social crisis has continued to deepen as a result of political uncertainty and the absence of [an agreement with the International Monetary Fund](#).

However, the Lebanese parliament recently [prolonged the mandate of General Aoun](#) as head of the Lebanese army, the main institution effectively promoting unity and stability in the country. This brings some hope in the current dramatic national and regional context. I encouraged my interlocutors to continue along this path, particularly with regard to the election of a president.

I conveyed to all my interlocutors the EU's deep concern at the risk of seeing Lebanon drawn into a conflict with Israel, and our desire to help prevent such a disastrous development. All of them, including the representative of Hezbollah, told me they were equally eager to avoid being pulled into such a downward spiral.

The main area of tension concerns the violations by both parties of [UN Security Council Resolution 1701](#), adopted after the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. The demarcation of the Lebanese–Israeli border and the presence of Hezbollah forces along it are critical points that require intense diplomatic efforts. In my discussion with Lieutenant General Lázaro Sáenz, we explored ways of strengthening [the role of Unifil](#) – to which a large number of EU Member States already contribute troops. The EU is also ready to support the Lebanese Armed Forces in order to increase their capacity to control this border.

Following [the agreement reached in 2022 between Israel and Lebanon](#) on the delimitation of their maritime border, all my Lebanese counterparts agreed in principle with the idea of negotiations with Israel on the delimitation of the land border and the associated security guarantees. However, all of them stressed also that stopping the hostilities in Gaza would be a prerequisite for this.

The dramatic situation in Gaza

I then had a [videoconference with Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini, who heads the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East \(UNRWA\)](#), the UN agency in charge since 1949 of providing aid to Palestinian refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Our conversation focused on the situation in Gaza, where [1.9 million people, who make up 85 % of the population, have been forcibly displaced](#) as a result of

the continuous fighting and the massive destruction in the enclave by the Israeli army. Of these, 1.4 million are being cared for by UNRWA.

Three UNRWA staff members posted in Gaza also took part in our discussion, providing a first-hand account of the dramatic situation they are witnessing, with thousands of refugees left without any shelter in the middle of winter, their only protection being a few plastic sheets, and with the risk of becoming collateral victims of bombing by the Israeli army. These people are in desperate need of food, water, medicine and healthcare, but humanitarian aid is still arriving in a piecemeal fashion amid the ongoing fighting. Beyond bombs and bullets, famine and epidemics are beginning to threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

The EU fully supports UNRWA

I conveyed to Commissioner-General Lazzarini our full support for the work carried out by UNRWA under these appalling circumstances, expressing our condolences for the loss of nearly 150 staff members in Gaza since 7 October. I also expressed my determination to [defend the agency against the unfair accusations](#) to which it is sometimes subjected. Last February, the European Commission advanced the disbursement of aid allocated to UNRWA for 2023, and by the end of the year we finally supplemented this with an additional €10 million to help with the acute crisis in Gaza. I am hopeful that we will be able to similarly advance the disbursement of aid for 2024.

The absolutely tragic situation experienced by the civilian population in Gaza is unfortunately not always sufficiently known in Europe, not least because Western journalists do not have access to the enclave and many Palestinian journalists have lost their lives since 7 October. Despite recent efforts to increase the flow of aid, it remains woefully inadequate. This failure shows, if any proof were needed, that only a lasting suspension of the fighting can truly improve the situation of the civilian population.

The EU and the international community firmly oppose any forced displacement of the Gaza population to outside the enclave. However, the vast majority of the people there have already been forcibly displaced from their destroyed houses and are now surviving in the middle of the rubble. If we don't want them to starve or die under the bombs, it is necessary to halt the fighting in order to be able to distribute the massive amount of humanitarian aid urgently needed and organise the release of the hostages. Otherwise the population of the enclave will not have

any other solution than to try to escape the trap that Gaza has become. And this is probably what some members of the Israeli government are aiming for when they talk about getting rid of the Palestinians of Gaza.

Saudi Arabia, a partner in reviving the Middle East peace process

I subsequently travelled to Saudi Arabia, where [I met Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, the kingdom's Minister of Foreign Affairs](#), and [Jasem Mohamed AlBudaiwi, the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council](#). Even before 7 October, Saudi Arabia had been one of our main partners – alongside Jordan, Egypt and the League of Arab States – in trying to revive the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations and the two-state solution. This partnership culminated in [an important meeting last September in New York](#), held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Beyond the Israeli–Palestinian issue, Saudi Arabia is also a major partner to the EU in many other areas, especially climate and energy.

With my Saudi interlocutors, I discussed the situation in Gaza. Our analyses converged on several critical points: the need for a rapid end to the fighting and the release of hostages, the need to avoid the forced displacement of Palestinians to outside the enclave and the need for a rapid withdrawal of Israeli forces at the end of the military operation.

We also discussed the risks of the conflict spreading to the wider region. This included the precarious situation in the Red Sea as a result of attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant ships. The Red Sea is indeed a major global supply route, accounting for around 10 % of global maritime traffic and 20 % of global consumer goods and container shipping traffic – and these figures are even higher when considering trade destined specifically for Europe. A prolonged blockade would lead to significant price hikes on imported products as a result of the additional costs generated by the need to reroute ships around the whole of Africa.

Saudi Arabia is in advanced talks for a peace deal in Yemen and wants to avoid the conflict in Gaza jeopardising this prospect. For our part, we are discussing options to help restore freedom of navigation, including the creation of a new European maritime operation alongside Operation Atalanta, which is already operating off the coast of Somalia. Immediately after coming back to Brussels I presented this proposal to EU Member States.

We also discussed Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran following the normalisation of diplomatic relations in March 2023, as well as our parallel efforts with the

Iranian authorities to prevent them from contributing to a regional escalation of the conflict. I also [met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken](#), who was in the country at the same time, to compare notes on our meetings in the region. We exchanged views following our respective efforts to de-escalate and end the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and strengthen the role of the United Nations.

The urgency of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

Returning from this mission, my conviction has only deepened that it is urgent for the EU to intensify its involvement in resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. At the same time, I am also more convinced than ever of the feasibility of doing so in close cooperation with our regional partners.

Since 7 October, there have been divergent views within the EU on how to react to the conflict in Gaza. This lack of consensus has weakened the EU in the region and prevented us from having influence on events, despite the fact that we are very directly impacted by this conflict and its consequences.

Now, the time has come for us to unite and shoulder our responsibility to push for an end to the hostilities in Gaza and work with our regional and international partners to actively pursue the implementation of the two-state solution, advocated by the international community and all EU Member States. A sustainable peace will not return to Israel, Palestine and the region if we do not make rapid progress on this path.

However, the initiative to revive the Middle East peace process we launched together with our regional partners only weeks before 7 October obviously needs to be thoroughly recalibrated in light of today's context. To help define our common way forward, I have invited the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, as well as the Secretary-General of the Arab League, to take part in the next Foreign Affairs Council on 22 January. I have also sent an invitation to the foreign ministers of Israel and Palestine. I hope that it will lead to a fruitful exchange between the Europeans and the main regional actors and contribute to strengthening the peace efforts.

IN GAZA, A PURELY MILITARY SOLUTION WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEMS

15 January 2024 – Op-ed. *In an article for the French daily Le Monde, I proposed a plan to prevent the Israeli–Palestinian conflict spreading to Lebanon and to break the spiral of violence in the Middle East.*

Just over three months after the tragedy of 7 October, I returned from the Middle East concerned by the gravity of the situation, but more determined than ever to make the voice of balance, reason and realism heard. For although the problems are complex, war is only inevitable for those who have a political interest in perpetuating it.

In the current context, there are three priorities. The first is to prevent the Israeli–Palestinian conflict spreading to Lebanon at all costs. The second is to alleviate the catastrophic situation in Gaza while resuming serious negotiations to free the Israeli hostages. The third is to pave the way for a settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, starting by putting an end to the violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. While these three issues obviously have their own dynamics, in reality they are totally intertwined.

On the Lebanese–Israeli border, exchanges of fire between the Israeli army and Hezbollah are increasing. Of course, everyone I spoke to was convinced of the catastrophic nature of a potential conflict. It would explode an already bloody Lebanon and prevent the return of people from the Israeli and Lebanese borders. But history bears witness to wars that break out without necessarily being premeditated. There is no insurmountable territorial conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

What's more, there is a legal basis for an accommodation. This is Resolution 1701. It presupposes a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Hezbollah forces behind the Litani River, Israel's respect for Lebanese airspace and the opening of indirect negotiations on the territorial dispute between the two countries, which in reality is limited in scope. This could be done immediately. And the European Union is ready to help.

Appalling humanitarian situation

If not, the conflagration in the region will be cataclysmic and the Lebanese people will once again pay a terrible price. This will increase tensions, encourage spoilers

and delay the search for a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in Gaza and beyond.

It is precisely in Gaza that the epicentre of the regional crisis lies. The humanitarian situation there is appalling. Today, more than 80 % of the population has already been displaced within the Gaza Strip. The absolute priority is to prevent any further de facto forced displacement from the enclave, which is illegal under international law and morally unacceptable. Near the town of Rafah alone, on the border with Egypt, more than 250 000 people are currently living in inhumane conditions.

We must alleviate their suffering by speeding up the flow of food, and therefore trucks, into the Gaza Strip. As we know, not enough lorries are allowed in. Their entry is hampered both by the cumbersome nature of the inspections, as US Senator Chris Van Hollen was able to see on the ground, and by the security conditions. This is why it is vital to reduce the intensity of the fighting and then suspend it. We must also contribute to a gradual return to a cash economy if we do not want the population to remain totally dependent on international aid for survival.

In this context, I would like to pay tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, whose contribution is absolutely essential, and whose criticisms seem to me to be unjustified. Calling into question the work of a United Nations agency is a serious act. And, if those who criticise it have arguments, they must back them up with evidence. International law cannot be invoked in Ukraine and flouted in Gaza. International law is a whole, and respect for the United Nations is an integral part of that whole.

Otherwise the virulent criticism of double standards will grow. And it is Ukraine that will pay the price. At the same time, negotiations on the Israeli hostages must resume in earnest. It is unrealistic for Israel to suspend its military operations without tangible guarantees that Hamas will release the Israeli hostages.

A political solution must then take over. Israel cannot remain in Gaza forever. And we all know that a purely military solution will not suffice if it does not lead to a political project.

Turning tragedy into opportunity

This is why I agree with former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert's suggestion that Israel should give priority to withdrawing from Gaza once all the hostages have been released. After that, an interim Palestinian Authority supported by the

international community should be set up. The fact that there are political forces in Israel in favour of a negotiated solution rather than a purely military one is encouraging. And I will continue to engage in dialogue with them, as well as with Palestinian and Arab forces.

During my trip to Saudi Arabia, my interlocutors agreed to continue the joint efforts led by the Arab countries and the European Union to find a political solution to the conflict. I must emphasise the constructive attitude of many Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, in addressing the security concerns of all parties, including Israel. The resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the only obstacle on the road to full normalisation between the Arab states and Israel. There is a real possibility of turning tragedy into opportunity.

An interim arrangement should be validated this time by the UN Security Council. This will give it strong legitimacy by making it credible in the eyes of the Palestinian population, Israel and future donors, none of whom will commit to the reconstruction of Gaza if a clear perspective towards two states is not defined beforehand. There are credible partners for peace in both Israel and Palestine.

A global political solution must be negotiated

At the end of this transition, a global political solution including Gaza and the West Bank must be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinian state, with the support of the international community. This presupposes a halt to settlement on the West Bank.

There are two lessons to be learned from the failure of the 1993 Oslo Accords. The first is that the two-state solution to the conflict must be established from the outset. The second is not to rely solely on the Israelis and the Palestinians to come to an agreement. The conditions for peace must be applied and guaranteed by the entire international community. This seems difficult at the moment. But that is all the more reason to get started. A task in which Europe must play a full part, not just as a spectator.

A PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

26 January 2024 – Blog post. *At our Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) we invited the foreign ministers of Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan as well as the Secretary-General of the Arab League to discuss how to alleviate the dramatic humanitarian situation in Gaza, free the hostages and implement the two-state solution. We also discussed the situation in Ukraine with Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba.*

Last Monday we had our monthly FAC. Each FAC is a defining moment for EU foreign policy, because it is when all 27 EU foreign ministers can exchange views and take decisions. However, this FAC was a particularly significant one since we had invited the Israeli foreign minister, Israel Katz, and his Palestinian counterpart, Riyad al-Maliki, to address the ministers, at two separate moments, as well as a delegation from the League of Arab States, including the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Jordan Ayman Safadi, and Egypt, Sameh Shoukry, and the secretary-general of the organisation, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, to discuss with us the situation in the region and the way forward towards a lasting peace.

To have succeeded in bringing together in Brussels the ministers of the EU-27 and those of the main regional players is a recognition of the role that the EU can play to address both current emergencies and longer-term political solutions in the Middle East conflict if it has the political will to do so.

The catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza

The most urgent issue that we discussed was of course the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, as described recently by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Security Council. Since the 7 October, 25 000 people have been killed and more than 60 000 injured in the enclave, a vast majority of them being children and women. The level of physical destruction in Gaza is unimaginable. The humanitarian situation of the 2 million surviving Gazans is dramatic, with widespread hunger and a lack of access to water, healthcare and almost all basic commodities. The delivery of aid remains massively insufficient,

with less than 100 trucks entering the enclave every day compared with 500 before the war.

During our meeting, all EU foreign ministers and I once again reiterated our common condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, of the atrocities committed by Hamas in southern Israel on 7 October. However, the current situation in Gaza cannot be an acceptable price to pay for the fight against Hamas. Humanitarian assistance cannot become subject to political negotiations. We urged the Israeli minister to do much more to ensure the protection of civilians and of humanitarian personnel and infrastructure, including that of UNRWA, open new access points and speed up the control of trucks.

In the West Bank, unprecedented levels of settler violence and settlement expansion threaten and destroy Palestinian communities and EU-funded humanitarian projects. Again, we asked the Israeli minister to halt these practices that violate international and humanitarian law.

More civilian deaths, more destruction and more hardship for the Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank cannot help defeat Hamas and bring more security to Israel. On the contrary. It is absolutely urgent to stop the fighting in Gaza to avoid more civilian casualties, provide sufficient humanitarian assistance and free the 136 hostages still held by Hamas.

We also discussed the serious risk of a regional spillover of this war. The situation along Israel's northern border is very concerning. All actors must avoid miscalculations. For my part, [I conveyed this message to all my interlocutors in Lebanon recently](#), including the leader of the Hezbollah parliamentary group. He insisted that Hezbollah does not want an escalation but will not stop until the Gaza war ends. On Monday, we exchanged views with our regional interlocutors on effective ways for de-escalation.

The critical escalation risk in the Red Sea

The other critical escalation risk is currently coming from the Red Sea. In recent weeks, I have spoken regularly with the Iranian leadership and called on them to show restraint and use their influence to prevent escalation in the Red Sea and elsewhere in the region. The EU also supported the UN Security Council resolution condemning Houthi attacks. During the FAC, we discussed the launch of a new defensive EU naval mission to protect commercial vessels in the Red Sea. The

principle was accepted, but we still have some homework to do to finalise this new mission. I hope we'll be able to launch it very soon.

During the FAC, the Israeli foreign minister presented us with two videos: one about an artificial island to be built off the coast of Gaza to accommodate a port, and the other about a railway line that would allow the transport of goods from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean. I have to say that, like many of our ministerial colleagues, I was quite surprised by this choice of the Israeli minister, which seemed rather out of step with the urgent issues we have to deal with and the decisions that need to be made to address them.

With the Palestinian foreign minister, we reiterated the support of the EU for the Palestinian Authority, which should play a major role in Gaza after the war. At the end 2023, we finally unblocked €118 million to support the Palestinian Authority. Although its contribution has been slightly declining in recent years, the European Union remains, with almost €1.2 billion for 2021–2024, the biggest provider of external assistance to the Palestinians and we will continue being so.

EU–Arab League joint efforts to revive the two-state solution

With our regional partners, we also discussed the 'post-war' Gaza and our joint effort to revive the political process towards the two-state solution. The EU position is well known: Gaza cannot remain occupied by Israel or be ruled by Hamas, and there should be no territorial changes or displacement of people. Its future should be closely linked to the implementation of the two-state solution, with a sovereign Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace side by side with the state of Israel.

We should indeed stop talking about the Middle East peace process and speak now of the two-state solution implementation process, because the events of the last months have clearly shown that it will not be possible to maintain a lasting peace in the region without implementing the two-state solution, which the international community and the EU have been advocating for decades. It is clear, however, and our discussion on Monday confirmed it once more, that for the time being this result cannot be achieved by the parties to the conflict alone.

During the last few decades, the inaction of the international community has led to too much unspeakable suffering. We cannot repeat the same mistake. The international community has the duty to engage actively in this peace process

and set a clear framework requiring the Israelis and the Palestinians to negotiate the path towards the commonly agreed result.

In this context, we discussed with our regional Arab partners the possibility of holding a peace conference in the coming months, building on the efforts in which [we had already engaged with them, particularly in the meeting organised last September in New York](#), some weeks before 7 October. I also shared with the EU Member States a proposal for a comprehensive approach to re-initiate this peace process. We will work further on this matter in the coming weeks.

The war of aggression against Ukraine remains a top priority

During our council we also discussed, as we do every month, the war of aggression against Ukraine. It remains of course a top priority because the Russian aggression represents a vital threat to Europe's security. In 2023, Russia made virtually no progress on the battlefield, suffering a lot of casualties. Ukraine has managed to achieve important successes, notably in the Black Sea, where the Russian fleet has been obliged to withdraw. However, ahead of his planned re-election in March, Vladimir Putin continues massively attacking Ukraine every day with thousands of shells, drones and missiles.

Via videoconference, our colleague Dmytro Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, informed us of the latest developments on the ground. The ministers agreed that the moment has not come to weaken our support for Ukraine and that we need on the contrary to do more and be faster with financial resources, military equipment, training for soldiers and so on. I will travel to Ukraine in February and we are continuing to work on predictable assistance for the years to come. We should reach an agreement in the coming days on a top-up of €5 billion for the European Peace Facility in order to establish a Ukraine Assistance Fund at the facility, based on a new approach to incentivising the military support of EU Member States for Ukraine. We are also finalising our work on the immobilised Russian assets, and I make a strong push for this decision to be taken before the next FAC.

Finally, we also exchanged on the tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. We expressed in particular our solidarity with France, whose diplomats have been expelled from Azerbaijan, and asked Azerbaijan to return to substantive peace and normalisation talks with Armenia.

I hope that our meeting with the main regional players in the Middle East conflict will enable progress to be made both on the immediate emergency of stopping

the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and on advancing on the way towards putting in place the two-state solution. But what I am sure of is that the EU can, and must, play a central role in helping to resolve a conflict that directly concerns its future.

DEFUNDING UNRWA WOULD BE BOTH DISPROPORTIONATE AND DANGEROUS

4 February 2024 – Blog post. *After allegations against employees of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the agency has launched an investigation. While some important donors have suspended funding, there has been a wide recognition that UNRWA is central to providing vital aid in Gaza. Defunding the agency would put hundreds of thousands of lives at risk.*

This has been an intense week. Starting with the Investors Forum for EU–Central Asia Transport Connectivity, the informal council of defence ministers, the European Council meeting, the EU–Indo-Pacific and EU–Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meetings, and finally the informal Foreign Affairs Council on Saturday. Throughout all of those events, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza featured prominently, in particular the issue of the future funding of UNRWA after allegations made by Israel that at least 12 employees of UNRWA – the United Nations agency responsible for supporting Palestinian refugees – participated in the atrocious Hamas-led attack on 7 October.

No one responsible for 7 October should go unpunished

The allegations against UNRWA staff are serious and no one responsible should go unpunished. However, UNRWA reacted immediately and the contracts of the accused staff members were terminated. An investigation by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services is under way and I am confident that it will be complemented by the start of an independent external investigation before the next payment from the European Commission is due at the end of the month. UN Secretary-General António Guterres has assured me that the United Nations is giving the issue the importance it deserves. I fully trust him.

The last meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council saw wide recognition that UNRWA is an irreplaceable supplier of life-saving aid to the Palestinians. While some important donors and some EU Member States have indeed suspended their financial contributions, the issue has been accompanied by misunderstandings and disinformation. In fact, neither the European Commission, nor Germany or France have decided to end their contributions. Some EU Member States will even

frontload and increase their payments. I have invited UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini to attend the next Foreign Affairs Council on development on 12 February and expect the UN's coordinator in Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, to debrief the Foreign Affairs Council.

While the emotions prompting suspensions of funding are understandable, political responsibility has to look beyond emotions and consider the consequences of such a step. Defunding UNRWA would be both disproportionate and dangerous. UNRWA has been given a very difficult task by the UN General Assembly, including by all EU Member States. The agency is expected to deliver high-quality, low-cost public services in a high-risk environment, employing mainly local staff. In Gaza alone, 13 000 local staff, who are themselves victims of the ongoing humanitarian tragedy, are playing a critical role in distributing food, water and medicine to 1.1 million people suffering from catastrophic hunger and the outbreak of diseases. They are also providing a roof to nearly 1 million displaced people in over 150 emergency shelters and around 23 000 medical consultations per day.

UNRWA's role goes far beyond Gaza

But UNRWA's role goes far beyond the assistance it provides directly to Gaza. It is central to the entire aid operation inside Gaza. No other UN agency, such as the World Food Programme or the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, could manage operations without UNRWA's infrastructure, logistics and personnel. As pointed out by the UN's coordinator in Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, 'It is critical to recognise the central role that UNRWA plays in the Gaza Strip. There is no way that any organisation can replace it.'

Currently, the suspended funds amount to more than \$440 million, almost half of the agency's expected income in 2024, putting its very existence at risk. Should UNRWA cease or limit services, which may be the case as early as the end of February, it would significantly aggravate the ongoing dramatic humanitarian crisis. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, not only in Gaza, are at stake.

Such a disproportionate response would be difficult to conceive elsewhere. If some doctors in a European hospital were involved in criminal activities, there would be a thorough investigation and all appropriate actions would be taken. However, no government would ever stop funding the health service, as this would primarily punish the people who receive these services. The wrongdoing of individuals should never lead to the collective punishment of an entire population.

Moreover, as I discussed this week with some of my counterparts from Arab countries, UNRWA's demise would also be a serious risk for regional stability. The UN agency not only provides essential services in war-torn Gaza but also supplies healthcare, education and other vital services to some 5.6 million Palestinian refugees in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In all its places of operation, it pays salaries to almost 30 000 employees, most of whom are teachers, doctors and nurses. It provides education for about 250 000 children in over 420 schools, food assistance to around 900 000 people and access to healthcare for almost 2 million patients.

UNRWA is critical for the stability of the wider region

In the whole Middle East, UNRWA is perceived as a guarantee of the commitment of the international community to a political solution for Palestinians, and the agency plays a critical role in contributing to the stability of the wider region. Any reduction in UNRWA services would increase pressure on the West Bank and Israel's Arab neighbours at a time of deepening socioeconomic crisis and an increasingly volatile security situation.

Certainly, some prominent members of the current Israeli government would like to see UNRWA closed, as repeatedly stated publicly. They have argued that UNRWA contributes to perpetuating the Palestinian refugee issue by granting refugee status across generations, despite this approach being in accordance with international law. These calls are by no means new; in 2018, they culminated in a suspension of US funding under President Trump, a move that has left the agency financially strained ever since. But suppressing the agency would not make the issue of Palestinian refugees vanish; it would only make it worse.

Members of the Israeli security establishment and civil society have warned that in the absence of UNRWA, Israel would have to step in and play a more direct role in the very challenging task of distributing food, medicine and other essential services. Israel, as the occupying power, has a responsibility for the well-being of the Palestinian people under the Geneva Convention.

Advocating for the end of UNRWA often confuses cause with consequence. The agency's continued existence, since it was established in 1949, has been the direct consequence of the fact that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has never been resolved. We should concentrate all our efforts on addressing this deeper cause and finally implementing the two-state solution advocated by the international community and all EU Member States. UNRWA's mission will automatically end

once a sovereign Palestinian state, living peacefully side by side with Israel, has been established.

I am confident that the UN will take all the necessary measures following the Israeli allegations, and that UNRWA will continue to be a vital lifeline for millions of Palestinian people.

GAZA: STARVATION AND BLOODSHED

5 March 2024 – Blog post. *On 29 February 2024 a bloodbath occurred during food distribution in Gaza. It was the direct consequence of limiting humanitarian assistance to a starving population. It had shown the urgency of ending the fighting, massively increasing humanitarian aid and freeing the remaining hostages.*

On 29 February, thousands of Palestinians rushed towards a convoy bringing aid into the ruins of northern Gaza. They hoped to finally get some food after days of starvation. Instead, more than 100 of them were added to the already devastating death toll of 30 000 Palestinians, mainly women and children, killed in the enclave. Another 700 were injured. This incident, a new chapter in a long list of horrors over the past five months, has shocked the world.

Accounts differ as to what exactly happened: whether the casualties resulted from Israeli gunfire or from a stampede triggered by Israeli soldiers firing warning shots. Regardless of the exact cause, this tragic event illustrates how desperate the situation has become in Gaza after five months of war and siege.

People in Gaza are starving

‘People in Gaza are starving. The conditions are inhumane and our common humanity compels us to act,’ is how US Vice President Kamala Harris summarised it last Sunday. The Israeli armed forces are clearly failing to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and the humanitarian aid flowing into Gaza is totally insufficient.

Across Gaza, civilian infrastructure has been devastated. Almost the entire Palestinian population has been displaced; 1.7 million people are surviving in shelters provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency in charge of helping Palestinian refugees, of which 158 staff members have already been killed. Civil order is collapsing in Gaza and anarchy is spreading.

A recent health report from Johns Hopkins University and the University of London predicts that unless there is a ceasefire and a massive surge in aid very

soon, more than 60 000 additional civilians will die. United Nations Children's Fund Executive Director Catherine Russell reported yesterday that at least 10 children have already died of malnutrition and dehydration and warned that one out of six children in northern Gaza are acutely malnourished. This should weigh heavily on the consciences of all parties involved in the conflict, as well as of the entire international community.

This situation is unacceptable. The ruling by the International Court of Justice last January is legally binding, and Israel must finally abide to it. 'The Israeli government must do more to significantly increase the flow of aid. No excuses,' as US Vice President Kamala Harris rightfully urged.

Jordan, some EU Member States and the United States have started airdropping food into Gaza. While better than nothing, airdrops are far from the most efficient way to provide the urgently needed amount of food to the 2 million people living in Gaza. Israel should allow massive aid to enter Gaza by land. There are airports at only 90 minutes by road from Gaza where aircraft bringing humanitarian aid could land.

Obstacles to humanitarian aid transfer at the Kerem Shalom crossing must be urgently removed, and the Karmi and Erez crossings in the north of Gaza need to be opened for humanitarian aid. Additionally, maritime access should be granted immediately to bring much-needed relief. Airdrops can be a short-term emergency measure, but they cannot replace access by land and sea.

After five months of devastating war and destruction, the actions of the Israeli government in Gaza give the impression that its objectives go beyond destroying Hamas. As Major General Giora Eiland wrote last December in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, there appears to be an effort to 'turn Gaza into a place that is temporarily or permanently impossible to live in'. And indeed almost everything that allows a human society to function has been destroyed: civil register, property register, cultural and health infrastructure, most of the schools built by UNRWA and so on.

Additionally, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, there has been a surge of demolitions, settlement construction and restrictions on movement and access, as well as settler violence since 7 October. All these measures make the lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories very difficult, if not almost impossible. For months, we have been calling on Israel to seriously confront settler violence, release much-needed revenues withheld from the Palestinian Authority and refrain from actions that may aggravate an already explosive situation. So far without success.

The Spanish and Irish governments have asked the European institutions to check whether the Israeli government's current policy complies with the human rights clauses in our association agreement. We will carry out this work.

The responsibility of the international community

Under such circumstances, it is the responsibility of the international community to step in and enforce an immediate end to the fighting in order to stop the humanitarian catastrophe, free the hostages still held by Hamas and protect the civilian population. Now that everyone agrees on this urgent need, the UN Security Council should be able to take a resolution to this effect.

The international community will also have to shift from treating the symptoms to treating the root cause of the current escalation and solve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict itself. Israelis, Palestinians and all peoples of the region deserve to live in security, dignity and stability. We all know that there is only one viable and sustainable way to achieve these objectives: a sovereign, secure and peaceful Palestinian state, alongside a sovereign, secure and peaceful state of Israel. It is the sole guarantee for realising and protecting the rights of both peoples.

The EU is determined to advance on this path, and US President Joe Biden is also working in this direction. Despite the refusal of the Netanyahu government, the international community is united on the question of the two-state solution and will have to advance swiftly in its implementation.

ON THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE RULING REGARDING GAZA

26 May 2024 – Blog post. *In May 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) took a provisional order regarding the situation in Rafah. The EU has constantly supported the ICJ, the highest court of the UN system. Therefore, we asked the Government of Israel to fully respect this court order.*

Last Friday, following the provisional measures already taken on 26 January and 28 March 2024, the ICJ has, by 13 votes to 2, requested the Government of Israel to:

‘immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. Maintain open the Rafah crossing for unhindered provision at scale of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance. Take effective measures to ensure the unimpeded access to the Gaza Strip of any commission of inquiry, fact-finding mission or other investigative body mandated by competent organs of the United Nations to investigate allegations of genocide. Submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to this order, within one month as from the date of this order.’

The highest court of the United Nations system

Those decisions elicit the following remarks. The ICJ is the highest court of the United Nations system. All its member states have the obligation to comply with its decisions. All EU Member States are then bound to them. Disregarding it would be against the rules-based world order we support and promote everywhere. The unconditional respect for and relentless promotion of international law is at the heart of both our identity and our foreign policy. The European Union, built on the ruins left by the two world wars of the 20th century, has always been a strong supporter of the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, notably through courts such as the ICJ in The Hague. We can therefore only emphasise the crucial importance of fully respecting this decision of the ICJ. Introducing caveats, objections or exceptions based on non-legal grounds damages the rules-based order, damages our values and will damage our international standing and weaken

our position on other issues including Ukraine. If one of the parties is not satisfied by the decision of the court, it can of course address a specific request for interpretation, but it cannot disregard the decision.

Those decisions are largely consistent with the requests made publicly for many months by almost all members of the UN, including all permanent members of the UN Security Council and EU Member States. The ICJ decisions are by no means targeting the brave people of Israel, who deserve to live in peace and security side by side with the Palestinian people. The court has recalled in particular its concern over the fate of the hostages abducted during the attack in Israel on 7 October 2023. It found 'deeply troubling that many of these hostages remain in captivity and reiterated its call for their immediate and unconditional release'. From the beginning, freeing the hostages has also been a core demand from the EU.

The deep concerns of the international community

The decision of the ICJ followed the requests for arrest warrants made by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court earlier last week, but is of course not of the same nature. However, they both reflect the deep, constant and mounting concerns of the international community in the face of the catastrophic situation prevailing in Gaza and the urgency of reaching a ceasefire paving the way for a political solution.

On Monday, the Foreign Affairs Council will have the opportunity to extensively discuss the situation in Gaza. This important meeting is taking place at a crucial moment. It will be enhanced by the presence of the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. They will give their assessment of the situation and present their proposals to get out of the deadlock and reach a political solution. We obviously also remain ready to welcome our Israeli counterpart. It is time for the EU to take its responsibilities in the face of a catastrophic situation of an unprecedented magnitude. We have to act. Our moral and political credibility is at risk.

THE IRREPLACEABLE ROLE OF UN AGENCIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

2 September 2024 – Blog post. *During the 23rd edition of the [Quo Vadis Europa? seminar](#) in Santander, we discussed the situation in the Middle East with various stakeholders, including Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA. On that occasion, I reaffirmed the EU's unwavering support for the UN and its agencies in the Middle East. Attacks against the UN system and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are compromising humanitarian operations worldwide.*

I have been organising this seminar for 23 years now within the framework of the [Menéndez Pelayo International University](#). It is an opportunity to step back and engage with academics, think-tankers and actors on the main issues affecting the future of Europe, particularly its foreign and security policy. The EU is facing major challenges resulting from two wars in its immediate neighbourhood and at the same time the consequences of two important elections, with a new European Parliament and leadership and the forthcoming US presidential elections.

During this seminar, we were able to discuss Europe–Africa relations with the former President of Senegal, Macky Sall; the colossal economic and technological challenges facing Europe and the means to tackle them; relations between the United States and China and what these mean for Europe; the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and its implications for European defence; and climate change and the European Green Deal.

It is impossible to give a detailed account of all these rich exchanges. For those interested, [debates were recorded](#) and are available online. However, I would like to revisit one discussion in particular: the one on the current crisis in the Middle East. We discussed this conflict with Jean-Pierre Filiu, professor at Sciences Po Paris and a long-standing specialist in Middle Eastern history and politics; Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA; Fania Oz-Salzberger, professor of history at the University of Haifa; and Dahlia Scheindlin, an international analyst in Tel Aviv.

Jean-Pierre Filiu emphasised that what is generally considered 'realistic' about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has, in fact, never been remotely so. The so-called realists have long claimed that the blockade of Gaza could continue indefinitely

and that the Palestinian issue would eventually resolve itself. A similar idea was expressed by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan a few days before 7 October. When I took my office in Brussels, five years ago, this 'realistic' approach was dominant in the EU: I was advised not to spend too much political energy and capital on an unsolvable issue. However, the terror attacks of 7 October have shown that the status quo was untenable and a looming threat for both the Israeli and Palestinian people. Through their actions or lack thereof, the so-called realists have contributed to the current catastrophe.

In Gaza, the future of Europe is at stake

For Jean-Pierre Filiu, nothing less than the future of Europe is at stake in Gaza. All the principles on which Europe is built are being called into question in this war. If Europe gives up defending, not to say enforcing, international and humanitarian law in Gaza and Palestine, it will lose its credibility. Its international position will be seriously and lastingly weakened, in particular regarding the global support for Ukraine against the Russian war of aggression.

And the United States seems to be no longer in a position to bring peace to the Middle East; they tried repeatedly but have consistently failed to do so in recent decades. However, given the new energy realities, the United States can live without lasting peace in the Middle East. Europe cannot. The Union needs to become much more involved in helping to resolve this conflict. It has many levers to do so but it is so far shying away from using them.

Philippe Lazzarini began by describing the harsh situation on the ground. The horror of the 7 October Hamas attack created a deep collective trauma, leading to an unrestricted Israeli political and military response which is far from respecting international and humanitarian law. Almost 11 months later, Gaza is in a situation that horrifies even the most experienced humanitarian workers. The Geneva Conventions, the moral compass of international humanitarian law, are at risk of becoming irrelevant. And yet Philippe Lazzarini noted a remarkable reluctance within large parts of the international community to take any meaningful action.

In Gaza, more than 200 UNRWA staff have been killed; 190 UNRWA premises have been damaged or destroyed and at least 560 displaced people have been killed while sheltering in UNRWA buildings under the UN flag. The Israeli Defence Forces and Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, have used the agency's premises for military purposes. Clearly marked humanitarian aid convoys have

been shot at despite coordinating their movements with Israeli forces. UN-mandated investigators have not been allowed to visit the country. Draft legislation is being discussed in the Israeli parliament to evict UNRWA from its premises in East Jerusalem, revoke its privileges and immunities and designate it a terrorist organisation. This would be unprecedented: a UN member state designating a UN agency, whose mandate is provided by the UN General Assembly, as a terrorist organisation. This move has to be rejected in the strongest possible terms.

Attacks against UN agencies are weakening humanitarian aid globally

Additionally, since the war in Gaza began, Israeli authorities have systematically barred international journalists from entering and reporting from Gaza, organising a media blackout. Staff of international NGOs and UN entities have been phased out through the non-renewal of their visas. These actions have now been extended to States, with Norwegian diplomats prohibited from operating in the occupied Palestinian territories. If allowed to continue, such attacks against the UN, its agencies and international NGOs will compromise humanitarian operations worldwide and erode multilateralism and the rule of law globally, warned Philippe Lazzarini.

Answering this analysis, the historian Fania Oz-Salzberger described the situation in Israeli society, emphasising the deep trauma caused by the dreadful massacre of 7 October and the depth of the consensus generated among Israeli leadership in favour of a solely military solution to defeat Hamas. She also noted a now deeply rooted distrust among the Israeli population towards the United Nations and UNRWA in particular. According to her, the UN is widely considered to be systematically hostile to Israel, due in particular to the large number of resolutions voted on in this framework. I was really shocked by this emphasis on the rejection of the UN as a whole, not only UNRWA. At the same time, she pointed out that there is also strong mobilisation in Israeli society in favour of a ceasefire in Gaza. She asked Europeans to give more support to this section of Israeli opinion, not only by putting pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu's government but also by stepping up pressure on Hamas and the states that support it.

Dahlia Scheindlin presented us with the results of various surveys carried out in Israel and the occupied territories, which show that support for the two-state solution has plummeted since 2010, when it was as high as 70 %. These polls also show that the Palestinian population's support for the 7 October terrorist attack

and Hamas remains high. In Israel and Palestine, public opinion has undoubtedly become more radical, and antagonisms are stronger than ever.

The EU's unwavering support for the UN and its agencies

For my part, I confirmed the European Union's unwavering support for the United Nations and its agencies, including UNRWA. If there is something to criticise about the United Nations in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, it is not so much the number of resolutions that are passed – these resolutions are directed not against Israel but against specific policies of its government – as their failure to be implemented, particularly those concerning the ceasefire in Gaza and the settlements in the occupied territories.

As for UNRWA, it plays an irreplaceable role in providing vital humanitarian support to Palestinian refugees not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but throughout the whole region. [While some of the agency's staff may indeed have been involved in Hamas's terrorist actions](#), the [report drawn up last spring by Catherine Colonna](#), the former French minister of foreign affairs, clearly showed that the organisation as such was not at fault and that it put in place the necessary measures to combat possible abuses. These measures have since been further strengthened. It is crucial to the future of the rules-based world order that the EU advocate for the United Nations and its agencies to be allowed to operate freely in the region.

Like Jean-Pierre Filiu, I too am convinced that Europe can and must become much more involved in helping to resolve this conflict, which threatens both its own internal stability and that of its immediate neighbourhood, as well as its relations with many countries in the so-called Global South. Our speakers in Santander showed that the level of acceptance of the two-state solution promoted by the EU and the international community is very low today, both in Israel and in the occupied territories. But at different times in the region's history the situation has been very different. Those who oppose the two-state solution have to say which alternative solution they propose. The history of the European Union itself shows that it is possible to overcome long-standing and deep-seated antagonisms.

There is nothing definitive about the current state of affairs if we are able to stop the ongoing Gaza war and to build, with the international community and our partners in the region, a credible framework for a just and lasting peace. I have devoted a great deal of effort to this over the last few months, and I will continue to do so until the end of my mandate.

TWO YEARS AFTER MAHSA AMINI'S DEATH, THE EU STANDS WITH THE IRANIAN PEOPLE

16 September 2024 – Blog post. *In September 2022, Mahsa Amini was killed in police custody in Iran, triggering the dignified 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement. This movement faced brutal repression. At the same time, Iran has also chosen to provide massive support to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Such policies have been answered with successive EU targeted sanctions.*

Two years ago today, Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian woman, was killed in police custody. Her death sparked the huge protest movement 'Women, Life, Freedom', led by women and girls. At least 500 people died and over 20 000 were detained in the brutal crackdown against this movement in 2022 and 2023. According to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council, many of the human rights violations perpetrated against protesters amount to crimes against humanity.

A fresh round of harassment and violence against women

Recently, the renewed hijab crackdown has spurred a fresh round of harassment and violence. The Iranian government has bolstered its surveillance, arresting women and girls for their peaceful activism. According to human rights organisations, Iran executes more women than any other country in the world. The new Iranian administration pledged to ease pressure on civil society and to end the use of force to enforce the hijab, but thus far it has instead presided over a surge in executions.

[The EU stands with Iranian women and people](#) in their ongoing fight for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Since October 2022, [we have adopted 10 sanctions packages](#) against those responsible for this brutal repression. They currently concern 227 individuals, including several ministers, prominent members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), governors, judges, prison guards and directors, and 42 entities, including the IRGC, the Iranian morality police, the ministries of culture and education, prisons and the state broadcaster Press TV. These persons and entities are banned from travelling to the EU and their assets in Europe are frozen. We have also forbidden the sale to Iran of any material or

services that could be used in the repression. In addition, the Council of the EU is currently discussing the possibility of designating the IRGC as a terrorist organisation.

Since the beginning of my mandate, despite all tensions and controversies, we have maintained regular contact with the Iranian authorities. Diplomacy is the way of settling international issues with people with whom you disagree. I have done so in particular because, as coordinator of the 2015 agreement on the Iranian nuclear program (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), I had the duty to try to preserve the very possibility of nuclear diplomacy with Iran after Donald Trump abruptly withdrew the United States from this agreement in 2018.

The fight against nuclear proliferation, a priority for the EU

I have often been criticised for this endeavour, but I am profoundly convinced that the fight against nuclear proliferation is and must remain one of the main foreign policy priorities of the European Union and of the international community. With Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, we can unfortunately see the risks to world peace and global stability when authoritarian regimes devoid of all scruples and determined to defy international law are in possession of nuclear weapons. However, so far we have not been successful in this regard.

Instead of recognising the efforts made by the EU to help bring Iran back into the community of nations, the Iranian regime has decided to support the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. First by supplying large quantities of drones to Russia and now by delivering ballistic missiles. Following this delivery, as we repeatedly warned our Iranian counterparts, we will have to again use the [specific sanctions framework against Iran's support for Russia's war](#) created in 2023. I have proposed new restrictive measures to our EU Member States under that framework, including banning the Iranian airline from flying to the EU.

Iran is a great country with a long history. It could and should play a major role for peace and stability in the region and the world. However, for the time being, this is not the case, and we are obliged to act accordingly.

EUROPE CANNOT SHIRK ITS RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

23 September 2024 – Op-ed. *In the French daily Le Monde, I explained that the EU must not abandon all hope of finding a political solution in Gaza, because we are at risk of being the first to be affected by the prolongation of the conflict and the ensuing loss of legitimacy of international rules and institutions.*

Nearly a year after the Hamas terrorist attack, which the European Union strongly condemned, the situation remains, strictly speaking, catastrophic from both humanitarian and political points of view. And, alas, there seems to be no end in sight.

In this endless night, the success of the polio vaccination campaign for the Palestinian population in Gaza appears to be a small ray of hope. It proves, once again, that humanitarian and UN organisations have an essential role to play in containing the effects of this catastrophe.

The EU is doing all it can to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population. It also fully supports the ongoing efforts of Egypt, Qatar and the United States to achieve a ceasefire. But the ceasefire agreement, a prerequisite for the implementation of the Biden plan, has still not been signed and does not seem likely to be in the near future.

Intransigence and total impunity

Why is this so? Quite simply because those who are at war with each other have no interest in putting an end to it, as if their political survival were more important than anything else. So, they pretend. Less and less, in fact. And those who pay the price are not only the Palestinian civilian population but also the Israeli hostages. Their intransigence goes hand in hand with total impunity. But, if actions have no consequences, if flagrant violations of international humanitarian law are ignored, if institutions such as the International Criminal Court are threatened, if the rulings of the International Court of Justice are totally ignored by the promoters of a rules-based order, who can we trust?

Less than six months ago, we were talking seriously about the ‘day after’, because we all knew that there was no military solution to an eminently political conflict.

Today, however, the 'day after' is receding ever further into the distance, like a mirage in the desert.

Not only is there no let-up in the war in Gaza, but what is on the horizon is its extension to the West Bank, where the radicals want to use the same methods as in Gaza: increasing the violence, inciting provocation and then reacting with force, and not hesitating to tell the world that the only way to achieve a peaceful settlement is to annex the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The West Bank could very quickly become a new Gaza. Just as Gaza could become a new West Bank, because some settlers are planning to move there.

The spread of the war to southern Lebanon is also a source of concern, despite the existence of a legal basis for resolving the conflict, namely UN Security Council Resolution 1701. Finally, the attacks by the Houthis – whose resources continue to grow – on maritime trade and on Israel are casting an even darker shadow over the regional situation. My fear is that not only will the conflict be prolonged, but the process of normalisation between Israel and its moderate Arab neighbours such as Egypt and Jordan, who are paying a high price for this war, will be called into question, as seems increasingly inevitable. Moreover, even Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which are the most favourable to normalisation of their relations with Israel, have made it clear that this cannot take place without a political perspective on the creation of a Palestinian state. The two-state solution therefore remains the only serious basis for breaking the deadlock.

Avoiding 'Gaza fatigue'

So, what can we do? First, I think we need to reaffirm the basic principles for resolving the conflict. The legal bases exist and have been clearly set out by the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. The only thing missing is the political will to implement them. As Europeans, we must therefore make our voice heard at the next United Nations General Assembly and avoid a kind of 'Gaza fatigue' that would embolden the extremists and once again put off the idea of a political solution. From this point of view, I am delighted to learn that the Israeli prime minister will address the UN General Assembly, which opens in New York on 24 September; by his presence, in front of his peers from all over the world, he will logically confirm his support for the fact that the United Nations is the place where international law and legitimacy are created and expressed. I think he will be keen to tell us how his government envisages ending the war.

Second, we must push the Palestinian Authority to reform itself. Commitments have been made, and we are waiting for them to materialise because we are the main foreign donor. If nothing happens, Hamas will win. That's probably what some people want, but it can only lead to another 7 October. We have all known since Clausewitz's treatise on military strategy in 1832 that war only makes sense if it is based on a political strategy; otherwise, it is doomed to endure.

Third, we must facilitate all attempts at dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis, such as that undertaken by Nasser Al-Kidwa, former foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority, and former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert. In the current context, the channels of communication between the Israelis and the Palestinians have become so rare that they must be supported where they exist, and created where they do not, if we do not want to see the radicals on both sides win the day, so deep are the divisions within each camp.

Fourth, we must not give up talking to the Israeli society traumatised by 7 October. This concerns everyone, not just Europeans; the Palestinians and Arab civil society must take part in this movement. I know how difficult it is to reconcile the two narratives, Israeli and Palestinian. But to believe that one will prevail over the other is an illusion.

Even if it is absorbed by the war of aggression against Ukraine, Europe cannot shirk its responsibilities in the Middle East, because instability in the region affects it first and foremost. So, it cannot pretend that the problem is too big for its frail shoulders, or that Ukraine is enough of a problem. That's why it has to stay present, talk to everyone and get politically involved in the region. I have just been there again, and my last stop was in the United Arab Emirates. Given its geographical proximity to the Middle East, Europe would be the first to be affected by any prolongation of the conflict. It must therefore keep repeating that in the Middle East, starting with Gaza, the night must end.

HOW TO AVOID ESCALATION IN LEBANON

26 September 2024 – Speech. *During the high-level week of the UN General Assembly in September 2024, I addressed the UN Security Council on the issue of the Gaza war spreading to Lebanon and how to avoid it.*

We speak about a region of the world where the worst is generally true.

So, I would, first and foremost, like to express my sympathy for the Lebanese people who have clearly, for a long time, been hostage to a conflict that they do not deserve, and which is far beyond them.

We all know the tragic situation in recent months. You have been explaining it and I will not repeat it. Some 60 000 Israeli inhabitants forced to leave their homes since October. Now 200 000 Lebanese on the roads forced to flee the fighting while their houses have been systematically destroyed. They will not have anywhere to come back to.

I am not going to play the game of blaming one more than the other. But what I know is three things.

Escalation will not solve anything

First, escalation will not solve anything because war does not solve anything.

Second, what is happening in southern Lebanon cannot be separated from what is happening in Gaza. One thing influences the other. But, at the same time, we have to do everything to avoid southern Lebanon becoming a new Gaza. And it is becoming a new Gaza.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, said at the United Nations General Assembly, and as many of you have said, when the communication devices were exploding – targeted in their purpose, but indiscriminate in their consequences – they put the Lebanese people in the night under terror.

Third, there is a legal basis for settling the Israeli–Lebanese conflict. And this basis, you know, is this famous Resolution 1701. The little problem is that it was approved more than 20 years ago. Twenty years ago – without being implemented.

So, what can we do in the face of this escalation, in the face of this procession of death, while the sound of cannon fire is behind us? I heard the cannon, when I was visiting the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon headquarters some days ago. And I am asking this question to the Security Council.

And allow me, and excuse me, but sometimes I wonder if it is not better for the Security Council to talk about insecurity – which registers crises, recriminations and grievances without resolving them, and, when it agrees on something, is not able to implement it. What a tragedy.

Bring about a ceasefire along the Blue Line

So now it is up to all of us to do something to bring about a ceasefire along the Blue Line, so that the instinct for life can take precedence over the instinct for death. So that the terrible fatalism that is ours today, in the face of so much horror, can be overcome.

Before coming here, I had the opportunity to speak with the families of Israeli hostages held by Hamas. Still held, for almost one year.

So, I know how this tragic situation is affecting everyone, Palestinians, Israelis and now Lebanese.

And I saw some days ago at the Rafah border – by the way, closed – once again listening to the cannon, how the tragic situation in Gaza calls to our conscience.

So, please, let's try to call unanimously for the suspension of hostilities along the Blue Line and implementation of this famous Resolution 1701.

What else can we do? At least let's agree on that and try to make it implemented.

Let's call for restraint to avoid the trap of fatality, the one that would have us believe that there is nothing to be done. Yes, something has to be done.

That is the only thing I can do. But naming things is essential. You have to put a name to things, because refusing to name things only adds to the worst tragedy.

PUT AN END TO THE HORRIFYING SITUATION IN GAZA

27 September 2024 – Speech. *During the UN General Assembly high-level week in September 2024, I also addressed the UN Security Council regarding the dramatic situation in Gaza and the West Bank.*

Everybody knows the figures. Since the start of the war, more than 41 000 Palestinians have been killed, maybe more under the rubble of Gaza. Most of them are innocent civilians, including over 11 000 children. And this after 1 200 Israelis were killed and hundreds taken hostage.

Many of them are still being kept in captivity, while Gaza has been reduced to rubble. A place where life is no longer possible.

This week I met the families of hostages. I already had during [my last visit](#) to Israel, and I see their agony.

And two weeks ago [I was at the border of Gaza](#). I heard the bombing behind me, and I saw large supplies of humanitarian aid, which could be life-saving, but are not allowed to enter Gaza.

Gaza is horrifying even the most seasoned humanitarians

And it is difficult for me to add anything to what Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said yesterday, ‘Gaza is a place that horrifies even the most seasoned humanitarians.’

And I want to use this opportunity to pay tribute to UNRWA, of which 222 staff members have been killed.

The European Union keeps calling for an immediate ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and the unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid, which is really needed. And we support the United States, Qatar, and Egypt in their ongoing efforts.

It has already been said. The escalation in the region is driving it into the abyss of a full-blown war across the Blue Line and in the region.

While we are talking, bombs are falling again in Beirut, and civilians are paying an unbearable price.

The Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union, which I am proud to represent here, supports the French and American efforts towards an urgent ceasefire in Lebanon and the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 by all parties. It is essential – but allow me to remind you that this resolution was adopted 20 years ago, and we are still asking for it to be implemented.

The West Bank is on the brink of a precipice

Also, the West Bank, including Jerusalem, is on a precipice. The European Union continues condemning the violence, all kinds of terrorism and settlement expansion.

We have adopted sanctions on terrorist organisations, such as Hamas, but also on some of the extremist settlers.

And, as many have said, sorry, but the West Bank is becoming another Gaza. You can see the videos of bulldozers destroying roads, destroying water supply systems, destroying sewage – all that in the name of fighting against terrorism, of course.

Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese and all people deserve security and the protection of international law. For Israel's sake, as well as for the Palestinians, we need a strong, legitimate and effective Palestinian Authority.

Therefore, we support its reform and, on that basis, we provide [emergency support](#) worth €400 million, and we will work with key partners on further support.

Finally, it is vital not to focus just on the many crises of today; as my Norwegian friend has said, we have to work to resolve the underlying conflict.

Therefore, yesterday we co-hosted a [high-level event](#) with the Arab League – and I want to thank everyone who made this event possible, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation contact group and Norway, thank you very much to Norway – open to all United Nations members. All, no exclusions. Some decided not to come, but many did.

It was a big event – a constructive, positive event.

Under the chairmanship of Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, we launched this global alliance for the implementation of the two-state solution. Well, in fact, for the implementation of the Palestinian state, because the other state has already been implemented.

Under its umbrella, all states and international organisations can bring together their practical measures to bring about a free Palestine next to a secure Israel.

And I want to stress that we want security for Israel. We Europeans, we ask for a free Palestine next to a secure Israel.

Taking responsibility means that we must say not only what we oppose.

'I do not want this solution.' OK, then what is your solution? If you do not want the two-state solution, what is the solution? Someone knows a better one that can be explained and implemented? We have to act if we want to achieve.

We will do this work with the whole world, quickly, because every day costs lives. But, in the end, it is up to the Israelis and the Palestinians to make their own peace.

And I know that both peoples experience this conflict as an existential one. Both fear the other one will destroy them.

The Israelis fear being thrown to the sea, and the Palestinians being thrown to the desert.

Extremist forces do their worst to fan the hate, the hate that killed Yitzhak Rabin, former prime minister of Israel. The hate that killed Rabin and the same voices that pushed for killing Rabin are now being heard again.

Understanding the suffering of the other is a challenge

So, all of us must help the societies to speak to each other. Understanding the suffering of the other is certainly the most difficult challenge, the most difficult thing to be done by people in conflict. But it has to be done.

We Europeans can maybe present an example of how this has been done. Some will say that this is not the time for the two-state solution.

When was the right time? When will be the right time? How many more people have to die before it is the right time?

The Palestinians are a people who refuse to die. *Le peuple palestinien est un peuple qui ne veut pas mourir.*

And there is nothing more absurd than antisemitism. There is nothing more absurd than to hate and to kill a human being because he belongs to another group, another ethnic group, or professes another religion.

And antisemitism has brought humanity to the worst crimes. So, please, do not let this word be banalised. We refuse any antisemitic approach to this problem.

And, on this basis, it is time to act. Let's go to work.

The bombs continue falling.

We are living in a world of resolutions, meetings, speeches. Outside this room, the real world is made of war, people being killed, misery and hate.

Let's make this world approach the real world. And let's make our world have the capacity to change it.

7 OCTOBER: STOP ALL THE HORRORS

7 October 2024 – Op-ed. *To mark the first anniversary of the 7 October massacre, I published this article in the newspapers of the Vocento group in Spain.*

One year ago, on 7 October 2023, the world was shaken by a tragedy that still reverberates today. On that day, people living in the kibbutzim surrounding Gaza and young people celebrating life at a music festival nearby suddenly found themselves plunged into a nightmare unleashed by Hamas, which drowned their joy in violence and death. That day left 1 200 people slaughtered and over 240 taken hostage. We have condemned this act of terrorism, just like the Hezbollah and Iranian missile attacks on Israel, in the strongest possible terms.

For the hostages and their families, the nightmare continues. During the UN General Assembly, I met with relatives of hostages in New York. I met a man whose two brothers were taken from the kibbutz Kfar Azza. He lives in uncertainty, not knowing if they are still alive. And I spoke to a mother who had already received the most painful news – her son had been killed in captivity. For all the families of hostages, 7 October is the anniversary of a horror with no end in sight.

The beginning of another horror

At the same time, 7 October unfortunately also marked the beginning of another horror for the people of Gaza. It marked the beginning of a war in which international humanitarian law has not been respected, that has killed more than 40 000 Palestinians – the vast majority civilians, many of them children – and displaced almost 2 million people. Two hundred and fifty United Nations workers have lost their lives in the line of duty. The vast majority of the population is malnourished, especially children under five, who are also afflicted by viral infections and bacteria resulting from a lack of clean water and the destruction of sanitation. Many suffer from diarrhoea, and the absence of vaccination has led to the return of polio. Everything that makes a society function has been reduced to rubble: hospitals and schools. We must not reduce this tragedy to statistics that make us indifferent.

A few weeks ago, I was in Egypt at the Rafah border crossing. I could hear the explosions on the other side. In a children's hospital that I visited, co-financed by

the EU, I saw children and teenagers who had lost legs or arms. I met mothers terrified at the thought of returning to a place where human life is barely possible any more. And I saw how the Israeli authorities persistently hinder the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip. This tragedy has to stop. One horror cannot justify another.

The EU has been working to help return the Israeli hostages and alleviate the suffering of Gaza's civilian population. We fully support efforts to achieve a ceasefire. However, a ceasefire seems increasingly unlikely, largely because those who are waging war have little interest in stopping it. Instead, we are seeing the expansion of violence into the West Bank, and the expansion of war into Lebanon and beyond.

The cycle of violence continues

Today, one year after 7 October, we see the cycle of violence that has led us from funeral to funeral, from one generation to the next, continue. Trust between the parties in conflict has been shattered. We see the voices of extremists grow louder and we see many in the Middle East trapped in a logic that seeks military knockout blows but lacks a political strategy for what comes next.

As defenders of human rights and friends of Israel and its people, we want to ensure that the horrors of 7 October are never repeated. But true friendship also requires us to point out that the only viable way to achieve this is to recognise that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples are equal in rights and dignity, and that they must coexist peacefully in mutual recognition. Therefore, Palestine has the right to self-determination and statehood. Peace is the only true security guarantee.

We need to push back against the extremists on both sides. We must not allow them to dominate the debate with incitement to violence and hate speech. Instead, we should amplify the voices of the many moderates who seek dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis, such as Nasser Al-Kidwa, a former foreign minister of the Palestinian Authority, and former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, who have just launched their own peace proposal.

We also need to strengthen all those in the Middle East who advocate for peace. As my friend Ayman Safadi, the Jordanian foreign minister, said recently at the United Nations, 57 Arab and Muslim countries are willing to guarantee Israel's security if the occupation of Palestinian territories ends and a Palestinian state is

established within its internationally recognised borders. No one should dismiss this offer.

There is no more decisive blow that Israel can deal to those who seek its demise than to engage with those who recognise its right to exist and are willing to guarantee its security. Some of them have done so for several decades, including Jordan and Egypt. These peace agreements should serve as blueprints for peace with other states of the region, including with a Palestinian state.

The worst spiral of violence in decades

A year after Hamas's terrorist attack that has plunged the region into the worst spiral of violence in decades, peace seems a distant dream. Both societies are deeply traumatised. Resentment, polarisation and dehumanisation have reached alarming levels. As Hannah Arendt said, 'The death of human empathy is the first sign of the descent into barbarism.'

However, this is precisely where the building of peace must begin, and with it the construction of a new Middle East, where the horrors that began on 7 October become as unimaginable as war between Europeans is today.

ISRAEL AND GAZA: OUR TASK IS TO TRY TO GIVE HOPE FOR PEACE

7 October 2024 – Speech. *On the occasion of the first anniversary of the massacre of 7 October 2023, we had a plenary debate in the European Parliament.*

The President of Parliament has already said it before – two days before the attack on 7 October, I was in Kyiv, by the notorious Babi Yar ravine, attending a church service in the small synagogue above the ravine, where some 35 000 Jews killed by the Nazis during the Second World War are buried.

Two days later I woke up to the announcement from my crisis cell that the kibbutz on the Gaza border was under attack, in what has undoubtedly been the greatest tragedy for the State of Israel and for the Jewish people since the Holocaust – which had in that ravine in Kyiv one of its cruellest expressions.

Antisemitism is the most perverse invention of humankind

It has always seemed to me that antisemitism is the most perverse invention of humankind – to claim that someone deserves to die because they belong to a certain ethnic group. This hatred is rooted in history, and directed towards a people who have suffered so much. It seems to me to be one of the worst perversions of which humans have been capable. Therefore, so much reparation is due to the Jewish people.

I am not going to repeat what the president said, because you want me to talk about what happened in the last year. Not only what happened on 7 October – which we know all too well and have condemned and condemned a thousand times – but what happened afterwards, up to the present day.

From the point of view of the people of Israel, I will take the words of the former Minister of Defence, Mr Benny Gantz, who says in an article that not only were 1 200 killed and 250 hostages; not only are 100 still in captivity. Immediately after that came the Hezbollah attacks in the north of Israel, which forced 70 000 Israelis to leave their homes, leaving 47 dead. And then the Iranian attacks – first on

13 April and then on 1 October, which sent 7 million Israelis out of their homes and into bomb shelters.

This is what happened, from Israel's point of view. We have condemned these terrorist attacks from the outset. We have stood by the families of the hostages. I myself have met them four times, three times in Tel Aviv and once recently in New York. The release of the hostages is, of course, an unconditional condition, if you will forgive the redundancy, which must take place, as we have said from the outset, without any conditionality and immediately.

Israel needs to be sure that 7 October never happens again

It is also true that it is clear from this tragic experience that the people of Israel cannot look to their future unless they are sure that 7 October will never happen again, never again.

As I say, from the very beginning we have condemned these attacks. We have also condemned the whole wave of antisemitism that has taken place. We must not trivialise the word 'antisemitic'. Because in the same way that it must be completely repudiated, because no Jew should suffer the consequences of the decisions of the Israeli government, neither can this word be applied to those who criticise, or criticise the decisions of, this government.

A government has every right to defend its people, but the right to self-defence, which any government has in the face of an attack, also has its limits. Unfortunately today, when we talk about what has happened since 7 October, we cannot ignore the other tragedies and horrors that have taken place. Unfortunately, today the prospect of a ceasefire seems to be disappearing. Probably because the 'day after', of which we have spoken so much, is not the day of peace, but the 'day of expansion' throughout the region of a war which affects Lebanon – but which we will talk about tomorrow in another debate that you have convened.

In a war there are neither good nor bad victims; there are simply civilian victims. Civilian victims, whether they are Israelis or Palestinians. And all victims are equal. Just as we weep over the fate of those who were brutally murdered on 7 October, we must also consider what has happened, what is happening in Gaza, where more than 40 000 Palestinians have died under the bombs or from disease or from the dramatic circumstances in which this population lives, and where another 97 000 Palestinians have been wounded, according to the latest figures of 6 October from the Gaza Health Ministry. As I tell you, there are neither good nor bad victims;

there are only civilian victims, innocent victims, who are collateral victims of the war.

Unfortunately, children are the most frequent victims of the war in Gaza – about which I am not going to give you any more details than you already know. Unfortunately, humanitarian aid today is at an all-time low. Only 17 trucks per day have been detected passing through Kerem Shalom and six via Shechem.

We are the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Gaza

Yes, there is another serious humanitarian problem there. It is a humanitarian problem which has also merited very substantial aid from the European Union. We are the main provider of aid, with more than €330 million in the years 2023 and 2024. We have launched more than 60 flights of our humanitarian airlift, having activated our Civil Protection Mechanism more than 10 times since 7 October. Together with the EU Member States, we are the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Gaza. However, the problem today is no longer just the continuation of the war, and the humanitarian aid that can be provided, but the lack of political perspective.

As I have little time, let me concentrate on this problem: the lack of political perspective in resolving this conflict. On the one hand, there is Israel's right to defence; on the other hand, there are the limits to this right, stemming from the humanitarian consequences of its exercise; humanitarian aid to the victims of the war; the political solution to the conflict; and, preventing the war from spreading to the region as a whole. These are the five vectors, the five vertices of the polygon within which the Union's foreign policy has been moving. Not always with great unity among the Member States, because, as you know, there are different positions on each of these five vertices.

We will talk about Lebanon tomorrow, but, today, let me tell you that the political prospects for resolving the conflict that is once again ravaging this Holy Land so often promised – that narrow strip of land within which the three monotheistic religions have fought so hard, and where two peoples have now been disputing it for many years – those political prospects seem to have disappeared in the midst of the tragedy that is unfolding. Never before has there been so much talk about the Israel–Palestine conflict, but perhaps never before with so little prospect of a political solution.

The tragedy is that we are all well aware of the parameters for resolving this conflict. The international community has spoken out many times in a very united way: the construction of a state for each of the two peoples.

One already has a state, a strong, democratic one with enormous military and economic capacity. The other does not exist. The international community intends to build one. But the tragedy is that this solution – the only one we know of to try to build peace – does not have the support of one of the most important parties to the problem, which is the present Israeli government.

Europe is profoundly absent from this conflict

The tragedy is that Europe is profoundly absent from this conflict, probably because we – the Member States, who dictate foreign policy – are deeply divided. We are the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. We are the first donor of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Yet when it comes to voting in the United Nations, some of us vote for, some of us vote against and some of us abstain, in almost every vote.

We do not see the horror of what is happening in Gaza or in the West Bank in the same way. We do not perceive it in the same way, despite the fact that we Europeans were the ones who invented the two states in 1980 – 1980, 44 years ago, in the Venice Declaration, inspired by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former President of the French Republic.

The tragedy is that we all say there are too many dead. But the dead keep on increasing. That is why it is so important to take positions like the one recently taken by the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, which has been subject to wide debate.

That is also why it is so important to point out the importance of what the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is doing. Incidentally, in recent days the Israeli parliament has voted to declare it a terrorist organisation and to remove it from any form of involvement in helping the Palestinian people living in Gaza or the West Bank.

The European Parliament will also have to debate this issue and what aid they think we should give to UNRWA from the Union budget.

Finally, I believe that a great effort should be made for dialogue between the civil societies of Israel and Palestine.

I know that this may seem ridiculous, strange, at a time when resentment and hatred dominate all other feelings. It may seem illusory to think that, after so much confrontation, so much pain and so much hatred, we can try to build bridges between these two peoples.

We have tried to do so; we have called three meetings between them and on 27 October we will do so again in Barcelona, on the fringes of the Union for the Mediterranean.

I believe that we must give hope for peace. Yes, these words may seem strange or ridiculous to some in the current circumstances. But I believe that this is Europe's responsibility: to give hope for peace, which can only come from dialogue and agreement.

The need to move from mutual rejection to mutual recognition

We must move from mutual rejection to mutual recognition. Let me coin this phrase: from mutual rejection to mutual recognition.

If someone believes that this is not possible, then they have an obligation to come up with another solution. If this solution is not possible, then what is the solution? Because there must be a solution if we do not want generation after generation, having funeral after funeral, to continue to witness the tragedy of this cursed Holy Land.

Closing remarks

Thank you very much, Madam President. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for this debate, which has shown how bitter and different the positions are.

As I was saying, one of the tragedies of today's conflict is the total lack of empathy for the pain of others. The pain of the other; yours is so great that you do not recognise the pain of the other. The Israeli has become the Jew, the Palestinian has become the Arab. The epithets 'anti-Muslim' and 'antisemitic' are exchanged back and forth, with total virulence.

Look, here where we are, no one in our family has been killed, our house has not been destroyed, we have not lost our friends, our family, we have not been caught up in the spiral of violence; we just watch. If it is so difficult here to make an effort to understand

each other's positions, imagine what it must be like in the Middle East, where so much blood has flowed and so much hatred has been created – on one side and on the other – in this spiral of violence. As in all spirals, if it is not stopped, it will go on ad infinitum. If we here are not capable of making an effort to understand what is happening and the reasons for it, how can we see it from the other side?

I recommend a magnificent book called *The Vision of the Other*, where Israeli and Palestinian writers comment on each of the historical moments that, since 1948, have brought us to this point. If there is this total lack of empathy between, as I say, people who are settled in well-being and who have not suffered any of the consequences of the conflict, how can we expect there to be empathy on the other side?

Our task is to try to give hope for peace

However, our task is to try to give hope for peace. Let me repeat: give hope for peace. No, I am not manipulating the title of an old Beatles song, I am simply saying that this is what it is all about: to seek peace where there is only hatred; to build bridges between two peoples who, for 100 years, have been fighting for the same land and who have no other solution than to share it; to move from mutual denial to mutual recognition. It will not be with the positions I have heard here today that we are going to build it. I ask all of us to make an effort to try to open up hope for peace.

More specifically, someone asked me what I had done before 7 October. Well, I was the high representative who resumed the Association Council meetings with Israel, which had been suspended for many years. It was decided to suspend them when I had not yet arrived in Brussels, because of a disagreement with the Israeli government over the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. I took them up again, because I thought that so many years without talking to each other would not lead to anything, and it would be better if we sat down again and talked to each other. That is what I did with the government before Netanyahu's.

I was also the high representative who invited the foreign minister of the current Israeli government to come to the Foreign Affairs Council to explain himself. I must say that the explanation was not particularly enlightening, but we took the initiative to do so.

Before 7 October broke out, I remember everybody saying, 'The Middle East has never been so peaceful and calm.' The US Secretary of Homeland Security made

this point two weeks before 7 October exploded: 'The Middle East is quieter today than it has been in two decades.' Why worry?

'With the Abraham Accords we are making peace between Israel and the Arab countries.' Yes, but not with the Palestinians. As if this problem can be encapsulated and its existence denied. As if making peace with the neighbours also means making peace with those who live within the borders – in occupied territories, by the way, illegally occupied territories.

Saying what all the UN resolutions say cannot be antisemitic

Can we not at least recognise this, or does that also deserve to be called antisemitic? For saying what all the UN resolutions say. That is also part of the problem, ladies and gentlemen.

More to the point, someone said here that with European funds we are feeding Hamas's coffers.

It was you, Mr Jordan Bardella, and others. I hope that you have proof of this statement, because politics is not about slandering. It is about arguing. If you have the slightest proof that European funds are feeding the Hamas coffers, I, as Vice-President of the European Commission, demand that you produce it. If you do not produce it, I demand that you withdraw your words. Yes, Mr Bardella. Politics does not consist of insult and slander.

I hope you will bring them tomorrow, because we in the European Commission, as soon as the terrorist attacks took place, took the decision to investigate where European funds were going. Audits were commissioned. For months that was looked into, on the initiative of the commissioner in charge of relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority. After months of investigation, the reports we received were that there was no trace of these European funds going to Hamas.

The auditors must be dumber than you, Mr Bardella. They must have less information, or perhaps they are less light on their feet. So, come on, bring me the evidence tomorrow. Come on, you will bring it, won't you? Yes, yes, yes, yes, I will wait for you tomorrow. I will expect you tomorrow, Mr Bardella, and if you do not bring it, I also expect you to withdraw your accusation.

To all those who have made this accusation, I simply ask you to provide proof. Because, you know what? There would be a lot to talk about regarding who has

helped finance Hamas. A lot to talk about. But you have made an accusation and I would ask you to substantiate it.

On everything else, of course we agree on condemning antisemitism. I said so from my very first words. There is no more perverse and evil idea in the history of humanity than to claim that a human being deserves the worst, even death, because he or she belongs to an ethnic group, a race, a human community. Yet this has been handed down for centuries and centuries. Yes, the Jewish people have received the worst persecution.

But Israel is a democratic state. We cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, expect a democratic state to behave like organisations that we have described as terrorist organisations: Hamas and the military wing of Hezbollah.

The truth, ladies and gentlemen, is that I can only repeat the same thing: we must open the door to hope in order to build peace. The first thing needed to do this is a ceasefire throughout the region, on all fronts in the region, and then the release of the hostages and a massive increase in humanitarian aid, including to Lebanon.

We will talk about Lebanon tomorrow, but now is also the time to resolve the political process in Lebanon and to organise this humanitarian conference that President Macron has called for.

Start with a ceasefire and then seek a political solution

Now is the time to start with a ceasefire and then seek a political solution, which, as I said before – and no one has put forward any other – can only be based on a partition of the land for which these two peoples are fighting.

The State of Israel was created by a United Nations resolution. And, today, the Palestinian territory is reduced to an archipelago. Do you know what an archipelago is? It is a group of islands. It is a group of islands in the middle of a sea, and they do not communicate. If we want to build a state, the truth is that we have a small problem in defining the territory of this state.

We have this and many other problems, but nobody here today has put forward any solution other than to tackle this one, however difficult it may be. And, as it is not my job to declaim, but to build, we are going to continue to seek peace by establishing a dialogue between the peoples at loggerheads that will enable them to achieve mutual recognition. That is what I invite you to do, ladies and gentlemen.

LEBANON / MIDDLE EAST: WE MUST STOP THE ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT

8 October 2024 – Speech. *After discussing the state of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict one year after 7 October, I also spoke before the European Parliament about the situation in Lebanon following the intense Israeli bombardments and the fourth ground invasion of the country.*

As we were talking about yesterday, it was one year since the conflict started in and around Gaza. Since then the war has continued, and has spread in a multifaceted way.

Yesterday we already talked about the situation in Gaza. If you go to the Rafah border – closed, by the way – you can hear the explosions on the other side. You can see the warehouses full of donations coming in from all over the world, which cannot get in because they are rejected for rather futile reasons, such as, for example, that a green sleeping bag cannot get in, or that a small scissors for cutting bandages cannot get in either because it is a dangerous weapon.

The conflict has spread in the region

That is what is happening on the Gaza border. But since then the conflict has spread in the region. Now it is affecting southern Lebanon – you can't separate one thing from the other. It all started with Hezbollah, launching rockets at Israeli positions in the occupied Golan – on 8 October itself, immediately after 7 October, in solidarity with Hamas. Then they continued into Israeli territory, in an intense manner that has resulted in 45 dead and some 70 000, according to former defence minister Mr Benny Gantz, Israelis displaced from their homes and their territories.

Israel is now shelling Lebanon intensively, after a series of continuous exchanges of fire along the Blue Line. Its troops have entered Lebanese territory. The bombardment is of extraordinary intensity. Figures say that approximately 20 % of Lebanon's population has been displaced, and some 150 000 have crossed into Syria. The number of civilian casualties is estimated at around 2 000. The bombing in the city affects not only the Shiite neighbourhoods, where Hezbollah is supposed to have its infrastructure, but very central parts of the city.

We have condemned Hezbollah's attacks on Israel over the last few months. International mediation, led by France and the United States, was developed to try to stop the escalation and put an end to this extension of the war. There was a ceasefire proposal in which the European Union participated, together with France, the United States and several Arab countries, calling for and reinforcing compliance with Resolution 1701, which, as you know, is 20 years old – 20 years old – and has not yet been applied.

On 26 September, the EU-27 called again for a ceasefire. We thought that the Netanyahu government had been part of the negotiations prior to this call, which originated in the G7, but the reality is that, since then, the crisis has escalated and the bombings have increased.

Lebanon is a deeply destabilised country

Lebanon is a deeply destabilised country – destabilised because it has within the state another state, which is Hezbollah, with an enormous dependence on Iran. Hezbollah actually has a civilian arm – with members in the Lebanese government, with members who sit in its parliament – and a military branch, which we consider a terrorist organisation and with which we have no contact. But we do have contact with the – let's say – civilian branch, which, as I tell you, has members in the Lebanese government and which represents a minority – not a majority, but a very important minority – in the region.

The situation in Lebanon is deteriorating. Hundreds of thousands of people – I was telling you about 20 % of the population of Lebanon – have been displaced. The bombings have affected the lines of communication with Syria. Syrian immigrants, Syrian exiles, are trying to return to Syria to escape the situation in Lebanon – and that will not fail to have consequences for us.

The European Union has mobilised €40 million in humanitarian aid to help those who have suffered from the events of the last week. We are coordinating a consular-type operation with EU Member States to provide for the return of our nationals. There are about 45 000 of them in Lebanon, but there doesn't seem to be much demand for returnees at the moment; there are more places offered than there is demand.

It is clear that it would be essential to reach a ceasefire through diplomatic procedures. It is clear that Lebanon has an internal political problem that must be resolved by the Lebanese themselves. Its state of institutional weakness has lasted for decades and it is the country's elites who bear a huge responsibility.

Since the explosion in the port of Beirut, when French President Emmanuel Macron went to Lebanon to point out the responsibility of the political elites in saving their country, not much has changed. Really the strongest institution, the backbone of the country, is its army. But that army has enormous weaknesses, even in terms of its financial capacity to pay its soldiers. Several foreign countries help finance its troops. Certainly, its military capacity does not even allow it to counterbalance Hezbollah's, let alone defend the territorial integrity of its country against an invasion or an attack by its neighbour Israel.

There are 10 000 United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) troops who, at the moment, are in their bunkers because obviously, in the midst of the heavy bombardment of their area, all they can do is try to protect themselves.

Without political reform, Lebanon has no solution

Let me stress the point that, without a strong commitment to political reform within Lebanese society – by the political actors in Lebanon – Lebanon has no solution. No one can replace them in doing what only they can do. It is Lebanon's political class that has to take control of that country and lead it. To do that, I think there are four essential actions at the moment.

First, the election of a President of the Republic, which has been stalled for more than two years. During my recent visit to Lebanon, I met with the Speaker of Parliament, Mr Nabih Berri, and obviously with the Prime Minister. The election is stalled because, as you know, the president has to be a Maronite Christian and there is no way to get enough votes to elect him. In the particular political structure of Lebanon, where every high office has to belong to one of the religious collectivities of which Lebanon is made up, it has to be a Maronite Christian – but there is no way to elect a president and therefore the country is paralysed.

Now it seems that, in the face of the enormous difficulty caused by the bombings – on one side of the border and on the other – and, more recently, the intense bombings in Beirut and the entry of Israeli troops into its territory, that possibility – which so far has not been realised – could be achieved. This is a fundamental question. A country that is unable to elect its President of the Republic can hardly tackle other reforms.

Second, there is the support for the Lebanese army, which must return to southern Lebanon – as is the duty of any country and any army of an independent country, which is to protect its border. We have made financial commitments to help the

Lebanese forces, through the European Peace Facility. But it is certainly not enough. Much more needs to be done, assuming there is an 'intra-Lebanese' consensus to do so.

Resolution 1701 provides the legal framework for this redeployment of the Lebanese army, but it must have the capacity to do so. This is not possible as long as there is no prior political momentum.

Unifil must be given a stronger mandate

Third, I believe that Unifil must be given a stronger mandate to secure peace on the border. Again, this seems unrealistic in the current circumstances, but we all know what the occupation of southern Lebanon means. This is not the first time Lebanon has been invaded by Israel.

Israel has invaded Lebanon three times: in 1978, in 1982 to 2000 for the second time, in 2006 for the third, and now for the fourth.

Hezbollah was born out of the 1982 invasion, and it has evolved a lot, from a first resistance force to an organisation with huge links to Iran. Which, as I said, has become a state within a state. It seems to me that, unless the UN forces are strengthened, it will be very difficult to restructure the region and prevent Lebanon from becoming a new Gaza – in terms of the intensity of the war it can withstand.

The fourth line of action is to provide aid: material and humanitarian aid. The people of Lebanon are suffering enormously. Imagine, 20 % of the population displaced – who can take in 20 % of a country's population? Plus the heavy bombardment, which has resulted in a very high number of dead and wounded. I have already mentioned the latest figures, but they continue to rise.

President Emmanuel Macron has proposed a humanitarian conference for this purpose, and it should certainly be done. That would allow the return of displaced populations on both sides of the border. But note that on the Israeli side there are about 70 000 displaced people, and on the Lebanese side there are about 2 million. The difference is remarkable.

We have problems of emergency; we have problems of security; we have problems of state-building; we have problems of massive aid to rebuild this state. The

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, promised last May €1 billion for this purpose.

A timetable should be set for the disbursement of these amounts because sometimes we are in the habit of fixing amounts without giving them a time dimension. It is not the same to disburse 1 billion a month, 1 billion a year, 1 billion all at once. 1 billion disbursed when? We in the European Union should get into the habit of setting timetables and payment schedules for the amounts to which we commit ourselves. Finally, there is this commitment that we must honour.

The moment of truth for Lebanon and the Lebanese

This is the moment of truth for Lebanon and the Lebanese. They have to face up to their responsibilities, the ruling class. A political movement is urgently needed, starting, as I said, with an elected president and a fully functioning government, because the one they have now is an interim government.

I am in constant contact with my friend the foreign minister Abdallah Bou Habib. I know the enormous difficulties they are facing. We have to help this country; we have to use this opportunity of Hezbollah's weakness to strengthen the political structures in Lebanon. We have to bring about a ceasefire in the region.

As I said to you, Israel has invaded Lebanon three times; this would be the fourth. After each invasion one has to ask whether its security has increased, or whether they have been tactical victories but strategic defeats. Many in Israel believe that these actions have not made Israel more secure. On the contrary, they have destabilised Israel's northern border and led to the birth and strengthening of Hezbollah.

Could another military intervention yield different results? I do not know. History shows that there are no military solutions to conflicts that are deeply rooted in the structures of a region like the Middle East – and even more so in the face of a country's institutional weakness.

This is what we have to take into account when assessing our action. This is also the moment of truth for us, to see if we are really capable of helping Lebanon. But, above all, and first and foremost, the Lebanese political class must be made to face up to its responsibilities. Without them, certainly no country has a solution.

IT IS TIME TO GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

18 October 2024 – Blog post. *On 17 October, the death of Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas, was announced. It should mark a turning point. We have a responsibility – and an interest – in helping make ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon and the release of hostages possible. And we must help the Palestinians and the Israelis move from mutual rejection to mutual recognition and assist the Lebanese in rebuilding their state.*

The anniversary of the 7 October terrorist attack on Israel took place amid an ongoing escalation on several fronts. A new cycle of violence, hatred and revenge has increasingly engulfed the entire Middle East, bringing the region to the brink of an all-out war.

In this dangerous context, the death of Yahya Sinwar should mark a turning point. He was an EU-listed terrorist, responsible for the heinous attack of 7 October, and one of the obstacles to the urgently needed ceasefire and the unconditional release of all hostages.

There must now be an end to the wars in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. The hostages must be freed and the suffering of the Palestinian people must end. As I outlined to the Members of the European Parliament, the EU needs to work on five dimensions.

1. Israel has a right and a duty to protect its citizens

As former defence minister Benny Gantz recently wrote, Israel's trauma extends beyond the events of 7 October 2023. It covers not only the 1 200 dead and 250 hostages, of whom around 100 are still held captive, but also the immediate Hezbollah attack on northern Israel, forcing 70 000 Israelis to leave their homes.

Additionally there were also Iran's attacks – first on 13 April and then on 1 October, forcing millions of Israelis into bomb shelters. We have immediately and repeatedly condemned these attacks in the strongest possible terms and recognised Israel's right and duty to defend and protect its citizens against terrorist attacks. Israel cannot look to its future without ensuring that 7 October will never be repeated.

2. Every right has its limits

However, like any right, the inherent right to defend oneself against attacks has its limits. We cannot ignore the fact that 7 October was also the beginning of other tragedies and horrors. More than 40 000 Palestinians have been killed in the course of Israel's military retaliation; almost 100 000 Palestinians have been injured and 60 % of the buildings in the enclave destroyed.

Kamala Harris recently stated that 'no food has entered northern Gaza in nearly two weeks'. Almost the entire population of Gaza is displaced and malnourished, humanitarian access has reached a new low and famine and disease are spreading. Almost everything that makes a society function has been reduced to rubble. There is a right to self-defence, but there is no right to revenge.

We are now increasingly seeing Israel replicating this conduct of war in the West Bank and Lebanon. In the West Bank, which is under illegal occupation and where illegal settlers have been spreading terror among local communities with total impunity, we are now witnessing Israeli airstrikes and the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The bombing of the Tulkarem refugee camp, killing 18 people, was the deadliest in the occupied West Bank in two decades. The disproportionate manner in which Israel has been operating in Gaza does not bode well for the protection of civilians in the West Bank and Lebanon. It has to stop.

3. It is urgent to deliver humanitarian assistance

The European Union has provided over €330 million in humanitarian assistance to Gaza in 2023 and 2024. We have sent more than 60 flights of our humanitarian airlift and have activated our Civil Protection Mechanism more than 10 times since 7 October. Together with the EU Member States, we are the largest donors of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

However, this humanitarian aid must be distributed on the ground. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) is the only UN agency able to provide essential services to millions of Palestinians in Gaza at the required scale. Across the region, it delivers food, shelter and healthcare to a majority of Gaza's population, and over 650 000 children attend its schools.

The draft bill on banning UNRWA, currently under discussion in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, is very alarming. If passed, it may bring down the humanitarian

response in Gaza and would have disastrous consequences for the civilian population of the enclave and of the West Bank.

Banning the very organisation that ensures that Palestinian refugees receive quality education and healthcare will only worsen an already tense situation, with negative consequences not only for Palestinians but also for Israel and eventually Europe.

4. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict needs a political solution

What we need most urgently now is a ceasefire and the return of a political process, in Gaza as well as in Lebanon. No military action alone can bring a safe future to the people of the region. No military action can be legitimate in the absence of any attempt at finding a political solution to the conflict that caused it. Only a political settlement will bring security and peace.

However, never before has there been so little prospect of a political solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We all know the parameters for resolving this conflict. The international community has backed it many times, overwhelmingly: it is the establishment of a state for each of the two peoples. One state already exists, a strong state with immense military and economic capacity. The other does not.

Unfortunately, this solution – the only one we know that could bring peace – does not have the support of one of the most critical parties to the conflict: the current Israeli government.

Yet this should not stop us from preparing a better future. This is why, in September, on the sidelines of the last UN General Assembly, I launched, together with Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud of Saudi Arabia and Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide from Norway, a global alliance for the implementation of the two-state solution. A total of 90 UN member states and intergovernmental organisations and almost 60 foreign ministers from around the world attended.

This global alliance will serve as an umbrella, under which each participant will contribute to incentivising the implementation of the two-state solution. This ranges from the ‘unprecedented package of political, economic and security support’ that the EU promised 11 years ago, to support for Palestinian state-building, contributions to regional security or a concrete plan for regional cooperation. We will organise in coming weeks a series of working meetings, starting in Riyadh and Brussels.

We also need to foster dialogue between the civil societies of Israel, Palestine and Europe. We have already convened three such meetings. On 27 October, we will do so again in Barcelona, within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

It may seem naive to think that, after so much confrontation, so much pain and so much hatred, it might be possible to build bridges between these two peoples. But, as Yitzhak Rabin told us, 'You don't make peace with friends. You make it with your enemies.' I believe it is Europe's responsibility – and in its interest – to help the two peoples move from mutual rejection to mutual recognition.

5. We must avoid further regional escalation

We cannot abandon Lebanon. It was already a deeply destabilised country. Additionally, the Israeli ground invasion has already killed 2 500 Lebanese and displaced 20 % of the population, a total of 1.2 million people. Lebanon has been threatened with being 'turned into a second Gaza'. This new war has already created tremendous human suffering and could at any moment spread across the whole region.

The EU has already mobilised €40 million in humanitarian aid to assist those affected and will continue to work relentlessly towards a ceasefire, supporting the mediation efforts led by France and the United States. However, without a strong commitment to political reform from the Lebanese political class, there is no long-term solution for Lebanon. It is on them to take control of the state and lead. This must begin with the election of a President of the Republic, a process that has been stalled for more than two years.

The Lebanese army must return to southern Lebanon. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 provides the legal framework for this redeployment. Through the European Peace Facility, we are currently helping the Lebanese Army build the capacity it needs to protect the country's borders.

With the shelling of United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) units – and the wounding of four soldiers – the Israel Defence Forces have crossed a red line. All of the EU-27 have condemned it; nobody is asking for Unifil to withdraw. In the future, Unifil should be given a stronger mandate to ensure peace at the border.

Israel needs to withdraw from Lebanese territory. Israel has already invaded Lebanon three times: in 1978, from 1982 to 2000 and in 2006. Each time, these tactical victories have evolved at the end of the day into strategic defeats for Israel.

Even within Israel's own security establishment, some have argued that these invasions not only failed to make Israel safer but also destabilised Israel's northern border and strengthened Hezbollah. What would make anybody believe that another military occupation will yield largely different results?

History has shown that there are no military solutions to the deeply rooted conflicts in the Middle East – not in Gaza, not in the West Bank, not in Lebanon. Peace is the only long-term security guarantee.

Israel's peace agreements with Jordan and Egypt have demonstrated this for decades. They should serve as blueprints, including for agreements with a Palestinian state. It is time to give peace a chance.

2.

CONTINUING TO STEADILY SUPPORT UKRAINE'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM



THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

23 January 2024 – Op-ed. *2024 started with an unprecedented number of Russian drones and ballistic missiles raining down on Ukraine. In this op-ed, published in various media outlets in the EU, I argued that we need to shift from supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes' to committing to doing 'what it takes' for Ukraine to prevail.*

2024 started with an unprecedented number of Russian drones and ballistic missiles raining down on Ukraine. Two years ago, in the early days of 2022, I visited the Donbas and Kyiv. The drums of war were already sounding clearly, as Russia amassed over 100 000 troops on Ukraine's borders.

In those days, Putin bet that Ukraine could not withstand a Russian attack and that internal division and energy dependency would prevent the EU from coming to Ukraine's rescue. He prepared for a war that would last merely a few days. Many Europeans harboured similar expectations. However, things turned out very differently. Putin could not have imagined that, two years later, Ukraine would still be resisting.

Ukrainians have liberated half of the territory captured by Russia

The Ukrainian armed forces won the Battle of Kyiv, they won the Battle of Kherson, they liberated more than half of the territory Russia had captured, broke the blockade of Black Sea ports and forced Russia to withdraw the bulk of its fleet from occupied Crimea. However, last year's Ukrainian counteroffensive did not achieve the desired results, and the Russian aggressors are keeping up the pressure on Ukraine by continuing with intense bombings. Russia achieved virtually no progress on the battlefield in 2023, but Putin is still prepared to let hundreds of thousands more young Russians die to conquer Kyiv. His army and his people are suffering, but he does not know the meaning of reverse gear.

As a result, we once again hear claims that Ukraine cannot win, and that Western support will not hold. And, once again, whispers of appeasement resurface. Those claims were wrong in 2022, and they remain so today. We must not let them shape our policy on Ukraine.

As Sam Greene, an expert on Russia at King's College London, put it: 'Putin may want negotiations, but he does not want to negotiate.' Putin himself declared, 'We want to end this conflict as soon as possible, but only on our terms.' His terms? Denazification, demilitarisation and dismantling. Three words that mean one thing: surrender. He has repeatedly shown that he does not negotiate in good faith and has consistently failed to honour agreements. And now, less than a year before the US elections (which he believes may favour his imperialist ambitions), who can seriously expect Putin to seek compromise?

Putin was wrong two years ago. He was wrong about the capabilities of his army. He was wrong about the resistance of the Ukrainians. He was wrong about European unity. He was wrong about the strength of the transatlantic link. We must prove him wrong again. Instead of eying appeasement, we should remember the lessons we have learned since 2022, avoid repeating mistakes and double down in areas where we have seen success.

The EU and its Member States have provided unprecedented economic, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine, delivering almost €30 billion in ammunition and weapons, and training nearly 40 000 Ukrainian soldiers on EU soil. The war has also bolstered transatlantic unity, and our sanctions, which we have progressively tightened to counter circumvention, have weakened Russia's war machine.

Too slow to provide Ukraine with essential weapons

However, we have frequently been too slow to provide Ukraine with essential weapons, often only acting when Russia has threatened to gain the upper hand. This hesitancy has cost lives. Going forward, we need a paradigm shift from supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes' to committing to doing 'what it takes' for Ukraine to achieve victory.

We need to equip Ukraine with the necessary tools to liberate its territory, including long-range missiles and other advanced weapons systems. We also need to bolster Ukraine's air defence capabilities. With Russia intensifying its campaign against civilian targets and infrastructure, anti-air missiles have become crucial to saving lives and preventing attacks, such as the recent bombing of a children's clinic in Kharkiv.

These actions need to go hand in hand with a renaissance of the European defence industry. The war in Ukraine has revealed that this industry is nowhere near adequately prepared to meet the challenges we face. Much of the EU's substantial

military support to Ukraine has come from existing stockpiles. Replenishing those stocks while at the same time providing Ukraine with more weapons and ammunition is a serious challenge for a defence industry in which production has shrunk to peacetime levels. Even though defence expenditure is already 40 % higher than the all-time low in 2014, this reversal of trend is not yet rapid enough. We must intensify our efforts to win the race against time with Putin's Russia.

We cannot allow him to prevail. Our own security is at stake. Should Putin's strategy prove successful, it would embolden Russia and other autocracies to pursue their imperialist agendas. We must at any cost prevent a world where might makes right, where powerful countries change borders at will, and where the weak fall prey to the strong. Allowing such a scenario would cast a long shadow over our future for decades to come.

Ukraine prevailing is the best security guarantee for Europe

Ukraine prevailing against the Russian aggression is the best security guarantee for Europe. A Russia that has learned to stay within its borders will lessen pressure on its neighbours, ease Ukraine's path to EU membership and allow Europe and the world to shift their attention to the many other challenges that need solving. With our assistance, Ukraine can consign Russia's imperial ambitions to the pages of history. This must guide our actions and thinking.

SUPPORTING UKRAINE AT THE VERKHOVNA RADA

7 February 2024 – Speech. *At the beginning of February 2024, I visited Ukraine for the sixth time and had the great honour and privilege to be allowed to speak to the members of the Verkhovna Rada, the parliament of the country.*

I am very much honoured to be here with you, once again, and thank you for raising the European Union flag. Once again here in Kyiv. This is my sixth visit to Ukraine, the fourth since the start of the full-scale war, and to this city, which for the last 10 years has been more conscious of its Europeanness than any other capital on the continent.

As Yuri Andrukhovych – whose books are increasingly translated into many other European languages – wrote, ‘Kyiv won the casting to become the scenario of the most beautiful of all revolutions: the Revolution of Kyiv, the Revolution of Dignity.’

We have just celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Revolution of ‘hidnist’, in your language dignity, which you launched, and I know that to defend it you have paid and are still paying a terrible price.

Many of the heroes of your revolution have died later on the front, fighting the Russian invader for your freedom. Take, for example, Roman Ratushny, the anti-corruption activist. He did not even turn 25.

Some of your soldiers have been fighting on the front lines for almost two years. Vladimir Putin believed the war was going to last one week. Two years later, you are still there.

They are the heroes of the Battle of Kyiv, when the Russian troops were 8 kilometres from this House. They were the heroes of Kharkiv, a name that everybody knows in Europe today. They did it – you did it – with old Soviet material, not yet with Western aid. You did it with the motivation of your army and your people.

And now you have liberated half of the territory Russia had captured and unblocked the Black Sea.

But I know that in each liberated town they were greeted – your troops – by people whose joy of liberation was equal to the pain they had suffered. And I mean in

Bucha. I know because I have seen it. They saw death and devastation and uncovered mass graves.

The war has taken the lives of many anonymous people. But let me name, for example, one of them. Victoria Amelina, a finalist in the European Union Prize for Literature. She worked as a war crimes investigator, and, instead of seeking safety, she travelled to the east of Ukraine to immortalise the stories of people living under occupation.

Last summer, a Russian missile, like the ones that have been falling on Kyiv tonight, killed her while she was having dinner in a popular pizza restaurant. She was certainly a war target. She was only 37 years old. She became 'the one who flew away too soon', as she put it in one of her poems. I am mentioning her, but I cannot mention every one of the anonymous victims and heroes of this war.

There are many tragedies like that of Victoria Amelina. And all of them remind us what the Ukrainian people are fighting for. Ukrainians always know why they are fighting. They are fighting for the freedom of their people and their land. The Russian soldiers do not know what they are fighting for. Soldiers are fighting for their very existence; the lives of their families; the future of their children; for their freedom; for your culture; and so that the Ukrainian language may not fall silent and that your books – like Victoria's books – may not remain unfinished.

The front line between democracy and authoritarian rule

You know which is the real border? The real border today of Ukraine with Russia is the front line, not only on the battlefield; it is the political front line between a world governed by law, and freedom, and one where powerful people impose their will within their society and with no respect for third countries. It is the front line between democracy and authoritarian rule. Nothing less than that.

A Ukraine that prevails against Russia's war of annihilation would make a huge contribution to the security of Europe as a whole. And I am the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, so you can understand how much it matters to me.

Yes, it is not a rhetorical sentence to be pronounced to gain applause. It is the crude reality. The security of Ukraine makes a huge contribution to the security of Europe as a whole. And the best security commitment that we can offer to Ukraine is to make Ukraine part of the European Union.

Let me remind you what the European Union is. The European Union is not a military alliance.

The European Union was built around the economy, to defuse conflict with negotiations and compromise. And it worked. After the two terrible world wars in the last century, we had peace in Europe for nearly 80 years. The antagonism between the old European empires vanished. The borders became invisible. That is also a reason why many Europeans mostly forgot that the world can be a terrifying place where force prevails. We made peace among us and we believed that peace was the natural state of things – and that is not true, unhappily.

Russia has not forgotten its own imperial illusion

The natural state of things is not this. In the world today, geopolitics are coming back – the struggle between big powers – and Russia has not forgotten its own imperial illusion.

That is why your war has been a moment of awakening for Europe. Since 24 February 2022, it has, therefore, not only been a question of military and financial assistance, but, for many of us, it has above all created a revolution in our mindset. This has been a moment of awakening, forcing us to understand how violent and dangerous is our world.

The war has changed our mindset. Now, we need to change the entire institutional setting of the European Union to adapt it to this new geostrategic reality. It is no longer about making peace among us; it is about facing the challenges at our borders.

Exactly two years ago, on 6 January 2022, [I was in the Donbas](#). At that time, Russia was already building up its troops at the border. I met with the Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, and he asked me: 'When they will invade us – because they will invade us – will you support us?' We were talking in his office. He said, 'Are you going to provide us with the arms to defend ourselves?' I will never forget that question. I will never forget that moment in my life. He went on, 'Are you going to help us?' And at that time I was not able to give a clear answer, because the European Union had never before provided military aid to a country at war.

But, when the invasion happened some weeks later, we responded in an unprecedented manner. So far, we have remained united, and we have

already provided – not a promise, a reality – €28 billion in military support and almost €90 billion overall.

And just last week EU Member States – as you know – agreed on another [€50 billion package](#) – another – to provide you with predictable financing and to help to pay salaries and pensions and provide public services. Because you have to win the war and to win the peace, at the same time.

And allow me to say that the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, deserve credit for putting this package together at the European Council and for working hard on getting it approved by all Member States.

But now it has to go to the European Parliament, which is the budgetary authority of the Union, and there has to be agreement between the Council and the Parliament on the proposal of the Commission. It will be done by the end of this month – be sure of it.

From 'as long as it takes' to 'whatever it takes'

But I know that more is needed. I said this is my sixth visit to Ukraine. We need a paradigm shift from supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes' to committing ourselves to supporting Ukraine by doing 'whatever it takes'. Not for 'how long' but for 'whatever it takes'. It is not a matter of duration – the shorter, the better. In order for this time to be shorter, measures have to be tougher. We must do whatever it takes for Ukraine to achieve victory.

We need to challenge the claims that Ukraine cannot win. I hear this message of defeatism: 'Why are you continuing supporting Ukraine if Ukraine cannot win?' That is not true. Russia has lost many wars in its history.

And to the people who say that 'Western support will not hold' – and I am measuring my words in this historical moment here in front of the representatives of the Ukrainian people – I am measuring my words to say that those who claim that Putin should be appeased are wrong. They were wrong in 2022, and they remain wrong today.

Because it is Putin himself who has declared, 'We want to end this conflict as soon as possible, but only on our terms.' And what are the terms? Denazification, demilitarisation and dismantling. These three Ds are Putin's recipe for Ukraine.

And these words mean only one thing: surrender.

Putin has repeated that he does not negotiate in good faith, has shown that he is not negotiating in good faith, and he has consistently failed to honour agreements. And he has clearly said that his war is against the entire West.

So, instead of eyeing appeasement, we should remember the lessons we have learned since 2022, avoid repeating mistakes and double down in areas where we have seen success.

Let's face reality. Russia achieved virtually no progress on the battlefield in 2023. Your armed forces successfully undermined Russia's air dominance over the front lines and broke the blockade of the Black Sea ports.

You have forced Russia to withdraw most of its fleet from occupied Crimea, and grain exports are reaching pre-war levels. The blockade against your exports of grain is finished. And it finished not thanks to agreements but thanks to your fighting, and the solidarity lanes, which have been an important support for your exports.

Ukrainian creativity is incredible

And your people fought back with incredible inventiveness. Two years ago, Ukraine had seven factories for building military drones. Today, it has hundreds. I visited two of them yesterday. What I saw is truly revolutionary. That was clear not because someone told me but because I saw it – how passionate young people with a lot of intelligence and creativity put their technical skills to work, transforming old factories into birthplaces of high-tech equipment. With €300 drones, you can destroy tanks. Ukrainian creativity is incredible. When I see these factories working, and people working, and young engineers creating new tools, I am sure that, when this war is over, Ukraine will be among the world's leading producers of new tools of warfare. So, allow me to congratulate you and your people.

At the same time, Russia is – if I may say – cannibalising its own future. Putin has mobilised its entire economy, society and political system for the war effort. Talents – when they can – leave the country and the demographic decline is deepening. But, nonetheless, we have to recognise that Russia has adjusted to the war and its economy is more resilient than expected.

We have to look the reality in the face. Yes, sanctions are taking a heavy toll on Russia's economy and on its war effort. They cover almost 2 000 entities and

individuals. And we have cut our pre-war trade with Russia by 60 %. We ended our dependency on Russia for energy. Now, we are prioritising the fight against circumvention. This is a very difficult process, but we see that it is working slowly but surely. The focus is on monitoring trade flows and blocking the re-export of goods that can be used on the battlefield. It is everyday work.

But, most of all, we need an urgent renaissance of the European defence industry. I know that you have expected from us more military support, more ammunition, more of everything.

But let me say that in the last two years much of our military support has come from existing stockpiles of our armies. Replenishing our stocks and at the same time continuing to provide you with more weapons and ammunition is a serious challenge for our defence industry, which diminished in size during peacetime, when we were not producing arms.

But we have already reversed this trend. The production capacity of our industry has already increased by 40 % since the beginning of the war. Now, we are expecting to reach a 1.4-million-round ammunition capacity by the end of the year.

More than 1 million rounds before the end of the year

I want to talk to you frankly. I know that on ammunition your needs are greater than that. I have been talking with your military staff, and I know that you need more.

But we are hard at work, and we will have donated more than 1 million rounds before the end of the year. This is on top of all the ammunition the European industry is selling to Ukraine. Because supply can be done in two ways: donations and exports. We talk only about donations – which is an important part because it is for free – but, apart from donations, our industry is producing for you an equal amount of ammunition.

I cannot tell you the precise figure because it is wartime, but we do not have to consider only donations. We have to consider supplies, and supplies come also through exports. We are giving priority to providing supplies to Ukraine, saying to our armed forces, 'You can wait,' and saying to third countries, 'You can wait because you are not at war. The priority is Ukraine.' And the total figure has to be calculated by adding up donations and exports; it is much more than what the public sometimes hears about.

We have provided a significant amount of military support: €28 billion. And this year – 2024 – Member States are planning more than €20 billion in military assistance, both bilaterally and through the European Union.

You know these figures, I want to highlight them because it is important for the public to understand the extent of our support.

We must counter the Russian narrative

But there is another battle. There is the battle of narratives. The battle of minds. You have to conquer not only land but minds.

The battle of narratives is happening all over the world. And I am also in charge of this battle, because the perception of this war in the rest of the world will be decisive in isolating Putin and making our sanctions work.

People in Africa, in South America, in South-East Asia, not only in the Western world, have to understand the root causes of this war – why this war is raging and why you are fighting.

Because for a large part of the world the defining historical experience has been colonialism. Colonialism has been the story of the people, and we were the colonial powers. However, paradoxically, many do not see Russia as an imperialist and colonialist power at all.

We must counter the Russian narrative. This war is not a matter of 'the West against the rest'. It is not the West against the rest of the world.

It is a war in defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and it is a war in defence of the principles of the United Nations Charter, in a world that is becoming more and more transactional, and in which it is more important than ever that universal principles are protected and understood by the people and the leaders of the world.

That is why Ukraine's peace formula, today, is the only comprehensive framework for just and sustainable peace. Yes, Speaker, it is, because it stems from the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

To be able to counter Russian anti-Western propaganda, we need to be consistent with our principles around the world and to avoid double standards.

And, to be frank, I am not sure that we have always been consistent, but we have to be.

This is why the European Union is, and I personally am, so committed to putting an end to the tragedy suffered by the civilian population in Gaza and to securing the release of the hostages held by Hamas, which is another battle in which we are engaged. And, finally, we must work on a two-state solution, which the international community has been advocating for decades.

And this solution is also part of building a world that prevents 'might makes right', where powerful countries change borders at will, and the weak fall prey to the strong. Because Putin's strategy must be proved not to be successful. If it were successful, it would embolden Russia and other autocracies to pursue their imperialist agendas against their neighbours.

Russia is the last colonial empire in Europe

We must show Russia for what it is: the last colonial empire in Europe. The last colonial empire: an anachronism. The Russian author Mikhail Shishkin wrote, in his letter to an unknown Ukrainian, 'My country is a country fallen out of time.'

Russia remains an imperialist power that is unable to disentangle itself from a colonial vision of its identity. Until this question of Russia's identity is resolved, it will remain a threat to all its neighbours in Europe. Václav Havel once said, 'Russia does not know where it begins and where it ends.' If a country does not know where it begins and where it ends, it is a serious challenge to its neighbours. Putin recently confirmed that assessment, when – in his cartoon propaganda for the next election – he said, 'Russia's borders don't end.' And, as long as Russia has not resolved this issue, its political system will remain what it is: an authoritarian, nationalist and violent regime.

Nobody knows that better than you Ukrainians. For centuries, you have been on the receiving end of Russia's imperialism, relegated to being considered 'little Russians' – a purely colonialist way of speaking – starved in the Holodomor or deported to Siberia. And Russian imperialism remains a crude reality. Putin is obsessed with his fantasies about 'historic Russian lands'. You, dear Speaker, showed me maps from 1600 where Ukraine appears clearly as a nation.

That is why we are once again seeing deportations from occupied Ukraine. We are seeing the repression of your language and the terrible forced adoption of thousands of Ukrainian children to be 'Russified' and make them forget about their Ukrainian roots, their parents and their families.

But you are no longer the vassal of any empire; you are not an object, you are a subject. Ukrainians are the masters of their own destiny. You have repeatedly shown, throughout history, your will to be a free country. And, as in history, we will write the next chapter together.

This is why I am coming to Ukraine as a member of the European Union.

Dear members of parliament, we have decided that your future is in the European Union. That is what you want. That is what the European Union's leaders agreed to [last December](#). And this decision is to be made a reality.

These cannot be empty words. This has to be a serious commitment and it must be implemented, but you have to play your part. You too have to make a lot of effort.

Choosing Europe over and over again

You make the European choice over and over again. And I understand it very well. When I was a young Spanish man in the darkness of dictatorship, Europe was for me the beacon of political freedom, economic prosperity and social enrichment. I wanted to be in the European Union, like you, most visibly 10 years ago in the Maidan Square. It was a sea of yellow and blue. The yellow and blue of Ukrainian flags mixed with the yellow and blue of European flags.

Today, I see you making that European choice, among political forces, among civil society, and businesses. But you have to preserve it, and you have to keep unity and consensus. This will be essential to your path to membership; it will require a lot of effort and a lot of compromises by you, members of the Rada – by you, government, but also by citizens, industry, civil society. It will require deep and comprehensive modernisation of your governance, your economy and your society. The European Union with Ukraine will be a different Union. And Ukraine will be a different Ukraine inside the European Union. It is going to be a way that will require significant efforts; you have to be prepared not to spare them.

We will be supporting you along the way. But you – like any other candidate country – have to implement and enforce all current European Union rules.

And let me say frankly that for many years corruption was the weak spot of Ukraine's society. It has caused a major gap in your development over the last 30 years. The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was elected with a mandate to fight corruption. There has been recent progress in law and its

enforcement, and your position in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index – which is a measure of how well a country faces the challenges of corruption – is clearly improving. This is clearly positive. It should encourage you, but more has to be done.

Corruption significantly undermines the efficiency of the war effort, and the efficiency of reconstruction, but it also undermines the goodwill and support you get from societies across the European Union.

The process of accession to the European Union will have to be accompanied in the coming years by a major reconstruction effort. These two processes have to go hand in hand. When you rebuild your homes, your roads, your bridges and ports, they have to be done according to European standards, for example on energy efficiency.

The invisible infrastructures that make a country free and united

But more important than the infrastructures used for transporting goods or flying, for example, are other kinds of infrastructures that are invisible: the invisible infrastructures that sustain democracies, that sustain the rule of law and pluralism, including political pluralism. This should be evident. It is not a partisan message. It should be evident for everybody: the separation of powers, inclusive governance, respect for human rights, social cohesion and equality. These are the invisible infrastructures that make a country free and united. They are at the core of democratic societies, and they are more difficult to build and maintain than roads, bridges and ports – but they are the backbone of healthy societies.

I know this is particularly difficult to achieve in a country at war. And that is why I said, at the beginning of my remarks, that you have to win both battles at the same time. It is not a case of one after the other; they have to be fought together. There is always a strong and understandable temptation to centralise power and limit freedom of expression when there is a war.

And, yes, in times of war, checks and balances are more important than ever: ensuring respect for the rule of law and fostering democratic dialogue between government and opposition will add to your resilience, and the capacity of the country to win the war.

Dear members of the Rada, once again, this is not a partisan message.

Being a democratic and inclusive society is your greatest advantage in the face of Putin's dictatorship. You are facing a dictator's regime, and you have to face it showing that you are a pluralist state and a democratic society.

I know that there are popular Ukrainian sayings such as 'For every two Ukrainians, there are three hetmans,' or Cossack leaders. In Spain, we say that, when four Spaniards have dinner together, one finds supporters of five political bodies. So it is not difficult to understand that sometimes pluralism creates structures that are difficult to manage.

Plurality of opinion, typical of European societies, is our strength

But plurality of opinion is typical of European societies; it is our strength. And this is something that Putin will never understand. He will never understand, but it is important that we Europeans preserve this absolute difference between democratic and authoritarian regimes.

And it is preserved here, in the parliament. I have been President of the European Parliament; I know what a parliament means. The Rada needs to be the forum where this plurality – this strength – is harvested. It needs to be the forum for discussion of reforms. It needs to be transparent, and it needs to make sure that all groups in society are represented, just as you did when you all agreed on when and in which circumstances the elections would be held, once martial law is over. This was a very important signal for the nation and for the world.

I am drawing to a close, members of the Rada.

Just before arriving in Ukraine yesterday, I checked the number of air alarms that have sounded in your skies at night since Russia's full-scale invasion. It has been almost 40 000.

That is 40 000 times in which the Ukrainian people have had to run quickly to shelters – as we did tonight, once again; 40 000 times that families have rushed to underground shelters; 40 000 times that children have been reading in basements. Some 55 alarms per day, in beautiful places like Kharkiv, Dnipro and Lviv.

We foreign visitors come and go, but you stay – and you stay under this pressure.

Next year, after the European elections, another generation of European leaders will board trains – those trains which, by the way, never run late, even under

bombardment, and which have brought me safely to Kyiv many times. Those trains will continue bringing new visitors, who will share with you these difficult circumstances.

But I am confident that this next generation will remain with you throughout your journey towards the European Union.

Because – and this is the most important message that I will give you – we know well that our own security is being defended by you on the eastern borders of Europe. And, when we say 'for our freedom and yours', we mean that we owe you a debt. A debt that will not be paid in casualties and young people being killed, but which has to be paid by not succumbing to fatigue.

The only ones who are entitled to be tired of this war are you – and you are not.

Wars are won by the commitment and motivation of the people. How many wars have been won by those who were powerless from a material point of view? Wars have been won by those with the least capacity in terms of arms and weapons, because the people knew what they were fighting for.

Look what has happened in so many countries around the world – from Afghanistan against the Soviet Union to Spain against Napoleon; it is the motivation, it is the understanding of why you are fighting and what you are fighting for that makes you win.

I do not see you succumbing to fatigue, and as long as you do not we will not do so either.

UKRAINE: OUR SUPPORT WILL BE DECISIVE

13 February 2024 – Blog post. *After my trip to Poland and Ukraine, I took stock of the situation in this blog post. Despite growing Russian pressure, the Ukrainians were determined to fight for their independence and freedom, but they needed more military support. The quality and quantity of this support is decisive – for Ukraine, but also for our own security.*

Last week's visit to Ukraine was my sixth as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and my fourth since the start of Russia's full-scale war. I started my journey with a stopover in Warsaw to discuss the situation in Ukraine with Polish Foreign Minister [Radosław Sikorski](#), and the military leadership. We agreed on the need to step up military supplies, including through the European Peace Facility, and the importance of EU–NATO cooperation. Poland's support for Ukraine has been exceptional. The country is hosting about a million Ukrainian refugees, is a logistics hub for military supplies and hosts one of the headquarters of the [EU training mission](#). In total, 60 000 Ukrainian soldiers will have been trained in the EU by the end of the summer.

The coming months will be decisive, for both Ukraine and the EU

In Kyiv, I met President [Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#), Prime Minister [Denys Shmyhal](#), Foreign Minister [Dmytro Kuleba](#) and Defence Minister [Rustem Umerov](#). All my interlocutors expressed gratitude for the recently agreed [€50 billion EU support package](#), which will provide Ukraine with predictable financing and help pay salaries and pensions and provide public services in the coming years. At the same time, they stressed the country's dire need for more military assistance. Another major Russian offensive could be starting in the months after the Russian 'elections' in March. However, I have found that the Ukrainian people remain determined to continue the fight, and I saw their ingenuity and resilience at work. Unlike their Russian counterparts, Ukrainian soldiers know what they are fighting for and do not lack motivation. But they cannot do it without our support, which has to increase urgently.

This is why we took stock of planned EU deliveries of military support in 2024 – currently estimated at more than €20 billion – at our last defence ministers' meeting. I urged EU Member States to work with their defence industries in

renegotiating contracts and to prioritise the delivery of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine. We are also in the process of establishing a €5 billion tranche of the Ukraine Assistance Fund within the European Peace Facility to fund additional deliveries of military support. What the EU and its Member States do in the coming months to provide Ukraine with the tools to withstand a Russian offensive will be decisive, both for Ukraine and for the security of the European Union.

Air defence is crucial to stop Russia from terrorising civilians

While in Kyiv, I experienced first-hand the daily reality of most Ukrainians, and what a difference Western military technology makes in Ukraine. At 5 a.m., an air alarm sounded – as these alarms have done 40 000 times in Ukraine since February 2022 – and we had to take shelter from about 20 Russian cruise missiles heading towards Kyiv. All of them were intercepted by Western-sourced air defence systems, but the debris of one of the intercepted missiles hit a residential building, tragically killing four people and injuring many more. I [visited this building](#) later that day with the Mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, and met some of the people who had just lost their homes. These Russian missiles serve no military purpose; they are indiscriminate attacks to terrorise the Ukrainian population. In cities with less protection by Western air defence, there is a high death toll. For instance, on 14 January 2023 in Dnipro, a [Russian missile hit a residential building](#), taking the lives of entire families – 46 people in total. To this day, many children in Dnipro cannot return to their classrooms. Schools without shelters are forced to provide classes online. Providing Ukraine with more and better air defence systems is an urgent priority. They save many lives.

During my visit to Kyiv, I delivered a [speech to the Verkhovna Rada](#), Ukraine's parliament. I paid homage to the brave Ukrainians who have been fighting, often paying the ultimate price, to safeguard their country, their families, their culture and their democracy against Russia's attempt to annihilate Ukraine. Ukraine is on the front line between democracy and authoritarian rule, and through its fight is making a decisive contribution to the security of Europe as a whole. If Putin wins in Ukraine, our security would be at high risk. This is why we need to change the paradigm from supporting Ukraine for 'as long as it takes' to committing ourselves to supporting Ukraine by doing 'whatever it takes' to win the war and win the peace. We need to oppose the claims that Ukraine cannot win and that Putin should be appeased.

At the Verkhovna Rada, I also met with the [leaders of all Ukraine's political groups](#). There is a clear consensus on Ukraine's European choice among political forces and civil society. I urged members of the Rada to preserve this unity and consensus,

which will be essential to advance on the path to EU membership and to implement the necessary reforms. The EU will provide all the support needed along this path, but it will fall to the Ukrainians to fight corruption decisively and strengthen the invisible infrastructure that sustains democracy: rule of law, pluralism and inclusive governance, the separation of powers, human rights, social cohesion and equality.

In parallel to fighting off the Russian aggression, Ukrainians are already rebuilding territories liberated from Russian occupation. One of the most dangerous but essential tasks is the clearing of the countless deadly mines the Russians have left behind everywhere. During my visit, the EU handed over to Ukraine another [de-mining system](#) able to clear anti-personnel, as well as anti-tank, mines and other unexploded arms. The system is remote controlled and particularly safe to operate. De-mining will make it possible for displaced people to return home and for farmers to work their land again.

I also visited the headquarters of our [EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform](#), through which EU policemen are training their Ukrainian colleagues. They teach them how to check armed individuals, assist in de-mining operations and respond to the discovery of mass graves in liberated territories, both to collect evidence and to provide psychological care to the families of the victims. The trained Ukrainians will in turn pass on their knowledge to many more Ukrainian police officers. The aims are to stabilise the liberated territories and ensure their full and smooth reintegration into the country, and to ensure that war crimes investigations start as quickly as possible, while witnesses are still available and before potential evidence becomes contaminated. There can be no peace without justice.

The battle of narratives

In parallel to the battle for Ukrainian territory, a second battle rages: the battle of narratives. It is equally important, because the perception of the war in Europe and the rest of the world will be decisive in maintaining support for Ukraine, isolating Putin and making our sanctions work. We need to resolutely counter the Russian narrative that this war is about 'the West against the rest'. It is a war in defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every country, and it is a war in defence of the principles of the UN Charter. It is about preventing a world where powerful countries change borders at will, and the weak fall prey to the strong. If Putin's strategy proves successful, it will embolden Russia and other autocracies

to pursue their imperialist agendas against their neighbours. This matters not only to Europeans, but also to people in Africa, in South America and in South-East Asia.

This battle of narratives must also be fought in the EU. As we are approaching the European elections, Europeans need to be aware of what it would mean if Ukraine were defeated and the Russian army took up positions along a much larger part of the EU's border. Contrary to what some may argue, this would not ease tensions; instead, it would create a much more dangerous environment for Europeans, lead to more human rights violations and cause many more Ukrainians to flee westwards. In the long run, it would be far more costly for us than supporting Ukraine today. Europe's own security is at stake, and we need to do everything we can to step up our support to Ukraine in the months to come.

THE ONLY WAY TO ACHIEVE A JUST PEACE IS TO REDOUBLE SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

23 February 2024 – Op-ed. *In this joint op-ed in Le Monde with my friend the then Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, we marked the second anniversary of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. And I reiterated the unwavering support of the EU for the fight for Ukrainian sovereignty and freedom.*

The day Russia sent hundreds of thousands of troops into Ukraine marked the start of a major geopolitical earthquake. For the past two years, Europe has been experiencing the grim reality of the greatest war of aggression the continent has seen since the Second World War, accompanied by horrific and widespread atrocities.

What Russia is doing is a classic example of 19th century imperial and colonial aggression. Ukraine is suffering what many other countries have suffered cruelly in the past. For Russia, this war was never about Ukraine's neutrality, NATO enlargement, the protection of Russian speakers or any other invented pretext.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated that Ukraine does not exist as a nation and that Ukrainian identity is artificial. The war is simply aimed at destroying an independent country, conquering land and re-establishing domination over a people who have decided to be masters of their own destiny. Russia's imperial ambitions are probably familiar to many nations around the world that have been oppressed by colonial regimes in the past.

Putin ushers in an increasingly transactional world

The consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine have been felt far beyond Europe. The war has affected food security and energy prices, and has been accompanied by massive campaigns of disinformation and political destabilisation. The shockwaves have been global.

Putin is ushering in an increasingly transactional world. He has deployed the Wagner Group in Africa, destabilised other countries through *coups d'état* and exercised economic coercion by using the weapon of hunger – offering grain that

he himself has made scarce by systematically burning fields in Ukraine, targeting storage infrastructures and blocking maritime export routes.

The war and its consequences therefore affect every country. If Russia were to win, it would send out the very dangerous message that 'might makes right'. All the world's aggressive powers would be tempted to follow Russia's lead. If aggression ends up paying, why shouldn't all those who have territorial claims on their neighbours act accordingly? That is why it is in the interests of many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America that Ukraine should win.

This is not a war of 'the West against the others'. Supporting Ukraine is not about being 'pro-Western'. It is about rejecting war and terror. It is about defending international relations based on mutual respect and supporting Ukrainians' rights to security and freedom. Ukraine and the EU share a vision of international relations in the 21st century that is the exact opposite of that of Putin's Russia. Our vision is based on international law, respect and mutual benefit, rather than coercion, corruption and fear.

No one has a greater interest than we do in bringing this war to a rapid end and bringing peace to our continent. To achieve this, Ukraine has proposed a 10-point peace formula, which the EU fully supports. Not only does it propose an end to hostilities, it also includes provisions to strengthen food security, nuclear safety, environmental protection, energy security, international justice, human rights and respect for the UN Charter.

A message of resilience

This formula is the only serious proposal on the table, and we call on all countries committed to peace to join us in implementing it. Ukraine is currently organising a world peace summit in Switzerland, and the EU is actively supporting this process. Leaders from around the world will seek to reach agreement on a shared vision of a just peace in Ukraine, based on the UN Charter. Russia will then be presented with this consolidated position representing the majority of the world, leaving it no choice but to engage in good faith.

As the war enters its third year, our message is one of resilience in the face of aggression and terror. We cannot and will not allow aggression to be rewarded in the 21st century; on the contrary, we will mobilise against it. The only way to achieve a just peace is to redouble our support for Ukraine. This is what the EU has been doing in recent months, and it will be stepping up its support again in 2024.

Our common goal is to ensure that Ukraine can turn the tide of war in its favour, in order to achieve a just peace as quickly as possible. The support of the world is essential to achieve this result. It is in everyone's interest that international law is respected and that international cooperation is the top priority. There must be no return to the dark past of military aggression, imperialism and colonialism – neither in Europe nor in any other region of the world.

REDISCOVERING THE HARSHNESS OF THE WORLD

15 March 2024 – Speech. *During a trip to Washington DC, I had the opportunity to give a lecture at Georgetown University to present European foreign and security policy in response to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine to the American public and to stress the importance of continued American support for Ukraine.*

I have now served over four years as the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – four years during which multiple crises have spilled onto us like a violent river overflowing its banks.

I will spare you the list of crises we are experiencing. You know them as well as I do.

Let me reflect today on what seems to me our continent's major challenge: Europe rediscovering – through Ukraine – the harshness of the world. A harshness for which we were poorly prepared.

European unity was built in opposition to power politics

Why so? Europe was poorly prepared for the harshness of the world because European unity was built in opposition to the very idea of power politics.

Its aim was to eradicate among Europeans the instinct of war, which had caused us so much trouble over the centuries. European nations had spent centuries at war – first on behalf of religion, then in the name of the nations, the will to power or imperial ambitions. Europe was the continent with the highest number of interstate wars.

When, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the idea of European unity began to emerge, Europe's top priority was to put in place a system that would put an end to the wars that had ravaged the continent.

This was the starting point of European integration. The new Europe would be built around the economy. Negotiations and compromise would defuse conflict.

And it has been a great success. It brought 80 years of peace within our Union. Today, the very idea of war between EU Member States is unimaginable.

But the downside for Europeans is that we began to think – or perhaps wanted to think – that war was also disappearing in the rest of the world. Or that, even if conflicts persisted elsewhere, they no longer concerned us. This has been the received wisdom in Europe for many decades.

This worked well during the Cold War, as, by definition, the war in question remained cold. And, in fact, Europe's security was ensured by an external actor, the United States. So it was almost as if Europeans were saying, 'For war, please call the United States.'

After the end of the Cold War, the belief in a world without war only grew. We believed in the 'end of history' and expected the triumph of democracy. Russia became a G8 member, and China joined the World Trade Organization.

We were told that globalisation would make borders meaningless; some spoke of the 'end of geography'.

But what do we see today? Two violent conflicts in the world – one in Ukraine, the other in the Middle East – where issues of territoriality are at stake.

In Ukraine, we are facing an imperialist power

In Ukraine, we are facing a conflict between a sovereign state, Ukraine, and Russia, an imperial power – or, more precisely, an imperialist power – that still has a colonial vision of its identity. This is the thread that runs through Tsarist politics, Soviet politics and now Putin's policy.

As long as Ukraine remained within Russia's orbit, Putin pretended to accept the formal principle of an independent Ukraine. But, the moment he realised that Ukraine was likely to break away from Russian influence and gravitate towards Europe, he set out to destabilise it. We all know the different stages: the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the Donbas.

As destabilisation failed to achieve the desired results, Russia opted for an open war of aggression, with the idea of waging a swift, decisive campaign. They expected victory within three days. We all know what followed.

On 24 February 2022, the forgotten harshness of the world returned to Europe with intensity.

Europe reacted in a remarkable manner that was neither guaranteed at the outset nor expected by Russia. It was Europe's moment of awakening as a geopolitical player.

We took strong and decisive action.

- We have adopted 13 successive sanctions packages, including freezing all Russian assets held in Europe.
- We have virtually stopped our energy imports from Russia, a move that seemed unthinkable. And, with the G7, we have capped the price of Russian oil sold by sea, thanks to the de facto monopoly held by European insurers on maritime freight – a little-known instrument of European power.
- We have taken the historic decision that Ukraine will become a member of the European Union – a step that will fundamentally change the EU.
- We have provided massive economic and financial assistance to Ukraine, including by supporting Member States hosting Ukrainian refugees. The commitments we have made now exceed €110 billion
- In addition, we have provided substantial military aid of €28 billion, either through bilateral aid from Member States or through EU mechanisms. And for this year alone Member States have budgeted for at least €21 billion in additional military assistance.

This makes us by far the largest financial supporters of Ukraine. However, the massive financial, military and political support of the United States has also been decisive in keeping Ukraine in the fight.

Russia has undoubtedly suffered a colossal strategic defeat. It failed at the gates of Kyiv; it suffered enormous setbacks when Ukraine liberated over half the territory Russia had captured and unblocked Black Sea routes. And the long-term prospects for Russia's economy are much bleaker than recent figures would suggest.

Russia has not yet lost the war

But Russia has not yet lost the war, nor has it changed its strategic calculation. Today we are entering a delicate new phase. It is important that we fully understand the magnitude of the situation, assess the difficulties we face and adapt accordingly.

What is this new phase?

First, the Russian regime has regained political space. Putin has done that in a number of ways. On the one hand, he has further consolidated power internally. The demise of Wagner Group leader Prigozhin and the recent murder of Alexei Navalny sent a signal that absolutely no opposition would be permitted.

On the other hand, Putin was able to move towards a war economy, by converting parts of civil industry into military production. This was facilitated by the authoritarian nature of the regime, as well as a formidable network for evading sanctions, particularly through central Asia.

Russia's political space was further amplified by the horrific attacks by Hamas on 7 October. The Hamas attacks and the resulting Israeli offensive have shifted the centre of gravity of global attention. Many countries in the Global South, which supported us only half-heartedly on Ukraine, now point to double standards when witnessing the scale of the carnage in Gaza and the failure of the international community to step in.

Calling for respect for international law has become much more difficult for us when the international community has failed to stop the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of our time. This is also what I told the UN Security Council two days ago in New York. If the two-state solution is really what we all agree on, the Security Council should now define the parameters for achieving it.

Russia is waging an asymmetrical war

The second reason why the war in Ukraine has entered a new phase is that Russia is waging an asymmetrical war. It simply needs not to lose in order to win, whereas Ukraine needs to win in order not to lose. That's a fundamental difference. Because, for Putin, Russian lives are cheap. But Ukraine has neither the means nor the desire to sacrifice large numbers of its population.

As the lethality of the war increases, this disparity between the two societies grows, shifting further in Russia's favour. Moscow has adapted by strengthening its defensive positions, using its advantages in terms of ammunition, manpower, drones and electronic warfare.

For Russia, what matters is that Ukrainian losses are proportionally much greater than its own, in accordance with the known principles of wars of attrition.

Wrongly or rightly, Russia believes that it has time. That's why calls for negotiations are pointless now, unless one expects Ukraine to simply surrender.

The context is therefore very worrying. But you can be sure that Europe's stance on Ukraine will not weaken. Nor should that of America.

There are lessons to learn from history. Appeasement and isolationism have not worked in the past.

In 1939, the rallying cry of the French pro-appeasement crowd was 'Pourquoi mourir pour Dantzig?', 'Why die for Danzig?', the Polish city.

And in 1940, when war was already raging in Europe, large crowds turned out on Washington's National Mall, just a few minutes from here, to protest against US involvement.

But war came anyway, to both France and the United States.

Today, the question is not even whether Europeans or Americans should 'die for Donbas'. It is, rather, if we are willing to provide the assistance needed to help Ukrainians stop dying for Donbas – and the rest of their country.

If we allow Russia to win in Ukraine, we will pay a high price

Our lesson from history must be that if we allow Russia to erase Ukraine from the map we will pay a much higher price later on.

In Europe, this realisation has largely unified our strategic view of Russia.

The vast majority of Europeans now see Russia as a direct threat to their security. This sentiment is widely shared from Riga to Lisbon. The possibility of a conventional high-intensity war in Europe can no longer be ruled out. Almost all European capitals are now working to prepare for this scenario, hoping, of course, that it will never materialise.

This realisation has several consequences.

First, we are urgently looking for ammunition, anywhere we can find it. Because Ukrainian forces have shown that, if they are sufficiently supplied and entrenched, they can inflict very high costs on Russian forces for minimal territorial gains.

An initiative by the Czech president has just identified 800 000 available rounds of artillery shells, many of which will be in Ukraine in a matter of weeks. And the ammunition production capacity of European industry has already increased by 50 % in the last two years.

We are also ramping up the capacity of our defence industry to produce more. The quality of European military equipment has been exceptional for the past two years. But, admittedly, we have often been too slow to provide our best technologies.

We hesitated on modern tanks, we hesitated on cruise missiles, we hesitated on F-16s. In the end, we agreed to send all of those, but the hesitation has cost lives.

Ukraine's path to turning the tide of war can only lead through technological superiority, including modern battle drones and artificial intelligence. And I don't need to remind you that on that front nobody can do more than the United States.

The second consequence is that Europe must, more than ever, solidify its credibility as a future guarantor of its own security. This is what is called "Europe's strategic responsibility". It will take time, require sacrifices and demand collective action. All this is easier said than done.

While we indeed agree that Russia is an enormous threat to Europe, our view on how to respond to this threat is far less unified. Let me explain this by looking more closely at Germany and France, the two countries at the heart of our union.

Germany's *Zeitenwende*, a turning point

Germany's response is captured in one word: *Zeitenwende* – a turning point in history. This turning point came to the tune of a €100 billion investment in the German army. Much of it is to be spent on US arms, indicating Germany's conviction that, in the medium term, European security without the United States is unimaginable. France, on the other hand, has concluded that Europe must stand on its own feet in matters of defence as soon as possible.

This is of course a very schematic picture. Poland and the Baltic states want both: a strong domestic arms industry and the United States to back them. On the other hand, some Member States have a history of military neutrality.

Against this background, Europe's strategic responsibility must be built and developed – first of all within NATO, in which a European pillar should be

established, a pillar developed in parallel with continued strong US commitment in support of European security.

The United States may have other strategic priorities outside Europe. Any state always has its own agenda. But when I appeal to the commitment of the United States, it is simply to remind us that the United States itself has a fundamental interest in ensuring that Europe's security is guaranteed and that its stability is strengthened so that its prosperity is not threatened.

Why? First, because Europe is by far the most important partner of the United States. Second, because, if the United States were to disengage from Europe by misfortune, the credibility of all its alliances outside Europe would inevitably be undermined.

Let us not forget that the Russians intervened in Syria because they saw that we remained idle in Crimea. Let us not forget that the Russians intervened in Ukraine because they saw the United States disengage from Afghanistan.

Our strategic interests are deeply intertwined

Our strategic interests are deeply intertwined, even if in military terms, we have to do more and better as Europeans. And doing things better is in my view as important as, if not more important than, doing more. Because, if one looks at the European military landscape, what prevails is not the lack of military effort but its dispersion and duplication among EU members.

So let me say it loud and clear. Europe has changed dramatically. We are now on alert because our vital interests are at stake. But the awakening of Europe should not imply that the United States should rest easy. We both need to remain vigilant, because our strength comes from our unity – working together as we have done for decades.

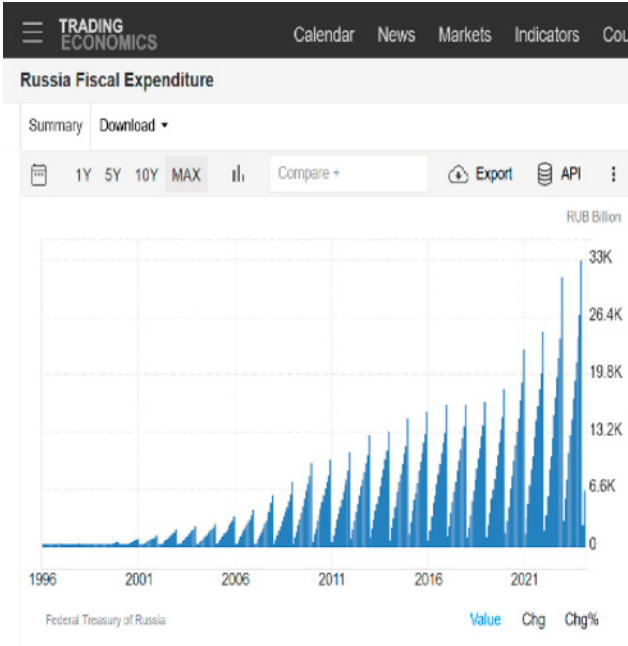
NO, TIME IS NOT ON RUSSIA'S SIDE

4 April 2024 – Blog post. *The Russian authorities regularly claim that the Russian economy does not really suffer as a result of Western sanctions and that time is on Russia's side. However, these ideas do not stand up to scrutiny. Our sanctions have already significantly weakened the Russian economy, and the future of the country becomes bleaker each day.*

Facing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the European Union has so far unanimously agreed on 13 sanctions packages – the biggest sanction effort it has ever made. These sanctions have been closely coordinated with many like-minded partners. However, we have often heard in recent months that these unprecedented sanctions may not be working. Those voices were particularly loud following the announcement by Russian authorities of a 3.6 % increase in GDP in 2023.

Caution is required with official figures in Putin's Russia

First, in an autocracy like Russia, where freedom of information and checks and balances do not exist, one must always exercise great caution with official figures. Economic figures are as suspect as the voting results of the latest presidential election. Second, it was unlikely from the outset that the Russian economy would collapse after the invasion of Ukraine. Over the past two years, we have consistently stressed that the effect of our sanctions would not be immediate and that their aim was to weaken Russia's ability to support its war effort in the medium term. And that is in fact what is beginning to happen.

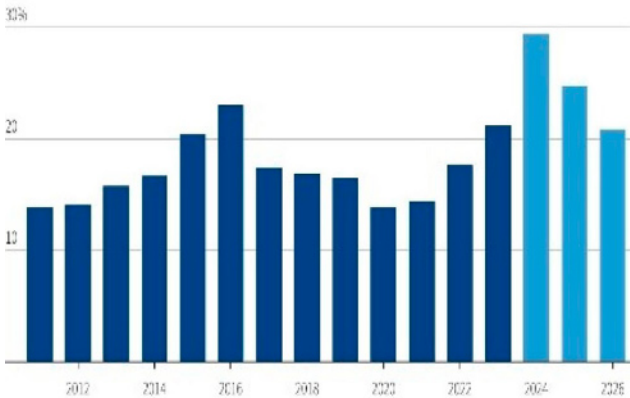


Source: Federal Treasury of Russia.

Russia's defence budget on the rise

The Russian government's share of expenditure on national defence has been steadily rising since 2020 and is likely to account for nearly 30% of the total budget in 2024.

Share of national defence spending in Russia's total budget



NB: Figures for 2024 to 2026 are from the draft budget.

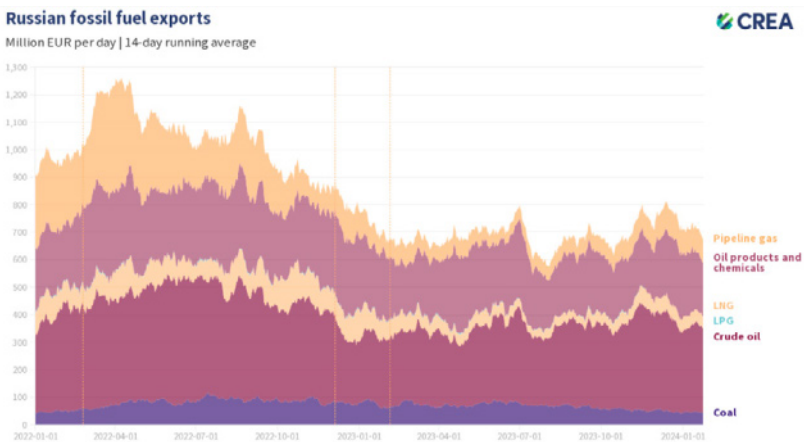
Source: Sen, S., 'Russia's draft budget plans', Reuters website, 16 October 2023.

The economic growth recorded in Russia in 2023 was the classic result of a policy of wartime Keynesianism, as seen in Germany in the 1930s. With a 70 % increase in 2024 in defence spending compared with the previous year, some 30 % of Russia's budget and 6 % of its GDP are now officially dedicated to national defence, with significant additional resources earmarked as classified expenses. Military and security spending are back to Soviet-era levels.

The Russian economy is fuelled by an explosion in defence spending

The Russian economy has been fuelled by this explosion in defence spending, including high payments to soldiers and the families of those killed in Ukraine, especially from ethnic minority communities in the poorer regions. This dynamic is also reflected in regional economic imbalances, with regions with strong military industries or bordering Ukraine showing better economic performance, due to war-related activities.

For an authoritarian regime like Putin's Russia, it is relatively easy to redirect the economy towards military production, albeit with massive negative consequences for other sectors. The shift towards a war economy necessarily means much less spending on education, health, social security, roads, civilian infrastructure, energy systems and so on. This reorientation has already negatively affected the lives of many ordinary Russian citizens, as we have witnessed, for example, with the many defects in collective heating systems in several Russian towns last winter. If the war continues, the situation will only get worse.

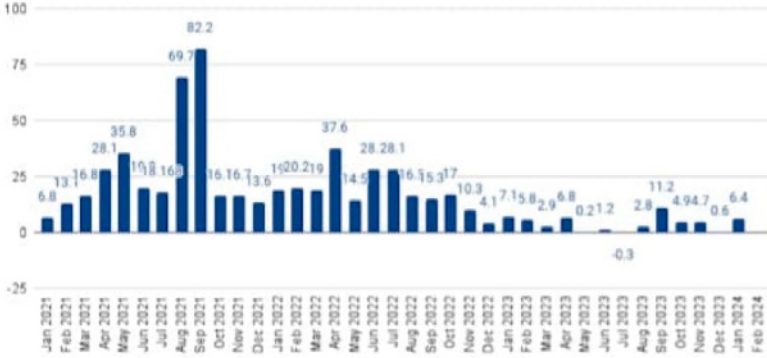


NB: LNG, liquefied natural gas; LPG, liquefied petroleum gas.

Source: Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, 2024.

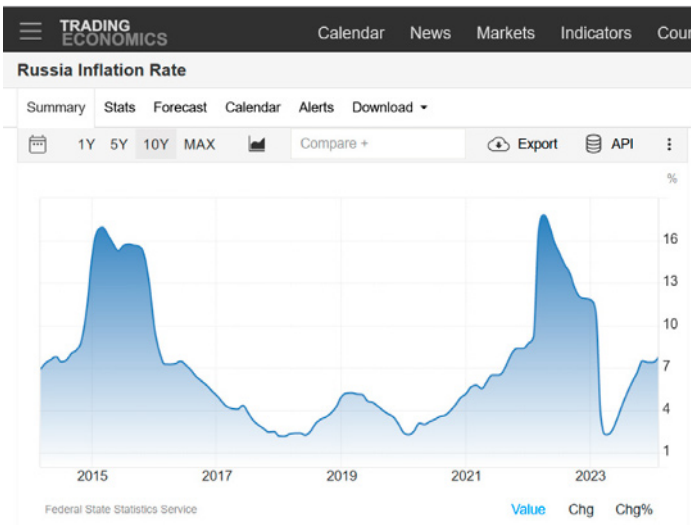
Russia current account \$bn

source: CBR



Source: Bank of Russia, 2024.

Our sanctions are already hitting Russia's purse. The revenue that the Russian economy derives from fossil fuel exports has halved since spring 2022 thanks to the European embargo on coal and oil and the price cap on oil exports set by the G7. Our objective has never been to prevent Russia from exporting fossil fuels, which would have triggered a major crisis on the world energy markets; it was to significantly reduce Russia's profits from these exports, and we have achieved this goal. This is evidenced by trade figures: as a major fossil fuel exporter, Russia has traditionally had a huge external surplus; however, over the past two years, this surplus has shrunk to almost zero.



Source: Russian Federal State Statistics Service, 2024.

In Russia, inflation is high

In 2022, the Russian economy also experienced a sharp rise in inflation, largely due to Western sanctions. In the first half of 2023, inflation had eased considerably, only to begin rising again from mid 2023. Currently, annual inflation rates in Russia surpass 8 %, compared with the 2.6 % seen in the euro area. This has been particularly true for food prices, with, for example, a 40 % rise in the price of eggs – a staple food for many Russians – in 2023. Expenditure on meals has increased to more than 30 % of the total household budget of an average Russian family.



Source: Google, 2024.

Since spring 2022, the rouble has also been falling steadily. This devaluation makes imports more expensive. To halt this fall of the Russian currency and the resurgence of inflation, the Bank of Russia has been compelled to sharply increase its short-term interest rates, which now stand at 16 %, 3,5 times the European Central Bank's interest rate. The massive war-related spending, the rising costs of imports and a tight labour market mean that inflation in Russia will remain elevated, forcing the Bank of Russia to keep interest rates at high levels.

At the same time, investor confidence in the future of the Russian economy is so low that the Russian government must borrow at a 10-year interest rate of almost 14 %, compared with an average of 2.9 % in the euro area. Russia has already experienced significant capital flight and even those who Russia labels 'friendly'

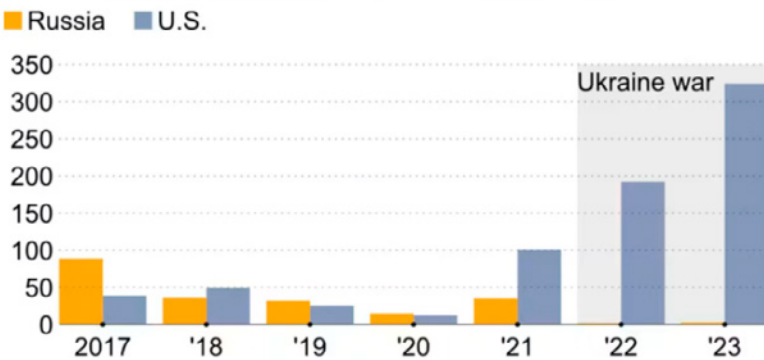
countries are not eager to bet their money on the future of Russia. With interest rates at such a high level, private investments in Russia are severely impacted and the Russian state itself can ill afford to borrow. A continuous lack of investment will further dent Russia's economic future.

Working to limit circumvention of sanctions

It is a recognised fact that our sanctions are partially circumvented, in particular through exports of products to Russia's neighbours, which are then re-exported to Russia. In response, together with our G7 partners, we are constantly working on limiting such circumvention, aiming to hold all players in the supply chain accountable, notably banks that contribute to such transactions. These efforts are becoming more and more effective. However, despite this partial circumvention, it has become much harder for Russia to obtain the products it needs to wage its war, especially high-tech products. Russia now manages to obtain only a fraction of what it needs and at much higher prices than before February 2022.

This difficulty is already reflected in official Russian statistics. In the Russian national accounts, investment spending has jumped by more than 20 % since the beginning of its war of aggression against Ukraine. However, this is not a sign that the Russian economy is modernising at breakneck speed. On the contrary, the volume of actual investment has probably decreased significantly. This jump in investment expenses reflects mostly the sharp rise in the price of the capital goods that Russia still manages to import.

Russia's launch contracts fall to almost zero



Compiled based on data from Jonathan McDowell, planet4589.org

Source: Compiled based on data from McDowell, J., 'Jonathan's space report', n.d., accessed 24 October 2024, <https://planet4589.org>.

Despite the ability of the Russian authoritarian regime to massively redirect the production of the country's economy towards weapons and ammunition, its dependence on countries like Iran and North Korea to provide enough drones, ammunition and missiles to sustain its war effort reflects a persistent industrial weakness aggravated by Western sanctions. The production of cars in Russia has plummeted to half of what it was before the war. The space industry, which was once the pride of the country, is in deep trouble. Air transport has become quite dangerous due to a lack of maintenance, software updates and spare parts.

A major labour market crisis

Moreover, in a rapidly ageing country, where the population has already been declining since 2000, the exodus of hundreds of thousands of qualified young people after February 2022, in addition to the hundreds of thousands mobilised, dead or disabled for life due to Russia's war, triggered a profound labour market crisis. In an attempt to mitigate this crisis, the Russian government opened the gates to immigrants from central Asia. However, after the tragic terrorist attack on Crocus City Hall, for which Daesh has claimed responsibility, many of these migrants are being sent back home, thus aggravating the workforce crisis in Russia.

Due to its war against Ukraine, Russia's economy is, more than ever, highly concentrated on trading basic commodities, often at a discounted price, for medium and high-tech goods. China is using this situation of weakness to buy cheap oil from Russia and export more goods to Russia, which is becoming increasingly dependent on its big neighbour. Currently, roughly 50 % of Russia's imports come from China.

In short, the beliefs that the Russian economy would be resilient to Western sanctions and that time favours Russia in its war of aggression do not stand up to scrutiny. If we do what is necessary to continue to support Ukraine economically and militarily, in particular with ammunition, it can prevail. Russia, despite being three times more populous, has in reality already been considerably weakened by our sanctions. Their effect is set to be increasingly felt over time, as human capital erodes, the volume and quality of investments deteriorate and Russia is deprived of the advanced technologies needed to support its future.

A STEP TOWARDS PEACE IN UKRAINE

12 June 2024 – Blog post. *The Summit on Peace in Ukraine, organised by Switzerland, brought together almost 100 nations from all parts of the globe to discuss a process to end the war against Ukraine. The EU fully supported this effort. No one desires peace more than the Ukrainian people, but lasting peace can only be achieved if grounded in the UN Charter.*

This weekend, I will attend the [Summit on Peace in Ukraine](#) in Switzerland. It is not a platform for direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. The summit, rather, aims to develop among the participating countries a common understanding of the parameters for peace, grounded in international law and the UN Charter.

The summit will also focus on selected practical issues on which to engage with Russia: how to enhance nuclear security, facilitate the exchange of captives and ensure the return of the many thousands of Ukrainian children abducted to Russia, a practice that harks back to darker periods of European history. It will also focus on ensuring free navigation and protecting Black Sea port infrastructure. The impact of the war of aggression against Ukraine extends far beyond its borders. A protracted or frozen conflict would perpetuate instability and threaten global food security and economic stability. Progress in these areas could open avenues for engagement with Russia in other areas over time.

This war and its outcome are existential for Ukraine, but also for European security. Any ceasefire that would allow Russia to maintain its repressive regime in occupied territories would reward its aggression, undermine international law and encourage further territorial expansion by Russia. Every UN report since 2022 has provided ample evidence of the brutal repression of Ukrainians and systematic human rights violations in occupied Ukraine.

No one desires peace more than the Ukrainians

No one desires peace more than the Ukrainians. However, the right conditions for peace matter, for Ukraine and for the world. Russia is fighting an unprovoked war of choice, driven by imperial ambition, while Ukraine is fighting a war of necessity, defending its very right to exist. As Vladimir Putin said again in St Petersburg a few days ago, he is pursuing full victory on the battlefield and sees

no urgency to end the war. Only a few weeks ago, he launched a new offensive against Kharkiv. His missiles have largely destroyed Ukraine's energy infrastructure and continue to kill Ukrainian civilians every day.

Meanwhile, his envoys tour the world to discourage countries from engaging in the Summit on Peace. Russia is obviously not ready to engage in good-faith negotiations and would use any ceasefire to rearm and attack again. Russia's narratives around peace are merely disguised attempts to legitimise its war of territorial conquest.

Consequently, Russia's declaration that it would not attend the Swiss summit, even if invited, did not come as a surprise. However, the participation of close to 100 countries and organisations, from Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, indicates robust international support for ending the war on the basis of the UN Charter. This is crucial to reassure Ukraine, the victim of Russia's war of aggression, ahead of any possible engagement with Russia.

Other proposals will also be discussed at the summit, but we believe that Ukraine's 10-point peace formula remains the most credible basis for future peace negotiations. Proposals that do not reference the UN Charter and ignore Ukraine's political sovereignty, territorial integrity and right to self-defence would amount to rewarding the aggressor and legitimising Russia's attempts to redraw borders by force. Such proposals cannot bring lasting peace. In this regard, the absence of China in Switzerland and its outreach to discourage participation do not strengthen China's claims of neutrality.

The EU wants a solution that respects international norms

The EU wants peace in Ukraine. A diplomatic solution that respects international norms would have the backing of all EU Member States. At the same time, we must continue to match our diplomatic efforts with military support, in line with Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence as per Article 51 of the UN Charter. Given that Putin shows no intention of negotiating in good faith, Europe's continued military support to Ukraine remains just as crucial to peace in Ukraine as our support for a diplomatic track.

Yes, wars generally tend to end with a peace agreement, but the content of this peace agreement is crucial to European and global security, and the international rules-based order. Let's make the Summit on Peace in Switzerland a first step to a fair, UN Charter-based peace in Ukraine.

CLOSING THE TAP ON RUSSIAN GAS RE-EXPORTS

26 June 2024 – Blog post. *In June 2024, EU ministers approved the 14th sanctions package against Russia. For the first time, the sanctions targeted gas, banning re-exports of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) in EU waters and prohibiting new investments in LNG projects in Russia. These measures aim to further curb the Kremlin's revenue.*

Our sanctions have already significantly [weakened the Russian economy](#) and are helping prevent Putin from accomplishing his plans to destroy Ukraine. To amplify these efforts, the European Union agreed yesterday on a new [sanctions package](#), which for the first time targets one of Russia's major sources of revenue, its LNG business.

The measures will prohibit the use of the EU's port infrastructure to reload Russian LNG from one vessel to another, a practice known as trans-shipment. They will also sanction new Russian LNG projects by cutting off the delivery of EU goods, technology and services, which will make their completion more difficult and costly.

Halting Russian liquefied natural gas re-exports

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU has been steadily weaning itself off Russian fossil fuels. In 2022, we banned all coal and most crude oil imports. EU Member States also slashed imports of Russian natural gas by two thirds, from 45 % of all EU gas imports in 2021 to 15 % in 2023.

Despite these efforts, Russian gas has recently been making a quiet comeback, creeping up to 18 % of EU gas imports in the first months of 2024. This uptick was largely driven by a growing inflow of Russian LNG. Of the Russian LNG reaching the EU, more than 20 % is being re-exported to other parts of the world. This practice runs counter to the EU's goal to curb, as much as possible, the revenues the Kremlin derives from its energy exports to fund its war, and it makes new targeted sanctions necessary.

We expect that the ban on trans-shipments will have no repercussions on the EU's security of supply, nor on the price of LNG on the global market, because the LNG

produced by Russia currently makes up only a fraction of the global supply. The ban will however deal a blow to Russia's purse.

This is because Russian LNG terminals are located in the Arctic. Russia, therefore, uses specialised icebreakers to transfer LNG to warmer waters, where it is reloaded onto bigger ships. Until now, most of this activity has taken place in EU ports. Once the new sanctions enter into force, the Russian icebreakers will need to sail much longer distances to reach the next suitable facility to transfer the LNG into bigger ships. Consequently, they will face much higher operational costs (estimated to be up to 75 % higher), and the volume of LNG effectively transported from Yamal, in the Arctic Ocean, to international clients will be reduced.

Alternatively, Russian vessels could sail to the Pacific; however, the summer route through the Arctic Ocean is only viable for three to four months, and Russia therefore needs to rely on trans-shipment services for the rest of the year.

Putting the brakes on Russian LNG projects

Faced with a drop in demand in Europe – the end point of its gas pipeline network – Russia is currently massively expanding its LNG infrastructure in the Arctic region. It aims to become a global player in the LNG business. Currently, the Yamal facility is Russia's largest LNG liquefaction plant. However, two LNG production projects are currently under construction in the Arctic region. They could triple Russian LNG exports by 2030.

In response, the new restrictive EU measures will ban European companies from delivering advanced LNG technology and services to Russia to slow down the construction of these facilities, and of a new trans-shipment installation in Murmansk that could replace European ports.

With this new sanctions package, we are sending another clear signal that the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine will not be tolerated and that Russia will pay a steep economic price for its criminal activities. By targeting the LNG sector, we are striking at a key pillar of Russia's economy. The effects will not be instantaneous, but in the longer term they will act as a slow poison on the Russian economy and will limit Russia's ability to sustain its military aggression.

THANK YOU AND FAREWELL, DMYTRO KULEBA

8 September 2024 – Blog post. *My friend and colleague Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba had been replaced by his former deputy, Andrii Sybiha. In this blog post, I paid tribute to the tremendous job he did in a very difficult time in advancing the EU–Ukraine relationship.*

As the Ukrainian foreign minister in the midst of the worst war of aggression on European soil since the Second World War, Dmytro Kuleba has had one of the most difficult jobs in the world. He managed this challenge skilfully, in an impressive way, showing remarkable resilience. He always put the Ukrainian people and their cause above anything else.

A very close working relationship

We worked as closely as it gets; I dare say I worked even more closely with him than with many EU foreign affairs ministers. We met for the first time during my first trip to Kyiv in early 2020. We travelled together to the Donbas in January 2022, where I got to witness first-hand the very dangerous situation at the demarcation line. I was also the first foreign official he called when Russia launched its full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, at one of Europe's darkest hours in decades.

From then on, our relationship has grown stronger by the day, becoming a real friendship. I have visited Ukraine five times since then, and together we even organised the first-ever EU Foreign Affairs Council outside the EU, in Kyiv last October. In parallel, the EU–Ukraine relationship has evolved in a similar way; since 2022, the EU has given Ukraine massive economic and humanitarian support, as well as offering military support for the first time ever to a country at war. Furthermore, last year Ukraine became a candidate country, with a clear path towards EU membership.

Dmytro Kuleba has significantly contributed to these major achievements through his engagement and diplomatic skills. More broadly, he has been a remarkable voice of Ukrainian diplomacy around the world. From Africa to Latin America, he was able to explain very clearly and convincingly to audiences largely unfamiliar

with the realities of the region why Ukraine needs to be supported against a brutal aggressor, who is violating international law and the UN Charter.

From the bottom of my heart, I wish Dmytro Kuleba all the best for the rest of his career. In the meantime, I am looking forward to working with Andrii Sybiha, who has been given the difficult task of succeeding him. A seasoned diplomat, he has held multiple roles alongside President Zelenskyy and Minister Kuleba. The months ahead will be decisive for the course of the war. It is important to have a skilled official like Minister Sybiha at the helm of Ukrainian diplomacy – to continue securing international support for Ukraine, starting at the UN.

We just had, a few days ago, our first phone call. I extended to him my open invitation to participate in the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which Dmytro had attended ever since Russia launched its full-scale invasion. Unfortunately, the significant aid we have already given to Ukraine has not yet been sufficient to restore the country's sovereignty over its entire territory and put an end to the Russian war of aggression. I assured Minister Sybiha that the EU will stand with Ukraine – for as long as it takes and doing whatever it takes.

Boosting our political and military support to Ukraine

Ukraine has been a top priority throughout my mandate. As my tenure nears its end, I intend to use these last months to keep advancing our cooperation and boost our political and military support to Ukraine. I also intend to travel to Ukraine one more time before Kaja Kallas takes over as High Representative and Vice-President and continues our common fight for Ukraine's victory and freedom.

3.

BOOSTING EUROPE'S DEFENCE AND DEFENCE INDUSTRY



FIGHTING DISINFORMATION AND FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

23 January 2024 – Speech. *Security can no longer be guaranteed solely by defence in the traditional sense. We are increasingly faced with massive manipulation of information and foreign interference, particularly by Russia. In January I presented how we combat these aggressions at a conference organised by the European External Action Service.*

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you this afternoon, to welcome you to discuss one of the most significant threats of our time. It is not about a bomb that can kill you, it is about a poison that can colonise your mind – and how to address it, how we can together address Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

I hope FIMI will become something familiar, something that people understand what it is about, as they learned to know what COVID-19 is.

Four years ago, when I began my mandate, Russia and others had already built an extensive infrastructure for lying, manipulating and destabilising on an industrial scale and in a sophisticated manner.

Well, lies already existed. In Spanish, we say *bulo* – a *bulo* is something such as a rumour. You spread a rumour in the Middle Ages. Jewish people were the victims of rumours, no? 'Oh, the Jews kill young children and they drink the blood, or they put poison in the water sources to kill people.' It has always existed.

Information manipulation has become an industrial activity

But now we are much more vulnerable to this threat because information circulates at the speed of light, and manipulation and interference have become an industrial activity.

We have been working a lot in order to make our people wiser, to have information, to know. Coming from illiteracy, not being able to read, to have enough information in order to be able to discern, to be able to choose. And at a certain moment in time, in order to participate in elections, you had to prove that you were able to read. Now, everybody has the right to participate in elections. But the problem is

not being able to read and to know, the problem is being misinformed, being faced systematically with information that is false and can completely trump your understanding of reality.

And then came the COVID-19 pandemic, and we saw how malign actors started to undermine trust in science and literally put our lives at risk – and not always ordinary people. You will remember someone who was not exactly an ordinary person, giving absurd advice about how to fight against the illness. Remember that people were saying 'Drink that, do that', putting lives of other people at risk.

Facing a fully-fledged instrument of war

And then came the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and, with that, we have been facing a fully-fledged instrument of war. A war that targets not only us, but our partners in the Western Balkans. That is why we invited my friend the Minister of Foreign Affairs from North Macedonia, who can explain to you case studies of how disinformation works.

And that is also why we have here our distinguished Member of the European Parliament who has written an extraordinary book – a bestseller – about misinformation, disinformation and foreign manipulation.

FIMI actors actively seek to undermine democracy, proposing an alternative model, making people mistrust everything – mistrust institutions – and toxically infiltrating our societies, to poison them.

So we had to respond. And I think that our response has been important, decisive – advancing our capacities from the Strategic Compass. When I presented the Strategic Compass and made a list of the threats, disinformation was there, and imposing restrictive measures – sanctions, colloquially we say sanctions – against disinformation actors and banning disinformation channels in Europe.

Now, we are facing a new wave of information manipulation during the war between Israel and Hamas. Let me share a real-life example, something that happened.

On 31 October, people in Paris, Parisians, woke up to the sight of 250 blue Stars of David spray-painted on buildings across the city. Not one, not two, but 250, strategically located around the city of Paris, marking the homes where Jewish people were living.

This reminds us of the worst days of the Holocaust and some of the darkest times in European history, and this spread quickly on social media.

Well, in another genocide that happened in Africa, the houses of the people who were going to be killed were also marked the previous day in order to guide the killers. But imagine the shock in Paris when people saw, in 250 places, the Stars of David.

Some commentators immediately started blaming the Muslim community. 'Oh, this is the Muslims. They are pushing hate against Jewish people.' And it immediately ignited a discussion in France, breaking the social fabric, attacking political Islam and attacking multiculturalism. And these images reached many parts of the world, far beyond France.

However, a week later, the French authorities traced the incident – looked into it – and they found a Russian destabilisation campaign behind it.

It is a textbook example of Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference, because the Russian perpetrators – and I can say 'the Russians', knowing what I am saying, because it has been proved and verified – identified a potential fault line in a European society. Stars of David marking the places where people were living. They pinpointed a subject that could generate divisive positions, and then immediately used over 1 000 bots to spread more than 2 500 posts on social media. As I said, many sources travelling at the speed of light.

Disseminate the feeling that nothing is true

The constant stream of lies is meant to plant the notion that all information is unreliable and not trustworthy. To disseminate the feeling that nothing is true, and everything is false. To make us suspicious about everything. That there is no such thing as the truth, and that there is nothing that can be trusted. This is a very uncomfortable society when you cannot trust anyone, anything.

And that is why it is a danger. Because disinformation weakens the social fabric, poisons democracies, because only information makes democracy possible. Democracy is a system that works on the basis of information, good information. That is why dictatorships, the first thing they do is close the newspapers, install censorship and block information, only allowing the ones that they consider good for them.

Liberal democracies cannot live without information, without reliable information and without trust in democratic processes, such as elections.

And if we want to defend democracy, if we want to defend ourselves from manipulation, we have to protect ourselves, consider it a security threat and go into this battle with the same capacity as the ones who are attacking us.

That is why, when we presented the Strategic Compass, which planned to strengthen the European Union's security and defence policy, we made decisive actions against information manipulation one of its pillars. We have to defend ourselves against the threats that are challenging us, and one of these threats is manipulation of information.

If you go to the market and you buy a piece of meat, it will have a certificate saying: 'This is good, you can eat it. It is not going to kill you.' But when you receive information and your brain processes it, where is the label of quality saying 'This is true, you can believe it. You are not going to be in a very bad shape because you are consuming bad information'? There is none.

After the Strategic Compass, we created this [Information Sharing and Analysis Centre](#) to help civil society in our Member States and beyond to pool their knowledge about root causes, about incidents, about threats, and we committed to the creation of a toolbox to fight FIMI.

Two years after the adoption of the Compass – in the meantime, the war in Ukraine came – I can say that we have delivered, and I would like to explain to you what we have delivered.

The FIMI toolbox makes use of instruments such as restrictive measures against aggressors, which we used to ban the so-called media of the Kremlin – Russia Today and Sputnik, which have been banned here in Europe, but not, for example, in other places such as the Sahel. The toolbox also provides for capacity building, and works with civil society organisations to increase media literacy, to not only be able to read but to understand who the sources are and what the dangers are behind some of the information you are consuming.

Disinformation, the second biggest risk for the world in 2024

This comes at the right moment, as the *Global Risk Report* by the World Economic Forum has just ranked disinformation as the second biggest risk the world is going to face this year. That is difficult to believe, no? But the World Economic Forum considers that disinformation is the second biggest risk that we are going to face this year.

Additionally, artificial intelligence comes and has been really revolutionising how you can manipulate content. Today it is much cheaper to produce and much more difficult to detect information that is completely false, making the asymmetric threats to our democracies still more dangerous.

And why this year? Because 2024 is a critical year for fighting against FIMI because we have a lot of elections.

Sixty elections will be held around the world. Two billion people – 50 % of the adult population of the world – will be asked to cast a vote. Half of the adult population of the world will be called on to vote.

In the European Parliament, in the United States, in India, in many places around the world, elections will become the prime target of malign foreign actors, as we saw last year in the Spanish elections. In last year's Spanish elections, Russian agents – once again – imitated the official website of the regional government of Madrid two days before the elections, warning people about ETA – the former terrorist organisation that, thank God, no longer exists, but, before it was disbanded, killed more than 1 000 people in Spain – that ETA was coming back and had a plan to attack polling stations.

So, time and careful planning are of the essence when countering such FIMI attacks.

Containing incidents to avoid them spreading further

How do we have to proceed? We have to focus on four areas.

Containing incidents, to avoid them spreading further. To detect and stop them as quickly as possible.

Minimising their effects. Redirecting audiences to verified information. Make people who are sensible to one information understand that they can check this information somewhere else.

And maybe the most important one is strategically ignoring them, to avoid escalating an incident by attracting unwanted attention to the incident itself. So maybe sometimes the better strategy is not to give a lot of importance to it but to encapsulate it and avoid people knowing about the existence of it – not falling upon it, not looking for it because they were aware that something was happening about something.

All that allows us and the people – thank you for your work – at the European External Action Service to target measures that can help us to prepare for and protect societies against potential interference in elections: exposing false stories beyond the strike; restricting the amplification of manipulated content; removing websites or channels associated with FIMI; giving visibility to reliable content; identifying and limiting financial incentives for FIMI activities; and taking legal measures, including sanctions. We built a legal framework to sanction people who disseminate false information.

We have a threats report, a response action plan. And the first step is always situational awareness of what is happening.

Now we have published our [second annual FIMI report](#), which sheds light on the current threat landscape, based on 750 investigated FIMI incidents, and presents countermeasures.

In the incidents analysed, we see that different individuals are being targeted. One of the most targeted individuals is the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy; another one is the President of France, Emmanuel Macron – but movie actors are also regularly being targeted to amplify their reach.

Ukraine, the country most often targeted

The report also finds that Ukraine continues to be the country most often targeted by information manipulation – not by accident. It is not by accident that Ukraine is the most targeted country, because who is behind the disinformation? Someone who is waging war against Ukraine using the classical means of warfare.

Ukrainians are the most battle-hardened, and Ukrainian civil society plays a major role in suffering disinformation and fighting against it, and we support them. We are doing crucial work through the Foreign Policy Instrument, my services and the services of the European Commission, contributing to maintaining good information, which is a good basis for maintaining security.

For example, information that Ukraine tried to create a chemical incident in occupied Donetsk was immediately detected by social media users. They found that these images were created long before the alleged incident happened. But Russians immediately put this incident in order to make people believe that yes, Ukrainians in Donetsk were creating a kind of chemical weapon. Well, it is not the first time that we have been told that someone has arms of mass destruction, so

it means that the idea of sending lies to the public opinions worldwide has not been waiting until the social networks were covering the planet.

Rapid action is essential to prevent the manipulation of information from spreading, and it has to be debunked before it goes viral.

Therefore, we have to share information. What does it mean in concrete terms? Let's go back to the example of the Stars of David.

This operation was uncovered by the French government agency Viginum. Viginum, in French, I suppose is *Vigile numérique, on surveillance le monde digital*. Viginum is a digital watchdog that was created by the French government only two years ago.

Viginum shared its information with our rapid alert system here in Brussels. We initiated this platform at the very beginning of my mandate. It will be part of my legacy. It is managed by the European External Action Service and brings together the Member States, the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. This system is being used by members to alert others to ongoing information manipulation activities.

And it is thanks to this communication between the French watchdog and our rapid alert system that we were able to discover who was the source of these Stars of David across Paris.

It is particularly important because Russia and others are testing tactics in some countries before rolling them out in others. This was not an accident: it happened immediately after the start of the war in Gaza, in France, in a country with a strong Jewish community but also with a large Muslim population. 'Let's test it and, if it works, we will use it somewhere else.'

Building strong international cooperation

It means that we need to build strong international cooperation in order to fight FIMI on a global scale.

We cooperate with the G7 partners through a rapid response mechanism, coordinated by our Canadian colleagues, and with NATO.

We are also holding discussions with the United States in different formats, including through the work of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council.

We have agreed on a concrete methodology to create standards that can be used to face the threat together – the EU and the United States.

Let me say something about resilience building.

We need to support citizens, institutions, civil society and, crucially, journalists, in becoming better equipped to tackle FIMI.

I hope that all of you know and use our website, [EUvsDisinfo](#). It started operating in 2015. Since then, the team at EUvsDisinfo has collected about 16 000 cases of information manipulation. It has reached more than 20 million people just last year and now, including audiences in Africa and other parts of the world.

Every year, we are providing hundreds of workshops for journalists, for fact-checkers, and for ministries of foreign affairs of the EU Member States.

Because what we are doing is fighting against an industry that produces lies as Ford started producing cars: on a production line. Twenty-four hours a day, non-stop.

And we are doing that everywhere, outside the European Union, in countries such as North Macedonia. And in an instant, in a moment, Minister, you will debrief us on some of the cases you have been living.

And we are training independent journalists globally. It goes without saying how important journalists are as a pillar of democracies, and they are too often targeted by FIMI.

We are offering training and legal aid to combat lawsuits aimed at pressuring journalists into self-censoring. Why create a censorship department if you can influence journalists to become, each one of them, a censor on themselves?

How to respond to information manipulation

And of course, we provide training on how to recognise and respond to information manipulation.

Another word about sanctions. 'Sanctions' has become a very popular word. Everybody talks about the European Union imposing sanctions. In fact, the word 'sanctions' does not exist in our treaty. You go to the treaties, you do a search –

'sanctions' does not exist. What you will find is 'restrictive measures'. You take a measure to restrict something. And we take measures to restrict the activities of the FIMI actors. I mentioned the activities of Russia Today and Sputnik.

Last July, we listed seven Russian individuals and five entities responsible for conducting a [digital information manipulation campaign](#) called Recent Reliable News. They have a sense of humour, as Recent Reliable News was a factory of lies.

Recent Reliable News was instrumental in spreading the images of the Stars of David through a large number of accounts affiliated with them on Facebook and the platform today called X.

Our FIMI threats report found that 750 investigated incidents covered 4 000 channels that were activated almost 10 000 times.

Therefore, we have to work with the [Digital Services Act](#), which sets legal obligations for online platforms to prevent abuses. And we have made use of these powers in the wake of the attacks on Israel of 7 October, when social media channels were flooded with malicious content, things that were false. And we have to identify it and warn people.

Ensure effective safeguards without slipping into censorship

But all of that would be useless – well, not useless, but not efficient – without a public debate. We must ensure effective safeguards without slipping into censorship. This is a very delicate balance.

We cannot invent a 'ministry of truth', one that says, 'this is true, this is not true'. You can imagine what would become of a world in which someone had a stamp to say: 'This is true, this is not true.'

Authoritarian regimes have enacted 'disinformation laws', but they disguise it, in fact, as protecting public order or national security – in practice they are being used to suppress dissidents and suppress freedom of expression.

Where is the line between controlling the quality of information and going into censorship? What is the balance between security and freedom? This is crucial. The balance between security and freedom appears in every dimension of public life, now also in information.

The European Parliament has already debated this issue, contributing with useful recommendations. I would like to thank the INGE Committee and its chair, the Member of the European Parliament Raphaël Glucksmann, who is here, for its important work and for your very important book.

But you have to engage all institutions in this democratic process, because in the end democratic institutions are the primary targets of information manipulation and interference.

Amplify the truth, counteracting the industry of lies

More than ever, we must amplify the truth, counteracting the industry of lies.

When we enact decisions or rules here in Brussels, they reverberate around the world, and they can sometimes be received negatively. We have to take care of that.

For example, the deforestation regulation or the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, which some saw as protectionist measures, which they are not, but you have to explain why they are not.

Because it is quite easy to present them as if they were. It is quite easy to present them and say: 'Look, in the end, it is just Western protectionism. They want to keep us out of the competition because we have a certain economic advantage.'

If we do not explain what we are doing, we leave the door open for others to fill the space. And it makes it more important than ever the pedagogical activity in the political life. You have to explain what you want to do, what your purpose is and how you want to achieve it. Otherwise, someone will manipulate it and present it with a negative bias against you.

So, the work is not only to create a good tool but to make the *service après-vente*. *Il faut le présenter, il faut l'expliquer. Il faut dépenser plus d'argent et de temps, beaucoup plus d'énergie dans la pédagogie qui accompagne l'action politique.*

Par exemple, for example, in Beirut, we have our Strategic Communications Hub for the Middle East. This hub communicates in Arabic because, although we believe that everybody around the world speaks English or French – well, in fact, I speak Spanish but ... We believe that they speak English or French as we do, more or less, and then, we do not take account of the people – millions of people – who

speak Arabic or Chinese. And if we want to get to them, we have to talk in their language.

The other day at Cairo Airport, it was full of advertising about Russia Today broadcasting in Arabic. Russia Today has arrived in the Arabic world and it is announcing itself as a good source of information in Arabic. We have to do the same thing: to speak and to use the same language.

So, we communicate in Arabic, including through social media with the channel [EU in Arabic](#).

This is needed more than ever. Sorry to say, but we need people who speak not only English but Arabic, Hindi, Chinese and languages spoken by hundreds of millions of people that are not part of the traditional parameters of our linguistic culture.

Combat disinformation in sub-Saharan Africa

This year, we have also set up a task force to combat disinformation in sub-Saharan Africa. Because we have seen images of people in sub-Saharan Africa being clearly pushed by the Russian propaganda against the Western countries.

So, we are engaging in a 'battle of narratives', something I was starting to talk about just at the beginning of my mandate when we started discussing masks, vaccines and viruses – and their relation to political systems. We are going to be living amid a battle of narratives, and this battle has to be won. And in order to be won, it has to be fought – and in order to fight you have to have capacities, tools and dedicated people. Once again, thank you very much to the ones who are doing this work. Silent work, but, little by little, it is emerging, being known by the media, by the public, and it will be an important actor in political life in the future.

To conclude, this is a matter of security. I am in charge of foreign policy and security policy – and security is no longer just a matter of weaponry, it is not a matter of armies. It is a matter of information. It is a matter of the social fabric and how citizens get fed with the ideas, the facts, that later will determine their capacity as citizens to choose their government and to mark the policy of their nations, and the policy of the European Union, and influence the history of the world.

Keep in mind that unchecked, malicious content spreads like a cancer and puts the health of our democracies at risk.

But we have the tools to fight effectively against this disease. We have the capacity – we need more, but we have started fighting this battle. And this meeting, and this discussion today, is part of this process.

TO SECURE PEACE, THE EU NEEDS TO BE READY TO DEFEND ITSELF

2 February 2024 – Blog post. *In this blog post I took stock of our military support to Ukraine at the beginning of 2024. Regarding ammunition in particular, we were lagging behind our target, but we were also accelerating our effort. By the end of 2024, we will have delivered more than 1 million artillery rounds to Ukraine and trained 60 000 Ukrainian soldiers.*

Last Wednesday, we had an informal meeting of EU defence ministers at the invitation of the Belgian minister, as we do during each rotating presidency. It has been one of the most dense and intense defence ministers meetings since the beginning of my mandate, with frank and open discussions.

€28 billion military assistance already provided to Ukraine

First, we discussed our military support to Ukraine. Rustem Umerov, the Ukrainian Minister of Defence, updated us via video message on the situation on the battlefield and Ukraine's needs. We shared with our Member States new aggregated data about our support to Ukraine since the start of the Russian aggression almost two years ago. The European Union, through its own instruments, and its Member States, bilaterally, have together already provided more than €28 billion of military assistance to Ukraine. It is quite an impressive amount.

Ahead of this meeting, we also asked our Member States about their budgetary commitments for military support to Ukraine in 2024. We have not yet received all responses, but many Member States have already sent their inputs, and, at this stage, they have budgeted €21 billion in 2024 alone for military assistance to Ukraine. It demonstrates that we are accelerating our support significantly. In one single year, we will get close to the amount spent in the two previous years of this war.

We also took stock of our [EU training mission](#). We have almost reached the target of 40 000 Ukrainian soldiers trained and we have agreed to add an additional 20 000 by the summer. By then, we will have trained 60 000 Ukrainians soldiers in total on EU territory. As any military leader knows very well, good-quality training means that many lives will be saved on the battlefield.

In March 2023, the EU and its Member States committed to delivering 1 million artillery rounds to Ukraine within one year. Based on the information we have received so far – once again, not all Member States have already sent their input – we will have delivered 524 000 rounds, 52 % of the objective, by March.

We know that the battle is fierce on the front line, that our Ukrainian friends urgently need more ammunition and that we are far away from the goal. However, we also knew from the start that the objective set last year was very ambitious. A world shortage of ammunition, bottlenecks in the supply chain, limited stocks and the necessary lead time for new investment are some of the reasons for this delay. I passed the clear message to the Member States that we need to do more and quicker. The European Defence Agency has signed 60 framework contracts with European producers in order to jointly procure 155 mm calibre ammunition. We still have a spare capacity of €1.5 billion to absorb and I have encouraged EU Member States to place more orders.

It is a work in progress. According to the information received from our Member States, 631 000 additional ammunition rounds will be donated to Ukraine before the end of the year. It means that we will have delivered more than 1 million rounds before the end of 2024. It is important to bear in mind that, in addition to these donations by the EU and its Member States, the European defence industry is also delivering additional artillery ammunition to Ukraine under normal commercial contracts.

40 % more capacity for artillery rounds than two years ago

The European defence industry is currently investing heavily to increase its production capacities. Based on the data provided by Commissioner Breton, this production capacity has already increased by 40 % since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine. Our production capacity for artillery rounds is currently at almost 1 million per year and by the end of 2024 it should reach 1.4 million rounds per year. It will allow us to replenish our stocks and at the same time to continue delivering ammunition to Ukraine.

We also continued discussions on a new Ukraine Assistance Fund, which I have proposed to create within the [European Peace Facility](#) (EPF) to guarantee long-term military support to Ukraine. With the EPF, we have until now mostly supported delivery of military assistance to Ukraine from Member States' existing stockpiles. With the Ukraine Assistance Fund, we would rather focus on new

acquisitions made by Member States through joint procurement from the European defence industry and continue in parallel to 'train and equip' Ukrainian soldiers through the European Union Military Assistance Mission. The proposal I have put forward was well received by ministers. It was also discussed by EU leaders on Thursday. Work must now be accelerated with a view to having this fund in place by early March. There is no time to waste.

To strengthen our industrial and technological base in the defence sector, we need to move from an emergency mode, which we have been in for the last two years, to a longer-term approach. During its [December meeting](#), the European Council called upon me, as High Representative for Security Policy and the European Commission, to swiftly present a new European defence industrial strategy, in coordination with the [European Defence Agency](#). The first elements were also discussed in our meeting, and this new strategy will be presented in a few weeks. Europeans need to realise that we now live in a very dangerous world and that, to face these challenges, we need to strengthen the industrial and technological basis of our collective defence.

Aspides, a new EU naval defensive mission in the Red Sea

Lastly, we discussed the situation in the Red Sea and in the Sahel, in the presence of our partners from the United Nations and NATO, as well as a representative of the European Parliament. Regarding the Red Sea, we are about to launch a new maritime operation called Aspides, the ancient Greek word for shield. It will be a purely defensive operation to protect merchant vessels in the Red Sea by strengthening maritime situational awareness and accompanying them to deter attacks. This mission will not conduct any action on land. Our goal is to launch it at the latest during the next Foreign Affairs Council on 19 February. I am fully aware of the urgency, and this will be among the fastest operations launched in the history of our common security and defence policy.

Regarding the Sahel, we have to adapt to the new reality on the ground. Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso have withdrawn from [Ecowas](#) and, following the revocation by the junta in Niger of the corresponding legal agreements, our [military partnership mission](#) in Niger has already left the country. Preparations are under way for the withdrawal of our [civilian mission](#) by next June. In the coming weeks, we will also make decisions about our [military mission in Mali](#), since its mandate is finishing next May. At the next [Foreign Affairs Council](#), we will present a new country-by-country approach on the Sahel, including our engagement on security and defence.

Butter and cannons

I know that the economic and social situation is currently very tense throughout all European countries. And I am well aware that in such a context it can be challenging to increase military spending to support Ukraine, refill our stockpiles, develop our defence capabilities and strengthen our defence industry. However, this is exactly what needs to be done if we want to maintain our security and deter any attempt at aggression in an increasingly tense geopolitical context. Everyone, including myself, always prefers butter to cannons, but, without adequate cannons, we may soon find ourselves without butter either. *Si vis pacem, para bellum*: if you want peace, prepare for war.

WHY WE NEED A NEW EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

5 March 2024 – Speech. *With my colleagues Margrethe Vestager and Thierry Breton, I presented the first European defence industry strategy, which we had defined together. We reacted vigorously and unitedly to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, but our defence industry is in dire need of a boost after three decades of 'silent disarmament'.*

Maybe you will remember that, two years ago, when presenting the [Strategic Compass](#), I said 'Europe is in danger'. Well, I am sorry, I was right. Europe was in danger and today is even more in danger.

Peace is no more a given, unhappily. The war is at our borders.

Russia's war of aggression has brought a great sense of urgency to step up our industrial defence capacities.

At the beginning, the war was fed by stocks. Now, we are going into an industrial production war. Because the war has lasted two years, it does not seem it is going to end soon, and the need for military equipment has been increasing, exhausting stocks and increasing the capacity of our industrial production.

The European Union has answered in an unprecedented manner

Certainly, the European Union has answered in an unprecedented manner. This war has changed the way we look at our defence capabilities.

The European Union is not a military alliance, but the treaties express the will to build a Common Security and Defence Policy. And part of this Common Security and Defence Policy is to have a good and efficient industrial basis.

We have done a lot through the European Peace Facility to supply what we have. Now we have to move from emergency mode – urgency – to a medium- and long-term approach that strengthens our defence industrial readiness, to continue providing military support to Ukraine.

It is no longer a matter of looking at the stocks but being able to produce a continuous flow of production.

On ammunition, for example, industry has responded quickly to the emergency. The European defence industry has increased its industrial capacity by 50 % since the start of the war. And I want to thank the Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton, for pushing the industry. And the industry has answered: a 50 % increase in capacity since the beginning of the war is a remarkable achievement.

And today what we lack is not production capacity, it is financing. In the short term, we have production capacity, but we need financing. But, looking a little bit ahead, we need more production capacity.

Funding is fundamental

We increased it by 50 % and it still has to increase further and quicker – but funding is fundamental. We do not have a Pentagon in Europe. We do not have an institution that has a strong buying capacity driving the market and driving the industry.

But we have to cooperate and to coordinate the way the Member States react in order to provide funding for the industry and the capacity for the industry in order to respond to the increasing demand.

We need to do more, not only on ammunition. In the medium term, we need to increase – as Margrethe has said and Commissioner Breton will explain in more detail – the strength and resilience of the European defence industry.

We need a defence industrial policy, because the defence industry is unique. You do not go to the supermarket to buy defence products. There is a single buyer – governments. And there is a variety of producers, but 90 % of the industrial defence capacity is concentrated in a few Member States.

Our defence industry, before the war, secured about 40 % of the defence needs of our armies and exported about half of its production. So our industry is competitive – half of its production goes to exports. But, since the beginning of the war, the amount we need to buy outside the European Union has been increasing. But keep in mind that governments are the buyers – they set the priorities based on operational needs. Working together with Member States is crucial because they are the masters of their armies.

This strategy tries to match supply and demand, through procedures to invest more, better and together as Europeans. We have to overcome fragmentation through cooperation.

Our demand is fragmented – obviously, because we have different national armies. As I said, we do not have an institution that concentrates demand and drives the industry.

We are divided into 27 Member States, with 27 different armies. So this has to increase our cooperation.

Keep in mind one figure: in 2022, the defence investment of our Member States amounted to €58 billion, divided among 27 'demand centres' (Member States). In the United States, a single one – the Pentagon – was asking the market for \$215 billion, almost four times as much.

As I said, since the beginning of the war we have to request more imports because our industry has faced an increasing demand.

Our cooperation level is still very low

Our cooperation level is still very low. In 2022 only 18 % of our procurement was done in a cooperative manner. The target is 35 %.

The European defence industry is sticking close to this degree of cooperation, and we have not improved over the years. This strategy will try to incentivise joint procurement of defence capabilities and projects of common European interest.

Fragmentation needs to be addressed with cooperation. Fragmentation is the logical consequence of the fact that we are not a single state, but it has to be overcome by cooperation if we want to spend not more, but better. I will push for the Permanent Structured Cooperation to work in this direction.

You mentioned also our cooperation with NATO – for sure. And also financial capacity, and that is related also to the discussions about frozen Russian assets. If we agree that these assets could be used in order to support Ukraine's reconstruction, they could also be used to avoid Ukraine's destruction. And it means increasing the military capacities or the defence technological base of Ukraine.

But for that we still need the agreement of the Member States. We need a unanimous agreement based on a common foreign and security policy proposal

that can be tabled. But for the time being we will continue working with the Member States in order to get an agreement on that.

It certainly has advantages, and also some inconveniences. But the key idea is that if we can use this money to support Ukraine in the reconstruction process, we should also be able to use it to avoid the destruction of Ukraine by increasing its defence capability.

TIME TO STRENGTHEN THE EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRY

11 March 2024 – Blog post. *After the adoption by the College of Commissioners of the first ever European Defence Industrial Strategy, I explained in this blog post why we urgently need to boost our defence industry to replenish our stocks and face new potential threats while continuing to provide adequate military support to Ukraine.*

We need to boost our defence industrial and technological base. It was not clear to anybody before Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but now it has become common sense. It is a prerequisite if we want to be able to strengthen our defence capacity in a tense geopolitical context.

That is the reason why the European Council tasked me, as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to define a new European defence industrial strategy together with the Commission and the European Defence Agency. Last Tuesday I presented [the result of our work](#) together with my colleagues Executive Vice-President Vestager and Commissioner Breton.

A greater sense of urgency

The war against Ukraine has indeed brought a greater sense of urgency to the issue of ramping up the production capacities of the European defence industry. To respond to the Russian aggression, we have done what was unthinkable a few years ago – provide weapons, mainly from our existing stocks, to a country at war, using the [European Peace Facility](#). But, after two years of a high-intensity war, existing stocks are depleted and the conflict has evolved from a war of stocks to a war of production.

After two years of a high-intensity war, existing stocks are depleted and the conflict has evolved from a war of stocks to a war of production.

We must move from emergency mode to a longer-term vision to enable us to replenish our stocks and develop the defence capabilities we will need in the future in a more contested geopolitical environment, while at the same time continuing to provide adequate military support to Ukraine.

The most urgent concern is ammunition production. The industry responded to this emergency by increasing its production capacity by 50 % since the start of the war, which is quite remarkable. Today, in that domain, the constraint is not so much a lack of production capacity, but rather a lack of orders and financing. Industry leaders are clearly telling us: place orders and we will produce more.

However, ammunition production capacity is only part of the problem. We need to do much more to develop this industrial sector. The European defence industry includes a great variety of actors, from large multinational champions to small and medium-sized enterprises. It is highly concentrated geographically: a few Member States make up 90 % of the total European defence industry. This industry has an annual turnover of €70 billion and employs 500 000 people.

It supplies around 40 % of the needs of the European defence, meaning that our armies are importing the majority of the weapons and equipment they use. For the last two years, this proportion has even been much higher due to the need to increase our capabilities very rapidly: between the start of Russia's war of aggression and June 2023, 78 % of defence acquisitions by EU Member States were made outside the EU. At the same time, the European defence industry also exports between 40 % and 50 % of its production to non-EU countries. The products that we import and export are quite different in nature.

Governments are the only buyers

What makes this sector unique among all industries is that governments are the only buyers. In 2022, defence investment by Member States amounted to €58 billion, almost four times less than in the United States. Defence policy remains an exclusive competence of Member States and they are the masters of their armies. If we want to boost the European defence industry, working with Member States is therefore crucial.

We need to invest more, better and together as Europeans. We have already said that many times before, but this time we need to do it. EU Member States are indeed still not coordinating and pooling their defence planning and procurement enough. In 2021, European collaborative procurement was at only 18 %, despite the benchmark of 35 % set by Member States themselves back in 2007.

The fragmentation of the European defence industry is related to the political fragmentation of the continent. In Europe, we do not have a Pentagon that concentrates demand and drives the industry. We have to overcome this

fragmentation through more cooperation, incentivising more joint procurement of defence capabilities and projects of common European interest.

We have to overcome the fragmentation of European defence industry through more joint procurement and more projects of common European interest.

We will set up a defence industrial readiness board to identify joint procurement opportunities and define industrial production objectives. We will also strengthen the European defence industry commitments in the framework of the [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) and incentivise common projects through additional financing, simplification of procedures and value added tax exemptions. With the new European defence industrial strategy we aim for a 40 % share of joint procurement in 2030.

To make our defence industry more resilient, we need also to better ensure security of supply and address bottlenecks in times of crisis. We will work with Member States to help create strategic stocks of critical equipment.

Better access to finance for the defence industry

We need, finally, to ensure better access to finance for the European defence industry both from private and from public sources. We call in particular on the European Investment Bank (EIB) governing bodies to adapt the EIB lending policies to allow it to finance the European defence industry. The EIB is an investment bank. Its role would not be to finance arms purchases, but to invest in increasing production capacity. The EIB can be a key driver in this regard.

For the remaining period of the current [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\)](#), from 2025 to 2027, €1.5 billion from the EU budget will be allocated to support the European defence industry. During the next MFF, much more significant financial means will be needed, for sure.

A debate has been launched recently on joint EU borrowing to cope with the major effort required to invest in our defence capabilities and our defence industry. It is certainly not something we will be able to complete during this term of office, but, in my view, it would make sense. We already did it successfully to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic – I do not see why we should not do it when Russia threatens our very security and we urgently need to boost our defence capabilities and our defence industry.

We need also to strengthen our cooperation with partners, and in particular Ukraine and its strong and innovative defence industrial base. Visiting recently a Ukrainian plant to produce drones, I was very much impressed. Strengthening the Ukrainian defence industrial base and helping it to cooperate closely with the European defence industry will be part of the EU's future security commitments to Ukraine. To stimulate this cooperation, we will host an EU-Ukraine Defence Industry Forum this year and open an EU Defence Innovation Office in Kyiv.

If Member States agree – it has to be a unanimous decision upon a proposal by the High Representative – we could use the windfall profits of Russian frozen assets to purchase arms for Ukraine and/or help strengthen its defence industry. So far, we have considered using these profits to support the reconstruction of Ukraine. However, currently, the main issue in Ukraine is not so much reconstruction, but rather avoiding further destruction. If Member States agree, it would make sense to use these resources to procure additional military support for Ukraine through the European Peace Facility. In the longer term, we could also use these funds to support the Ukrainian defence industrial base.

We need to become 'defence ready'

In the current geopolitical context, we have no other choice: we need to become 'defence ready'. I am confident that our Member States will show the political will and provide the resources necessary to make the bold leap forward that is needed to take control of our own destiny.

EUROPEAN DEFENCE INDUSTRY: TIME FOR A LEAP FORWARD

20 March 2024 – Op-ed. *Together with my colleague, Commissioner Thierry Breton, I explained in this op-ed published across several outlets in Europe the rationale for the new European defence industry strategy.*

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine puts the EU's security at risk. With war on our doorstep, the United States profoundly divided over its continued support to Ukraine, and dangerous tensions increasing in the Middle East and many other regions, it is time for Europe to take its security into its own hands to protect its citizens and deter its adversaries.

Reverse the 'peace dividend' policy

We have already begun to reverse the 'peace dividend' policy – the approach of reducing defence spending and the related industrial production – that has long prevailed after the end of the Cold War. Since 2022, this change of mindset has materialised with the accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO, the entry of Denmark into European defence cooperation, and EU Member States' decision to invest massively in defence and support Ukraine militarily with €28 billion since the start of the war and a further €21 billion announced for 2024. The EU is using instruments such as the European Peace Facility in an innovative way to finance the transfer of arms to Ukraine, and we have just agreed to add €5 billion to this facility. We have also mobilised the EU budget in unprecedented ways to support joint procurement and investment in ammunition production.

But we need to do much more, moving from emergency mode to a structural, long-term approach. We must produce and invest more in defence, faster and together as Europeans. Building a credible Defence Union will be a major European project for the next decade.

We are not talking about creating a European army. What we need – and what we want to achieve in coming years – is closer cooperation between our national armies and a stronger defence industry in Europe. It will help also build an effective European pillar in NATO. We must build a Europe of defence that allows us to act together with our allies when possible, but also independently when necessary.

In the current geopolitical context, we have no other choice: we need to become 'defence ready'. Not because the EU should wage war but, on the contrary, to deter our potential aggressors with the certainty that our industry will be ready to sustain efforts in the long run. That is the sense of the European defence industrial strategy we presented on 5 March, which will be discussed by EU heads of state and government later this week.

Becoming 'defence ready'

The availability of defence equipment – on time and in volume – has become a critical security issue. Over the last two years, 78 % of defence equipment acquired by EU Member States was sourced outside the EU. As in so many other areas (raw materials, clean technologies), in a world of increasing geopolitical tensions we must reduce Europe's excessive dependencies. We should not take it for granted that defence producers abroad will always be eager to sell us equipment at the time, price and pace we need.

We need to increase Europe's industrial production capacities, replenish our Member States' stocks, structure resilient European defence industrial ecosystems and secure their supply chains everywhere in Europe.

We have already done it for ammunition: the European production system can today produce more than a million rounds of artillery ammunition per year and, with the support of the new Act in Support of Ammunition Production, we will reach a production capacity of 2 million in 2025.

However, we must also cover the broader defence capability landscape. We need to invest into European cyber and anti-aircraft defence capabilities, to monitor threats from space, better protect our maritime areas – the domains that none of our Member States can manage to secure on its own. But all of this presupposes the availability of European defence equipment.

Europe needs a defence industry policy underpinning its security strategy for now and the future – without having to hold our breath every four years awaiting the results of elections among our allies. With urgency and focus. Beyond slogans and short-term actions, we need to substantially increase our collective investment for the long term. Without taboos.

Therefore, we need to improve our European defence industry's access to finance from private and public sources. The European Investment Bank could be a key driver in this regard, if it adapts its lending policies accordingly.

Secondly, we need a comprehensive collective investment plan. We were able to react quickly and decisively as Europeans to the existential COVID-19 crisis by jointly mobilising €750 billion for Europe's recovery and resilience. At a time when our very security is under threat, we need a long-term, predictable and credible financing plan for investing in our defence capabilities and our defence industry – including, if necessary, common borrowing, as proposed by several heads of state and government.

Time to think, invest and act as Europeans

One thing is for sure. As with all other major challenges – climate change, pandemics, migration, energy – relying on national solutions alone will not be sufficient. It is time to think, invest and act as Europeans. We are confident that the EU Member States will show the political will and agree to provide the necessary resources to make the bold leap forward needed to take control of our own destiny in defence industry matters.

EUROPE'S DEMOSTHENES MOMENT: PUTTING DEFENCE AT THE CENTRE OF EU POLICIES

25 March 2024 – Blog post. *The March 2024 European Council meeting was the culmination of intense work on the EU's security and defence, with the preparation of the European defence industrial strategy and the creation of a new fund to step up our military support to Ukraine. We also took stock of the progress made in implementing the Strategic Compass.*

Power politics are reshaping our world. With the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the war that has flared up again in the Middle East, coups in the Sahel, tensions in Asia ... we are witnessing at the same time the return of 'old' conventional wars and the emergence of 'new' hybrid warfare characterised by cyberattacks and the weaponisation of everything from trade to migration. This deteriorating geopolitical environment is putting Europe in danger, as I anticipated when presenting the Strategic Compass, the new EU defence and security strategy, in 2022.

Four years ago, when we were facing the COVID-19 pandemic, many said that the EU was having a Hamiltonian moment because we decided to issue a common debt to alleviate the consequences of this crisis as Alexander Hamilton did after the US war of independence. We are now probably entering a [Demosthenes moment](#), in reference to the great Greek politician mobilising his fellow Athenian citizens against Macedonian imperialism 2 400 years ago: we are finally becoming aware of the many security challenges in our dangerous environment.

What are we doing to address these multifaceted threats? The month of March marks two anniversaries: the third of the creation of the [European Peace Facility](#) (EPF) and the second of the adoption of the [Strategic Compass](#). These tools have been central to our geopolitical awakening during recent years. It is the right moment to reflect on what has been done and where we are heading on security and defence.

Supporting Ukraine militarily in an unprecedented way

The EPF is an intergovernmental and extra-budgetary EU fund. It was established in 2021 to allow us to support our partners with military equipment, which was not possible via the EU budget. We started with €5 billion – today the financial ceiling of this fund stands at €17 billion.

While it was not originally created for this purpose, the EPF has been the backbone of our military support to Ukraine. So far, we have used €6.1 billion from the EPF to incentivise the support to Ukraine by EU Member States and, with them, the EU has delivered in total €31 billion in military equipment to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. And this figure is increasing every day.

Thanks to these funds, we have sustained our military support to Ukraine. Among other actions, by this summer, we will have trained 60 000 Ukrainian soldiers. We have donated 500 000 artillery shells to Ukraine and by the end of the year it will be more than 1 million. Additionally, the European defence industry is also providing to Ukraine 400 000 shells through commercial contracts. The Czech initiative to buy ammunition outside the EU comes in addition to these efforts. However, it is far from being enough and we have to increase both our production capacity and the financial resources devoted to support Ukraine.

Last Monday at the Foreign Affairs Council, we decided to create a new [Ukraine Assistance Fund](#) within the EPF, endowed with €5 billion, to continue supporting Ukraine militarily. [I also proposed last Wednesday to the Council to redirect 90 % of the extraordinary revenues from Russian immobilised assets](#) into the EPF, to increase the financial capacity of the military support for Ukraine.

Reinforcing our global security and defence partnerships

But the EPF does not help only Ukraine. So far, we have used it to support 22 partners and organisations. Since 2021, we have allocated close to €1 billion to operations led by the African Union and regional organisations, as well as the armed forces of eight partner countries in Africa. In the Western Balkans, we are supporting regional military cooperation, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. We are also supporting Moldova and Georgia in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and Jordan and Lebanon in the Southern Neighbourhood.

Since the beginning of my mandate, we have launched nine new missions and operations under our Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The last one, [Operation Aspides](#) in the Red Sea and Gulf region to protect commercial vessels, has been set up in record time. With [Operation Irini](#) in the Mediterranean, [Operation Atalanta](#) near the Horn of Africa and our [Coordinated Maritime Presences](#) in the Gulf of Guinea and the Indian Ocean, we are becoming more and more a global maritime security provider. We also launched last year two new civilian missions in [Armenia](#) and in [Moldova](#).

However, our missions in Niger had to be suspended due to the military coup, and our military mission in Mali has been put on hold. We are currently reconsidering the form of support we can offer to our partners in the region: in this context, we set up last December a [new type of civilian–military initiative](#) to help our partner countries in the Gulf of Guinea fight the terrorist threats stemming from the Sahel.

We have also reinforced our cooperation with NATO in various key domains such as space, cyber, climate and defence and critical infrastructures. We have broadened and deepened our network of tailored bilateral security and defence partnerships with Norway and Canada, as well as countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Georgia, Moldova), Africa (South Africa, Rwanda), the Indo-Pacific (Japan, South Korea, Australia) and Latin America (Chile, Colombia). The first [Schuman Security and Defence Forum](#) in March last year, bringing together security and defence partners from more than 50 countries, was a success. We will build on this when we meet for the next Schuman Forum on 28 and 29 May.

One of the main deliverables foreseen by the [Strategic Compass](#) was the creation of a new EU Rapid Deployment Capacity to be able to quickly react autonomously to crisis situations, for instance to evacuate Europeans in the event of an emergency as in Afghanistan in August 2021 or in Sudan in April 2023.

It will become operational next year, but, to prepare for it, we organised the first-ever EU military live exercise last October in Cadiz in Spain. It involved 31 military units, 25 aircraft, 6 ships and 2 800 personnel from Member States' armed forces. A second live exercise will take place at the end of the year in Germany.

A new [Crisis Response Centre](#) is also now operational in the European External Action Service to coordinate EU activities in the event of emergencies, including the evacuation of European citizens. We are also strengthening our military and civilian headquarters in Brussels.

Investing more in defence and boosting the EU defence industry

At home, we also need to invest much more and help our defence industry to increase its production capacities. There is no other solution if we look at the magnitude of the defence needs of Ukraine but also of our Member States, which need to replenish their stocks and acquire new equipment.

EU Member States are already spending significantly more on defence, with a 40 % increase in the defence budget over the last 10 years and a €50 billion jump

between 2022 and 2023. However, the €290 billion EU defence budget in 2023 represents only 1.7 % of our GDP – under the 2 % NATO benchmark. And in the current geopolitical context this could be seen as a minimum requirement.

However, the global amount of our expenditure is not the only figure we have to follow carefully. To use our defence spending efficiently, we have also to take care to fill gaps and avoid duplication. As I have already said on many occasions, we need to spend more but also better, and better means together.

In 2022, European armies invested €58 billion in new equipment. For the fourth year in a row, it exceeded the benchmark of 20 % of spending on defence. However, [only 18 % of these defence investments](#) are currently done in a collaborative manner, far below the 35 % benchmark set by EU Member States themselves in 2007. Since the start of the Russian war of aggression, 78 % of the equipment bought by EU armies has come from outside the EU. We are also lagging behind in our investments in research and development.

That is the reason why I presented earlier this month, together with the Commission, the first-ever [European Defence Industrial Strategy](#). We need to incentivise much more joint procurement, better secure our security of supplies, anchor the Ukrainian defence industry in Europe and organise a massive industrial ramp-up. We also need to catch up on new military technologies such as drones and artificial intelligence. With its innovation hub, the [European Defence Agency](#) will continue to play a key role in these efforts.

To succeed, we will need to ensure much better access to finance for the European defence industry, notably by adapting the European Investment Bank's lending policies. We should also plan for issuing common debt to help finance the major investment necessary in defence capabilities and the defence industry, as we did to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. However, we still have a lot of work to do to reach an agreement on that subject.

Finally, we will also need to reinforce our defence when it comes to hybrid and cyber threats, foreign information manipulation and interference, and resilience of our critical infrastructure.

As detailed here, a lot has already been done in recent years; however, I am very much aware that a lot more remains to be done to match the magnitude of the threats we are facing. We need a leap forward in European defence and the European defence industry.

FIGHTING FOREIGN INTERFERENCE TO PROTECT OUR DEMOCRACY

3 June 2024 – Blog post. *Ahead of the June 2024 European elections, I took stock in this blog post of our fight against information manipulation and foreign interference in Europe. We must protect our democratic processes from such attempts, which have become numerous recently, particularly emanating from Putin's Russia. However, we have put in place tools to detect and combat them.*

The next European elections will be a defining moment for our common future. It is a critical occasion for European citizens to discuss, in particular, pressing foreign and security policy issues and define the future global role they want for Europe. It is a difficult task because the EU needs to overcome at the same time many geopolitical, climate, economic and democratic challenges. Europeans, all of us, need to have the sense of urgency required to be up to the task.

To achieve this goal, we need to protect this election process and, more broadly, European public debate from malign foreign actors, who want Europe to fail. This is a security challenge that we need to take seriously. Credible elections are at the heart of democratic societies. All European citizens should be able to exercise this right free from foreign interference and manipulation.

An increase in information manipulation operations

After the launch of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, malign foreign actors, in particular Putin's Russia, have further increased their existing information manipulation operations across Europe and beyond. These operations are part of a [wider set of hybrid and cyberattacks](#) that foreign states, and in particular Russia, deploy against us and our partners.

Russian information manipulation has taken advantage of increased social media penetration and cheap artificial intelligence-assisted operations. Fake bot accounts boost deceptive content and manipulate algorithms. Better machine translations facilitate larger volume and cross-language production. Russia develops in particular ['doppelganger'](#) websites or online profiles, which pretend to be authentic news outlets but are in fact fake sites trying to deceive people into believing they are seeing content from reputable journalists or politicians.

When propagandists design their campaigns they tend to piggyback on existing hot-button political topics. Add claims of scandals or emotional content, and these campaigns can travel fast and wide in the online world. Unchecked social media platforms offer Russian and pro-Kremlin operators cheap and fast tools to reach communities that would otherwise not necessarily tune into pro-Kremlin voices. Pro-Kremlin platforms are trying not only to pollute the information environment inside the European Union, but also to smear the reputation of the EU across the Middle East, the Western Balkans, Africa, Latin America and Asia. All this in more than 20 languages.

Smear campaigns against European political leaders who are critical of Putin's Russia are being promoted by bots and other inauthentic tactics to manipulate algorithms and make them jump to the top of our newsfeeds. Along with other EU and Member State national leaders, I am a regular target of the Kremlin's attacks. We are blamed for all sorts of evils. President Emmanuel Macron of France has been in the crosshairs in particular recently, with a [range of false and vulgar attacks – Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez](#) of Spain likewise. A prominent example of a doppelganger attack recently hit my colleague, [the German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock](#), but the German authorities took prompt steps to counter this.

These information manipulation operations are not just online, they also take place in real life. Since the beginning of the year, French authorities suspect that Russian services have sought twice to increase polarisation and spread hatred in France by organising antisemitic actions in Paris – painting [Stars of David on the walls of certain buildings](#) and [red hands on a Shoah memorial](#).

A serious security threat

These malign activities pose a serious security threat. This is why, two years ago, the [Strategic Compass](#), the EU's security and defence strategy, made countering foreign information manipulation and interference one of its main goals.

Russian state-sponsored campaigns to flood the EU information space with deceptive content are a threat to the way we have been used to conducting our democratic debates, especially in election times. To address this challenge we need to invest in four areas: situational awareness, societal resilience, foreign policy instruments and regulatory tools.

Across the EU, Member States have put in place the necessary systems and resources to conduct the European elections to the letter. While we do not need

to fear them, we need to be aware of the ill intentions of these foreign state actors. Exposure of facts to citizens is the best instrument to counter all sorts of deceptions and conspiracies. By exposing the malign tactics, techniques and procedures of our adversaries, we limit the impact of these attacks on our democratic decision-making.

In recent years, the EU has put in place measures and systems to detect and respond to foreign malign interference, disinformation, cyberattacks and data breaches. We have stepped up our already close cooperation between the EU institutions and Member States to be ready to mount a collective response, should this be needed. We are also working together with the G7 and its [Rapid Response Mechanism](#) to bolster our collective defence and response arsenal.

We have worked regularly with academia, civil society organisations and journalist communities, and tech companies and platforms in the EU and beyond to better understand and fight foreign information manipulation and interference. We make our work available to the public, in particular via the [EUvsDisinfo platform](#), which, among other things, has the world's largest publicly available database of pro-Kremlin disinformation cases.

In the field of regulation, we need to always preserve the delicate balance between freedom of speech and fighting disinformation. Our democracy needs in particular the watchful eye of the free and independent press. The recently adopted EU Digital Services Act gives us new and enforceable possibilities for dealing with social media platforms to ensure accountability and transparency, while preserving freedom of speech. This is a crucial element in our toolbox, even if we need others, too.

Also a personal responsibility

It is, however, also the personal responsibility of each of us to help fight information manipulation by foreign actors. As consumers of news, we should take a pause regularly to run a little 'sanity check' on our information diet. Like our consumer diet, is it diverse and healthy enough? Is it checked, edited and issued by reputable publishers, who follow professional standards and can be held accountable? Just as we should not live on junk food alone, so should our information diet be built on quality and reputable content.

Finally, the time to vote in the European elections is nearing. I would like to use the opportunity of this blog post to encourage all EU citizens, in the EU and

abroad, to go out and vote. The act of going out and voting is in itself an important step in the defence of our democracies against authoritarian and imperialist powers. If you don't decide yourself, others will do it for you.

UNITY AND STRENGTH – THE ONLY RECIPE TO DETER AGGRESSORS

10 July 2024 – Speech. *I travelled to Washington DC in the United States to take part in a NATO summit marking the organisation's 75th anniversary. On the sidelines of this summit, I gave a speech to explain to the US public the efforts the EU is making to develop its defence capabilities and industry.*

Mark Twain once said: 'History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes.' And it is true.

When I look back to 75 years ago, when NATO was founded, I see that history rhymes a lot.

Seventy-five years ago, what was the big event in 1949? The big event was the blockade of Berlin. For almost a year, the United States' DC-3 planes were landing over the heads of people, and 2 million people were kept alive.

Berlin was the front line between democracy and authoritarian regimes.

In Ukraine, the future of Europe's security will be decided

Today, this front line is Ukraine. In Ukraine, the future of the security of Europe will be decided.

Seventy-five years ago, we responded following the advice of Winston Churchill, when he said: 'There is nothing that the Russians admire as much as strength, and there is nothing that they respect less than weakness, especially military weakness.' So appeasement does not work with them.

Seventy-five years ago, our response was unity. The United States and the free and democratic states of Europe committed to collective defence, and we created NATO.

But, when the Cold War ended, we not only believed that freedom, peace and democracy were the only possible future, but took them for granted. They did not

need to be defended. And today the President of the United States, Joe Biden, has said that freedom and peace cannot be taken for granted. They come with a price.

Then we look at Putin butchering people in Chechnya in 1999, intervening in Syria. We reacted mildly when he invaded Georgia in 2008 and half-heartedly when we saw him annexing Crimea in 2014.

We did not want to see what was obvious. That Putin wants Russia to dominate its neighbourhood again. Putin has not given up on Russia's imperialist ambitions.

Putin wants to rebuild the Russian empire

And that is the problem: Russia is still behaving as an empire, and Putin wants to rebuild the empire – be it the Tsarist empire or the Soviet empire.

Then, finally, in February 2022, when they started bombing Kyiv, we woke up to this unhappy reality, and we found ourselves poorly prepared. That is another fact.

We woke up and then we realised that we were not prepared to face this challenge. Yes, history rhymes.

Seventy-five years ago, the Soviet Union emerged as a threat to freedom and democracy in Europe, and we responded with unity and strength.

And today, the only thing that we can do is follow the same path.

And I am happy to say, here in Washington, that we Europeans have started rebuilding our defence capabilities, increasing our defence budgets and boosting our defence industry, rebuilding a stronger capacity.

Just an example, just one figure: in the last three years, the total defence expenditure in Europe has increased by more than 30 %. This year, we will reach almost – on average, all together – 2 % of EU GDP, 1.9 %. It is not enough, but it is much better, and it is growing.

For us, it is a matter of strategic responsibility. We know, we are fully aware, we are convinced that we have to improve the capacity of our armies, of our defence, in order to be able to defend ourselves.

Not as an alternative to NATO – there is no alternative to NATO for the territorial defence of Europe – but to make NATO stronger and to share the burden.

In the last five years, a lot has been done. Some things that looked unthinkable have become a reality. For example, providing military equipment to a country at war – something that we have never done before.

And seen from here, from Washington, this may sound unremarkable, this may sound logical. But for us, for the European Union, which is not a military alliance – although we want to build a Common Security and Defence Policy – this was revolutionary.

I will always remember, two weeks before the start of the war, I was in Donbas. I was meeting with the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal, and he told me: 'We know that when the Russians attack us – because they will attack us – you will not send your young people to fight in Kyiv. But are you going to help us resist? Are you going to provide us with the arms that we need in order to defend our country?'

And at that time, I could not give him a concrete answer – I was not sure. But happily, that is what we have done.

Yes, seen from Washington it looks normal. Seen from the European Union, it is a revolution – a mental revolution for the European Union.

We are increasing the capacities of our defence industry

Now, we are increasing our industrial capacities, incentivising our industries, pooling resources, jointly developing our defence capacities in order to face this challenge.

We know this requires more efficiency, more interoperability for our 27 different armies, and more predictability for the defence industry, which needs to know what the future demand is going to be in order to justify the investments of today.

We know that the defence industry will play an important role in the future.

Because we understand that if we allow Putin's Russia to turn Ukraine into a second Belarus, and to put a puppet government in Kyiv, we will pay a much higher price later.

That Ukraine prevails is existential. It is a requirement for our security.

We know that Russia has moved to a war economy, using what is called 'military Keynesianism' to feed the war machine, boosting the economy through military expenditure. As a result, today, the World Bank has upgraded Russia to a high-income country.

But it has not come with an increase in the well-being of the Russian people – on the contrary, they have embarked on an industrial production operation.

We know that, today, in this kind of war, industrial production and technological capacity are key to delivering missiles, artillery ammunition and anti-aircraft systems.

That is why I insist on this idea. We are boosting our defence industry by buying together, by increasing production capacity and by stimulating cooperation between European arms producers.

I can cite some examples: in one year, we have doubled our capacity to produce ammunition. By the end of this year, it will be three times bigger.

We need to spend more and to spend more European

We need to spend more and to spend more European.

If we want European states to increase their defence budgets – and I think that it is exactly what the United States is asking the Europeans for – it also means that we have to produce more in Europe.

Our defence initiatives are designed for that: to ramp up our production capacity, to make our industries bigger and more efficient.

But this does not exclude US companies that are based in the European Union and meet security conditions.

We have a lot to learn from the United States. And we have a lot to learn from Ukraine, too.

In Ukraine, warfare is being revolutionised by technology. In February I visited one of the more than 200 factories where they are producing drones.

I saw how 'necessity powers innovation'. Drones and electronic warfare 'Made in Ukraine' could become world leaders.

We will open an EU Innovation Office in Kyiv. We will make cooperation between Ukrainian start-ups and European Union defence companies easier. We want the ideas to flow both ways.

We will organise a continued outreach to you.

Remember, some months ago, you were in Brussels at the [EU-Ukraine Industrial Forum](#), to facilitate exchanges and matchmaking between European Union and Ukrainian companies.

Yes, dear friends, history rhymes. And those with more industrial capacity and better technology will ultimately prevail.

In defending Ukraine, we are defending European security

I know that some of you may look at the European elections some weeks ago, and look at the travels of one of our prime ministers, and ask yourselves: 'Is Europe really committed to Ukraine's defence in the long run? Is that a real commitment, not just empty words or pure rhetoric?'

Allow me to answer that. In spite of whatever you could have heard in these last hours, the answer is yes. Not only because it is the right thing to do – and it is the right thing to do – but also because it is in our own interest. Because, in defending Ukraine, we are defending European security. It is the only way to achieve peace.

I know that someone says that he is looking for peace. Well, all of us want peace and, in particular, the Ukrainians. They want peace more than anyone else.

But what kind of peace? What kind of peace?

I know how to end the war. If we stop supporting Ukraine, the war will be over very quickly. Ukraine cannot defend itself without our support.

The war will stop, yes. But how? What will be the final result of the process? What kind of end? What will the fate of the Ukrainian people be if Putin goes to Kyiv and puts a puppet government there?

What will be the result of this story if Ukraine has to surrender? Putin will not stop in Kyiv.

Those who blame the 'global powers' for this war should be courageous enough to name and blame the one who started this war. He has a name. It is not 'global powers'; he is called Putin.

We certainly regret that people are dying, but the Ukrainian soldiers are fighting and dying because they are defending their country, which has been aggressed.

Looking for peace does not make us forget that there is an aggressor and an aggressed. We cannot put both of them on the same level.

We know who the aggressor is. He is the same one who launches missiles against civilian targets every day – yesterday again, on the largest children's hospital in Kyiv.

Yes, we want peace – how could we not? But only a peace that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and provides security guarantees. Only that would be a real peace.

Peace is something more than the absence of war. Everything else – a ceasefire – will only allow Russia to rearm and attack again.

The truth is that only when Russia agrees to stay within its borders will it stop being a threat to its neighbours, and to the whole of Europe.

Unity and strength is the only recipe to deter an aggressor

And for that, we need unity and strength. It is the only recipe to deter an aggressor.

It was true 75 years ago, and it is true now.

I am happy to have heard, a moment ago, President Biden say that Russia cannot prevail.

For that, we have to increase our industrial capacity, putting more money on the table, more technological development. We did that during the euro crisis. We did that during the pandemic. We will do it again to rebuild our defence.

But allow me to remind you that the awakening of Europe – as much needed as it is – should not imply that the United States should rest easy.

Allow me to say to you that the six months spent by Congress discussing US military support to Ukraine – ‘Yes, we do. No, we do not. We finally do,’ – has come with a bill in terms of human life lost. It has come with a bill in terms of weakening the capacity of Ukraine to defend itself.

We have to overcome this kind of discussions, all of us on both sides of the Atlantic.

We have to join our forces in order to fight against the challenge that Russia represents, today as it did 75 years ago.

And only unity today, as it did 75 years ago, can save Europeans first, and democracy and freedom around the world.

SHARPENING EUROPE'S EYES IN THE SKY

29 August 2024 – Blog post. *Ahead of a EU defence ministers' meeting discussing the future of the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen), I explained in this blog post the crucial role it plays in European security by supplying EU and Member State actors with critical analysis of satellite imagery. To stay at the forefront of geospatial intelligence, SatCen's resources need to keep pace.*

In Torrejón de Ardoz, a small town on the outskirts of Madrid, lies the key to Europe's eyes in the sky: the [EU Satellite Centre](#) (SatCen). This facility is the hub for streams of satellite data from commercial operators, such as Airbus and European Space Imaging, as well as from the EU's Copernicus programme and government satellites in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Luxembourg. The intelligence produced here is indispensable for EU decision-making, particularly in moments of crisis, when accuracy and speed can mean the difference between life and death.

The evacuation of Khartoum in 2023 illustrates SatCen's role

The evacuation of Khartoum in April 2023 illustrates SatCen's critical role. When paramilitary forces seized the Sudanese capital, hundreds of European citizens were suddenly trapped in a city spiralling into armed conflict. The EU Crisis Response Centre immediately turned to SatCen for an analysis of the situation on the ground.

SatCen assessment revealed that the international airport was blocked. When several EU Member States launched evacuation efforts a week later, they did so armed with the latest SatCen-provided maps. These maps identified alternative airports, selected the remaining viable bridges across the Nile, and defined routes for convoys to circumvent roadblocks and hotspots of military activity. Within days, more than a thousand Europeans were safely evacuated – thanks in no small part to the people behind the screens at SatCen.

But SatCen's capabilities extend beyond this single operation. It is monitoring population displacements in Gaza, which is critical for targeting EU humanitarian assistance. It provides precise and timely battlefield analyses on Ukraine and supports EU maritime missions, such as [Operation Aspides](#), which protects

maritime trade in the Red Sea from Houthi attacks. Frontex also regularly relies on SatCen's expertise to combat human smuggling and drug trafficking at Europe's borders. The centre also supports the United Nations in monitoring arms embargoes, as well as supporting inspectors of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Since I took office, demand for SatCen's services has more than doubled, with almost 80 % of its products now delivered within 24 hours. This impressive development has been enabled by artificial intelligence tools developed at SatCen that assist human analysts, enhancing efficiency, quality and speed. Nevertheless, the exponential rise in demand is increasingly straining SatCen's financial resources and the capacity of its staff. Over the past four years, budget contributions from Member States have not been able to keep pace.

The centre is also facing growing challenges in obtaining satellite images. Currently, more than 90 % of its data come from commercial satellite operators. Such high reliance on commercial providers poses a risk during crises, because in these high-demand periods commercial providers may prioritise clients willing to pay a higher price for priority access or even grant them exclusive rights to images.

To remain at the forefront, SatCen's resources need to increase

These are among the issues I will address with EU defence ministers tomorrow when we discuss the SatCen development plan for the next five years. If we are to remain at the forefront of geospatial intelligence and keep up with rising demand, SatCen's resources must match this ambition. Furthermore, to ensure continued access to the highest-quality satellite imagery at the shortest possible notice, we need increased data sharing among Member States, as well as with the EU's forthcoming Earth observation governmental service. And it requires us to realise the ambition of the [EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence](#) and reinforce the EU's role as a global space power with its own cutting-edge space assets.

In the longer term, the EU could also broaden SatCen's mandate. With its extensive archive of spatial images from Ukraine, SatCen could also assist in gathering evidence of war crimes. Additionally, the centre's capabilities could be harnessed by Europol and other law enforcement agencies in the fight against human trafficking, or in supporting partner countries, such as those in West Africa, in combating illegal fishing fleets.

SatCen holds a unique position in Europe's security ecosystem. It demonstrates that a more integrated European defence brings benefits for all, providing a wealth of information that few Member States could gather on their own. By investing in and expanding SatCen's capabilities, we can ensure that Europe continues to have autonomous tools to act in times of crisis and keep its citizens safe.

DEFENCE TECHNOLOGIES – TIME TO THINK BIG AGAIN

12 October 2024 – Blog post. *Working to improve Europe's technological sovereignty in the defence sector has been an important part of my job as High Representative. In September 2024, I attended a conference on this topic in Spain. In a world of renewed conflicts and geopolitical rivalries, Europe's industrial defence sector has great potential; our task is to unlock it.*

On 20 September, I participated in the Foundation for Technological Innovation (COTEC) conference in Las Palmas, Spain, discussing the nexus between technology and defence with Cristina Garmendia, a former Spanish minister of science and innovation. COTEC promotes innovation as an economic and social driver and is co-presided over by the King of Spain and the presidents of Italy and Portugal. Here are my three main takeaways from that discussion.

1. Despite some progress, we still have a long way to go

Many of the world's greatest innovations have emerged from the defence industry. Radar was born in the United Kingdom in 1935, while the internet, computer chips and GPS were developed in the United States for military use in the 1960s and 1970s. All of these were later put to service for civilian use. In more recent decades, much of this innovation has taken place in the United States, and not without reason.

The EU and its Member States are spending €14.4 billion annually on military research and development (R & D), compared with €130 billion in the United States – 10 times as much. Worse still, this limited amount is spent in a fragmented way, with each Member State setting its own priorities and carrying out a rather solitary kind of work. This fragmentation is mirrored in the way Europeans buy military equipment: only 18 % of defence equipment is procured in cooperation, the rest on a national basis. The consequence is a European defence industry that is too small, too fragmented and lacking innovation.

To address this issue, we have started pooling European expertise in common R & D projects. With the European Defence Fund, which has a budget of €8 billion over the seven-year period of the Multiannual Financial Framework, we are

incentivising pan-European cooperation, bringing together industry, small and medium-sized enterprises, research organisations, the European Defence Agency and our armed forces. These projects include, for example, Arturo, a state-of-the-art radar project coordinated by Leonardo S.p.A. from Italy, and Ecoballife, led by the Spanish company Tecnalía, which develops durable yet lightweight protective materials for soldiers and vehicles.

We have also taken steps to help innovative European start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises enter the very competitive defence market. The Hub for EU Defence Innovation in the European Defence Agency helps our armed forces identify gaps and specify innovation needs. In parallel, the European Commission has set up the EU Defence Innovation Scheme to support innovative smaller players to meet those needs. This year, this scheme awarded €225 million to about 400 companies.

But of course much more remains to be done. We need to provide EU defence companies with access to European innovation funds and encourage collaboration with research institutes and universities. We must also strengthen cooperation among European defence companies themselves, not only in R & D but also in the next steps of the process, starting with joint production. To encourage this, we will need stronger financial incentives at the EU level. And we should be careful not to overuse the treaty provision (Article 346) that allows Member States to bypass EU rules on procurement if they believe it threatens national security.

2. Technological sovereignty in defence is a must

While many great innovations have emerged from the defence sector, we are increasingly witnessing the reversal of this logic: technologies used in military equipment are often initially developed for commercial use. Take, for example, the most advanced computer chips: their development costs billions. Such vast investments are often feasible only because of their initial commercial applications – from computer games to artificial intelligence (AI).

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has provided a clear illustration of this trend. It began with a large-scale cyberattack. It was Microsoft – a commercial entity – that was able, and stepped in, to safeguard Ukraine's digital infrastructure. When Russia targeted Ukraine's internet infrastructure, it was Starlink, another commercial operator, that kept the Ukrainian armed forces connected. And, as the battle increasingly turned to drone warfare, commercial drones provided the blueprint for the drones the Ukrainian army is currently using to target tanks.

The war against Ukraine has provided a window into the future of warfare: ground robots will do everything, from reconnaissance to direct attacks. Russia has already deployed unmanned vehicles that can launch anti-tank missiles, grenades and drones. Ukraine has used robots for casualty evacuation and explosive disposal.

Aerial drones have already been successfully complementing tanks. Maritime drones have neutralised much of Russia's on-paper advantage at sea, reopening the Black Sea. Drones have also made warfare much more asymmetrical: a swarm of cheap drones (€500 per unit) can immobilise a battle tank, and even a much costlier F-35 would struggle to fight them.

AI is already used in autonomous weapons, cyber operations and surveillance. AI models in drones help avoid obstacles and identify potential targets in Ukraine. And AI systems can use data gathered by sensors in robots and drones to map the battlefield and predict points of attack. And there is increasing dependence on space assets: a modern soldier relies a staggering 80 % on space services for communication, positioning and operating various weapon systems.

The next milestone in this trend may well be quantum technology. It will have enormous military applications: from decrypting secure communications to enabling GPS-independent navigation, thereby overcoming jamming devices. Fortunately, European research institutes are among the global leaders in this technology.

To protect Europe's technological sovereignty, we must avoid excessive dependencies in all these critical technologies, such as importing from a small number of the same suppliers, which are, furthermore, not strategically aligned with the EU. For instance, just one Chinese company (DJI) controls an estimated 70 % of global commercial drone production.

But this does not mean autarky: we should expand, and leverage our partnerships with trusted non-EU countries better.

And we need to invest more to develop our own advanced technologies. Europe's absence from the top 15 global tech companies is alarming. This must be addressed by substantially increasing public funding and by unifying Europe's capital markets and expanding the role of non-banking finance, such as venture capital. In 2023, €62.5 billion of private investment went into US AI, while Europe (the EU and the United Kingdom) attracted only around €9 billion and China €7.3 billion. We should follow the recommendations of Enrico Letta to build a savings and

investments union to direct more of Europe's private savings – amounting to a staggering €33 trillion – towards European technology development.

3. Defence contractors can foster Europe's competitiveness

While the EU is lagging in terms of tech giants, it has strong champions in the defence sector. The EU is home to 5 of the 15 [largest global defence contractors](#) by market capitalisation, such as Safran from France, Leonardo from Italy and Rheinmetall from Germany. But the European defence industry landscape remains populated mainly by national players operating in relatively small domestic markets. They lack the scale for innovation and for winning big contracts. Fragmentation also often leads to a lack of interoperability of equipment.

To change this, we need to better coordinate demand on the military side and provide stronger supply-side support to industry. On the demand side, we have the European Defence Agency, whose already significant role could be expanded to develop more military research projects, encourage companies to collaborate and improve coordination in the procurement of equipment for European armies. To address the supply side, I have proposed, together with the Commission, the first-ever [European Defence Industrial Strategy](#). We can improve Europe's competitiveness through defence industrial policy, exploiting synergies with other sectors for technologies with dual-use potential.

However, to do that effectively and rapidly we need to mobilise much more funding at the EU level. The [Draghi report](#) points to very substantial funding needs. What remains an open question is how to meet them. We cannot wait until the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework. It would be detrimental to the EU's own interests.

Instead, we should immediately strengthen the European Investment Bank's role in financing defence initiatives. And we should consider issuing joint debt to fund the expansion of the European defence industry, as we did during the COVID-19 pandemic. This would certainly raise a number of delicate political questions, including whether it is fair to use common debt to equip the armies of Member States that have so far made little effort to develop their defence capabilities. However, if Russia's aggressive imperialism were truly seen as an existential threat to the Union, the decision to use joint debt would be made quickly.

Resorting to joint debt to finance a major military effort in support of Ukraine, in order to force Putin to the negotiating table, would certainly be in accordance

with the treaty. It would also boost Europe's competitiveness in the crucial industrial defence sector and ensure we do not fall irreparably behind Russia and others.

Europe stands at a critical juncture. While we have made progress with initiatives such as the European Defence Fund and the Hub for EU Defence Innovation, we need to act more boldly. In a world full of war and unrest, we must think big again: invest heavily in key technologies such as AI, drones and space capabilities, and help our defence industry unlock its potential.

FROM FRAGMENTATION TO COMMON ACTION

16 October 2024 – Speech. *In Brussels we had, for the fourth time, a European defence and security conference bringing together experts, EU and national decision-makers and industry actors. It was an occasion to take stock of our action in this area during my mandate and to indicate the most urgent priorities I see in the current very dangerous geopolitical context.*

You know that security and defence is an important part of the tasks of the High Representative. People believe that it is about foreign policy; it is foreign and security policy, and the defence policy is part of the security policy, so more and more the role of the High Representative will be related to security and defence.

I had tried to do it since the beginning – when Europe was still sleeping, still believing that war was far away, that it was not something that mattered.

At the beginning of 2022, things were completely different; we presented the [Strategic Compass](#). A white paper will be published in a few weeks by the new Commission, together with the new High Representative.

Europe is in danger

But the Strategic Compass was already a kind of ‘white paper’ for European defence. And the main message of this document – which is already old – was ‘Europe is in danger’. Many people believed that this was some kind of marketing slogan, something to catch people’s attention, or an overreaction. No, it was not an overreaction.

On the contrary, it was not the high-intensity reaction that was needed. Since then, Russian aggression against Ukraine has continued and the security environment of Europe has dramatically changed for the worse.

Maybe citizens are not very aware how dramatically the security environment has changed, but they should be.

One year ago, war returned to the Middle East. Now, the regional war is even closer. If, by accident or by will, the scenario further changes into all-out war

between Israel and Iran, the consequences will be even more serious – for all of us.

The war started with the terrorist attack by Hamas. Then the Israeli Defense Forces invaded Gaza, followed by Lebanon. The retaliations between Iran and Israel could rise to a level involving nuclear facilities and oil production facilities, and maybe reach the stage of having troops on the ground in Lebanon. Then the security situation of Europe will really be in danger.

Even without getting to that point, just look at our environment – from Ukraine to the Caucasus, to the Middle East, to Sudan, to the Sahel. We are surrounded by an 'arc of fire', from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Baltic.

Not to mention the tensions in the South China Sea, which is not exactly in our immediate neighbourhood. Or the Red Sea, which is closer to us and is being attacked by the Houthis. Some months ago, I visited a couple of warships of Member States participating in the EU Mission in the Red Sea. Certainly, this situation is not very easy, and it could get much worse, depending on the events in the Middle East.

Russia is again targeting Ukrainian grain. The issue of exports of grain from the Black Sea is again a problem. Last week, the Russians bombed Odessa and attacked three foreign-flagged ships. So the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine will continue to cause difficulties for everybody in the world, be it energy- or food-related issues.

Looking at the other side of the Atlantic, there is the question of the long-term involvement of the United States in European security. In two or three weeks, by the middle of November, this question will be resolved – but, whatever the result of the election, be sure that the long-term involvement of the United States in European security is becoming more and more uncertain.

Security and defence at the top of the political agenda

The recent developments have catapulted security and defence to the top of the political agenda of Europe.

The war in Ukraine was a wake-up call, but it is one thing to wake up and another to get out of bed and stand up. Maybe the world has woken up but not everybody

has stood up. But we have to do it. We have to be fully conscious of the great deal that the Russian aggression represents for us.

As Europe, we have done a lot. We delivered weapons to a country at war for the first time in our history. I am quite proud of having had a decisive role in making it happen, in convincing my colleagues that the European Peace Facility could be used for that.

We have been using it. For the time being, we have channelled more than €42 billion to the Ukrainian defence capacity, €6.6 billion of it from the European Peace Facility. We will reach €45 billion quickly, before the end of the year.

We have not matched the military support given by the United States, but certainly €45 billion is not a negligible figure. And if we add up everything – military, humanitarian, economic, financial support – we are at about €110 billion of support for Ukraine. This is certainly more than what the United States has been providing.

Our military support to Ukraine has been a game changer

Well, this has certainly been a game changer. The story of our military support to Ukraine will be part of the story of the development of the defence capacities of Europe. At the beginning of the war in Ukraine, we provided helmets; now we are sending them F-16s. We have come a long way. But each step of this long way has been made after too many doubts and too much discussion and hesitancy.

We asked ourselves if we should provide Leopard tanks. And the answer in the first instance was 'no' because the Russians would get very upset. We had long discussions and we ended up providing Leopard tanks.

Then we got stuck in discussions on the Patriots, on fighter jets. Again, we ended up providing Patriots and F-16s.

Every time a proposal to increase the quality of our support was put on the table, we spent months discussing it before providing what was proposed from the start. And I feel guilty about that. I think that we did a lot, but maybe too slowly. It is a lesson learned for the future.

We should have been quicker. These delays can be measured in terms of lives. If we had been more assertive from the beginning in providing Ukraine with the arms that we finally delivered, maybe the war would have been different.

Now we are confronted with another request from Ukraine, which they consider crucial: allow them to use our military support to hit military targets inside Russian territory. The answer, for the time being, is no, but we will see where we end up.

Now Russia is destroying Ukraine's energy system. This is their purpose: put Ukraine in the dark and in the cold. They have been quite successful at that: 70 % of the electricity capacity in Ukraine has been destroyed. Ukraine could face up to 20 hours per day without electricity in winter – and it is quite cold in Ukraine in winter. What is important today is that we continue providing Ukraine with electricity generators and avoid them being destroyed the following day.

We have to get out of the cycle of 'we provide, they destroy, we re-provide' by providing more air defence capacity.

Ammunition, the bread and butter of warfare

Certainly, ammunition is the bread and butter of warfare, when the war becomes a war of attrition. The Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton, did a remarkable job in increasing Europe's ammunition production capacity. In one year, we have doubled the ammunition output of the European industry. The goal of providing 1 000 000 rounds of 155 mm calibre ammunition to Ukraine has still not been reached, but doubling the capacity of production of ammunition in Europe in less than one year is already a remarkable success.

Now we have to do this in other areas, in our defence industry. Since there are many representatives from the defence industry in this room, I suppose you will be asking: 'Where are the orders?' The issue of production capacity is crucial. But the capacity is created when the demand is there. If governments present a sustainable demand, the industry will increase its capacity.

Governments are the only buyers of defence products, and it is up to them to fix the priorities and to provide funding. But each Member State has a relatively small domestic market. We are too fragmented because, as Mario Draghi says in his [report](#), 'we are politically fragmented'. We are not a state and we do not have a Pentagon: we have 27 Member States, we have 27 armies, we have 27 ecosystems of industrial capacity. Each one too small on its own.

We said years ago that the target for cooperative military procurements was 35 %, but we are not there: only 18 % of military procurements are made in a cooperative

manner. And the target has now been increased. In Europe, we often fix targets, and when we approach the deadline without reaching it, we fix a new and higher one. The real question is: What are the reasons we have not reached the target the EU proposed some years before?

Mario Draghi told us: it is the vicious circle of the European Union defence industry. Without aggregated demand among Member States, the industry cannot benefit from economies of scale. It innovates and invests too little to cover the long-term needs.

We end up with fragmentation, reduction, not enough innovation and not enough investment. Europeans, all together, invest in military innovation, research and development 10 times less than the United States. Certainly, we cannot keep up with our competitors.

We have seen a 30 % increase in investment in defence equipment, reaching €67 billion last year. This means that there was 30 % more spending on military capacity.

Military expenditure of course means a lot of different things: the pensions of servicemen are part of military expenditure. Increasing the pensions of the military will increase military expenditure, but will not increase military capacity. So let's talk about things that matter.

Things that matter are the capabilities. Capabilities come from investment. And investment has increased 30 % in recent years. We are at roughly €67 billion. However, about 80 % of this defence investment is done outside the European Union.

We invested 30 % more, but 80 % of this demand goes to people who are producing outside the European Union.

Making sure increased investment in defence benefits our industry

This is the key question: How do we manage to increase our investment in defence and make sure this demand is addressed to our ecosystem?

This vicious circle has to be broken, and for that we have to do several things at the same time: provide military support to Ukraine at the right level – that is not the case today; replenish the stocks of our armies; increase our own defence

capabilities; reduce our excessive dependencies – this 80 % is a clear excessive dependency; and innovate to prepare the defence capabilities of tomorrow.

We have not to produce the arms that were conceived years ago, but to start conceiving the arms that will have to be produced tomorrow, because the war of tomorrow will be done with the arms of tomorrow, not with the arms of yesterday.

And, to achieve that, we need to better coordinate the demand side and supply side of the market, and we need to be clear on who does what.

Until the treaties are reformed – if they are, one day – a huge challenge in the coming years will be how to break taboos without breaking the law, break taboos inside the perimeter of the existing treaties.

We have to do what was done in the fight against COVID-19. We found within the treaties a way of going to the markets to ask for €700 billion of funding in order to fight against the virus. We did that because it was clear that the virus was an existential threat.

If the Russian aggression against Ukraine were also perceived an existential threat to our security – as the virus was – then the reaction would be the same and adequate measures would be taken. But this is not the case.

That is why we should be prepared for a long discussion about how to fund the development of the military capabilities of the European Union and about the line between defence industry and defence policy.

Defence industrial policy is something where the Commission has a role because it has the duty, according to the treaties, of supporting the industrial policy – including the defence industry.

Defence belongs to the Member States

Defence policy, or defence, is something that belongs to the Member States.

For example, the proposed European air shield – is that an industrial project or is it a defence project? Who has to conceive it? The armies. Who has to manage it? The military. I do not imagine the bureaucrats in Berlaymont managing an air defence shield. It has to be conceived by the armies, the ones who know about it, and the ones who are able to manage, control and command it – because this is a defence capability.

Only the armies can do that. So only the Member States can do that. Certainly, there will also be a spillover to the defence industry, because part of this shield will comprise things that could be produced in Europe. But who is leading it? Is this an industrial project or a defence project?

I believe that the governments are the only ones that can define the specification of an air shield and its command structure, and how it will be integrated into existing defence structures.

Nobody can substitute for them. That is why the natural way to develop such a project would be to use an intergovernmental framework. The Permanent Structured Cooperation is an example of a framework for developing this kind of project, which later – but only later – will have to be funded. The industry will have its part, its role, in producing the elements to make it a reality.

I ask everybody not to reinvent the wheel every day. We should not create new structures, forgetting what we already have. We already have the European Defence Agency. Its role has to be expanded to develop more and better defence research projects, to better aggregate demand and coordinate joint procurements, as the treaty tasks the agency to do.

Then the funding. Mario Draghi says €500 billion will be needed for the next decade. €500 billion for a decade means €50 billion per year. It is quite an amount of money, but maybe not too much to meet our needs.

Where will this money come from?

Where will this money come from? Can we wait for the next Multiannual Financial Framework in 2028? Can we wait four years for that? I do not think so. If we cannot wait for the next financial perspective, then we should anticipate resources by issuing European debt, as we did in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

But to issue debt for what? I am anticipating the discussion among the members of the European Council.

What are we going to finance with debt? Firstly, it could be used to finance a major military effort in support of Ukraine, in order to force Putin to go to the negotiation table. This would be a perfectly good purpose.

We could and we should go to the financial markets and ask for money to increase our military support for Ukraine. It is the only way to make Putin go to the negotiation table. Putin will not go to the negotiation table unless he is forced.

He will not be forced, unless Ukraine has an advantage on the military field. They will not get it without a stronger support from our side. We will not be able to provide this support without more funding, and the only way that more funding can come is by issuing debt.

If the Russian aggressive imperialism were truly seen as an existential threat to the Union, which I believe it is, then the choice would be made very quickly. It is just a matter of political perception by the public opinion, political parties and government.

The second purpose could be to boost our defence readiness, to better finance the capabilities of our armies by procuring military equipment. This is a different purpose; it would raise a question of moral hazard.

Is it fair to issue common debt to equip the armies of those Member States that have so far made no or little effort to develop their defence capabilities? Why should all the European Union pay for the laggards? Some Member States today, they spend 4 % of their GDP on military capacities – 4 %; others spend 1.8 %.

Why should the ones who paid for their military capabilities now have to pay for the increased military capacities of the others who have not done so?

This is exactly the same moral hazard that we faced with the euro crisis. This question will certainly be put on the table when Member States discuss it.

Increase the production capacity of the defence industry

One thing is also clear. Some Member States will agree only as far as the production happens inside the European Union, and expenditure is not spent outside the European Union. This requires a strong increase in the defence production capacity of the Union, because, in order to produce more, you have to have more production capacity.

On the demand side, and on the supply side – in a market, both matter. You can finance demand, but, if there is no supply capacity, then the demand goes out

of the circuit, asking for another provider, be it in South Korea or in the United States.

So the third purpose of issuing debt could be to increase the production capacity of the defence industrial and technological sector. But increase capacity to produce what? We have to be sure that those industrial capabilities will be matched with the long-term needs of our armies. This is something that has to be done carefully, because, if we don't do this matching adequately, we could waste a lot of money.

The Draghi report injected much-needed straight talk into the European debate on defence. I do not agree with all the proposals by Draghi, but at least it has put on the table the need to try to work to match the defence capacity to supply and demand.

The European Defence Agency has been doing a lot of work in order to define the demand side and define what our armies need in order to avoid fragmentation and use the money in a more efficient manner.

So, my successor and the leaders of the European Union will have a lot of work to do to clarify who does what. The Commission has to do a lot of things in accordance with its competencies, which are limited to the industrial side of the question.

Strong cooperation between institutions will be needed

Defence policy, from doctrine to capabilities to deployment, is something that belongs and will continue to belong to the Member States. Strong cooperation between institutions will be needed in order to take the right decisions – and to take them quickly.

I do not think Europe can wait for the next multiannual financial cycle, which is four years from now, to start doing what has to be done now, when it should have been done in the past.

What has not been done in the past – do not wait for tomorrow to do it. Do it now. The security of Ukraine is our security. Supporting Ukraine is supporting ourselves. Providing Ukraine with the military capabilities they need now, because they are at war, is a better and less expensive way of ensuring our own security than doing it several years from now.

4.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE



EUROPE BETWEEN TWO WARS

3 January 2024 – Op-ed. *For the website Le Grand Continent, I presented the difficult geopolitical situation at the start of 2024, with the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the war in Gaza, which threatened to spread throughout the region, and what we were doing to deal with that.*

Two deadly wars are unfolding on our borders and dominating the European agenda: the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the war that has recently flared up again in the Middle East. I will focus here on the consequences of these wars for Europe and, therefore, will not address other major issues for our foreign policy, such as our relations with China, the impact of climate change or the tensions in the Sahel.

In 2019, at the beginning of my mandate, I already sensed that Europe's security would become an increasingly important 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 it in November 2021, I said that 'Europe is in danger'.

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 Russia's deployment of troops along the borders of Ukraine was merely to put pressure on the West and obtain further concessions. A similar sentiment prevailed regarding the Middle East. For instance, Jake Sullivan, President Biden's security adviser, said as recently as last September that it had rarely been so calm. I was 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 encroachment of illegal settlements eroding the territory of a potential Palestinian state, no one was really paying attention any more. It was widely assumed that the Palestinian issue would resolve itself.

However, just weeks after I presented the Strategic Compass, war suddenly returned to the Union's borders, and, since 7 October, the situation in our immediate neighbourhood has become even worse. The dramatic situation in Gaza has become an immediate priority, but the war against Ukraine remains crucial because it poses an existential threat to the European Union. Despite the different actors and origins, these two conflicts are 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 NextGenerationEU by issuing common debt. Some described this as 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 NextGenerationEU did not address existing debts of the Member States and was intended to be a one-off operation.

Today, some speak of a Demosthenes moment, in 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 more apt: we are now facing the imperialism of a great power that threatens not only Ukraine but also our democracy and the entire European Union.

I fear that if we do not change tack quickly and mobilise all our capabilities, if we allow Putin to win in Ukraine, if we fail to end the tragedy suffered by the people of Gaza, the European project will be seriously threatened.

Let us examine these two wars more closely to understand how we can influence their course. 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.

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. We had a 100-year war in Europe, but this is the 100-year war of the Middle East. The question is: How can this conflict be resolved? The answer lies in one of 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 unacceptable. We need to strive towards the first possibility. This is exactly the aim of the two-state solution that has been on the table for over 30 years, starting with the Oslo Accords. However, since then very little has been done to actually implement those accords. Yet 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 – oppose the two-state solution and have done everything to make it impossible up to the present day. Crucially, the Oslo Accords did not stop the illegal settlements in the West Bank – in other words, as in Ukraine, the occupation of other people's land in contravention of all the 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 Palestinian state impossible.

The Israeli government rejects the two-state solution

Hamas is opposed to the very existence of the State of Israel. But the current Israeli government is also opposed, and has been for a long time, to the two-state solution. Benjamin Netanyahu, the current prime minister, promised to his fellow citizens that, with him, a Palestinian state would never see the light of day, despite the entire international community being in favour of it. This community therefore has a problem with Benjamin Netanyahu's policy. 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 convinced that it is essential 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. In my opinion, there are two lessons to be learned from this tragedy. Firstly, the solution cannot be found by the parties to the conflict themselves. It must be imposed from outside by the international community, the Arab neighbours, the United States and Europe. Secondly, we need to change the negotiation method. In Oslo, the end point of the negotiations was not clearly defined. We need to reverse this process. The international community needs first to define an end point; then, through negotiation, Israelis and Palestinians must find the way to reach it. Today, the Arab states, including those that have recognised Israel and maintain relations with it, are making 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 actually be implemented. Long-term peace will never return 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, 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 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 Member 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 creates a great temptation to use such leverage to obtain concessions from other countries. This is what happened at the last European Council when deciding on opening accession negotiations with Ukraine. If one is able 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 far too slowly to events, and we often pay dearly for it. In practice, our size is not

always a strength, and, in moments of truth, our rules often prevent us from acting. The envisaged enlargement of Europe to include Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan countries raises the question of the reform of the European Union. I cannot imagine how we could continue to operate with 37 members if we maintain the unanimity rule. We need to work differently to be able to act quickly and forcefully enough in this dangerous environment.

A remarkable European response to the war against Ukraine

In the case of Ukraine, unanimity was fortunately achieved quickly. Before the war began, I visited the Donbas, in January 2022. I met Denys Shmyhal, the Ukrainian prime minister. He told me that in a few days the Russians were going to invade Ukraine and he 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 did not know how to answer because I was not sure that we would reach unanimity to do so. But fortunately, when the day came, we did.

Europe's reaction to the war against Ukraine was indeed remarkable. First, we succeeded in drastically reducing our energy dependence on Moscow, which seemed almost impossible at first glance, with a 40 % dependence on Russian gas. Moscow thought that this dependence would prevent us from reacting, but we proved otherwise. However, this came at a 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, they have weakened the Russian economy by driving down the value of the rouble and pushing up inflation. 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. Thanks to our help, Ukraine has been able to resist. US military aid has certainly 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.

Will this unity last? What are we going to do if the Americans reduce their support for Ukraine once they have elected a new president, or perhaps even before then? These are indeed questions we are going to have to answer.

During the Grand Continent Summit, someone asked whether I believed that Putin could win the war in Ukraine. However, this is not really a relevant question. What each of us thinks on the subject is of little interest. The real questions we need to answer is 'What are we prepared to do to ensure that Putin loses this war?' Are we prepared to do what it takes to achieve that result? Do we really want to prevent Vladimir Putin's victory, which would mean the installation of a puppet government in Kiev, like the one in Belarus? Personally, I think we need to act faster and more decisively to support Ukraine, because Russia represents a major strategic threat to the European Union, even if I have to admit that not all Member States agree on the nature of this threat.

We must not underestimate our adversaries. 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. The Ukrainian counteroffensive 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 there. He is still prepared to let thousands of Russians die to conquer Kiev. His army and his people are suffering, but he does not know the meaning of reverse gear.

Vladimir Putin does not really want to negotiate

Before the war, everyone went to Moscow – Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz – 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 latest press conference to see that. It is evident 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, notably Finland. In any case, he is not going to seek any appeasement before the US elections, which he hopes will favour his imperialist plans. The high-intensity war will therefore continue, and we must prepare for it. To start with, we need to develop 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.

But, as I was saying, not all Member States share this view. Some do not see Vladimir Putin's Russia as a strategic threat. Does disunity on this existential issue threaten the future of the European Union? It is impossible to say at this stage. For my part, I am convinced that Europe must do everything in its power to prevent Putin's victory in Ukraine, which would be extraordinarily serious. I will be working tirelessly in this direction over the coming months. I am convinced that, if Europe commits all its strength to countering this threat, it will cement our unity and make us stronger.

Europe is divided on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

With regard to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the situation is very different. The perception of this conflict varies greatly between Member States. This is primarily due to historical context, in particular the aftermath of the Shoah, the darkest chapter in European history. Nevertheless, the European Council has reached a minimal agreement among Europeans, stating that Israel has the right to defend itself in accordance with international law and that we would not call for a ceasefire but for humanitarian pauses. However, on two occasions, when resolutions calling for a ceasefire were put to the vote at the United Nations, our unity wavered, weakening our international stance. The number of EU Member States supporting a ceasefire increased from 8 to 14 between the two votes, while the number of those opposing fell from 4 to 2, with the others abstaining.

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. The European Commission has recently scrutinised this financial assistance 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 the situation on the ground would be even more difficult. In particular, this Palestinian Authority should 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. For my part, I believe that Europe should be much more involved in resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Until now, we have relied too heavily on the United States in the search for a solution to this conflict that directly affects us.

Problems of coherence and credibility

The coexistence of these two conflicts poses problems for the EU's coherence and credibility 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. However, we must be aware that many of these countries do not share our sense of indignation at Russia's aggression against Ukraine. They agree to condemn this invasion at the United Nations, 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 in terms of energy and food prices. Moreover, some express distrust in our policies, which are supposed to be based on principles, but are perceived by many as driven by double standards depending on our interests.

In the case of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, our lack of unity has weakened our credibility when it comes to defending international law. When 144 states support Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly, we believe that they are 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 conundrum presents significant political and moral dilemmas for Europe that must be faced with clarity and courage.

This is one of the main reasons why the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the war in Ukraine are so closely linked, despite their differences in nature. If we do not want to lose our footing in a 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 – 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 play a significant role in our foreign and security policy. However, in the current context, I have chosen to focus on the two main conflicts we are facing, the existential risks they pose to Europe, and the urgent need for European society to understand them and for its political leaders to act accordingly. Thank you for your attention.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND EUROPE'S GEOPOLITICAL AGENDA

25 February 2024 – Op-ed. *On the occasion of the second anniversary of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I explained the main priorities of the EU foreign and security policy in this op-ed for the media group Vocento in Spain.*

It is now two years since Putin launched his aggression against Ukraine. He thought it would be a short war. He hasn't won it, but he hasn't lost it yet. Since then, it has been one of our most serious challenges. We discussed it a lot at the Munich Security Conference and at the G20 meeting in Brazil. But Europe's geopolitical agenda, which I could not have imagined 50 months ago when I took office in Brussels, is today composed of three territorial issues, Ukraine, Gaza and the Global South, and one structural issue, defence.

Three challenges relating to Ukraine

On Ukraine we have three challenges; first, to support it more and faster in a new type of high-intensity warfare that associates the trenches of the First World War with the decisive role that the use of drones and artificial intelligence play; second, to provide Ukraine with security commitments to increase its resilience on all fronts, knowing that the best such commitment is membership of the European Union; and third, to prepare for a long period of tensions with Russia, which may risk provoking politically and militarily its other neighbours, some of them NATO members. Our military effort must be sustained and take into account that US involvement in European security may change in the future.

I visited Ukraine again a few weeks ago, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was very clear about the need to increase the supply of ammunition, which is now our most important task. This has been my message to European defence ministers, pointing out to them that in the short term we are not short of manufacturing capacity but of financing.

On the Middle East, we need to promote a political solution that includes not only Gaza, but also the West Bank, which is the most important obstacle to the two-state solution that everyone agreed on at the G20 meeting. The West Bank is seething and the level of violence against Palestinians has been on the rise since

7 October. And, if the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is forced to reduce its support to them, we could be on the eve of an explosion of conflict.

For Europe to be a relevant actor in the search for such a solution, we need to be more united, as we have been in the case of Ukraine. It is essential to act in concert with the United States and support the initiative to make the two-state solution that the Arab countries are preparing viable. In the meantime, a ceasefire must be achieved, as 26 of the 27 EU Member States have called for.

Following the Oslo Accords, we have been talking about the two-state solution for more than 30 years, but doing little about it. Without a clear perspective for the Palestinian people there will be no peace in the Middle East, and Israel's security will not be guaranteed by military means alone.

We must avoid the 'rest against the West'

Europe also needs a strategy for its relationship with the so-called Global South. These countries have their own dynamics, and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have increased their political space, and the accusation of double standards has increased. True, the world is 'de-Westernising', but we need to avoid the narrative that a 'rest against the West' alliance is being forged in the Middle East and Ukraine. These are different wars, with different causes, but they are also the old turf wars, of peoples fighting for their land. We thought geography no longer mattered but it still does.

And finally there is the cross-cutting issue of our security and defence capabilities. Two years ago, we launched the Strategic Compass and I said that Europe was in danger. Nobody paid much attention. Now, everyone is talking about it, including the need for a defence commissioner, although it remains an exclusive competence of the Member States because it is they who have the military capabilities.

Following the 2008 crisis, Europe entered a long period of silent disarmament, and our defence industry has become too small. We need to understand that we will not be able to address our geopolitical agenda if we are not able to defend ourselves. And this starts with developing our defence industry. We are doing so; for example, ammunition production capacity to supply Ukraine has grown by 40 % in the last year.

Our armies need to work better together, to have greater interoperability and coordination to launch joint missions. It is not about having a European army, but

about being able to mobilise it in a joint and coordinated way to face common challenges. We are making some progress. During my term of office I have launched seven Common Security and Defence Policy missions, the last one in the Red Sea to contribute to the security of navigation in the area.

In short, our complex geopolitical agenda requires a better understanding of our challenges, a decisive increase in our capabilities, and strengthening our unity, without which we are irrelevant in an increasingly multipolar world where the use of force to resolve conflicts is widespread – the opposite of what Europe has learned to do over the past 70 years.

THE FOUR TASKS ON THE EU'S GEOPOLITICAL AGENDA

25 February 2024 – Blog post. *At the Munich Security Conference (MSC), I presented the four main tasks on the EU's geopolitical agenda: supporting Ukraine more, and more quickly; putting an end to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and implementing the two-state solution; improving our relations with the Global South; and strengthening our own defence.*

This year, the atmosphere in Munich was particularly grave. With two wars on its doorstep, and many other powder kegs all over the world, everyone was finally aware that Europe is in danger, as I said two years ago when presenting the strategic compass.

On the first day of the conference, we learned about the suspect death in a penal colony in Siberia of Alexei Navalny, who had been slowly murdered there by President Putin. I met with his wife and invited her to attend the Foreign Affairs Council last Monday, where we paid tribute to Mr Navalny and she updated us on the political situation in Russia.

During my stay in Munich, I also had exchanges on the most pressing global and bilateral issues with António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Gustavo Petro, President of Colombia; Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of China; Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Foreign Minister of India; Hakan Fidan, Foreign Minister of Türkiye; and Chris Van Hollen, US Senator. With Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Kosovan Prime Minister Albin Kurti, I discussed, in separate meetings, how to de-escalate the tensions – without success, unfortunately.

In different meetings, I discussed the situation in the Middle East with Najib Mikati, Prime Minister of Lebanon; Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia; Sameh Shoukry, Foreign Minister of Egypt; Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council; and Espen Eide, Foreign Minister of Norway. We focused on our efforts to put an end to the fighting in Gaza, free the hostages, alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip, avoid the conflict spreading in the region and go forward to implement effectively the two-state solution.

I also presented my views in a plenary session on the [EU's next geopolitical agenda](#). While our priorities are constantly reshaped by events, four items currently dominate our agenda: the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the war that has flared up again in Gaza, both of which are directly putting the security of the EU at risk, and two more structural issues that also require urgent action – improving our relations with the so-called Global South and strengthening our defence and security capabilities.

1. Supporting Ukraine more, and more quickly

Regarding Ukraine, two long years have passed since Russia started waging its war of aggression against Ukraine, acting as an imperialist and colonialist power. Ukraine is facing a long and high-intensity war, where casualties are rising on both sides. We must not allow Russia to be rewarded for its aggression. If Putin prevails, this will send a very dangerous signal globally that powerful countries can change borders unilaterally.

This war has put us in a situation that requires a completely different approach to that of ordinary times of peace. We have to shift towards much greater agility, commitment and focus. If we do not act swiftly enough in the coming months, Ukraine risks losing ground. We have to support Ukraine more, and we have to do it quicker, in particular regarding artillery ammunition. It is needed now, not in a few months. The issue is not currently a real lack of ammunition production capacity any longer; rather, it is a shortfall in funding and orders.

We are witnessing a new kind of war: one that evokes both the trenches of the First World War and the robots of Star Wars. Technology, in particular drones and artificial intelligence, are shaping the outcome of this war. We need to find ways to provide Ukraine with the latest technology. During my recent visit to Ukraine, I was very impressed by the drone factories I visited. We also have to draw the consequences of this new type of warfare for ourselves and invest more in defence innovation.

We also have to provide Ukraine with long-term security commitments. EU Member States are already signing corresponding bilateral agreements, and we will do the same at the EU level. We are continuing our work to create a new dedicated Ukraine Assistance Fund within the [European Peace Facility](#) in order to guarantee long-term military support to the country. However, the most important security commitment the EU can give to Ukraine is EU membership. [Last December](#)

[the European Council](#) opened the way to this, and we have to remain fully committed to this process.

2. Putting an end to the fighting in Gaza and implementing the two-state solution

In the Middle East, the stakes are also very high for the EU's security. If we fail to help end the man-made humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and finally implement the two-state solution, this conflict risks setting the whole region ablaze. The repercussions for Europe would be profound in many respects: migration, terrorism, internal tensions, an energy crisis, interrupted sea routes, as we are already witnessing in the Red Sea

In light of the ongoing major humanitarian catastrophe, putting an end to the fighting in Gaza is obviously the most urgent task. However, the situation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is also very worrying. The level of violence against Palestinians, already very high before, has escalated dramatically since 7 October. The West Bank is boiling, and, if the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has to stop supporting the Palestinian people, we may be approaching a major explosion. In terms of implementing the two-state solution, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are in reality the main obstacles. In the search for a political solution for the day after we must not look exclusively at Gaza, but to all occupied Palestinian territories.

Can the EU play a role in bringing peace to the region and finally implement the two-state solution that we have been advocating for more than 30 years? I am convinced we can. It is not only possible, it is also our duty and in our interest. We have already engaged with many important regional actors, notably through the [Peace Day initiative](#) launched before 7 October. However, to be successful we need to be more united, as we have been in our support of Ukraine. On the Middle East, we have seen a greater diversity of approaches, and many Member States seem to prefer to pursue their own strategies.

Arab countries are preparing a new peace initiative, and we have recently had a lot of discussion with our Arab partners, including at the [Foreign Affairs Council in January](#) and at the MSC. We are awaiting their formal proposal, and after that we should join efforts to effectively implement the two-state solution. Without a clear prospect for the Palestinians of an end to the occupation and the creation of their own state, there will be no peace in the Middle East and no real security for Israel. In the long term, security cannot be ensured by only military means.

3. Improving our links with the Global South

The third strategic issue currently on our agenda is our relations with the so-called Global South countries. I know that the term Global South encompasses very different realities, but it nevertheless raises a real issue. If the current global geopolitical tensions continue to evolve in the direction of 'the West against the rest', Europe's future risks being bleak. The era of Western dominance has indeed definitively ended. While this has been theoretically understood, we have not always drawn all the practical conclusions from this new reality.

The combination of the war of aggression against Ukraine and the war in Gaza has significantly increased this risk, as we have recently seen in the Sahel and elsewhere in Africa. Many in the Global South accuse us of double standards. Russia has managed to take advantage of the situation, although its war of aggression against Ukraine is typically an imperialist and colonialist one. We need to push back on this narrative but also address this issue, and not only with words: in the coming months, we must make a massive effort to win back the trust of our partners.

4. Reinforcing our defence capacities and our defence industry

Last but not least, we need to massively reinforce our capacities in security and defence. We must obviously be prepared in particular for a prolonged period of tensions with Russia, which may be tempted to escalate its political and military provocations against NATO countries in the coming months. It has been at the core of my work during the last four years: as High Representative, I am in charge of not only the EU common foreign and security policy, but also the Common Security and Defence Policy, and since 2019 I have devoted a lot of effort to this second dimension.

Before the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we launched the [Strategic Compass](#) – the new EU security and defence strategy – because I was convinced that Europe was in danger. At that time, nobody really noticed or realised the gravity of the situation. Now, European defence is back at the centre of the public debate, and not only at the MSC. Rightly so.

I have repeatedly explained in recent years that Europe has gone through a long period of silent disarmament, gradually losing military capacity, while our defence industry has been shrinking dangerously. We have now started to reverse this trend. For the last 10 years our defence budgets have been growing again. And,

since the start of the Russian war of aggression, we have begun to reboot our defence industry: our capacity to produce artillery ammunitions has grown by 40 %. It is still a long way to go but we are moving in the right direction.

We must sustain these efforts in cooperation with key partners, in particular the United States. Recent months have reminded us how important NATO remains to our collective defence, but also the need to strengthen its European pillar, as our US friends have been asking for. There are uncertainties regarding the future level of US engagement in the European security, and we must be prepared for different scenarios. Regardless of the outcome of the US elections, it is clear that we will have to rely more and more on our own forces in the future.

I know how complicated it is to spend more on defence at a time when the economic and social situation is difficult everywhere in Europe. For decades we have, understandably, preferred butter to cannons. But if we are not able to defend ourselves we risk losing not only our butter but also freedom and democracy.

To maximise the effectiveness of our efforts, we need to decisively step up our coordination to avoid unnecessary duplication, fill the gaps in our defence capacities and increase interoperability. We have said it for a long time; now we must finally do it.

This also requires a stronger and more resilient European defence industry. This is why, as tasked by the European Council, I, as High Representative responsible for our Common Security and Defence Policy and Head of the European Defence Agency, together with the Commission, will present in coming days a new European defence industrial strategy to boost the industrial and technological capacity of our defence industry.

We had excellent cooperation with Commissioner Breton, in charge of our industrial ecosystem, which includes the defence industry. In the future, a commissioner for this industrial sector alone could be an option, although strong interdependencies exist with other industrial and technological sectors.

Defence remains an exclusive competence of the Member States

According to the treaties, however, defence policy itself remains an exclusive competence of the Member States, and only Member States have armies and defence capabilities. Our responsibility at the EU level, my responsibility as High Representative in charge of the Common Security and Defence Policy, is not to

build one European army, but to mobilise our national armies in a coordinated way in order to face common challenges more effectively.

We need to make them work together better, to be more interoperable, to avoid duplications, to address shortfalls, and to be able to launch common operations when needed. During my mandate, I launched seven such EU missions, with the last one on Monday in order to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

The work has only just started to strengthen our defence capacities and our defence industry. We must accelerate and focus on working together to make sure the EU and its Member States have the means required by our ambition to be a geopolitical player.

THREE WORK STRANDS TO BETTER PROTECT EUROPE

14 April 2024 – Blog post. *On the occasion of the publication of my 2023 yearbook, [Europe between Two Wars](#), I took stock in this blog post of the lessons learned in four years of EU foreign and security policy and defined the main work strands for the EU in the months that followed.*

In 2019, when I started my job as High Representative, I said that Europe needs to learn to speak the language of power. I was already convinced that security needed to become a major priority for Europe. But I had no precise idea at that time how much Europe would be in danger in the years to come.

We live in an increasingly multipolar world where multilateralism is in decline. Power politics dominate international relations again. All forms of interactions are weaponised, whether it is trade, investment, finance, information or migration. This implies a paradigm shift in the way we think about European integration and our relations with the rest of the world. In concrete terms, it requires us to act decisively on three work strands.

1. Strengthening European economic security

First, Europe's security needs to be understood in a broader sense. During the COVID-19 pandemic we discovered that Europe no longer produced medical face masks or paracetamol. And our heavy dependence on Russian energy reinforced Putin's belief that Europe would not be able to respond to his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Our excessive dependencies on a few countries for many critical goods put us in danger. For too long we Europeans have lived in the illusion that *doux commerce* is enough to bring peace globally. We have found out the hard way that the world does not work like this.

That is the reason why we have decided to 'de-risk' our economy by limiting excessive dependencies and taking action, in particular on raw materials and components critical for the green and digital transitions.

This is about de-risking, not decoupling. The European Union has always been open to trade and investment, and wants to remain so. By de-risking we mean,

for example, strengthening trade and investment links with Latin America or Africa in order to diversify our supply chains.

When it comes to China in particular, we need to reduce our excessive dependencies in specific domains, especially those at the heart of the green and digital transitions, and we need to rebalance our trade relations. This rebalancing is urgently needed. Last year, our trade deficit with China was a staggering €291 billion, making up 1.7 % of EU GDP.

Just last month, the Chinese government revealed plans to invest massively in high-tech manufacturing. This means that our tech industry is going to face even fiercer competition in the coming years. It is crucial that we shield our industry against unfair competition. We have already started to do so for our electric vehicles, our solar panels and other net-zero industries.

Our values and political systems differ significantly and we have opposing views regarding the universality of human rights, but let's be clear: we don't want to go back to a bloc-to-bloc confrontation. We have become too interdependent for that. And cooperation with China is essential to solve the main global challenges of our time, like climate change.

2. Moving defence to the heart of European policies

While security is more than defence, there is no doubt that defence remains and will remain at the core of any security strategy. With the war of aggression that Russia is waging against Ukraine, we have seen the return of territorial rivalries and the use of violent military force in Europe that we had intellectually dismissed.

At a time when US involvement in Europe is becoming less certain, this war poses an existential threat to the EU. If Putin manages to destroy the independence of Ukraine, he will not stop there. If he prevails – despite clear support for Ukraine by Europeans and the US public – this sends a dangerous signal about our capacity to stand up for what we believe in.

We need a paradigm shift in European defence. Our Union was built around the internal market and the economy. And this has worked well to bring peace between the peoples of the Union. But we can't just continue along this path. We have for too long delegated our security to the United States, and, in the last 30 years, since the fall of the Berlin wall, we have allowed a silent disarmament.

We must assume our strategic responsibility and become able to defend Europe by ourselves, building a strong European pillar inside NATO. And we need to make this leap forward in a very short period of time. Not because we intend to go to war. On the contrary: we want to prevent it by having the means to credibly deter any aggressor.

This does not mean creating a European army. Defence is and will remain for the foreseeable future an exclusive competence of our Member States. It is first about spending more at the national level. In 2023, we spent on average 1.7 % of our GDP on defence; this percentage must increase to more than 2 %.

But, even more importantly, it is about spending together to fill gaps, avoid duplications and increase interoperability. Only 18 % of equipment purchases by our armies are currently made cooperatively, even though we set a 35 % benchmark in 2007.

We also urgently need a leap forward in our defence industry. Since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, European armies have bought 78 % of new equipment from outside the EU. We have made significant progress in recent months, but we still have difficulties in sending enough ammunitions to support Ukraine. Additionally, we face significant qualitative challenges in terms of new military technologies like drones and artificial intelligence.

One major lesson of the war against Ukraine is that technological superiority is key, especially when faced with an adversary for whom lives are cheap. We need to have a home-grown defence industry to meet our needs.

To achieve this, we must invest massively. The most promising avenues for achieving this goal are: first, changing the European Investment Bank lending policy to allow it to invest in the defence sector and, second, issuing common debt, just as we did successfully to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. These discussions are, however, in their early stages among our Member States, and it is critical to get everyone on board.

The leap forward in defence also requires a shift in mindset. I have been told by arms producers that they struggle to recruit the brightest engineering talent. Similarly, private investors are often deterred from investing in defence companies. Every European must understand that effective defence is a prerequisite for the survival of our social, environmental and democratic model.

3. Working to prevent the 'rest against the West'

Ukraine is not the only war in our immediate neighbourhood. Hamas's brutal terrorist attack on Israel and Israel's disproportionate response are ongoing and risk spreading war in the whole Middle East region, as we have witnessed with [the Iranian attack on Israel last weekend](#). In this conflict, our reaction has cast doubt on Europe's capacity to be an effective geopolitical actor.

On Ukraine, we have proven that we can respond decisively because we are united. But, faced with tens of thousands of dead, mainly women and children, and 2 million people starving, we have not so far been able to stop the fighting in Gaza, put an end to the humanitarian disaster, free the hostages and start implementing effectively the two-state solution, the only way to bring a sustainable peace to the region.

Our limited influence in this conflict, which so directly impacts our future, is not due to a lack of means. We are Israel's leading partner in trade, investment and people exchanges, and our association agreement with this country is the most comprehensive of all. We are also the main international financial supporter of the Palestinian people.

But we have been quite inefficient until now because, as a Union – bound by unanimity – we have been divided. Our common position has been sometimes behind the one of the United States, for example on sanctioning violent settlers in the West Bank. Moreover, we have sent contradictory signals, for example regarding our support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

Our division has cost us dearly in the Arab world but also in a great number of countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The difference in our response to wars in Ukraine and Palestine has been used extensively by Russian propaganda. And this propaganda has been quite successful, as we have witnessed in particular in the Sahel, because it came on top of existing grievances such as the unequal distribution of vaccines during COVID-19, too-restrictive migration policies, the lack of funding to tackle climate change and international organisations reflecting the world of 1945 and not the one of today.

We need to act decisively in the coming months to prevent the consolidation of an alliance of 'the rest against the West', including as a consequence of the Middle East conflict. To effectively counter this threat, we need to stay true to our

principles. Everywhere. Not just in words, but also by using our tools when these principles are violated. The decisiveness we demonstrated on Ukraine should guide us in every other part of the world.

EUROPE COULD DIE

3 May 2024 – Speech. *I was invited by Professor Timothy Garton Ash to give the Dahrendorf lecture at St Antony's College in Oxford. It was a great honour. On that occasion, I presented my views on the geopolitical situation and the priorities of the EU's foreign and security policy.*

It is a particular honour to deliver the Dahrendorf lecture. Ralf Dahrendorf was an exceptional human being: a politician both in Germany and in the United Kingdom, a European commissioner, a political scientist and a staunch defender of open societies.

As you said, I try to be an academic. I have been in universities for part of my life, and in the political sphere for the other part. I have always been very much interested in bringing together the worlds of ideas and politics: people who think, and people who act.

That is why I am very happy. I enjoy moments like this with people who think deeply about what is happening in this contested and challenging world. You have, maybe, more time to think than I have, so I need you to inspire our decisions. And I hope that, after this lecture, I will have the opportunity to exchange some ideas with you.

Yes, I am the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – thank you for stressing ‘and Security Policy’. From this privileged position, I have the great opportunity of looking at the world. And what do I see?

More confrontation and less cooperation

Well, I see more confrontation and less cooperation. This has been a growing trend in recent years: much more confrontation and much less cooperation.

I see a world that is becoming much more fragmented. I see a world where rules are not being adhered to.

I see more polarity, and less multilateralism.

I see how dependencies become weapons.

I see that the international system that we were accustomed to after the Cold War no longer exists. America has lost its status as a hegemon. And the post-1945 multilateral world order is losing ground.

I see – as you know – China rising to superpower status. What China has done in the last 40 years is unique in the history of humankind. In the last 30 years, China's share of the world's GDP, at PPP, has gone from 6 % to almost 20 %, while we Europeans decreased from 21 % to 14 %, and the United States from 20 % to 15 %. This is a dramatic change in the economic landscape.

China is becoming a rival for us and for the United States. Not just by manufacturing cheap goods but also as a military power, at the forefront of technological development and building the technologies that will shape our future. China has embarked on a 'friendship without limits' – although all friendships have limits – with Russia, which signals the growing alignment of authoritarian regimes in front of democracies.

I said the world is much more multipolar – yes, that is true.

Middle powers, such as India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, are emerging. They are becoming important actors. Whether they are BRICS or not BRICS, they have very few common features, except the desire to get more status and a stronger voice in the world, as well as greater benefits for their own development.

In order to achieve this, they are maximising their autonomy, not willing to take sides, hedging by choosing one side or the other depending on the moment, depending on the question. They do not want to choose a camp and we should not push them to choose a camp.

We wanted a ring of friends. Instead, we have a ring of fire

We Europeans wanted to create in our neighbourhood a ring of friends. Instead of that, what we have today is a ring of fire. A ring of fire coming from the Sahel to the Middle East, the Caucasus and now the battlefields of Ukraine.

Thomas Gomart, the Director of the Institut français des relations internationales, has been analysing the choke points of the global economy. Several of these points are very close to us: the Red Sea, for trade; the Strait of Hormuz, for oil and gas;

and the Black Sea, for grain exports. They are in our immediate vicinity. In some of them, we are even engaged in EU naval missions, as is the case in the Red Sea.

And there are two wars. Two wars. When I came to Brussels, there were no wars.

There are two wars in which people are fighting for land. This shows that geography is back. We were told that globalisation had made geography irrelevant, but no. Most of the conflicts in our neighbourhood are related to land; they are territorial. Land that has been promised to two groups, in the case of Palestine, and land at the crossroads of two worlds, in the case of Ukraine. Those fighting say, 'This is my land,' 'No, it is mine.' And this fight for land is shedding a lot of blood.

At the same time, we have seen an acceleration in global trends. Climate change is no longer a future problem. The climate crisis is already here – it is not a problem for tomorrow; it is one for today. The technological transition – in particular, everybody talks about the rise of artificial intelligence – is bringing changes that we cannot fully grasp. Demography is also changing rapidly. And, when I talk about demographic balances, I am talking about migration, in particular in Africa, where 25 % of the world will be living in 2050. In 2050, one out of four human beings will be living in Africa. Alongside these changes, we have seen inequalities growing, democracies declining and freedoms at risk.

Europe could die

This is what I see. It is not very nice, I know. In this landscape, the role of the European Union, and the role of the United Kingdom, is to be defined. I do not know what our role is going to be. But it will surely depend on our response to the challenges we are facing – nothing new. Jean Monnet said, 'Europe will be forged in crisis.' But now the urgency, and the gravity of the situation, is such that we hear warnings that Europe could die – nothing less.

Well, okay – what do we need to do?

First, we need a clear assessment of the dangers of Russia – Russia is considered the most existential threat to Europe. Maybe not everybody in the European Council agrees with that, but the majority are behind the idea. Russia is an existential threat to us, and we have to make a clear-eyed assessment of this risk.

Second, we have to work on our principles, on our cooperation and on our strength.

But first let's talk about Russia.

Under Putin's leadership, Russia has re-adopted an imperialist understanding of the world. Imperial Russia from the tsar times and the soviet empire times has been rehabilitated by Putin, with the dream of restoring Russia's former size and influence.

It was Georgia in 2008. It was Crimea in 2014. We did not see, or we did not want to see, the evolution of Russia under Putin's watch. Even though Putin himself warned us at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. It is important to re-read what Putin said in 2007 at the Munich Security Conference, which, I am afraid, nobody wanted to hear or to understand.

We built a model – the European model – based on cooperation and economic interdependence – and it has been a remarkable success. There have been 70 years of peace among us. We believed that interdependence would bring political convergence through what the Germans call 'Wandel durch Handel'. This would bring about political change, in Russia and even in China.

Faced with Russia, interdependence did not bring peace

Well, this was proven wrong. It did not happen. Faced with the Russian authoritarianism, interdependence did not bring peace. On the contrary, it turned into dependence, in particular on fossil fuels. And later this dependence became a weapon.

Today, Putin is an existential threat to all of us. If Putin succeeds in Ukraine, he will not stop there. The prospect of having in Kyiv a puppet government like the one in Belarus and Russian troops on the Polish border, and Russia controlling 44 % of the world's grain market is something that Europeans should be aware of.

Everybody is becoming more and more aware of that. Even the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, who at the beginning of the war said, 'Il ne faut pas humilier la Russie.' Now, he is one of the voices warning people about the global consequences of a Russian victory. But there are other voices around the world, like, some days ago, the Prime Minister of Japan, Fumio Kishida.

But I know that not everybody in the European Union shares this assessment. And some European Council members say, 'Well, no, Russia is not an existential threat.'

At least not for me. I consider Russia a good friend.' There are not many, but there are some.

In a Union governed by unanimity, our policies on Russia are always threatened by a single veto; one is enough, as the Prime Minister of Hungary, Victor Orbán, proved by delaying our most recent assistance package for Ukraine. At the same time, in the United States political polarisation has delayed a military assistance package for half a year. In the middle of a war, half a year is a lot of time. It could be the difference between winning and losing the war.

Putin invaded Ukraine under the pretext of the 'denazification' of Kyiv, believing that we would be unable to react. It was after the fall of Kabul. And he was convinced that our strong dependency on Russia's gas would make us react as slowly and softly as we did in 2014 to the invasion of Crimea.

I was in the Donbas in [January 2022](#), some weeks before the invasion started. And I will always remember my conversation with the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Denys Shmyhal. He asked me, 'When they invade us, because they will invade us – there are 150 000 Russian troops on the other side of the border – what are you going to do? Are you going to support us? I am sure that young Europeans will not go to war to die for Kyiv. But are you going to provide us with the arms that we need in order to resist the invasion?' That question, at that time – in January, in the middle of the darkness and the cold of winter – I could not answer. I was not sure what was going to be the answer.

Because the European Union had never provided arms to a country at war. But then the invasion came and, happily, our response was remarkable and we very much united in order to provide Ukraine with the military capacity it needed to resist.

From helmets to fighter jets

The United Kingdom did that before us. At the beginning, we were talking about providing helmets, and now we are providing F-16 fighter jets. It is a long way between one thing and the other. We have come this long way because Ukrainians have proved they are able to resist. Remember that in 2014 Angela Merkel did not want to support Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion of Crimea. At that time, the answer was 'no', because it was going to be useless.

This time, the answer was 'yes', because Ukrainians have proved they are able to resist.

Now Putin sees the whole West as an adversary. He has made that clear in many of his speeches. Every day, the following is said and repeated on Russian TV stations: 'The West – the whole West, the global West – is our enemy.' And Russia acts accordingly, through spreading disinformation and poisoning our information environment using a powerful factory of lies; with that, Russia is attempting to interfere in our democratic processes, as they have already done and will do – I am sure – with the next European elections.

Yes, Ukraine is resisting in difficult circumstances, overcoming the fact that the United States and the European Union have not been supplying everything it needs to continue to fight.

And then another war came. The horrible attack by Hamas of 7 October 2023 and Israel's response – for many people, a disproportionate response – plunged the Middle East into the worst cycle of violence in decades. Just before 7 October, many believed that the Abraham Accords had diluted the Palestinian issue. Well, they had not. It was a way of making peace between the Arabs and Israelis, but not between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

One week before 7 October, Jack Sullivan said that the Middle East had never been so calm. Well, it was not calm. It was not calm; you just have to look at what was happening in the West Bank to realise that it was not calm at all.

Now, we have two wars. And we Europeans are not prepared for the harshness of the world.

But, as you, Ivan Krastev, have pointed out, it is one thing to be awake – and we have been woken up – and another thing to get out of bed. In some cases, we are still in bed. The awakening was clear, but do we understand the gravity of the situation? I have my doubts. And I want to use this opportunity in order to send a message that, yes, the situation is one of gravity and urgency, because we are facing a mix of geopolitical, economic and societal threats. Four of them: geopolitical, economical, technological and democratical.

The European Union is a Union of values

Europe – not only the European Union but the way of living of Europeans, the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humanity has ever invented – is certainly in danger. And in order to face this challenge I think that we have to work on three dimensions: principles, cooperation and strength.

Let's start with principles. Principles are important because we say that the European Union is a Union of values. That is what is in our treaties. We are a Union of values, and those values are enumerated in the treaties. These principles are everything that is good; it is difficult to disagree with them.

Then, there are the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations to limit the actions of stronger powers, and to safeguard us against our own worst instincts, given that we Europeans set the world on fire not once but twice within half a century.

In the simplest possible terms, those principles outlawed 'the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state'.

Then, there is international humanitarian law, which aims to regulate how wars are fought and safeguard the protection of civilians. These principles should provide the best protection against the normalisation of the use of force that we see all over the world.

Europeans need to respect their values always and everywhere

I know, however, that to be able to rally the world around those principles, we need to show that we Europeans respect them always and everywhere. Is that what we are doing? Well, not to the extent that we should. And for Europe this is a problem.

Wherever I go, I find myself confronted with the accusation that we have double standards. I used to say to my ambassadors that diplomacy is the art of managing double standards. Certainly, it is something difficult, but it is about that: managing double standards.

But the fact is people around the world have not forgotten the war in Iraq. Even if some EU Member States did not participate, others participated with a lot of enthusiasm and others withdrew quickly from the war, this last being the case for the country I know best.

What is now happening in Gaza portrays Europe in a way that many people simply do not understand. They saw our quick engagement and decisiveness in supporting Ukraine and are wondering about the way we are approaching what is happening in Palestine.

Yes, I can try explaining how the European Union's decision-making processes work: unanimity. I can try to explain the very different historical experiences of our Member States. At the United Nations General Assembly, 18 voted on one side, 2 on the other, and others abstained when the moment came to decide about the ceasefire.

But the perception is that the value of civilian lives in Ukraine is not the same as in Gaza, where more than 34 000 are dead, most others displaced, where children are starving and humanitarian support is obstructed.

And the perception is that we care less if United Nations Security Council resolutions are violated by Israel with respect to settlements than when they are violated by Russia.

Yes, the principles that we put in place after the Second World War are pillars of peace. But this requires that we are coherent in our language. If we call something a war crime in one place, we need to call it by the same name when it happens anywhere else.

One horror cannot justify another

We all agree that Hamas sparked this new cycle of violence with their atrocious attack, which we have to condemn once and again. But what happened in Gaza in the following six months is another horror. And one horror cannot justify another.

This is more and more what our societies are feeling, as the passionate debate and the many demonstrations around the world, and in particular in the United States, are showing.

Our second line of defence is cooperation.

Cooperation requires an essential ingredient: trust. If I trust you, I am ready to cooperate with you. I am not afraid to be dependent on you if I trust you.

But, in a world where dependencies are increasingly weaponised, trust is in short supply. This brings the risk of decoupling from large parts of the world: decoupling in terms of technology, decoupling in terms of trade and decoupling in terms of values.

More and more transactional relationships are forming but there are fewer rules and there is less cooperation. But the great challenges of the world – climate change, technologies, demographic change and inequalities – require more cooperation, not less cooperation.

So, what can we do?

First, certainly, we can reduce excessive dependencies. During the pandemic, we realised that in Europe we were not producing a single gram of paracetamol. Not a gram of paracetamol. It was a crisis situation, and the market was not able to provide what we needed. So, we need to reduce excessive dependencies, for sure.

We need to diversify our trade links and deepen cooperation with our close friends. The United Kingdom is a close friend and a close partner. We share the same values. We have converging interests on almost all geopolitical issues. In any area in which we can cooperate, it would be beneficial for both of us.

But that is not enough. If I only talked with people who shared my values, I would stop working at midday. No, there are many people around the world with whom I do not share the same values or have contradictory interests. In spite of that, I have to look for ways of cooperating with them. This is the case when it comes to China. We need to work and cooperate with people who do not necessarily share the same values or interests as us.

We have to be aware of the resentment toward us

Then, we have to have a look at why the world is feeling some resentment towards us. Yes, there is a feeling of resentment, because people believe that they have different levels of responsibility in certain areas. Let me cite only two of them.

The first is climate change. We Europeans have produced about 25 % of all global CO₂ emissions since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Sub-Saharan Africa has produced 3 %, and Latin America 3 %. Sub-Saharan Africa and South America have almost none of the responsibility, yet they share the most important and damaging consequences.

So, when we talk about fighting climate change, we have to understand their views and the feeling that this is a problem that someone has created, while others pay the consequences. And the only possible answer is to provide more resources in order to help them face this problem.

More resources – but it has not been the case. Not always the case.

Remember, in 2009 in Copenhagen, developed countries committed to providing \$100 billion per year of support to the countries most directly affected by climate change – and this promise took a long time to be realised.

And even now the United Nations tells us that in order to achieve a just transition – we talk every day about the just transition – we need \$2.4 trillion annually to fund clean energy and climate resilience. This will require an unprecedented increase in global solidarity.

Where is this money going to come from? If it has been so difficult for us to provide \$100 billion per year, how will the world provide \$2.4 trillion, which is the United Nations' estimate?

And this highlights another point of action, which is fiscal justice. And on Gabriel Zucman's initiative, there is no way out without a strong change in some fiscal rules. To start with, a minimum tax must be imposed on corporations and a minimum wealth tax on the world's richest people. This could provide the amount of money required to face climate change, which is considered an existential threat to humanity.

Another reason for resentment is vaccines. When the pandemic came, it was a matter of life or death. In December 2021, rich countries had already used 150 doses of vaccines per 100 inhabitants – 150 per 100 inhabitants. Lower-income countries had just 7 doses per 100 inhabitants. We had 150; they had 7.

And they remember that. I have been talking with some leaders around the world, who have told me, 'During the pandemic, I wanted to buy vaccines from you, not ask for them. I was ready to pay for them, but you told me, "Sorry, we do not have vaccines." Then, I went to Russia and China, and they had them.'

The same values, but not the same priorities

Yes, this has not been forgotten. We can claim that we have been the biggest exporter and the biggest donor. That is true. But at that critical moment, when people were dying, the answer from our side was not a good one. People remind us about it. Climate change and vaccines are two examples of factors fuelling the resentment of the developing world towards us.

This has to be taken into consideration because when we talk with them and we talk about values, they say, 'Yes, we share the same values, but we do not share the same priorities. You have your priorities according to your level of development. I have mine.'

And, if you want to put both things together, unavoidably, a high level of resources must be transferred in order to face pandemics when they come and to face climate change.

The last word is about strength, and this brings me to the security side of my job.

There is nothing that authoritarian regimes admire as much as strength. They like strength. And there is nothing for which they have less respect than weakness. If they perceive you as a weak actor, they will act accordingly. So, let's try to demonstrate strength when talking with authoritarian people.

If authoritarian regimes perceive you as weak, they will act accordingly

This is a lesson that we in Europe had forgotten. Maybe because we had been relying on the security umbrella of the United States. But this umbrella may not be open forever, and I believe that we cannot make our security dependent on the US elections every four years.

So, we have to further develop our security and defence policy. I did not expect this part of my portfolio to take up so much time and effort, but this is the way it is.

We have to increase our defence capabilities and build a strong European pillar inside NATO.

In the past, when we talked about the European pillar inside NATO, this was portrayed as a step towards weakening NATO, leaving NATO or forgetting about NATO. But the funny thing is that today it is the United States itself who is encouraging us to go ahead and to increase our capacities, and to do so in a coordinated manner.

I think that the European pillar of NATO has to be understood not from the point of view of the European Union alone, but from the geographical perspective of Europe, as a space that is bigger than the European Union – not only from an institutional point of view (among the 27 Member States) but from the point of view of the people who know what it is to be European.

Because you, you are the United Kingdom – you left the European Union, but you are still part of Europe. And there are other people in Europe who are not part of the European Union – because they never wanted to be, like Norway, or they decided to stop being, like you – or who are still waiting to become members of the European Union. So, look at that security issue from a geographical perspective, and not only from an institutional one.

And I think that in security and defence we can have with the United Kingdom a stronger relationship. We can build more because this is a pure intergovernmental policy in the European Union. It should not be difficult to expand the bilateral treaties that we already have – such as the treaties of France with the United Kingdom and the Lancaster House Treaties – in order to make security an integral part of better and stronger cooperation.

Certainly, we have to think about who will pay for this security. I wonder how Europeans can be able to pay for more security, a stronger fight against climate change and more cooperation with the rest of the world, and at the same time comply with all the fiscal rules.

I want to recall that when the euro crisis came, we invented out-of-the-box solutions in order to circumvent unanimity and look for a way to save the euro.

Europe needs more resources

Today, we are more or less in the same situation. We have to provide the Europeans with more security, and more financial capacity, to work with our partners around the world, and to become a trusted partner. This will require more resources.

Today, in Europe, in Brussels, there is a great debate about how to achieve this. We did so during the pandemic. We invented NextGenerationEU because the pandemic was an existential threat. People were dying in the streets.

Well, now they are not dying in the streets but they could die in the streets if we cannot offer security capacity in order to deter those who could be tempted to expand war into our territories.

This is one of the biggest challenges that Europeans are facing.

The other one – I am coming back to the situation in the Middle East – is drawing up a peace plan.

I came here from Riyadh, and in Riyadh I met the Arabs and many Europeans.

I think that the Arabs have to present their prospects for a political settlement of the situation. I invited the foreign affairs ministers of the Arab countries to come to Brussels and explain their proposals.

We have to make everybody understand that there is not a military solution, that you cannot kill an idea. The only way of killing an idea is to provide a better one. And what could this good idea be?

Well, everybody says that they want the two-state solution. We have been repeating that for 30 years, since the signing of the Oslo Accords.

But in Oslo the two-state solution was not part of the agreement. It was not. They said, 'Later, maybe, we could try that,' but it is not in the text.

If we believe that the two-state solution is the only solution, then the international community has to engage much more, taking this not as a starting point but as the end point that it must work towards.

And we have to ask those who say that they do not want a two-state solution what they want.

Yes, you do not want it; what is your solution then? If we exclude the extermination or forced migration of Palestinians, what is the solution?

When we ask the Netanyahu government this question, the only answer we get is 'We do not want a two-state solution.' But then what do you want?

And this is what the international community has to ask, once and again, in order to find an answer that can avoid another human tragedy and make these two people work side by side in peace and security.

In Europe, old enemies are today good neighbours

It happened in Northern Ireland, it happened in Europe. Old enemies are today good neighbours, and more than good neighbours; they are best friends. It should be possible, but in order for it to happen land has to be shared. They cannot live together; they have to live side by side, in peace and security but each within their

own home, on their own land, with their own government, their own territory and their own political capacity.

This is one of the most important problems that Europeans have to solve, because it is the most divisive thing among us. We have been united on Ukraine, we remain united in the face of Russia. We have not been united in mounting a response, a basic response, condemning Hamas, asking for the freedom of the hostages, asking for humanitarian support, asking for a political solution. Our response has to be seen in actions, not just in declarations.

This will be something that – from now until the end of the year – will be very high on the agenda of European politics.

And I hope that we can work together with the United Kingdom in order to look for a solution, and to become partners on security, to be partners on trying to ensure the geopolitical battles of our time finish as soon as possible, knowing that it is not easy. It has never been easy, but we have the moral responsibility to contribute because we are part of the problem. We created this problem in one way or another, and we have a great responsibility for trying to solve it.

The existence of Ukraine depends on us. I know how to finish the war in Ukraine. I can finish the war in Ukraine in a couple of weeks just by cutting the supply of arms. If I cut the supply, Ukraine cannot resist, it will have to surrender and the war will finish.

But is this the way we want the war to finish? I do not want that, and I hope that most people in Europe do not want that either.

On the contrary, we will do whatever we can in order to provide the Ukrainians with the necessary military and political support, and we will offer the people in the Middle East all our political engagement to seek a fair peace.

In the meantime, we have to continue fighting to uphold the values and principles that make Europe what it is: as I said at the beginning of my speech, the best combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion that humanity has never been able to invent.

EUROPE DAY 2024: THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE EU

9 May 2024 – Blog post. *On Europe Day, I reflected on the necessary paradigm shift for the EU in the dangerous geopolitical landscape we are now living in, between the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the war in the Middle East.*

'World peace cannot be safeguarded without creative efforts proportionate to the dangers that threaten it.' These were the opening words of Robert Schuman's declaration on 9 May 1950, which paved the way for the European Union. Thanks to the dynamic launched at that time, deadly battlefields have been replaced by meeting rooms and bloody conflict by cooperation and compromise between European countries. However, 74 years later, as Europe commemorates this visionary moment, multiple conflicts threaten peace again in our neighbourhood. We need to engage in new creative efforts and decisive action, in Europe and on a global scale.

Power politics is back

We Europeans, had long hoped that international trade, creating closer links between peoples and nations, would secure lasting global peace. However, this hopeful illusion did not stand the test of reality. Power politics is back. The world is becoming more multipolar and less multilateral. From trade to investment, from information to migration, all types of interaction are being weaponised, and global competition has escalated into confrontation. Once again, world peace is seriously threatened. Profound changes are needed in the EU to deal with this dangerous geopolitical landscape.

Two years ago, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine brought back to Europe the first high-intensity inter-state war since 1945. Under Putin's leadership, Russia has returned to the imperialist worldview of the tsar and the soviet times. Putin's war of choice is creating an existential threat to the EU. Should he succeed in destroying Ukrainian independence and installing a puppet regime in Kyiv, he will not stop there. He has already repeatedly declared its opposition to the core values of freedom and democracy, on which our Union is based.

Russia's war of aggression is threatening not only the EU but world peace. Should such a flagrant violation of the core principles of the UN Charter succeed, it would signal to powerful nations everywhere that they too could impose their will on their weaker neighbours. This would mark the end of an international system based on norms. That is the reason why the vast majority of countries stood repeatedly with Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly in condemning this brutal aggression.

However, despite this condemnation, despite our support for Ukraine and our ability to end our excessive dependency on Russia's fossil fuels, Russia is still continuing its war of aggression. Putin's autocratic regime has silenced any opposition and mobilised all the resources of its economy in the service of its war, while benefiting from the support of other authoritarian regimes. And Russia's forces are currently putting a lot of pressure on the Ukrainian front lines in the Donbas, escalating attacks against railway infrastructure, energy grids, dams and gas storage facilities. Cities like Kharkiv and Odesa – which I visited a few months ago – are constantly shelled with ballistic missiles and drones.

This happens because Ukraine lacks air defence and artillery ammunition. The decisions we take to support Ukraine, just like the postponement of such decisions, have consequences – now and tomorrow, for Ukraine and for us. The military aid finally passed by the US Congress was much needed. It should arrive at the front line in the coming days. But there is no reason for complacency from the EU: we still have to do our part. Several initiatives by EU Member States are under way, but each day counts: our ability to deliver more missiles, artillery ammunition and air defence systems more quickly to Ukraine is a matter of life and death for thousands of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel.

Putting security and defence at the centre of European politics

Beyond this immediate urgency, the deteriorated geopolitical context imposes a paradigm shift for Europe: we need to put security and defence at the centre of European politics. The legacy of the Schuman Declaration is that our Union has been built around the internal market and the economy. And this has worked well to bring peace between the peoples of the Union. But we have for too long delegated our external security to the United States. We must assume now our strategic responsibility and become able to defend Europe by ourselves, building a strong European pillar inside NATO.

We need to invest more in defence at national level. In 2023, we have spent on average 1.7 % of our GDP; this percentage must increase to more than 2 %. But,

even more importantly, we need to spend more together to fill gaps, avoid duplications and increase interoperability. Only 18 % of equipment purchases by our armies are currently made cooperatively, even though we set a 35 % benchmark in 2007. And, since the beginning of the war against Ukraine, European armies have bought 78 % of new equipment from outside the EU.

We need a quantum leap in both our defence capabilities and our defence industry. Every European must understand that effective defence is a prerequisite for the future of our social, environmental and democratic models. We have begun to move in this direction, but much more effort will be needed in the coming months.

In the meantime, in the Middle East, Hamas's terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 triggered a wave of violence that is still at risk of spreading throughout the entire region. Despite more than 34 000 lives being lost and almost 2 million people being displaced and surviving in appalling conditions in Gaza, even the UN Security Council resolution of 25 March 2024, demanding an 'immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan' was not obeyed, a failure for the entire international community.

It is high time to overcome our divisions on the Middle East

As the EU, we could have the means to influence the actors in this tragedy. We are the first to provide international aid to the Palestinian people and the foremost partner of Israel in trade, investment and personal exchanges. Our association agreement with Israel is the most comprehensive of all. However, we have been too divided to be able to influence the actors. It is high time to overcome these divisions and act decisively to put an end to the hostilities, release the hostages and start the political process to finally implement the two-state solution – the only way to bring lasting peace to the region.

This is essential not only to preserve human lives and peace in the region, avoiding the potentially disastrous consequences for Europe of the pursuit and extension of the conflict, but also to tackle the 'double standards' narrative, used against us with some success by Russian propaganda in many parts of the world. If we are not able to help bring peace in the Middle East, we risk losing global support, especially on Ukraine.

We are also witnessing conflicts in many other regions, threatening the lives and basic human rights of millions. Often, the same actors fan the flames in other parts of the world and on the fringes of Europe.

This deteriorating geopolitical context is making the world less cooperative and more transactional, precisely when we would need more trust and cooperation to face major global challenges, such the triple crisis of climate change, loss of biodiversity and inequality. As the EU, we have always strongly supported multilateralism and the United Nations system. The work of UN agencies is irreplaceable in Gaza and elsewhere, and Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has consistently been a voice of reason in recent months.

However, the effectiveness of the multilateral system has been eroded recently by many vetoes and its legitimacy weakened by the insufficient representation of the diversity of today's world. Profound reforms are needed. The UN Summit of the Future in September must be the first stage in this necessary overhaul.

A defining moment for our common future

The next European elections in a few weeks will be a defining moment for our common future. They will provide a critical opportunity for European citizens to discuss current foreign and security policy issues and define the future global role of the Europe they want. For the European project to survive, it has to be able to overcome the geopolitical, economic and democratic challenges we are facing. Europeans need to have the sense of urgency required to be up to the task.

EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES: THE NEED TO COORDINATE OUR POLICIES CLOSELY

14 May 2024 – Speech. *During a trip to California, I had the opportunity to go back to Stanford University, where I studied 50 years ago and give a speech at the Hoover Institution about the geopolitical situation, EU priorities and the EU–US relationship.*

I studied at Stanford 50 years ago – 50 years ago! When I left, I said to myself that I would have to come back, because I had the best time of my life there. As I am sure you have.

Well, it only took 50 years, but finally I am here and I am very happy to have been invited. Thank you so much for that; this is a very good opportunity for me to come back to the Stanford campus.

The EU–US relationship has been at the core of our prosperity

Our relationship – the one between the European Union and the United States – has been at the core of our peace and prosperity. It was true 20, 30 and 50 years ago, and it is still true today. We greatly value this transatlantic relationship, but the relationship is not just about Washington DC; it is also about California, which has a strong European (Spanish) heritage.

If you were a country, you would be the fifth largest economy in the world. And today you are leading the artificial intelligence revolution, and I am happy that we are partners in building responsible and human-centric technological innovation.

But let's get on to the subject; you are not here to hear about my life, although you may understand that for me it is very moving to be here in Stanford. After attending the university, I went into politics, and four years ago I became the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. At the beginning, foreign policy was the most important part of my portfolio, of my job, but today my job is more about security and defence, because the world has changed a lot in the last four years.

At the beginning, when I took office, I said a sentence that was very much noticed: 'Europe has to learn to use the language of power.' And it was important because the power was not in the European Union's DNA, because our project was driven by the rejection of power, the rejection of force and the rejection of power politics among us, among Europeans. And we managed to succeed greatly in avoiding power politics among Europeans.

Our foreign policy was mostly oriented towards market integration among us, and market trade was the most important part of our foreign policy. We wanted to develop partnerships through trade, believing that partnerships based on trade would bring peace and good relationships around the world.

Now we have to change gear. We have to adjust our software. We have to reset our minds, because power politics today is certainly a reality – unfortunately, it's not an insanity. It's something that dominates the world. And if we want to protect our values and our interests then we have to look at the world in the way it is, and not in the way we want it to be: as a peaceful place.

The tragedy of great powers

We made peace among us, and we believed that the rest of the world was also a peaceful place. Unfortunately, that's not true. And now we are living – as some say – a Demosthenes moment or – as others say – a Hamiltonian moment. We are facing the tragedy of great powers.

And we need to redefine our position with respect to the international system, at least for three major reasons.

First, we are witnessing strong and fierce competition among major powers, and the rise of an intense inter-state rivalry. The weaponisation of interdependency: if you are dependent, it is going to be used against you, and this changes everything.

The second reason is that our economic way – the EU's economic way – is declining. Some 30 years ago, you – the United States – were 25 % of the world's gross national product. And you are still 25 % of the world's gross national product. All of us have been growing, but you have kept your size – that is, your share of the world economy.

Us? No. We have been shrinking: our share of the world economy has been declining, and we are facing the risk of becoming or suffering collateral damage

from the US–China competition, which will be the most important factor in international relations in the coming decades.

And this is going to be the century of South-East Asia and China in particular. Before the war in Ukraine, you, the United States, moved to the Indo-Pacific because you were convinced – and I think you are still convinced – that this is the new front line of the world. And we Europeans could be collateral damage of this competition.

And the third reason is that the security landscape has dramatically changed, in particular in terms of geography; the war against Ukraine is some kilometres from the European Union. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has changed everything for us.

I remember Javier Solana, who was (as I was) a Fulbright scholar, saying when he left his job as High Representative, ‘Europe has never been so secure, in peace and tranquillity.’ Well, that’s not exactly what I’m saying today.

Europe is in danger

When I presented the Strategic Compass, weeks before the start of the war against Ukraine, my words were quite different. I said, ‘Europe is in danger.’ Solana said, ‘We have never been so peaceful and so secure.’ I said, ‘Europe is in danger’ and we have to increase our capacity to face difficult challenges.

This difference between the words of my friend Solana and my words are due to some changes. What have been these changes in the last four years?

The first is the Russian challenge and how we are managing it. And we managed to put an end to our dependency in an incredibly short period. Forty per cent of our gas came from Russia. You, from the United States, warned us, ‘Don’t do it. It’s very dangerous. Putin is not a reliable partner. He’s not a reliable supplier.’ In spite of that, we continued building pipelines – Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 – in order to get more and more gas from Russia. Until the war came, when we cut our supply from Russia from 40% to 9% in just a couple of years. This is remarkable. And we did that partly thanks to the fact that you have been a great provider of liquefied natural gas.

Second, we have been able to build a common vision vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine. I know I am talking in front of one of the best specialists on Russia. Well, the

Europeans were quite divided about Russia, but we managed to be united in response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. And we are united in considering Russia an existential threat to the Europeans. Not everybody agrees exactly on this definition: there is at least one or maybe two countries that don't believe that Russia is an existential threat. But the rest of us, and in particular the ones who are closest to the border, consider that we have to behave with this state of mind.

Third, we need to be one of the biggest security providers to Ukraine – maybe the biggest. If you add up civilian support and the military support, we have disbursed, paid effectively, since the beginning of the war, €96 billion. This is a figure that, if I am not wrong, is bigger than the amount provided by the United States. You are much better on military support, but we provide more overall support, military and civilian; and even on military support we can discuss it.

And, by the way, what a pity it is that you have been discussing for six months whether or not to maintain this support: this six months could have made a big difference on the front line. The last news I got this morning in the daily report from my people in Brussels was that Russia is starting a new offensive, forming a new front line in the north of Kharkiv. I was there some days before the war started, and now this may be the place where a decisive development that affects us occurs, and events could happen there this springtime.

Yes. There is a new offensive in Kharkiv, and maybe – why not – if Putin wins this war he could destabilise other EU Member States. All of them are knocking at the door of NATO to become members, including Finland and Sweden, traditionally neutral, because they are very much convinced that if they want to avoid to be invaded or aggressed by Russia the best thing they can do is become members of NATO.

Ukraine still needs your support

We will be confronting huge challenges in terms of war sustainability. Ukraine will need our support. Everyone wish that Ukraine resists. We have to do more and quicker. This six-month delay in US support, and some delays in our support in providing ammunition, could unfortunately make a difference, and, in any case, the cost will be paid in terms of lives – a lot of lives.

And the final thing I want to convey to you is that indeed we Europeans have a deep concern: will the United States continue with the same security priorities?

This depends on who will reside in the White House. This is your business, but it will affect people around the world, and in particular us. And we are looking at what's going to happen in the United States, because alone we Europeans will certainly have difficulty continuing to provide Ukraine with the support it needs in order to continue its fight.

I was talking with the Prime Minister of Ukraine one week before the war started, in his office, and he said to me, 'They will invade us. On the other side of the border, there are 150 000 troops, with heavy arms, and they are not there for coffee. They will invade us. And when they invade us, what are you going to do? Are you going to help us? Sure, you will not send the young Europeans to be killed to defend Kyiv. But are you going to provide us with the arms necessary in order to defend our homeland?'

At that moment, I couldn't give him an answer. But later, yes, the EU responded with strong unity in support of Ukraine. I think that we Europeans and the United States have to continue strongly along these lines, because it's our security and it's the peace and stability of the world that are at stake.

Alarmed by the terrible situation in Gaza

And then another front line was opened, in Gaza. And we are extremely alarmed by the terrible situation in Gaza. I was in Gaza in 2008–2009; and this is, I think, the third or the fourth time that Gaza has been destroyed. But this time it is being destroyed to the roots, flattened completely. People are dying and starving and suffering in unimaginable proportions.

And, yes, we provide humanitarian support as much as we can. But humanitarian support in this case is the means, it is not an end. It is not a natural catastrophe that is happening in Gaza: it is not an earthquake, and it is not a flood, when you can go and help people suffering the consequences. It is a manmade disaster; it is a manmade catastrophe. And we are pushing as much as we can in order to reach a ceasefire; to get the hostages back home, certainly; and to provide better access to humanitarian aid in Gaza.

You could have a look through a satellite at the Gaza border, as I do every morning. You could see more than 1 000 trucks waiting, queuing, in order to be able to enter, when on the other side of the border there are hundreds of thousands of people – according to the United Nations – experiencing the highest level of starvation.

We have to start a political process to empower the Palestinian Authority. I don't see any other solution. And we have to make it loud and clear that the only way to get out of this tragedy is to reach a two-state solution. Difficult as it could be, as it is. I don't see any other way of stopping this tragedy, which will remain a stain on human consciousness.

I don't see any other way of stopping one generation after the other from attending funeral to funeral, if we want to make the Palestinians and the Israelis share the land, for which they have been fighting for more than 100 years. In Gaza, the Europeans have been strongly divided. They are very much united against Russia, with some exceptions; and very much united in providing money to Ukraine and supporting it politically and economically, from any point of view.

In Gaza, we have been very much divided. Look at the United Nations vote a couple of days ago, or when the ceasefire was voted on: 18 Member States were in favour, 2 were against and the others abstained. That is for historical reasons that you can easily imagine. But it doesn't mean that we don't have to take a greater part of the responsibility because we have delegated looking for a solution to the United States. I see a certain fatigue from the US side when it comes to continuing to engage in looking for a solution. And we Europeans are trying to push the Arab people in order to work together, the Arabs and Europeans, to make this two-state solution a reality. In the meantime, the release of the hostages and the provision of humanitarian support are urgently required. But those things alone are certainly not going to be enough to solve the conflict.

Europeans have to increase their strategic responsibility

Looking ahead, I think we Europeans have to increase our strategic responsibility. We have to spend more on our defence and to better allocate our common resources. Easy to say, difficult to implement. We are not a state, not even a federal state: we are 27 sovereign states, with 27 different armies. Altogether, we spend four times more than Russia on the military, and theoretically as much as China. I say theoretically because, in fact, nobody knows how much China is spending. But we do that in a fragmented manner.

So we have to work, and we are working, and I am working, on building a European pillar within NATO, because there is no alternative for the territorial defence of Europe but NATO. But we have to be stronger inside NATO altogether. As I said: this is easy to say, but difficult to achieve.

And then we have to mobilise our resources in order to prevent Europe from losing competitively vis-à-vis the United States; it is not only about China, but also about you. If the gap between the United States and the European Union increases, our savings will be rushed to the US capital market, which is much broader and deeper, and where energy costs are much lower than in Europe. And some choices made by the US government to revamp your economy, and fight back against China – for example, the Inflation Reduction Act – may create a problem for European firms that is certainly going to require a massive subsidy. And we should not engage in a war of subsidies. That's what we blame China for doing. That is what in one way or another you are doing too.

And when I talk with American friends they tell me, 'You are not happy with that? Do the same thing. We don't care. Do the same thing as we do.' Well, the problem is we cannot do it because we are not a federal state. We don't have a Pentagon and we don't have a U.S. Treasury. So, who is going to put \$300 or \$400 billion on the table? I don't know how many. Who? There is not a federal authority. If we let each Member State do it, with their own capacities, then we will break our internal market. So it is not easy to do the same thing that you are doing. And in some cases it is clear that we are strong allies but we are not aligned, in particular on China.

China: the elephant in the room

And this brings me to China again: the elephant in the room. We are talking every day about Gaza, every day about Ukraine and every day about Russia. We look at the Sahel, at Africa and at Latin America. We don't talk enough about China. And we have a systemic problem with China, as you have. Market rules are trumped by security and policy rules. Market access is limited. New investment opportunities are lower than expected.

There are no new entrants to China's economy from Europe. The ones who were there, they stay. But the newcomers are looking for other places in South-East Asia.

China is flooding us with electric vehicles, as they did with solar panels. 80 % of all solar panels in Europe are produced in China. And the same thing may happen with batteries and electric cars. Everything that has to do with the digital revolution.

We were very much depending on Russia for oil, hydrocarbons. Now, we are as much dependent on China to provide the critical materials needed for the digital

revolution as we were on Russia to provide hydrocarbons, which was supposed to be the past.

China is doing extraordinarily well in anything related to renewables. In a single year, they have created much more power capacity through renewables than the United States in its whole history – than you in your whole history. And in spite of that they still produce 60–70 % of the energy they consume using hydrocarbons: coal, oil or gas. But they need everything. And they use everything. And China is producing more CO₂ than the rest of the world together. So there is no way of looking for a solution to climate change without strong commitment from and engagement with China.

And we say that China is a rival, it is a partner and it is a competitor: three things at the same time. And it is difficult to manage a relationship as complex as this one. But I want to insist on this idea: we cannot become the adjustment variable of the Chinese economy, which is confronted with internal imbalances and the potential loss of the American market. If the Chinese lose the American market, they will direct to Europe their excess of capacity. We cannot be the adjustment variable of this confrontation.

And, please, for those who have studied geo-economics, don't confuse excess production capacity with internal imbalances of the economy. As long as internal consumption and production in the Chinese economy will be so unbalanced, China will have, one way or another, to look for a solution through exports. And this raises the issue of competitiveness, and relative advantages. But the public opinions in Europe are not ready to accept the dismantling of European industry. You are not neither.

We will have to protect our industries as you do

Therefore, if China is not responsive enough, we will have to protect our industries as you do. But the important message here in Stanford is that we have to try to do it in a coherent and coordinated manner.

If you do that on your side and we do that on our side, we will be paying each a high price for the adjustment. So more coordination in relation to China is one of the most important things that the Europeans and the Americans should do in order to balance the challenges of this world.

Yes, we have to learn to speak the language of power. Power is not only military power. But it is also military power. So we have to increase our military capacities.

We have to act using all the tools that we have. And we still have a lot of them. We have to build the political will to use them, as we have done in to respond to Russia, to face the challenges of the world, increasing our strategic responsibility.

This is not a luxury. This is not something that you may have or not. This is indispensable if we want to protect our lifestyle and our social fabric and our values.

I used to say that in Europe we have been able to achieve a good combination of political freedom, economic prosperity and social cohesion. You cannot be secure at home, if your neighbour is not having dinner. Security at home depends on social cohesion – on the strength of the social fabric. And this goes hand in hand with political freedom. This is the first competition in the world requiring not only military means. It also requires intellectual means, to conquer the minds of the people. And China and Russia are spending a lot of money and capacity in order to develop a narrative about which political system is better. This is the most important battle to date, and the free world cannot lose it.

THREE LESSONS FROM CALIFORNIA

23 May 2024 – Blog post. *I returned from my visit to California with three main takeaways. First, we need to significantly increase investment in the high-tech sector. Second, the EU's human-centric approach to tech regulation is viewed positively in California. And, third, Europe needs to avoid becoming the adjustment variable for Chinese overcapacity.*

Last week, I was in California to explore the intersection between rapid technological developments and key foreign policy and security questions. If California were a country, it would boast the fifth-largest economy in the world. Given its economic strength and size, it is important to not only focus on Washington DC in the transatlantic relationship but also to give special attention to California.

The United States' most populous state is at the heart of a high-tech revolution. Artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing hold many promises: making huge advances in climate action, developing drugs more quickly and enhancing food security. However, these critical technologies also pose significant risks for our democracies, with the massive spread of disinformation and surveillance capacities, as well as for our collective security, if powerful AI models and quantum technologies fall into the hands of malign actors. Silicon Valley is central to this technological revolution and the interconnected geopolitical tensions between the United States and China.

During my exchanges with tech leaders and Californian decision-makers, three things stood out.

1. Europeans are deeply integrated in the value chains that drive the tech revolution. However, to keep innovation in Europe, we need to invest significantly more.
2. EU tech regulation is broadly welcomed by both Californian decision-makers and tech industry voices.
3. With the US market closing to China, Europe needs to avoid becoming the adjustment variable for Chinese overcapacity.

Europe's role in tech and our investment needs

In Silicon Valley, I met [Nvidia](#) CEO Jensen Huang. His company designs the most advanced chips in the world, and is key to the rapid development of AI. His message was simple: 'All countries should invest in AI. No one can afford to outsource this technology.' Currently, Europe is behind in that field, but the picture is not as bleak as it may look at first glance. Much of the AI innovation coming out of California bears some EU fingerprints.

Nvidia stands at the top of a global value chain spanning from Europe to the United States, Taiwan and South Korea. Key in this value chain is the semiconductor manufacturing equipment of the Dutch company ASML. Without it, Nvidia's most advanced chips could not be produced. Similarly, ASML relies on a supply chain that brings together thousands of companies from the EU tech ecosystem. This diversity of highly advanced smaller companies is Europe at its best.

The same can be said about European scientists. Jack Clark, a co-founder of AI company [Anthropic](#), spoke highly of European physicists and mathematicians involved in developing the large language models of his company.

There are several reasons why these competitive advantages have not translated into more European tech giants. Some of them, such as different risk cultures and linguistic fragmentation, are difficult to address. Others, however, such as the lack of investment to scale innovation in Europe, could be solved by a substantial increase in public funding and a reform of Europe's capital markets.

Public investment should be particularly directed towards supercomputers and quantum technology. Computing capacity is the key driver of AI and enables the training of large language models, as well as other AI innovations. It is an essential ingredient for scaling AI businesses in the EU.

Another key ingredient is access to private capital. In 2023, €62.5 billion of private investment went into US AI, [while Europe \(the EU and the United Kingdom\) attracted only around €9 billion](#) and China €7.3 billion. However, with China now de facto closed for US investors, venture capitalists are increasingly turning their attention to Europe, creating opportunities for Europe to access growth capital for scaling up. Nvidia alone collaborates with more than 4 000 European tech start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises through their inception programme. However, as Enrico Letta recently pointed out, Europe's capital markets remain too fragmented. The next European Commission should prioritise

building a [savings and investments union](#) to direct more of Europe's private savings – amounting to a staggering €33 trillion – towards European tech assets.

The second main takeaway was that EU regulation is broadly welcomed by both Californian lawmakers and tech industry leaders. Europe has a clear vision for how we want the digital economy to develop. EU regulation focuses on keeping consumers safe, increasing trust in new products and safeguarding our democracies by countering information manipulation, abuse of personal data and addictive algorithms.

This human-centric approach to digital policy is shared in Sacramento, the political capital of the state, where legislators are keen to align California's legislation with the EU AI Act and other digital policies. They demand that big tech companies give the same benefits – such as data protection and privacy – to US users. The same is true regarding regulation to fight climate change and the decarbonisation of the energy system. As it is the most populous and progressive US state, California's rules often set standards across the United States. In short, Sacramento is where the 'Brussels effect' meets the 'California effect'.

However, EU regulation, in particular the AI Act, was also largely welcomed by the tech industry leaders with whom I spoke. They were aware of the possible dangers of AI and the need to establish safeguards to protect our democracies and our societies. This awareness prompted the establishment of a European Union office in San Francisco two years ago. Our experts facilitate closer collaboration with local legislators and industry stakeholders in shaping technology regulations and help ensure that the best ideas flow both ways.

Europe's position amid US tariffs and Chinese overcapacity

My meetings in California took place against the backdrop of a major development in US–China relations: the imposition of 100 % tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles by the Biden administration.

Europe's approach to economic security is de-risking, not decoupling or turning protectionist. However, the closure of the US market to Chinese products is putting the EU in a difficult position, as this will likely divert Chinese exports to the European market. As I told students at [Stanford University](#), Europe cannot become the adjustment variable of the Chinese economy.

The root of this problem lies in Chinese overcapacity, which stems from China's unique political system, economic imbalances and large-scale subsidies. According to the [Kiel Institute for the World Economy](#), China's industrial subsidies are estimated to be three to nine times higher than those in major Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. Coupled with very low domestic consumption, this results in a significant portion of the industrial output being directed towards exports. Chinese authorities have repeatedly committed to enhancing consumer spending; however, substantive measures to address this issue are still lacking.

Therefore, if China is not responsive enough, Europe will need to protect its industries using tools such as anti-dumping procedures, as exemplified by cases involving electric vehicles and wind turbines. Additionally, Europe may also utilise its new tools such as the Foreign Subsidies Regulation or the International Procurement Instrument.

Coordinate our approaches to China's overcapacities

In the face of Chinese overcapacity, both the United States and Europe will face higher costs if we do not coordinate our respective approaches. Some of the choices made by the United States recently, such as the Inflation Reduction Act with its 'Buy America' provisions, are creating problems for European companies and putting us at risk of a subsidy race.

Closer US–EU cooperation, with full respect for our respective approaches, would be beneficial for both sides. This was the message I conveyed to politicians and China experts, and it was widely echoed by many of my Californian counterparts.

EUROPEAN IDENTITY, YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW

21 June 2024 – Speech. *In June 2024, I was invited to Austria by my friend and colleague Alexander Schallenberg, the Austrian foreign minister, to receive the Dr Alois Mock Europe Prize in Göttweig Abbey. It was an occasion for me to reflect on European identity and responsibility and what they mean for us in the current very tense geopolitical context.*

There is a saying in Spain, ‘Libreme, Dios, del día de las alabanzas,’ which, translated, means ‘Please, God, save me from the day when everybody will be praising me.’ Because it will mean that either you are leaving or you are dying.

I am not dying. I am still not leaving. But I thank you a lot, because I know that this prize, and your friendship, is one of the rewards that I will take with me after all these years.

European identity has been forged in places like this abbey

We are here in a fantastic place, Father Abbot, a fantastic place.

It comes to my mind that monasteries, churches, are at the heart of the European identity. And monasteries make the perfect place for European awards because they have been the centre of intellectual exchanges; they have linked Europeans beyond borders for hundreds of years. European identity has been forged in places like this, which were havens of peace in troubled times, where culture has been transmitted from generation to generation, building what Europe is today.

Let me tell you that last week I was in another monastery for another prize.

I was at the monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, in Spain, where Mario Draghi received the Charles V European Award. It was the King of Spain who was giving this award.

Charles V for you; for Spain, he was Charles I. But, in any case, this king or this emperor marked the history of Spain and Austria, because with him the Habsburgs ruled both Austria and Spain.

Charles was born in Flanders and he was educated there. But he was sent to rule in Spain when he was 16 years old. And he did not speak a single word of Spanish.

He was educated in French. 'Now you are becoming king of Spain,' he was told. And he came to Spain not knowing a single word of Spanish. He ruled not only Spain, but Austria and the Holy Roman Empire.

When he decided to retire, he went into a monastery to spend the last days of his life living as a monk.

He had a brother, Fernando – Ferdinand for you. His brother was educated in Spain, in Alcalá de Henares, and he was sent to become the archduke of Austria. And he didn't speak a single word of German.

Well, at that time, this happened – and they did not have simultaneous translation – but one who didn't speak a word of Spanish went to rule Spain, and another who didn't speak a single word of German was sent to rule Austria. And then, for years, the Habsburgs built something that was already called Europe.

It shows how deep the historic links between Austria and Spain are.

This attempt to build Europe beyond borders has been followed by other rulers; they did it by means of war.

What is extraordinary and historic is that we are building Europe by peace.

The European Union, the biggest machine for erasing borders

The European Union has been the biggest machine for erasing borders, for cancelling borders. And that's good, because borders are the scars that history has left on the skin of the Earth.

These scars, these lines, were left on the skin of the Earth by fire and blood.

But erasing borders and uniting people beyond borders, making them feel part of a bigger identity, does not cancel out the original identity.

I am Catalan. I am Spanish. I am European. I am personally ready and able to have these three identities inside me. They are not contradictory. They are complementary.

And the European identity is not yet finished. And it will not be finished, as you have been saying and working for, until the countries of the Balkans – all of them – become part of this family.

So, thank you. Thank you very much for honouring me with your friendship, first of all, and with this prize, and for all of you being here.

I have to recognise that I have never met Alois Mock. But I know of his most famous act: cutting the Iron Curtain together with the Hungarian foreign minister.

There are pictures that have made history, and the picture of Alois Mock cutting these wires and cancelling a border, a bloody border, is part of European history.

I am a Spaniard; I spent at least half of my life living under military dictatorship.

Our border did not have barbed wire, but for my generation, Europe represented political freedom and social cohesion. Political freedom and social cohesion are the trademarks of Europe.

And, for us, Europe was the beacon in the night of the dictatorship. To become part of a land where political freedom, social cohesion and economic prosperity were being built together.

During my life I've seen freedom expanding all over the continent.

First, the dictatorship in southern Europe fell, then the Iron Curtain

First, the dictatorship in southern Europe fell, and later, the Iron Curtain.

Twenty years ago, more or less exactly, in July 2004, I was President of the European Parliament. And I opened the first parliamentary session with the new members from the 10 new EU Member States.

Twenty years ago, people were wondering: is it going to work?

With 10 more people sitting in the circle, with more languages, with more translation activities? Is it going to work with the different cultures of these people coming from living under the communist regime? And it worked.

And, for them, it was an incredible boost to prosperity.

Yes, enlargement has been a story of success, and the pending enlargement will also be a story of success.

The problem is that it has been delayed for too long, and now we have to speed up.

You, Minister Schallenberg, have been playing an important role, you and the other members of the European Union being represented here today, in order for us not to forget that Europe is not complete, and will not be complete, until these partners become real members.

After the Iron Curtain fell, we believed that freedom, peace and democracy were going to drive humankind. That this was the only solution, and everybody would be living in democracy, in peace and in freedom.

Well, this is not the case. On the contrary; have a look at the world.

We built peace among us, but the world is not a peaceful place. We are living in democracy, but democracy is not expanding; on the contrary. Freedom is being jeopardised in many places, and some countries are being invaded by powerful neighbours.

History has taken a different course from the one we expected.

The return of power politics and the decline of multilateralism

Today we see the return of power politics. We see the decline of international norms. We see the use of force as a way of solving conflicts.

All interdependencies are becoming weapons. Everything is being weaponised: energy, food, technology, migration.

And inside Europe we see a return of the authoritarian ideas that have done so much harm in the past.

I think that we are shifting from a Europe open to the world, and wanting to find common solutions, to a Europe of walls and national solutions.

The keyword of the first wave of European integration was 'market'. The keyword today is 'security'. Why?

Because we are living with and facing important threats. Because we are living in a dangerous landscape.

But take care. National solutions and building walls is not going to be a solution for Europe as a whole. We need to continue building bridges, find common solutions and be open to the world, which needs Europe.

You cannot imagine how much people around the world demand more from us. They want more Europe. Because we represent freedom, prosperity and social cohesion.

We live in a deeply interconnected world, like it or not. And we need to stay united, more united, and open to the world if we want to influence events globally.

If we want to be a global player, we have to go to the rest of the world, united.

How the war in Ukraine ends is essential for European security. And only together can we influence the way this war will finish.

What happens in the Middle East profoundly impacts Europe

What happens in the Middle East impacts European societies profoundly. It is the strongest cause of division among us and inside our societies. And, once again, only united can we help to take steps towards peace.

Instability in the Sahel and climate change in Africa are consequential for migration. Migration has root causes, and climate change is one of them. And political instability in Africa is another one.

And then we have security, maritime security, in the Red Sea and the South China Sea. Next week I will travel to the Red Sea to visit our fleet. Yes, a European fleet, ships from several different European navies, trying to protect the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

This matters for our trade; it matters for our economic security; it matters for our security.

Let me repeat: only by becoming more united will we Europeans survive. No European country can face the challenges of this world alone. Even the biggest, the most powerful, will be irrelevant in the face of the challenges of the world.

Only together, joining our forces, sharing a common story, will we be able to protect our political freedom, our economic prosperity and our social cohesion, which are the elements of this European civilisation that are underpinning this building and what this building represents.

So, thank you very much, and let's work for a more united Europe.

THE HERITAGE OF VENTOTENE: LET'S THINK BIG AGAIN FOR EUROPE

19 September 2024 – Blog post. *In August 2024, I returned to the island of Ventotene in Italy, where in 1941 a visionary manifesto, For a Free and United Europe, was published. Many of those visions have become reality, but, in the current context, much more needs to be done to strengthen our political union and reinforce our common foreign and security policy.*

At the beginning of September, I participated in the 43rd edition of the seminar on 'Federalism in Europe and the World' on the island of Ventotene, in the Gulf of Naples. Ventotene is the place where the famous manifesto *For a Free and United Europe* was written in 1941 by Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, who were among the founding fathers of modern Europe.

Before addressing the seminar, I inaugurated a beautiful artwork, a wall painting on the City Council building with the entire text of the manifesto. I also attended a gathering to relaunch the Action Committee for the United States of Europe created by Jean Monnet in 1955. Opening the seminar, I explored what had been achieved since 1941 in Europe, but also, more importantly, what remains to be done.

Making war impossible among Europeans

The Ventotene manifesto was drafted at a time when fascist armies were marching victoriously across Europe. It was visionary and proposed building a European federation to make war among Europeans impossible. Nine years later, with the Schuman Plan of 1950, work was set in motion to pool together coal and steel, the very ingredients of any war machine. During the following decades, EU Member States renounced key elements of sovereignty, giving way to a common market, a common currency and the freedom to travel all over Europe without a passport. Those are historic achievements, but the full promise of the Ventotene manifesto remains unfulfilled.

And we are going through a difficult time. War is back along our borders, and we live in the most dangerous geopolitical environment since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Maybe even since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the world came close to a nuclear apocalypse. In this increasingly hostile world, we cannot

continue to just react to events. We have to become proactive; we have to develop a plan. We need to strive more than ever for a strong political union with an effective common foreign and security policy.

My experience of the last five years has taught me that we Europeans have only just woken up to the hardship of this world. After the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954, defence was not part of Europe's initial project. However, recently, events have forced us to take action in this field. It will be the dominant issue in Europe in the coming years. We have already made some progress in building an EU foreign and security policy, which did not exist back in the 1950s, but we are still quite far from what is needed.

As the Draghi report has shown, we need to pool much more EU resources if we want to be able to finance the green and digital transitions and develop our defence capacities and boost our defence industry at the same time. Like Alexander Hamilton during the American Revolution, we decided to create EU debt in 2020 to face the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of the war against Ukraine, this should not remain a one-off action. However, when Alexander Hamilton created common borrowing, he also created US federal taxes to repay this debt. So far, the EU has not done so. Creating debt is easier than creating taxes!

We also need to change our decision-making process. The EU is hamstrung by the unanimity rule for taxation, foreign policy and defence. One Member State is currently preventing the EU from giving €6 billion in military support to Ukraine, a country that is facing heavy bombings every day. This is not acceptable if we want to build a political community able to defend our citizens and our values and interests. With 27 countries, the unanimity rule is already a heavy burden. After a new enlargement, with 37 countries, it would become unsustainable.

We need an alternative. The current treaty permits us to transition to qualified majority voting for these policies – but only if we agree on that through a unanimous decision, which is very unlikely. In the end, even if this process is always difficult and risky, we will probably need to reform the treaties. We could explore, for instance, the use of a supermajority rule of four fifths.

Thinking big again about Europe

In short, while we have made progress, we still have a long way to go to realise the vision set out by the Ventotene manifesto. To face the challenges of our time – from geopolitical tensions to the urgent need for green and digital transitions – we

should not shy away from thinking big again, just like Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli did in the dark times of 1941.

THE DRAGHI REPORT AND EUROPE'S GEOPOLITICAL FUTURE

26 September 2024 – Op-ed. *In September 2024 Mario Draghi published a major report he had prepared on EU Competitiveness EU competitiveness. I made public my thoughts on this report from the point of view of EU foreign and security policy for the website Le Grand Continent.*

First of all, our sincere gratitude goes to Mario Draghi and his team for the quality and exhaustive scope of their report; the information they gathered paints a striking picture of the qualitative leap the Union urgently needs to make if it is to overcome the many challenges it faces.

A major technological deficit

The diagnosis is clear: Europe is facing a major technological deficit in a very difficult geopolitical context. The remedy lies in a massive and sustained increase in investment. It was essential to explain this situation to the people of Europe and to their leaders, while at the same time presenting them with solutions for overcoming it.

The Draghi report highlights three major challenges for Europe: the need to accelerate innovation and find new drivers of growth; the need to lower energy prices while continuing to decarbonise our economy; and the need to respond to a more unstable world where Europe can no longer rely on others to guarantee its security.

The two latter challenges have been particularly highlighted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But we have known for a long time that we have a deficit of innovation. As early as 2000, the Lisbon strategy set out to make the European Union 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' by 2010. Despite this ambitious statement, a quarter of a century later, the gap has continued to widen between us and the United States, and is now widening in relation to China.

In 2010, the Monti report on the single market also stressed the need to simplify European regulations to create a simpler, less restrictive framework for businesses. Yet, 15 years on, the Draghi report shows that the situation has not improved.

Mario Draghi did not mince his words on this matter when presenting his report: 'For the most part, we have done all we can to limit innovation.' We urgently need to take action. To meet the challenges facing the Union, we need to shatter new taboos, as we did when we jointly borrowed €750 billion to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we did when we decided to provide military aid to Ukraine to support its fight for survival.

In particular, greater integration will be required in key areas such as taxation, notably to finance the Union's budget and support its issuance of debt, foreign policy and defence. To achieve this, it will be inevitable to amend the treaties.

Integrating these three areas into Union competencies will be particularly complex as they represent the core of national sovereignty, but when the current treaty was approved in the early 2000s, the world was a very different place than it is today.

Amending the treaty may seem unrealistic, but not doing it would be worse

Amending the treaty may seem unrealistic, but not doing it would be equally so. It will be very difficult for the Union to survive if it adheres solely to the treaties as they stand today, as Mario Draghi has repeatedly made clear.

The debate surrounding this report has so far focused largely on the question of whether or not to create a joint debt for the EU Member States to finance the massive increase in investment that Mario Draghi is recommending. Unsurprisingly, this proposal has been met with strong resistance. Some were even quick to dismiss the Draghi report as dead on arrival because the idea had been rejected by political leaders in Germany and other countries, as well as by the President of the Commission.

Mario Draghi must not have been surprised by these reactions. His report prudently advised that the proposal to issue joint debt should only be pursued 'insofar as political and institutional conditions allow'. Indeed, it could not be otherwise.

Despite this, it seems to me that this report will have a lasting impact on the Union's agenda. That's why we need to engage in an in-depth debate on the many proposals it contains, to identify the most urgent ones and how they can be effectively implemented. We also must highlight those that are still not fully developed and consider them as a starting point for more in-depth discussions.

As High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), I would like to contribute to this debate on two specific subjects: the geo-economic dimension of the Union's foreign policy, and the institutional framework for coordinating the Common Security and Defence Policy and support for the defence industry.

Investing more in Europe without forgetting the rest of the world

In a world where all interdependencies have become weapons – weaponisation of dependencies, as we say in our jargon – the question of economic security has become a central element of any foreign policy. In his report, Mario Draghi stresses the need for the Union to develop a true 'foreign economic policy' and to coordinate 'preferential trade agreements and direct investments with resource-rich countries, the building up of stocks in certain critical areas, and the creation of industrial partnerships to secure the supply chain for key resources'.

I agree. The siloed approach we have seen all too often up until now – with the European Union's trade policy on one side and its foreign and security policy on the other – has become wholly ill-adapted to the geopolitical context in which we now find ourselves.

However, apart from the phrase 'foreign economic policy' – the President of the Commission also uses a similar expression – the Draghi report does not put forward any specific proposals for overcoming the dualistic approach that has often paralysed us in this area.

Prior to the Draghi report, however, the Lisbon Treaty had already sought to resolve this problem. It distinguishes between two areas; international economic relations, such as trade and development aid, fall within the Union's area of competence – trade is said to be exclusive, even if it requires the agreement of a qualified majority of Member States – while other areas of external action fall under the intergovernmental framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, with its own specific actors and procedures.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the HR/VP was to play a key role in integrating these two dimensions of foreign policy. In addition to chairing the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Aid, he or she was to also chair the Council of Ministers responsible for the Union's foreign trade. But for several years now this provision has not been applied.

In June 2023, we approved a joint communication with the Commission on economic security. This was a first step towards meeting the challenges posed by this new paradigm. But our Achilles' heel remains governance: clarifying who should do what and how, between the intergovernmental dimension of foreign policy and Union competencies and instruments.

The Lisbon Treaty provided for the interinstitutional coordination Mario Draghi is calling for, by entrusting the HR/VP with the function of linking the actions of the Council and those of the Commission in the field of foreign economic policy. The present geopolitical context suggests that such coordination would be even more necessary, but I fear we're heading in the opposite direction.

We have put too much faith in free trade

The Draghi report also acknowledges that we have been overly naive in the past, putting too much faith in free trade and opening up the Union to goods and capital. This observation has been shared for several years within the Union. During the term of office, which is now drawing to a close, significant measures have been taken to correct the situation, whether in the fight against dumping and excessive public subsidies, or controlling foreign investment in Europe.

The Draghi report proposes going much further still in terms of industrial policy, support for European innovation and protection of European producers by equipping us with new instruments and devoting a great deal of additional financial resources to them.

Admittedly, the measures we have already taken are still insufficient given how far we have fallen behind in many key areas and the increasingly aggressive practices of some of our competitors, not only China. But we must be careful to ensure that the measures we take in terms of economic security and industrial policy do not have unwanted – and undesirable – geopolitical effects.

Given that the Union has gone too far in opening up its economy, there is a risk that public opinion and European leaders will be tempted to let the pendulum swing too far in the other direction – and that we will alienate partners with whom, conversely, we urgently need to strengthen our ties. This applies in particular to the countries around the Mediterranean and in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as those in Latin America and South and South-East Asia.

This risk is real. In 2023, for example, we adopted a directive against imported deforestation. I naturally share the spirit and objectives of this law. But we have to admit that it has created significant difficulties in our relations with important partners such as Brazil, Indonesia and the countries of West Africa. It is important that all the measures we take in terms of economic diplomacy are precisely calibrated, discussed beforehand with our partners and gradually implemented to enable them to adjust to these changes.

It would be a major geopolitical risk for the Union if the majority of the countries of what is now called the Global South were to become hostile to us. This risk has recently been compounded by what has been perceived as a double standard in our reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the war in Gaza. We have already seen the potentially disastrous effects of this in the Sahel. Our legitimate desire to strengthen our industrial policy and better ensure our economic security should not exacerbate such a risk of geopolitical isolation.

Furthermore, the most important conclusion of the Draghi report is that, in order to catch up technologically, Europe would need to invest around €800 billion more each year in private and public money – equivalent to 5 % of European GDP. This is an ambitious target that will be very difficult to achieve.

Detrimental effects on European investment outside the EU?

The report stresses that this will only be possible if sufficient public money is made available to trigger momentum in private investment. But releasing the corresponding public funds at the European level means increasing national contributions or the Union's own resources, and/or issuing joint debt. If no agreement is reached on this issue, there is a risk that this major internal investment effort will be to the detriment of European public and private investment outside the Union. This would ultimately undermine our geopolitical position.

For example, the Union must of course do its part to tackle climate change. Hopefully, the Green Deal will be fully implemented by the new Commission. However, the most important factor at play here is not in Europe, but in emerging and developing countries. These countries will only fully commit to the green transition and adapting to climate change if the developed countries – which have historically been responsible for this phenomenon – provide them with sufficient support. They tell us this over and over again at every conference of the parties (COP).

If we cannot increase Europe's contribution to the global financing of the fight against climate change, we risk jeopardising the already fragile Paris Agreement process and alienating many of the countries most threatened by climate change. At the same time, climate change itself constitutes one of the main geopolitical threats for us in terms of instability at our borders.

Similarly, as a result of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, many countries in the south, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, are once again experiencing serious debt problems. Even if this excessive indebtedness today most often concerns China, Europe cannot refuse to do its part to resolve it.

In addition, China has dramatically expanded its geopolitical position, particularly in Africa and Latin America, by providing massive financial support for infrastructure construction through the 'New Silk Roads'. In 2021, we decided to respond with the Global Gateway initiative. However, the additional funding we can realistically mobilise remains very limited. We cannot neglect these issues in our relations with these countries.

Finally, the Draghi report reminds us that we need to reduce our excessive dependence on certain trading partners. At the same time, we need to develop our economic ties with other regions of the world. This is essential if we are to access the critical raw materials needed for the energy and digital transitions.

It is crucial that we avoid reverting to an 'extractivist' approach. We need to establish balanced partnerships with our partners, and help them build real industrial sectors to add domestic value to the raw materials they have.

In other words, overcoming our technological deficit, boosting our autonomy in the fields of digital technology and renewable energies and ensuring the survival of our social model means not only investing more in Europe, but also becoming more engaged abroad if we are to limit climate change and avoid allowing China and Russia to have free rein in the countries of the Global South.

Strengthening our defence requires an appropriate institutional framework

I largely agree with the Draghi report's diagnosis of the issues facing the defence industry. However, I have my doubts about the appropriateness of some of the recommendations, for both political and institutional reasons.

In a geopolitical context shaped by the war launched by Russia near our borders, by other flashpoints of tension in our vicinity and by great uncertainty about future US involvement in European security, we must prioritise – as part of the massive investment effort recommended by Mario Draghi – the strengthening of our defence capabilities and our defence industry.

Despite a significant increase, especially since February 2022, our investments in these areas remain insufficient, inefficient and fragmented. We still have a long way to go if we are to replenish our armed forces' stocks, support Ukraine at the level it needs and prepare for the future by designing and developing tomorrow's equipment.

Indeed, our defence industry is not able to keep up with the increase in our military spending. According to the report, since the start of the war against Ukraine, 78 % of the equipment used by Europe's armed forces has been purchased outside the Union. Moreover, we cooperate far too little in this area; only 18 % of orders for our armed forces are placed in a coordinated fashion in Europe.

This situation compromises our ability to act as a power on the international stage. Over the past five years, we have issued numerous warnings on this matter, notably in the Strategic Compass, a kind of white paper on European defence, published in March 2022, and in the annual reports of the European Defence Agency.

The need for a more active European defence industry policy

We undeniably need a much more active European defence industry policy. This would also have a major positive impact on other industrial sectors of the future, such as microelectronics, artificial intelligence, etc., as the United States has been showing us for decades.

The Draghi report places particular emphasis on the need for consolidation among firms in the sector. And he's right. Europe will only be able to build a sufficiently powerful defence industry if we succeed in overcoming current fragmentation.

However, this is much easier said than done, as there are still strong national sensibilities at play here. In my opinion, the Draghi report did not take the particularities of the military equipment market sufficiently into account. We will never be able to achieve a true single market for military equipment until we have a much stronger political union.

In order to develop 'Defence Europe', we first need to clarify the roles of the Commission and the Member States. According to Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union, individual states remain solely responsible for their own national security. But the treaty also establishes that they can act together through the Common Security and Defence Policy.

To this end, the treaty provides for the creation of a European Defence Agency, an institution that is mentioned only in passing in the Draghi report, even though its already significant role could be increased to develop more military research projects, encourage companies to join forces and better coordinate the procurement of equipment for European armies. Sometimes, we ask for the creation of new organisations while forgetting those that already exist.

The other way to build Defence Europe is to use the Commission's competencies and the European budget, together with the European Defence Fund and other industrial policy instruments developed during this legislature. In particular, this will be the task of the new defence commissioner, who is not actually a real defence commissioner in the full sense of the term, but rather a commissioner in charge of the defence industry, just as Commissioner Thierry Breton was in his wider portfolio.

Coordinating defence demand-side and supply-side support

To succeed, we need to closely coordinate these two crucial approaches: respecting the sovereignty of individual states while encouraging them to cooperate more closely on an intergovernmental basis within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework created by the Lisbon Treaty, and, at the same time, mobilising the European budget to support the European defence industry and encourage it to combine forces. At the same time, we need to better coordinate demand on the military side and provide greater supply-side support to industry.

This close coordination between the Union and intergovernmental levels is essential if we are to build the 'Defence Union' that President Juncker began talking about in 2017, and which President von der Leyen wants to make one of her primary objectives.

Where do we draw the line between industrial policy in the defence sector and defence policy? Could the military capabilities of European armies be financed in part by the EU budget? Could the European Union buy and own military equipment, as envisaged under the new Military Equipment Sales Mechanism proposed under the European defence industry programme (EDIP) and modelled on the US Foreign

Military Sales programme? Or could it develop defence capabilities through a 'European Defence Union' project to deal with shared, cross-border threats to the Union's security, as suggested by the European air shield project? Is the centre of gravity of such a project defence policy or industrial policy? What becomes of the role of existing intergovernmental defence cooperation instruments such as PESCO?

Could the supply security scheme described in the EDIP proposal, which would enable the Commission to order companies to give priority to defence over civilian supplies in times of crisis, be activated via the Union method? Given the current state of the treaties, all this seems difficult to imagine.

It seems to me, however, that these crucial institutional and legal issues have not been sufficiently addressed in the Draghi report, unlike, for example, the radical and specific proposals made in the area of competition policy. I'm not saying that we shouldn't plan to adopt measures such as those mentioned above, but it seems difficult to believe that they can fall entirely within the scope of 'industrial policy' – which is the only way the treaties currently allow the Commission to play a role in defence matters.

The HR/VP in charge of foreign affairs and security could and should play a major role in this process because there will only be a true Union in the field of defence if the Member States responsible for it are strongly involved. Industry – the Commission's entry point in terms of competencies in this vast field of European defence – is of course important, but it is far from the whole story. Nor can it be the decisive approach in political terms: the defence industry is a tool at the service of the Union's security policy.

The second issue is the size of the industrial players. The Draghi report repeatedly refers to the need for a new competition policy that no longer prevents Europe from building global players. Defence is one of the first sectors where such a philosophy could be applied, given its particular value to the Union's security.

The third issue concerns financing investment in the defence industry. The Draghi report points to very substantial funding needs, but does not provide much information on how to meet them, in the defence sector or elsewhere.

We cannot wait until the next MFF is adopted

When it comes to defence, we must first and most urgently remove regulatory obstacles to the private financing of these industries. But private funding alone will not suffice. Must we wait until the next multiannual financial framework has been adopted and the Union has been endowed with new own resources before

supporting the defence industry at the European level? Or should we pre-empt this effort by issuing European debt now, as we did in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

If the aggressive imperialism of Vladimir Putin's Russia was truly seen as an existential threat to the Union, as was the case with COVID-19, the choice of joint debt would be made quickly. It would be legitimate and in accordance with the treaty to resort to issuing joint debt to finance a massive additional military effort in support of Ukraine in order to force Putin to sit at the negotiating table. Indeed, there is reason to fear that the absence of such massive and rapid European funding could cause us to fall irremediably behind in the face of the Russian war machine, which is linked to those of Iran and North Korea.

On the other hand, when it comes to equipping the armies of Member States that have so far made little effort to develop their defence capabilities, issuing joint debt to make up for this lag would raise a morally uncertain issue. Many Member States would be unwilling to take on such a collective debt.

In conclusion, the European public debate needed the straight talk of the Draghi report. All that remains now is to ensure that the message is actually heard and to clarify certain recommendations – as well as to ensure that the Union's new leaders translate them into decisions that are equal to the stakes.

THE IDEA OF POWER IS NEW TO EUROPE

27 September 2024 – Speech. *During the high-level week of the United Nations General Assembly, I had the opportunity to address the Council on Foreign Relations about the geopolitical situation and EU–US relations*

We are living in difficult times, marked by the return of interstate wars that we thought were over, the proliferation of civil wars and the multiplication of tensions from the Sahel to the South China Sea, not to mention Sudan, Yemen and many other spots devastated by misery, strife and war. And, in the face of all these situations, the capacity of external players to shape the course of events tends to decrease. This reality affects Europe, but also the United States.

Two examples come to my mind. First, Ukraine: our role is absolutely crucial, but we cannot determine the final outcome. Second, the Middle East: we are unable to bring about even a ceasefire in Gaza or prevent the current extension of the Israeli–Iranian conflict to Lebanon. We need to help Lebanon to recover its full sovereignty.

European shaping power remains limited

Where does Europe stand in relation to a world in which what I will call our ‘shaping power’ is declining, and where an increasing and powerful number of actors are trying to navigate and make their own way?

To answer this question, let me first recall what Europe is and how its relations with power have been built.

The first point, which is often misunderstood or misrepresented, is that the European project has historically been built against the idea of power. This is a fundamental point, which makes the idea of power a very new one in Europe.

Why so? Quite simply because the aim of the European project was to reduce the instinct for power that existed among Europeans, who had been at war with each other for centuries. In addition, in the European project, they found a way to replace the use of force with peace, exchange, cooperation and interdependence. In fact, you will note that the Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957, came a year after the

Suez debacle, when France and the United Kingdom had to withdraw their forces under joint pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union. The treaty deliberately left aside issues such as war, defence and security, either because most states wanted to retain their sovereignty in this area, or because most European states felt that their security was guaranteed by NATO in the first place, especially after the failure of the European Defence Community.

How we are trying to enter the fray of power politics

But this situation has become untenable. One way or another, Europe is now obliged to think of itself as a power. And this is new. We cannot afford to stay out of the fray of power politics.

Why? First and foremost, because we have realised that the economic interdependence on which our project was based is now being captured by political and geostrategic rivalries. National security has deeply transformed economic policies. For example, it is no longer possible to plan the organisation of value chains in isolation from geopolitical constraints. We used to think that free trade would be in itself a source of security. The weaponisation of interdependences leads us to think differently. And in this regard we are much more vulnerable than the United States because – for example, regarding trade – our dependencies are broader than those of the United States. De-risking, including from China, is therefore much more difficult for us than for countries such as the United States. Still, we are adjusting our policy instruments to the new context. We want a much better level playing field while at the same time protecting our strategic infrastructures from potentially harmful external takeovers.

Secondly, because as Europeans we realise that we have common threats to face and common interests to defend, and that we can do both much more successfully collectively than individually. The EU works for Member States as a power multiplier in all areas where our interests are fully aligned.

Finally, because we also know that – while NATO remains fundamental to our common security – the United States may also have other priorities. We cannot afford asking ourselves every four years whether our security will continue to be guaranteed by NATO. For a long time, European strategic responsibility was seen as a zero-sum game between EU defence and NATO. This is fortunately no longer the case. Even within the United States, many are asking the EU to do more for its security. And basically all European states are absolutely convinced of the necessity of increasing their military expenditure.

At the same time, let me also say to a US audience that EU security is a huge asset for the United States and not simply a liability or a cost. NATO is the alliance on which the global standing of the United States is based. NATO makes the United States a great power. Today, we have come to a consensus on both sides of the Atlantic that Europe must do more. We need to do more and we have already taken this path – but we also need to do better and do it together, not an easy task. This why you cannot expect immediate or spectacular moves. The correction of the trajectory has started, but it will take time, especially at a time when public resources are seriously strained in many EU Member States. In Europe and elsewhere in the world, there is competition for scarce resources.

Power is a matter of resources. But it is also a matter of resolve. And resolve is first and foremost the expression of an instinct: the instinct of power. The power instinct stems from a sense of danger, threat and fear. As long as the danger is not effective and the threat does not materialise, power remains more or less an abstract concept. But, when you start feeling the heat, things change. You start thinking in terms of hard power only when you feel the heat, not before.

The idea of power is new to Europe

That is why the war in Ukraine has transformed Europe's relationship with power. For the first time since the Second World War, danger, threat and fear have materialised in an indisputable way. For the first time, a state, Russia, has invaded a European country. And what is important is that the brutality of the Russian invasion helped to unite European perceptions of the threat, whereas until then the Russian threat – understandably – had not had the same meaning in Riga as in Lisbon.

What has this war changed? Three things.

First, the war in Ukraine has forced the EU to tackle up front the issue of the use of force in Europe and the need to adjust to this new challenge. We are very far from becoming a hard power because we are not a superstate with a unified military force and a common command centre. But we have ceased to believe in soft power as the sole virtue. We used to be a benevolent soft power and now we are a 'semi-hard' power in the making – a 'semi-hard' power and not a fully fledged one because the EU is not and will never be a superstate. But we are a hard power in the making because we have the capacity to coerce our foes directly or indirectly and to react to their coercion. Therefore, and for the first time, we granted substantial military aid to Ukraine in a very short span of time and at a level equivalent to that of the United States.

We have also decided to accept Ukraine's membership in the European Union, something that seemed unthinkable four years ago. And, believe me, this is the best security we can provide to Ukraine. We are granting colossal economic support to Ukraine and to the countries of the EU that are taking in Ukrainian refugees.

We have drastically reduced our energy dependence on Moscow, despite the fact that they thought that this dependence would prevent us from acting collectively. Will this be enough? Certainly not. Power can only be built up gradually, and not always in a linear fashion. However, despite the scale of our unwavering support for Ukraine, the Russian–Ukrainian war remains an asymmetrical one. Ukraine needs to win the war. Russia just needs to avoid losing it. Which means that the status quo may work in favour of Russia. Moscow has the means to sustain the war because its resources are considerable, its human resources inexhaustible and its public opinion apathetic. So how will it all end? We do not know. Nevertheless, more than ever we need to step up our support for Ukraine, to enable it to establish a better balance of military, economic and strategic power with Russia. However, it is up to Ukraine to decide what is and is not acceptable. In addition, in this ordeal, the joint support of the United States and Europe is decisive.

Two peoples on the same land

Over the past year, we have had to face a second major challenge: the war in Gaza, following the horrific massacres committed by Hamas on 7 October. We all know the Israeli–Palestinian problem, a highly complex historical issue. And we all know that the only realistic and lasting solution to this conflict is the emergence of a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli state. There are two peoples on the same land. And that's not going to change.

On these principles, the views of Member States are fully aligned. But, when it comes to common decisions, the views held by the different Member States differ, sometimes profoundly. We are, however, one of the first providers of humanitarian aid to Gaza and by far the first provider of economic aid to the Palestinian Authority. We are also the first trade partner of Israel.

Today, we are still a long way from the prospect of two states, and perhaps further away than ever, since we are still seeking a ceasefire in Gaza.

Not only is a ceasefire far from being achieved, but it is not even certain that it will happen, probably because the belligerents have no interest in it – despite all

the risks that prolonging the conflict would entail for the Palestinian civilian population and for the Israeli hostages still being held by Hamas.

However, we must not give up, not only on a ceasefire, which the United States is working hard to achieve with countries such as Egypt and Qatar, but also on imagining what we call ‘the day after’ because, since Clausewitz, we have all known that war only makes sense if it has a political purpose.

Without a political solution, we will enter a never-ending spiral in which Gaza will resemble Somalia in the 1980s and the West Bank will resemble Gaza. Meanwhile, southern Lebanon and northern Israel are becoming the new battlefield of the confrontation between Israel and Iran – with two major risks. The first is to jeopardise the normalisation of Arab–Israeli relations, notably between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan, and postpone the normalisation with the Saudis. The second is an intensified war between Israel and Iran. In this context, Lebanon needs to regain its sovereignty.

As you can imagine, I have only scratched the surface of the complexity of the issues we have to deal with.

Let me say one last word about transatlantic relations.

Allies but not aligned

Overall, they are good; we share the same values and objectives.

Of course, we may have differences of opinion. However, that is perfectly normal. Europe needs the United States while the United States needs Europe. We are allies but not aligned.

I also know that the United States has an interest in having a strong, sovereign Europe on its side. I once said that Europe’s strategic autonomy will only make sense when the United States endorses it, not in order to distance themselves from us but, on the contrary, to strengthen us mutually.

In the current global context, we all need to avoid a form of revolt by the Global South against the West. We are witnessing the emergence of a new form of tripolarity, with the New West – which is now less a geographical concept than a geopolitical one. The New West (the United States, Europe, Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia) on one side; the New East (China, Russia and North Korea)

on the other; and finally the Global South, which has taken the measure of the global tensions that exist and is seeking to benefit from them, sometimes with great ability. In this ordeal, the cooperation of the United States and Europe is decisive. I believe that the United Nations General Assembly, for which we all gathered in New York, is the place where these differences are expressed.

In conclusion, I would say that Europe has made significant progress on the path to power during the last few years. But there are still huge obstacles ahead of us in tackling global issues and mobilising new economic resources to prevent the EU from declining, in a world of intensified military confrontation, political assertiveness and technological competition.

5.

REFORMING AND REINFORCING MULTILATERALISM



THE URGENT NEED FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE REFORM

22 February 2024 – Speech. *During the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Brazil, I spoke about the urgent need to reform global governance in order to adapt it to today's world, which is no longer that of 1945.*

It seems that there is strong agreement about the need to adapt our institutions to the world the way it is today, not the 1945 world.

We need a United Nations fit for the future, and we agree on the diagnosis; it is going to be more difficult to agree on the therapy. But at least we agree that the United Nations Security Council needs to reflect today's realities and represent all regions of the world.

Yesterday, I said that one out of four people will be living in Africa in 25 years from now. So, to have a strong voice from Africa is essential if we want to discuss global challenges.

The UN Security Council is blocked

It is clear – it is not an opinion; it is just statistics – that too often the UN Security Council is blocked. There are more and more vetoes, and less and less agreements. And this is becoming increasingly problematic.

To increase the number of members of the Security Council would be a good thing, better representing the world the way it is.

We have to consider that we have more poles in the world. The world is becoming more and more multipolar and less and less multilateral. And this is strange, because when you have more players in the game, you need better rules, if you want the game to work; otherwise, the system becomes more entropic, more disordered. But what we see is just the contrary: we see more and more players, and less and less rules.

I think the answer cannot be to rush into new institutions. We have to improve the institutions we already have. But what we need the most is a different mindset.

Allow me to say that, in the European Union, we have developed this kind of mindset because we have been practising multilateralism every day for more than half a century now. And we are well trained in the difficult task of getting agreement among many.

So, how can we revitalise multilateralism in an increasingly multipolar world? This is indeed the big question that we have in front of us. And there will not be a solution to the global challenges we face if we do not succeed on this reform. Because we will not have leverage on the dynamics of these global challenges. The UN Summit of the Future in New York in September will be an opportunity for that. But let's start working from now.

Make the World Trade Organization work

In particular, we need to start work on adjusting our multilateral development banks to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We need to make the World Trade Organization work. We have to recognise that it does not work.

The reform of the WTO to achieve a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system by the end of 2024 is the EU's top priority. Let's start by taking some steps in that direction, keeping in mind that no institution will work if the members of this institution do not practise the principles on which these institutions were built.

REACHING OUT TO THE 'GLOBAL SOUTH'

29 February 2024 – Blog post. *The G20 framework is a critical one because it brings together the G7 countries, Russia, China and the main countries of the so-called Global South. At the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Rio in Brazil, we discussed the conflict in the Middle East and the war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the urgent need to reform the multilateral system.*

Brazil took the presidency of the G20 last December. It is the latest in a series of emerging economy presidencies, starting with Indonesia in 2022, then India in 2023, and to be followed by South Africa in 2025. The current Brazilian government wants to show that 'Brazil is back' on the multilateral scene after the Bolsonaro era and enhance the role of the 'Global South'. G20 meetings are always a critical moment in international relations. G20 members represent more than 80 % of the world's GDP and they can play a crucial role in steering the world away from a global confrontation.

The G20 is a useful framework for exchanging views, but not really a decision-making body. Nevertheless, a successful Brazilian Presidency would be particularly important to show that, despite political differences, this forum can help make progress on critical global issues such as social inclusion, the green transition and the reform of multilateral governance – in particular at a moment when Russia, which is currently chairing BRICS, is trying to instrumentalise this other forum as an alternative in its geopolitical battle of narratives.

The G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Rio de Janeiro was also the first such meeting with the African Union as a permanent G20 member. This matters greatly, because in 25 years from now one out of four people in the world will be living in Africa. The EU has been a strong advocate for the African Union's membership of the G20, and I warmly welcomed the presence of its representatives in Rio.

During our meeting, we discussed our collective role in dealing with ongoing international tensions and the reform of global governance institutions.

Dealing with ongoing international tensions

The situation in Gaza and in the Middle East was the most pressing international issue. There was widespread consensus on the tragedy suffered by the civilian

population and that far too many innocent lives have been lost in Gaza. With 90% of the population now displaced, this man-made humanitarian catastrophe must stop.

I explained that 26 out of 27 EU Member States had urged the Israeli government not to take military action in Rafah and called for an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire, the unconditional release of hostages, and the provision of more and quicker humanitarian assistance.

Israel has to abide by international law and humanitarian law. Every country must. Two Member States have asked us to assess if Israel respects its human rights commitments under our EU–Israel Association Agreement. We will do this work in the coming weeks. It is particularly important following the binding preliminary International Court of Justice decision.

The most notable aspect of our meeting was the consensus on the two-state solution as the only way to ensure lasting peace and stability. Ending the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza is a matter of urgency, but immediately afterwards the two-state solution must finally be swiftly implemented. This time, it appears that the entire international community is ready to commit itself to achieving this result. In the absence of any final communiqué, I asked the Brazilian foreign minister to convey that consensus at his press conference, which he did.

An opportunity to send a strong message to Russia

With Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov present, the meeting also offered an opportunity to send a strong message on the Russian war of aggression and its consequences at the time of the second anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

With other G7 ministers, I firmly reiterated our stance regarding the Russian aggression and its destabilising consequences, not only for Europe but for the whole world. We highlighted the clear breach of the core principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity under the UN Charter and its major negative consequences for food and energy security worldwide. We also called out the slow murder of Alexei Navalny by the Russian regime.

The return of war to Europe also impacts global efforts to fight hunger and poverty, alleviate the debt burden of low-income countries, and fight climate change and loss of biodiversity. The Russian aggression compels us indeed to reallocate

financial resources that were meant to be spent on sustainable development to strengthen defence and increase military production.

As expected, Foreign Minister Lavrov repeated his usual narrative, full of lies and misrepresentations. I wonder whether even Sergey Lavrov believes them. Obviously, the rest of the world does not, as nearly all representatives of Global South countries reiterated their support for the core principles of the UN Charter, such as territorial integrity and non-use of force. I was impressed by how much Russia was isolated in that context.

Working towards global governance reform

The issue of global governance reform may not dominate headlines, but it is also a pressing one. Multipolarity is already a reality, but multilateralism – which should underpin and govern it – is in deep crisis. Its reform is precisely what we need to frame that multipolarity (which is here to stay) in the multilateral system. When you have more players in the game, you need better rules if you want the game to work. Without these rules, entropy increases and the system becomes more disordered – a situation we are currently witnessing.

During our meeting, there was widespread consensus that multilateral institutions must reflect the world of today, not that of 1945. We need a United Nations fit for today and for the future. However, reaching consensus on the specific solutions remains a significant challenge. The answer should not be to rush into creating new institutions. That would be costly, lengthy and complicated. The most realistic way of working is to improve the institutions we already have.

In Rio, there was widespread agreement on the need to reform the United Nations Security Council to better represent all regions of the world, and notably Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Too often the Security Council is blocked due to more and more vetoes. Clearly there is a need to change the rules on decision-making in the council.

We also need to reform the international financial institutions, scaling up their firepower from billions to trillions and changing their governance structures to better support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the fight against climate change. There is also an urgent need to restore the functionality of the World Trade Organization and achieve a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system by the end of 2024. This is one of the EU's top priorities.

The UN Summit of the Future in New York in September will be an important opportunity to advance the process of reforming the multilateral system. But to succeed we need to prepare actively for it now.

THREE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE UNITED STATES

20 March 2024 – Blog post. *In March 2024, I spoke to the UN Security Council in New York and visited Washington DC. Three things stood out: Russia's isolation within the UN Security Council; continued bipartisan support for Ukraine in the US Congress, but persistent uncertainty on US military support; and a changing mood regarding Gaza.*

Once a year, the UN Security Council discusses the [cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations](#). Today, the state of the world is deeply worrying, but it would be even more so if we did not have the United Nations, whose values and principles remain a compass for humanity. For us Europeans, the UN remains the cornerstone of the international system

However, the Charter of the United Nations is increasingly flouted or ignored. While we need more multilateral cooperation to face the many global crises – ranging from security challenges and humanitarian catastrophes to climate change – we see the opposite: a trend towards fewer agreements and more and more vetoes, paralysing, in particular, the UN Security Council.

The discussions in New York largely focused on Ukraine, Gaza and EU–UN cooperation on peace and security, in particular in Africa. On Ukraine, I appealed to the UN membership never to accept the normalisation of Russia's blatant violation of the core principles of the UN Charter – sovereignty and territorial integrity – which, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is meant to uphold.

On Gaza, I asked the UN Security Council to act. Its population is no longer 'on the brink of famine', but in a state of famine. The EU has massively increased humanitarian aid, but this aid urgently must reach the people in need. We cannot let people starve while trucks are waiting at the border. The Israeli authorities must stop impeding humanitarian access and end this man-made catastrophe.

However, we also need to address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. I encouraged the UN Security Council to take action and draft a new resolution setting out the principles and the time frame for making the two-state solution a reality.

I also briefed the Security Council on the EU's commitment to peace and security in Africa. The EU has been working closely with the African Union and regional economic organisations. However, military coups are multiplying and tensions are growing in many regions. The unmatched economic and human potential of Africa will remain untapped as long as many regions continue to be plagued by insecurity. The international community needs to help the continent more efficiently to find 'African solutions to African problems'. It must urgently address in particular the major humanitarian tragedy in Sudan, with almost 8 million people displaced – the world's largest internal displacement crisis – and almost half of Sudanese at risk of starvation.

The vast majority of the UN Security Council membership valued the partnership with the EU. As expected, Russia was the exception. The Russian ambassador repeated a familiar narrative, which depicts the EU as an 'aggressive, expansionist bloc, subordinated to NATO goals', but he found himself isolated. China, in particular, was more supportive of EU–UN cooperation than in previous years, stressing the need to avoid a confrontation between blocs and to work together in line with the UN Charter. The African members of the Security Council – Algeria, Mozambique and Sierra Leone – welcomed the EU's work on their continent and expressed the expectation that we will continue to contribute to African Union peace support operations.

Taking the political pulse in Washington

In Washington DC, I met with the US secretary of state, [Anthony Blinken](#), Republican congressman Don Bacon, and various think-tankers and academics, including the former Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad, and I gave [a speech](#) at Georgetown University.

On Ukraine, my message to US decision-makers has been very clear: a Ukrainian victory is essential for Europe's security, but also for the United States. Europeans are already shouldering the majority of the burden of providing support to Ukraine, but US military support remains essential. Not only out of solidarity, but also out of US self-interest.

If despite two years of EU and US support, Putin could indeed conquer Ukraine, install a puppet regime, like the one in Belarus, and crush the Ukrainian people, why would he stop there? Putin has been very clear that he already sees himself in a war with the entire West.

A Ukrainian defeat would encourage authoritarian regimes elsewhere and put enormous pressure on America and its system of alliances. No country could be sure any more that – despite clear support from the US public and a majority of lawmakers in Congress – the US government would come to the aid of an ally under attack. The price of inaction or delay would be much higher for the United States than that of supporting Ukraine now.

Overall, the picture that emerged is one of continued bipartisan support for US military aid to Ukraine. However, whether this support will translate into a positive vote in the House of Representatives remains to be seen. The rules of procedure of the house make it possible for the speaker to decide whether or not a vote is held. In my many discussions with academics and decision-makers, opinions varied significantly on the prospects of success.

On Gaza, I perceived a significant change in the mood in the United States in the face of 30 000 civilian victims and spreading famine. Several American interlocutors explicitly welcomed the resumption of EU contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine and our increase in humanitarian assistance. During my time in the United States, the categorisation by Chuck Schumer, the majority leader of the Senate, of Prime Minister Netanyahu as an ‘obstacle to peace’ was at the centre of many discussions. It was a small political earthquake reflecting this changing mood.

The slow convergence of the American public’s stance on Gaza with views held by many Europeans, and large parts of the world, is good news. No matter the issue, Europeans and Americans can always achieve more when they work together, whether on Ukraine or the Middle East.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IS A GLOBAL PUBLIC GOOD

5 July 2024 – Blog post. *In recent years, the EU has adopted various laws to ensure that products sold in the EU respect international human rights and labour norms and do not harm the environment. This is what European consumers have been demanding. However, these rules often have significant implications for our partners. We must factor in their views and help them to comply with EU rules.*

Today, the new [EU directive on corporate sustainability due diligence](#) was officially published. Member States now have until July 2026 to adopt these rules in their own national law. Together with the [forced labour regulation](#) and the [deforestation-free products regulation](#), it is part of a series of recent EU laws aimed at ensuring that companies doing business in the EU do not harm the environment or rely on inadequate labour standards or human rights violations. Such rules address a strong demand from European citizens, who want to be sure that our companies source responsibly and that the products and services they consume are produced in a way that avoids any such adverse impacts, both within the EU and in other parts of the world.

Binding rules in these domains are also a sign of recognition that previous attempts to achieve these objectives through self-regulation or voluntary codes of conduct have proven insufficient. Perhaps more than any other event, the collapse of the [Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh](#) 11 years ago – killing more than 1 100 factory workers in the garment industry – was a wake-up call for many European consumers. It was a reminder that cheap consumer products often come at the expense of the health and safety of workers and communities in other parts of the world, and it led to calls to hold businesses to account.

Not all new EU rules have been universally welcomed

Nevertheless, not all of the sustainability rules the EU has recently put in place have been universally welcomed. Inside the EU, some companies have voiced fears that social and environmental safeguards will increase bureaucracy and lead to a competitive disadvantage because of rising costs. Outside the EU, those very same rules are sometimes perceived as protectionist measures that will make

trade with the EU more difficult or even impossible, or as indirectly constraining non-EU countries' independent policymaking.

The deforestation regulation is one such example. Its rationale is simple: to ensure that products sold in the European Union do not contribute to the destruction of forests around the world. This is crucial to protect biodiversity and fight climate change globally. However, in some parts of the world it has not been welcomed. I vividly remember a ministerial meeting we held as a video conference during the pandemic. One of my interlocutors was sitting in front of a large banner reading 'No to the deforestation regulation'. Why? Because of concerns about how to trace products and verify their deforestation-free origin. This can be complicated and could have a negative impact on the business of smallholder farmers. To gain acceptance for our laws – inside and outside the EU – we have to become better at explaining their rationale, we must tailor-make our legislation with global consequences in mind and we need to invest more in helping our partners to put in place the structures necessary to comply with these rules.

Regarding the new corporate sustainability due diligence directive, the most frequent concerns voiced by our trading partners, particularly from developing economies, are that the rules will result in an additional burden on their businesses and that it is not for the EU to decide on production policies in their countries. They also argue that their companies already need to undergo several audits every year to comply with requirements stemming from various different sustainability standards.

However, we based the new EU rules on existing international standards, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as well as those of the International Labour Organization and of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In other words, we have made mandatory within the EU a set of principles that were already voluntarily applied by many trading partners and a majority of large companies worldwide. Consequently, a European approach to due diligence will reduce rather than add to the administrative burden for business, as it brings some order to the maze of national sustainability standards.

The responsibility of large companies at the top of value chains

Moreover, our new rules are a response to complaints I have frequently heard from ministers in developing economies that multinational companies, profiting from their size and market power, tend to choose the suppliers with the lowest environmental and social standards. By introducing binding standards, we are

extending the responsibility for human rights and environmental protection to those large companies at the top of value chains. They can then be taken to court by victims and may face penalties of up to 5 % of their annual turnover. This will hopefully prevent any future Rana Plaza-style tragedy from happening and avoid a global race to the bottom on labour and environmental standards.

EU delegations and Member States' embassies all over the world are already discussing these new EU policies with our partners. There is great interest and I am confident that by the time the new rules start to apply current reservations will have given way to a more positive assessment of the improvements for workers, communities and environmental protection.

The need to set legally binding measures at a global level

Yet, to be truly effective in addressing sustainability challenges in global value chains, all major economies have to work in the same direction. We need to set legally binding measures at a global level, perhaps through the United Nations. If enough countries implement coherent due diligence rules, it will simplify auditing requirements and prevent firms that apply high standards from being undercut by competitors with larger social and environmental footprints. Economic development must benefit everyone, especially the weakest and poorest. Social and environmental sustainability is not a burden – it is an essential global public good.

INTERNATIONAL LAW IS A MUST – NOT A MAYBE

15 September 2024 – Blog post. *At the Ambrosetti Forum in Italy, President Zelenskyy of Ukraine and Queen Rania of Jordan addressed the audience. They confronted us with the grim realities of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, highlighting how in both places civilians are suffering due to violations of international law and paying a high price for them.*

Last weekend, just before travelling to Egypt and Lebanon on a mission to help prevent further escalation in the Middle East, I attended the Ambrosetti Forum in Italy. The historic Villa d'Este, overlooking the serene Lake Como, stood in sharp contrast to the grim realities of war in places like Ukraine, the Palestinian territories or Sudan.

Two exceptional speakers came to the Ambrosetti Forum to confront us with these harsh realities and remind us about Europe's responsibility to work towards a just peace in both Ukraine and the Middle East: Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and Queen Rania of Jordan.

Ukrainians want peace but not at the cost of their national sovereignty

[President Zelenskyy's message](#) was unequivocal: Ukrainians want to end this war more than anyone, but not at the cost of their national sovereignty. Russia has left them no choice but to fight for their survival. He described the daily drone and missile attacks on hospitals, schools, libraries and residential buildings, which kill ordinary Ukrainians every night. He spoke of underground shelters and of Ukrainian children who learn to read and write in basements and metro stations to protect them from missiles and drones provided by North Korea and Iran.

Zelenskyy thanked Italy and other partners for the air defence systems they provided, but pointed out that those were not enough to cover Ukraine's vast territory – especially given that Ukraine still does not have authorisation to strike the airfields and launch sites deep inside Russia from which these attacks originate. This allows the Russian aggressors to bring grief and destruction to Ukraine with impunity from a position of safety.

We have committed to do whatever it takes to help Ukraine defend itself, and defence means being able to respond to an attack efficiently. In my opinion, Ukraine should have the capability to target the source of these attacks – ‘to strike the archers, not just the arrows’. This is why, during our last informal foreign and defence ministers’ meeting in Brussels, I supported Ukraine’s right to target key Russian military installations involved in the invasion, wherever they may be, as is allowed by international law, which does not stop at Russia’s border. Some Member States agreed with this position, while others viewed it as a matter of national discretion, so there is not a common EU position in this matter. What is clear, however, is that, in the face of Russia’s escalating bombing campaign against civilian targets, the current policy is very costly in terms of Ukrainian lives and affects the credibility of our resolve to support Ukraine.

In the days following the Ambrosetti Forum, President Zelenskyy also discussed this critical question with leaders from the United States and the United Kingdom. The discussions are set to continue at the UN General Assembly meeting in New York next week. However, it is essential to understand that this is not about entering into a war with Russia or adding fuel to the fire, as some have suggested. Anyone in President Zelenskyy’s position would ask for the very same thing. Because if Ukraine is not allowed to respond by attacking the places from which attacks originate, Russia will continue to destroy Ukraine with impunity.

Queen Rania’s emotional appeal to the conscience of Europe

Queen Rania of Jordan made [an emotional appeal](#) to the conscience of Europe: ‘Try to imagine what it must be like, to not be gathering here beside beautiful Lake Como, but to be a parent in Gaza.’ No hospitals. No schools. Almost every neighbourhood in ruins. Whole families starving. ‘Would any Western population be expected to tolerate decades of occupation, oppression and violence?’ she asked. Yet, in relation to Palestine, this injustice has been rationalised.

She put forward five principles that, if respected, could help to end the bloodshed and forge a just, sustainable peace for both peoples.

- First, international law must prevail. Because the conflict can only be resolved if we anchor the effort in a bedrock of impartiality.
- Second, autonomy, dignity and human rights are universal and unconditional. Palestinians and Israelis have an equal right to security and self-determination.

- Third, for justice to prevail, there must be accountability. Because, without accountability, a sense of impunity develops, just like in Gaza where policies creating conditions of mass hunger and displacement have faced little international pushback.
- Fourth, true security is not a zero-sum game. A just peace makes security mutual.
- Fifth, voices on the very extremes must be blocked from the conversation.

I subscribe to those principles and believe that anyone in Europe would agree with Queen Rania. However, she is also right in arguing that, when these principles are violated, mere words of condemnation are not enough. Many European leaders have travelled to Israel over the last 10 months expressing their concern, and negotiations are ongoing for a ceasefire agreement that could secure the release of hostages and provide humanitarian support to the Palestinians suffering from the horrific situation highlighted by Queen Rania at the Ambrosetti Forum and reiterated days later by Philippe Lazzarini, the Director of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine, in [his speech](#) at the Arab League ministerial meeting in Cairo. Countless leaders have also reminded Israel of its obligations as an occupying power and have branded settlements in the West Bank illegal. And many have criticised the incitement to violence and hate speech of Ministers Smotrich and Ben Gvir. But, unless we agree through an EU common position to act and hold those who fuel the conflict and undermine the two-state solution to account, our words will sound hollow and impunity will continue to prevail.

Human rights are not open to negotiation

A week after the Ambrosetti Forum at Lake Como, and only days after [I visited the closed Rafah border crossing](#) between Gaza and Egypt, the words of Queen Rania still resonate in my memory. She was saying, ‘Do not give up. We have to continue asserting that international law is a must – not a maybe. That human rights are not open to negotiation. That, without accountability, injustice becomes the norm. That peace – real, lasting, life-affirming peace – is key to security for everybody. And that extreme voices cannot be allowed to dictate our conversation.’ Those principles should guide us everywhere.

6.

EU FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY IN THE WORLD





6.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD

THE BELGRADE–PRISTINA DIALOGUE NEEDS COURAGE AND VISION

30 June 2024 – Blog post. *I hosted President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti in Brussels for the 11th gathering of the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue during my mandate. While progress has been slow, some steps forward have been made in normalising relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Ultimately, success requires the courage and vision of the leaders of both parties.*

When reflecting on the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue meetings during my mandate, I think initially of the many challenges we have faced: lack of commitment, lack of progress, lack of implementation, lack of willingness to reach consensus. However, despite these many challenges, there have also been some important steps forward.

My very first visit as High Representative was to Kosovo

When I took office, nearly five years ago, my very first visit as High Representative took me to Kosovo. At that time, the EU-facilitated dialogue had been stalled for two years already and needed to be re-energised. The normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is at the heart of EU engagement in the Western Balkans. It is indispensable to unblocking a European future for both and strengthening security and stability in the region.

In April 2020, I appointed Miroslav Lajčák as a dedicated special representative to put the process back on track. We initially made progress on various chapters of a comprehensive agreement, over the summer of 2020. However, different political dynamics in the region and an increasingly complex geopolitical context coincided with multiple crises, tensions and escalations.

We have seen roadblocks and barricades erected and taken down, culminating in Kosovan Serbs collectively resigning from their positions in the Kosovan judiciary, police and administration in November 2022. This constituted a serious setback.

The most dangerous moments occurred in May 2023, when protests in the north of Kosovo turned violent, leaving more than 90 Kosovo Force peacekeepers injured. And then, on 24 September 2023, the news reached me during the UN

General Assembly in New York that an armed incursion into the same region had resulted in the killing of a Kosovan police officer and the discovery of a shocking magnitude of military-grade ammunition.

However, despite these challenges and difficulties, our many meetings, visits and calls have contributed to important steps forward, which should not be forgotten. The dialogue has delivered tangible improvements to the lives of citizens in Kosovo and Serbia.

Tangible improvements to the lives of citizens

First of all, we have made it possible for all citizens of Kosovo and Serbia to travel freely between the two territories using their ID cards, by finally abolishing entry–exit documents. And we have solved the car licence plates issue with the mutual recognition of licence plates between Kosovo and Serbia. People can now freely drive through and between them. Freedom of movement is an essential part of normalisation of relations. We have also managed to move towards ending the unsustainable 20-year-long practice of non-payment for electricity in the north of Kosovo.

But, most importantly, we managed to reach the so-called Ohrid Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex in February and March 2023. Reaching such an agreement at the time of an unprecedented full-scale war on our continent was a significant achievement. For the first time, we have put in place a clear framework for the future of the process. Unfortunately, its implementation has yet to start in earnest and both parties bear responsibility for not fulfilling what they promised to do more than a year ago.

As part of this agreement, we addressed the issue of establishing an association/ community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo, one of the most sensitive issues in the dialogue. This had already been envisaged in the 2013 and 2015 Brussels Agreements. To help the process move forward, we presented the so-called European draft statute to deal with this sensitive issue, but so far it has not become a reality.

Unfortunately, this week's dialogue meeting did not bring any progress on the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. The discussions were as difficult as ever and, in the end, there was not even a face-to-face meeting between the president and the prime minister. Serbia was ready to meet, but Kosovo asked me to pass on a set of preconditions. Currently the two parties' positions remain far apart.

Nevertheless, work will continue: the chief negotiators of the parties have agreed to come to Brussels next week to work out concrete steps towards unblocking the implementation of the agreement.

The process can only advance as fast as the two parties are ready to move

In summary, we have done a lot over the past years, but the process can only advance as fast as the two parties are ready to move. The EU's facilitation cannot achieve more normalisation than Kosovo and Serbia want. In a few months' time, different people will be in charge of this file in Brussels, but the European Union's and its Member States' expectations will not change. The commitments and obligations of Kosovo and Serbia will not go away.

Everyone will still be looking at the willingness of the Serbian president and Kosovan prime minister to deliver a better, European future for their people. In the end, it will require courage, vision and political will. The EU will continue to help at every step along the way.

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA: CONFRONTING HISTORY TO BUILD PEACE

12 July 2024 – Op-ed. *On the occasion of the commemoration of the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995, I asked the people and the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the region to move forward with the reconciliation process in this op-ed published in the Western Balkan press.*

In July 1995, one of the darkest chapters in modern European history was written. Over 8 300 boys and men were systematically murdered and buried in mass graves in the hills surrounding the town of Srebrenica. Today, 29 years later, 14 of those victims, who were only recently identified, will be laid to rest at the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial and Cemetery. For their families and loved ones, a long and painful period of uncertainty finally comes to an end.

Srebrenica remains a deep scar in Europe's history. The failure to prevent this genocide is a burden we continue to bear. Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice have unequivocally defined this atrocity as genocide.

We vowed never to forget – neither the victims, nor the enduring pain of their families and their loved ones. Their memory compels us to work every day to ensure that history does not repeat itself, in a world where peace feels increasingly fragile.

By designating 11 July the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica, the United Nations General Assembly has elevated the significance of this tragedy beyond Europe.

Yet a troubling tendency to denial persists in Bosnia and Herzegovina and throughout the region. Any denial of this genocide is a profound affront to justice and a barrier to reconciliation. The EU has a clear stance: there can be no place for genocide denial, historical revisionism or the glorification of war criminals in societies that value truth and justice.

Reconciliation is everyone's responsibility

Reconciliation is everyone's responsibility. It is not an abstract goal: it must be a daily practice that permeates politics, education and all corners of everyday life.

It is in particular the role of political leaders in the region to reject divisive rhetoric and actively promote reconciliation. This requires acknowledging historical facts, honouring the victims, and fostering a culture of peace and cooperation.

In March, the leaders of the EU Member States decided to open EU accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The beginning of this journey towards EU membership brings renewed hope for political stability, economic growth and a better future for BiH citizens. It underscores the EU's commitment to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in establishing a functioning democratic state and society where pluralism, justice and human dignity prevail.

The EU brought reconciliation to Europe after bloody wars

We have shown that it is possible: the EU itself was conceived to bring peace and reconciliation to a European continent long divided by bloody fratricidal wars. This would not have been possible without the acceptance of established historical facts and a commitment to building institutions able to secure a lasting peace.

The Srebrenica genocide is a stark reminder of what can happen when hatred is unleashed and promoted by political elites. It is our common duty to ensure that this memory serves as a powerful reminder of the consequences of such hatred and intolerance. It is our common duty to make sure that these atrocities will never happen again. The European Union stands with Bosnia and Herzegovina in this endeavour.

IN A DANGEROUS WORLD, EUROPE AND BRITAIN NEED EACH OTHER

21 July 2024 – Op-ed. *On the occasion of the meeting of the European Political Community in Oxfordshire in the United Kingdom, I published this op-ed in The Times to call for a reinforcement of the EU–UK relationship in foreign affairs and security matters.*

The time for complacency about Europe as a bastion of enduring peace has come to an end.

Today, our continent finds itself at the centre of an arc of instability ranging from the battlefields of Ukraine to the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Sahel, but often lacks sufficient tools to significantly influence the course of events in these regions.

The pillars of the post-war order are crumbling

Meanwhile, the pillars of the post-war order are crumbling. Free trade, multilateral cooperation, liberal democracy and international law are increasingly contested. All forms of interdependencies, such as energy, technology or migration, are being weaponised.

Confronted with revisionist powers such as Russia and China, and a United States whose pivot to Asia seems inevitable no matter who wins the next election, we Europeans need to do more to ensure our own security. And we also need to think about security more comprehensively, encompassing military, economic, climate, technology and energy issues.

The case for a more robust European security architecture has never been stronger. This is my main conclusion from the conversations I had with European political leaders at Blenheim Palace this week.

The meeting of the European Political Community reflected this multifaceted approach to security on the European continent, even though there was never any doubt that Russia's invasion of Ukraine topped the list of threats. It must be clear to all Europeans that if we allow Putin's Russia to turn Ukraine into a second

Belarus, we will pay a much higher price later. As President Zelenskyy said at Blenheim: 'When the aggressor loses, the world wins.'

A Ukraine that prevails against Russia is the best security guarantee for Europe and that should guide our thinking and actions. I know this has been the assessment of the United Kingdom from day one and I was very pleased to hear Prime Minister Starmer reassure Ukrainians that the United Kingdom will 'stand with them for as long as it takes'.

This is the right path to follow and the only viable way of defending European security and achieving a just and enduring peace. Only a peace that gives Ukraine full sovereignty and ironclad security guarantees is a real peace. Anything else is, at most, a ceasefire that allows Russia to rearm and attack again. Only a Russia that has learned to stay within its borders will lessen pressure on its neighbours and all Europeans.

The EU–UK cooperation in helping Kyiv has been exemplary

For the last two years, our cooperation with the United Kingdom in helping Kyiv resist Russia's aggression has been nothing short of exemplary. UK military assistance has been essential since the first days of the Russian invasion and British intelligence has often been at the heart of decision-making in Brussels. This close coordination with the United Kingdom is crucial for our shared security interests.

For the EU, one thing is already clear: security and defence will play an even more prominent role in the next legislative term. Meanwhile, the new Labour government has signalled its intention to reset its relationship with the European Union and to seek a deeper and more structured cooperation with the EU in the field of foreign, security and defence policies.

In addition to Ukraine, one of the areas where I could see closer alignment is Gaza. I fully agreed with Foreign Secretary Lammy that the situation in Gaza is intolerable and that we must urgently secure a ceasefire deal, free the hostages, make sure humanitarian aid reaches a starving population, and create space for a credible and irreversible pathway towards a two-state solution.

The United Kingdom and the European Union will be aligned in their calls for respect for international law and against settlement expansions in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. These are essential issues that must be

addressed to shore up the international rules-based order, which is being contested as never before.

The world order is shifting beneath our feet and both the European Union and the United Kingdom must find their footing. Our response to today's challenges will define our place in this new reality. By working closer together, we can create a formidable partnership that not only safeguards liberty and democracy but also shapes the future of our collective security.

OUR ACTIONS HAVE GREATER FORCE WHEN THE EU AND THE UNITED KINGDOM SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE

14 October 2024 – Op-ed. *Ahead of his participation in the EU Foreign Affairs Council in October, David Lammy, UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, and I published this op-ed in several European media outlets to underline the importance we both attach to closer ties between the EU and the United Kingdom in today's context.*

Homes reduced to rubble. Families torn apart. Innocent civilians killed or forced to flee, seeking sanctuary from hellish conditions.

Such scenes feel like they should belong in the history books. But from Kyiv to Gaza City, Beirut to El Fasher, they are the reality of today's volatile world.

Faced with such suffering, we both feel a moral imperative to act. But we both also firmly believe that citizens of Europe cannot afford to treat these conflicts as somebody else's problem.

With more conflicts ongoing today than at any time since the Second World War, the EU and the United Kingdom have a direct interest in greater stability. Security and justice are global.

They do not concern only those countries or regions immediately affected. Insecurity damages our prosperity – with conflicts worldwide knocking almost \$1 trillion (€913 billion) off the global economy last year.

Both the United Kingdom and the European Union are heavily engaged in responding to conflicts and crises. But we are always stronger when we work together to tackle these challenges.

This is all the more obvious for friends and neighbours, united by our shared values as well as our mutual interest in greater global stability.

Yet there is still more for us to do to strengthen UK–EU cooperation in defence and security to make it as deep or extensive as you would expect for two partners with so much in common.

At times, even with the privilege of our positions, we both can feel powerless to prevent so much of the suffering around the world. But we do have the power to determine how we work together. We are choosing to stand together in partnership.

We can't allow our adversaries to drive a wedge between us

Today, on the occasion of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, with the foreign ministers of the 27 EU Member States, we will discuss how, collectively, we can support Ukraine and de-escalate tensions in the Middle East.

This underlines our shared conviction that the darkening global outlook requires, more than ever, a strong Europe.

It further demonstrates the new UK government's commitment to resetting relations with the rest of Europe. And it shows the importance the EU and the United Kingdom place on each other as valued partners.

With the ambition for the EU and the United Kingdom to become closer security partners, we need to strengthen our cooperation across the full range of foreign and security challenges we face as a continent.

But this meeting serves practical purposes as well.

In the short term, our message and our actions have greater force when we speak with one voice. Our adversaries seek to drive wedges between us, and between the West and other countries across the world. We must be clear precisely where we stand.

We stand firm in supporting Ukraine against Russia's imperialist war of aggression. We seek a just peace consistent with the UN Charter. Putin's meddling in Georgia and Moldova, in the Western Balkans and on the streets of our own cities is unacceptable.

And we stand firm in calling for immediate ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon and in engaging diplomatically in support of lasting peace for the region that fully respects international law.

Israel has a right to self-defence and we strongly condemn Iranian attacks on Israel. A new spiral of violence is in nobody's interests.

Now is the time for unhindered access for humanitarian aid and renewed focus on a two-state solution and a settlement in Lebanon based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

Let's form a stronger bond that protects us into the future

From joint G7 work on sanctions that have deprived Putin's war machine of over \$400 billion (€365.3 billion) since his full-scale invasion to large-scale humanitarian assistance to civilians in Sudan, the United Kingdom and the EU have already been making a difference together.

In the long term, today is an opportunity to start laying the foundations of a stronger bond that protects us into the future.

With the ambition for the EU and the United Kingdom to become closer security partners, we need to strengthen our cooperation across the full range of foreign and security challenges we face as a continent.



6.2 AFRICA

RWANDA: A REMARKABLE SUCCESS IN RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

8 April 2024 – Speech. *One of the most memorable experiences of my entire mandate was my visit to Rwanda in 2021 and the confrontation I witnessed between victims and perpetrators of the genocide as part of the reconciliation efforts. I made a point of speaking at the ceremony organised in April 2024 to mark the 30th anniversary of the genocide.*

I do not think we need to have a minute of silence. The silence is already here. Without having to stand up and observe one minute, this silence shows a lot about the emotion that all of us feel at this moment.

Yesterday was the 30th commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. I was asking you, Ambassador, what does *Kwibuka* mean. Yes, 30 years. It was not yesterday, but it is as if it had been yesterday.

One of the most moving things I have done in my life is to visit the memorial to this genocide, in your country. An impressive reminder of what happened in 1994, when, in less than 100 days, over 1 million children, women and men were murdered in a campaign of unspeakable and deliberate atrocities.

It is difficult to believe that in 100 days over 1 million people were murdered amid unspeakable atrocities.

And the international community was unwilling, but not unable, to protect them, as many times in history it happens. We regret, but we do not act.

Honouring the survivors and praising their resilience

We are gathered here today to remember the victims of this tragedy, to honour the survivors, because there are survivors – the survivors and their families – and to praise their incredible resilience and courage, which continues until today and to which I pay my heartfelt tribute on behalf of the European Union.

As I said, in 2021, I visited the Kigali Genocide Memorial and met with both survivors and perpetrators of this genocide against the Tutsi. And I participated

in one very moving ceremony, where the victims and the perpetrators were telling their stories, were explaining, in the open air, what happened – what they did, and why they did it. If it is possible to ask why. Is there any possible rational answer?

For me, this moment in which the victims and the perpetrators were telling their stories and sharing their pain on one side and their guilt on the other, trying to explain why he did that, or she did that, was one of the most important moments for me in trying to understand the behaviour of human beings.

It was one of the most dismaying but also one of the most moving experiences of my life.

I wrote about it, because I come from a country where reconciliation is still to be completed. This was a lively example of how people can talk to each other – maybe not forgiving, but in any case not forgetting. Because if you forget about history – as has been said – you can repeat it.

Let's hope not. I do not think it is going to happen again in Rwanda.

While I could barely fathom the unbelievable cruelties that occurred, I was also touched beyond words by the resilience of people whose relatives were butchered and who decided to embrace reconciliation. To reconcile is an act of bravery that shows the height of what human beings are capable of – the best and the worst.

Succeeding in reconciliation and reconstruction

Rwanda has succeeded in reconciliation and reconstruction in a way that no one would have predicted or even dared to hope for 30 years ago.

The reconciliation and reconstruction process has been as incredible as the genocide itself was. It shows how human beings can look to the future and try not to forget, but to forgive, the past.

In the case of Rwanda, it is especially amazing, especially important, because it has happened in a short period of time, while the memory is still alive. The people are still alive: the ones who did it and the ones who suffered it. They can witness, they can explain.

Reconciliation is not easy. It is a painful endeavour that can only succeed based on recognition of what happened, on accountability for the perpetrators and on

the preservation of the memory of the victims. These are the three conditions for true reconciliation.

Because reconciliation is not to put sand over the memory in order to forget. Reconciliation is not looking the other way. Reconciliation is to look into the eyes of another and recognise what happened and ask for accountability. And, in the Catholic religion, accountability means: 'You know, I forgive your sins, but you have to do penitence.' Reconciliation also requires the preservation of the memory of the victims. The victims have to be honoured, have to be remembered. Their memory has to be kept alive. And these lessons are valid today for the international community.

We must speak up and redouble our efforts to stop hate speech and ethnic politics before they run out of control, because hatred grows very quickly. And there are examples in history where words have become arms that kill – kill many people, because one person's words push others to kill. Because words can create a fire, they can toxify people's minds and make them believe that another human being does not deserve to live.

It is incredible, but it has happened not a single time but many times in different places for different reasons.

So, we need to act at the right time, so we do not have to commemorate tragic events again.

Reiterating our commitment to the prevention of genocide

We must reiterate our commitment to the prevention of genocide. The prevention: this can be prevented from happening. You can see it coming. You must act in order to stop it before it is too late. We must act across the world, trying to stop any crime against humanity, sparing no effort and doing our utmost to thwart the repetition of any such abomination.

It is so difficult to understand, here, in Brussels, in this building, among people like you, that someone could be pushed to go to their neighbours' house, with whom they were sharing life the day before, and kill all of them – women, children, men, elderly people, babies – just because they belonged to another ethnicity. Another what? Another what?

Here in Europe, we know a lot about genocide. That is why I understand very well what happened. Well, I say, 'I understand.' No, we do not understand. To say 'I understand' is an oxymoron. Nobody can understand this.

But that is why we have in our memory also that human beings can be pushed to carry out these atrocities, just because someone makes words become arms and toxifies the minds of the people in order to make them behave like animals, destroying other human beings just because they are different, they belong to another I do not know what – ethnicity, society, language, religion.

After the conclusion of this ceremony, I would like to invite you to visit the photographic exhibition on the ground floor of this building. And thank you to the Mission of Rwanda to the EU for allowing us to show this exhibition.

Maintaining peace and respect for every human being

And always remember that peacebuilding starts in your neighbourhood. Peacebuilding starts at home, in your staircase, in your area, in your street. Peace is very fragile, and it has to be kept through an everyday effort, by everybody.

The ones who share a common history of cruelty and pain, more than anyone else, have to engage in maintaining peace and respect for every human being. It is with them that you have to build your future.

These results that Rwanda has achieved are a very powerful testimony to *Kwibuka*, as they say in the beautiful 'country of a thousand hills'.

What can I say? Only to remember, to unite and to renew – this has to be our common purpose. And I thank you very much for your presence and your attention.

TIME TO STOP THE MAN-MADE DISASTER IN SUDAN

14 April 2024 – Op-ed. *Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, and I published this op-ed in several outlets. The conflict in Sudan has caused one of the worst humanitarian crises. Yet it is much less talked about than other crises, and the international community is not doing enough to put an end to it. We tried to help end the silence on this conflict by organising an international conference in Paris.*

[‘The world’s worst, most complex, most cruel crisis’](#) is unfolding in Sudan without making it into our prime-time news, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. With nearly 9 million displaced within the country – half of them children – and almost 2 million refugees abroad, Sudan’s is indeed currently the largest displacement crisis in the world. And the worst is still to come: combat disrupted planting season in Sudan’s most fertile regions. Nearly 20 million people, almost one in two Sudanese, are facing acute food insecurity in a country that used to be a major food producer.

Sudan’s war enters its second year

On 15 April, Sudan’s war enters its second year. On this day, the EU, with France and Germany, will host a high-level conference in Paris to plead for additional humanitarian aid and call for an end to this conflict. It must be a wake-up call for Africa, Europe and the whole international community.

We know who is responsible for this disaster. With their joint military coup in October 2021, the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces hijacked the aspirations of the democratic Sudanese revolution. Their coup alliance unravelled, and the situation descended into war between them on 15 April 2023.

The two belligerents decided to wage war not only against each other but also against Sudan and its people. In Darfur, the genocidal atrocities against civilians based on their ethnicity that put Sudan in the headlines in 2003 have resumed. Throughout the country, aid is being deliberately withheld and humanitarian workers are being denied access. Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese have fled to neighbouring countries, notably Chad and South Sudan, two countries already

facing their own humanitarian and food-security crises. The suffering is entirely man-made and could be stopped today.

External sponsors, bringing in cash and weapons, fuel the fighting. Players like Iran are delivering arms, including drones, to the Sudanese Armed Forces. The United Arab Emirates has direct leverage on the Rapid Support Forces that it should use to end the war. Russia plays both sides in the hope of getting access to strategic infrastructure and resources, including through mercenary private military companies, which are mainly after gold and minerals. The Red Sea is Europe's most important maritime connection to Asia and the Pacific, and Sudan could become a revolving door for human trafficking, radical fighters, weapons and all kinds of illicit trade between the Sahel, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Europe's security is at stake.

Before the war, during the victorious popular uprising against a brutal dictatorship, the many young activists, women's rights defenders and community leaders showed the world their will and determination to build a democratic and peaceful Sudan. Ever since, the EU and its Member States have stood firm in their view: the only side we take in this conflict is the side of civilians and the hope they have for their country.

We will continue to engage with the belligerents from a neutral position that puts peace and respect for civilians' lives and rights front and centre. The conference on 15 April in Paris must become a joint rallying cry for peace. It has to be the on-ramp for more comprehensive, concerted and consequential action on Sudan from Europe, Africa and the international community.

Averting the looming famine in Sudan

Chief among the goals of today must of course be to avert the looming famine in Sudan and to support the countries and communities that have taken in people fleeing war. The available aid held up by the belligerents on the basis of their political calculus must reach the people in need, wherever they are. Such war tactics violate international law and may amount to war crimes. We expect also the two leaders of the belligerent parties, Generals Burhan and Dagalo, to finally heed the calls to stop this carnage and come to the negotiating table. Failure to do so would have consequences.

Our action on Sudan is not isolated: in Sudan, as in Ukraine or elsewhere, democratic aspirations should not be fought through the barrel of a gun. The

Sudanese people have demanded no less since they took over the streets of Khartoum five years ago. This is why we are tirelessly calling for a ceasefire without delay, unfettered access for aid and a return to the path of democratic transition in Sudan. We always favour African solutions to African problems. As Sudan enters the second year of its most fateful war, we look to the region to take responsibility. Alongside our regional and international partners, we stand ready to help Sudan in its darkest hour.

THE EU HAS BEEN, IS AND WILL REMAIN A RELIABLE SECURITY PARTNER FOR AFRICA

21 May 2024 – Blog post. *After 11 years in the country, all EU personnel of the EU Training Mission in Mali are back in Europe. However, we remain firmly committed to the region: the people of the Sahel deserve peace and development, and the EU is ready to accompany them on this journey whenever and wherever they wish. Beyond the Sahel, the EU is and will remain a reliable security partner for Africa.*

I first want to pay warm tribute to the EU military staff, both those who have been deployed on the ground and those who have supported the mission from Brussels, for their efforts and dedication in a complicated context. At the request of the country's authorities, [the EU Training Mission in Mali](#) has trained over 20 000 Malian soldiers since 2013, helping the Malian Armed Forces and [the G5 Sahel](#) forces fight terrorist threats. After consultation with the Malian de facto authorities, the EU Member States have decided not to prolong the mandate of our military mission. Channels of dialogue and cooperation remain open, however, notably through the civilian [EU Capacity-Building Mission in Mali](#), which is helping to reinforce the Malian internal security forces.

A difficult context

The departure of the EU Training Mission in Mali comes in the context of a series of *coups d'état* taking place successively in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. This led to a rupture between these countries and Ecowas, the West African regional organisation, to the departure of French and American forces and to the end of EU military and civilian missions in Niger. At the same time, the growing presence of Russian mercenaries to assist these military regimes has resulted in more instability, more exactions against civilians and more plundering of natural resources, accompanied by massive anti-EU disinformation campaigns.

These developments represent a significant setback for EU foreign and security policy, and we need, with our Member States, to draw all necessary lessons to adapt to the new reality. That being said, what is clear and unchanged is that the EU remains fully committed to the Sahel region. It is indeed critical for the security and the stability of the African continent, as well as for Europe, due to the

persistent terrorist threat and various forms of trafficking in this vast and sparsely populated region. The people of the Sahel deserve peace, security, rule of law and development, and we remain ready to accompany them on this journey whenever and wherever they wish. Unfortunately, recent events indicate that, since the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, terrorists are gaining ground again in the region. New security actors cannot effectively counter them because they have neither the capacity nor, really, the will to do so.

As the terrorist threat expands from the Sahel, the EU has been stepping up its support to Gulf of Guinea states through a new model of civilian–military mission intended to meet needs identified by Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin themselves. As part of a wider response pulling together prevention, development and humanitarian assistance, the [EU security and defence initiative in support of West African countries](#) will help them in tackling instability and security challenges. In this context, [I visited Ghana in October 2023](#) to hand over 105 military vehicles to the Ghanaian military forces. The first activities to strengthen the national capacities of these countries were launched last April.

A reliable security partner for Africa

The EU also remains a reliable security partner elsewhere in Africa. We have demonstrated it recently with our [EU Training Mission in Mozambique](#) to help fight terrorism and restore security in the Cabo Delgado region. [I visited this mission when it began in September 2022](#). Faced with the first indications of what could have become a new Sahel, the Mozambican authorities asked for our support. We established in record time this training mission and simultaneously provided equipment through [the European Peace Facility](#), an EU instrument created in 2021. Using this facility, we have already dedicated more than €1 billion in three years to helping the African Union and various African countries to equip their armed and security forces. In Mozambique, we have also supported bilateral efforts with Rwanda and regional efforts with the [Southern African Development Community](#). These timely combined efforts made it possible to limit the expansion of the threat, although it hasn't completely disappeared. As of next September, this mission will evolve to assist Mozambique to autonomously prepare and deploy the troops who have been trained.

Furthermore, since 2010, the EU Training Mission in Somalia has contributed to building up the Somali National Army, providing strategic-level advice and capacity-building activities in line with Somali needs and priorities. And, finally,

at sea we are helping fight piracy with [EU Naval Force Operation Atalanta](#), off the Horn of Africa, and our [coordinated maritime presence in the Gulf of Guinea](#).

The European Union has always been, is and will remain a strong supporter of peace and security in Africa. Some setbacks will not change our steadfast commitment to those issues. The stakes are too high for the security of the continent, of Europe and of the world.

DJIBOUTI, A CRUCIAL PARTNER IN A STRATEGIC BUT UNSTABLE REGION

15 July 2024 – Blog post. *I travelled to Djibouti to meet the authorities of this country, a strategic partner at the heart of a region, the Horn of Africa, beset by multiple crises. I also visited EU Naval Force Operation Aspides, launched in February to protect maritime traffic in the Red Sea from attacks by the Houthis – a further step towards making the EU a global maritime security provider.*

Accompanied by the Greek defence minister, I travelled first to Larissa, Greece, where the headquarters of [Operation Aspides](#) is located. There we took stock of the situation with the officers leading the mission. It was launched in record time: it was approved in principle at the end of December 2023 and it began operations in February. This is the fastest launch of any mission decided on during my mandate.

We had indeed to deal with a major urgency. 22 % of EU imports normally pass through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Following the war in Gaza, attacks by the Houthis in Yemen on these ships have led to a massive diversion of traffic towards the Cape of Good Hope. This diversion extends the journey from Asia to Europe by 10 to 14 days. This extra time increases the cost of transport but its effect is also multiplied by the fact that, for the same amount of goods transported, more ships are mobilised at the same time on the sea. As a result, available transport capacity, which is limited in the short term, is shrinking.

This leads to a sharp rise in the cost of freight, simply due to the law of supply and demand. Since October, the cost of transporting a container from China to Europe has almost doubled. This state of affairs not only boosts inflation in Europe but also deprives an entire region of the essential resources derived from this transit. This is true for Djibouti but also for Egypt, where Suez Canal revenues fell by 57 % in the first quarter of 2024.

A strictly defensive operation

Operation Aspides was launched to try to restore this transit. It gathered significant support from day one. Six EU Member States have deployed frigates in the region, and 15 Member States contribute personnel to the headquarters. This operation has a strictly defensive mandate. Our vessels operate only in self-

defence to protect targeted ships and we are not engaged in any operation on land. Since February, Operation Aspides has accompanied more than 170 ships and destroyed more than 19 drones or missiles launched by the Houthis.

From Larissa, I travelled to Djibouti, where the Aspides ships are based. On arrival, I visited the Greek frigate *Psara*, anchored in Djibouti, and the following day I flew by helicopter to the Italian ship *Fasan*, on a mission in the Red Sea. A few hours after my visit, the *Psara*, which had left the port of Djibouti in the meantime, intercepted several drones launched by the Houthis.

Unfortunately, this mission and other allied ships present in the area have not yet made it possible to fully restore maritime traffic via the Red Sea. It remains around half of what it was before 7 October 2023. An end to the war in Gaza remains an essential prerequisite for a genuine return to normality in the region.

The EU is becoming a global maritime security provider

Despite these limitations, Operation Aspides illustrates one of the areas in which European defence and security policy has made significant progress during this mandate: the ability to be a global maritime security provider, to protect the EU's interests at sea, but also the interests of our regional partners. [Operation Iridi](#) in the Mediterranean, launched in early 2020, implements the United Nations embargo on arms deliveries to Libya, although routes other than the sea route are unfortunately also used for this purpose. [Operation Atalanta](#), which has been in place since 2008, has done remarkable work in the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia. We also have two [Coordinated Maritime Presences](#), in which the navies of our Member States coordinate their actions closely without being placed under a single command, as is the case in the EU operations. We have implemented this concept both in the Gulf of Guinea and in the north-western Indian Ocean, areas of major strategic interest for European supplies.

This growing EU role in maritime security has also led us to conduct a number of joint exercises with several navies, such as [India's in the Indian Ocean](#). In March 2023, we also organised [the first joint maritime exercise between the United States and the European Union](#). Most of the European Union's imports and exports are transported by sea. It is therefore crucial for us to be able to protect these flows all over the world when their security may be threatened.

Djibouti, a central EU partner in a strategic region

But this trip was not just about the Aspides mission. It was principally a bilateral visit to the authorities of Djibouti, a central partner in a region, the Horn of Africa, that is currently marked by numerous crises. Djibouti, a country of just over a million inhabitants, is certainly not the largest in the region. It nevertheless plays a major role thanks to its strategic position. The country is home to American, French, Chinese, Japanese and Italian military bases. Djibouti is also the main home port for both Operation Atalanta and Operation Aspides.

The country faces war-torn Yemen, just 28 kilometres across the Bab al-Mandab Strait at the entrance to the Red Sea. It neighbours Somalia, which has been plagued by internal conflict for decades. Tensions have recently been heightened in and around Somalia following the signature of a [memorandum of understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland](#), a vast region bordering the Indian Ocean to the north of the country. Djibouti is also a neighbour of Ethiopia, which went through a terrible civil war in Tigray last year and is now witnessing serious troubles in the Amhara and Oromia regions. Last but not least, the country is not very far from Sudan and South Sudan, both plagued by bloody civil wars.

Djibouti's economy depends essentially on its port, which accounts for 60 % of its GDP. However, this activity has been badly affected by regional tensions and the fall in maritime traffic in the Red Sea: revenues generated by the port have fallen by around 60 %. And the country's financial outlook is very bleak. It has a large foreign debt, representing 70 % of its GDP, mainly with China. Djibouti risks becoming insolvent rapidly if maritime traffic does not recover quickly.

It was against this difficult backdrop that I met the President of the Republic, Ismail Omar Guelleh, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf. I wanted to thank them for welcoming the ships of the Aspides mission after those of Atalanta, to discuss the critical situation in the Horn of Africa and to assure them of the European Union's full support at this difficult time for Djibouti and the region.

Djibouti also currently chairs the [Intergovernmental Authority on Development](#), the regional organisation that brings together Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Sudan (Sudan has recently suspended its participation). I met its Executive Secretary, Workneh Gebeyehu, to discuss the enormous difficulties facing the region.

The desalinisation plant – the flagship EU project in Djibouti

Finally, I visited a [seawater desalination plant](#), the flagship project of the EU's development cooperation in Djibouti. As throughout the region, access to fresh water is a crucial issue for a growing population at a time of intensifying drought. The first phase of this project resulted in the provision of drinking water to 30 % of the population of Djibouti. Together with the European Investment Bank, we have just launched the second phase, which will make it possible to provide water to 70 % of Djibouti's people by 2028.

As I come to the end of my term of office, I was delighted to be able to make this trip, which I had wanted to do for a long time. It illustrates both our determination to make the EU a global maritime security provider and our commitment to working alongside Africa and Africans to overcome the enormous challenges the continent faces.



6.3 ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA: STRENGTHENING OUR RESILIENCE AND DIVERSIFYING OUR RELATIONS

29 January 2024 – Speech. *I spoke in Brussels at the Investors Forum for EU–Central Asia Transport Connectivity, at which participants met to discuss the trans-Caspian transport corridor. In the current geopolitical context, central Asia is in many respects of major strategic importance for the EU.*

You know that we are living in turbulent times. I am not going to insist on the economic dimension, but on the geopolitical moment in which we are living. The least we can say is that both the European Union and central Asia have been – and still are – in a turbulent moment.

We navigated through the global challenge of COVID-19, which feels like centuries ago, but it was not so far away. And, when we were just coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic turbulence that it created, we were confronted with new and old crises in our neighbourhood – in our neighbourhood from one side of the geography and in your neighbourhood from the other side.

First, we saw the rapid collapse of the situation in Afghanistan in 2021. This brought new challenges to us all, and in particular to our partners in central Asia, who are the direct neighbours of Afghanistan. I remember being in a conference some days before Kabul collapsed, discussing with the then President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, who was warning us that this was going to happen – and it happened. And since then you have had a great challenge at your borders.

Then came February 2022, and we were confronted with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

And later, if that was not enough, came the war in Gaza and the threats of wider escalation in the Middle East, which continue to pose strong challenges to the international community and to both regions.

Sovereignty and territorial integrity should be indisputable

Russia's war against Ukraine has been a stark reminder of the critical importance of jointly defending the core principles of the United Nations. It is our best way of ensuring peace and security in the world. The sovereignty, independence and

territorial integrity of any country should be indisputable. And we must avoid going back to a world where 'might makes right' and where powerful countries can change borders unilaterally.

You know that, in order to defend these principles, the European Union has imposed substantial sanctions against Russia, which have significantly weakened its war machine. But still, they are there, and the war continues. And, if I can say it, the intensity of the fighting increases and we do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. And, in order for these sanctions to be effective, we need full cooperation from our partners.

Following closely trade between us, central Asia and Russia

We are following closely trade between the EU and central Asia, between central Asian countries, and between them and Russia. We are trying to analyse which are the mechanisms that enable sanctions to be circumvented. We have to increase our cooperation on that, because we need closer partnerships to address global challenges – and closer partnerships are the key objective of the [Global Gateway](#).

Yes, we have to build infrastructures. Yes, we have to increase the connectivity of our space. But all of that is at the service of a political purpose, which is to increase our partnership and to share a better future by increasing economic ties and also defending the same values.

In this very complicated geopolitical environment, central Asia has become a crucial partner for us. I used to say that four years ago, when I came to Brussels, central Asia was a little bit in the middle of nowhere – and now you are in the middle of everything. You are the cornerstone between Europe and Asia. Everything that matters between Europe and Asia goes through you. And that is why our partnership is so important for us.

And, beyond that, you have a vibrant history and cultures at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. And I still would remind of the first travellers coming from Europe, hundreds of years ago, trying to discover what was there and coming back full of admiration for the beauty and impressive architectural heritage that you have, and you maintain.

Notably, in terms of security and connectivity, energy and resource diversification, we have to strengthen our partnership towards increasing our respective economic security. These two words – economic and security – will go closely

together. More and more, when we talk about economics, we will have to look at the security dimension. And when we talk about security we will have to look at that through the lens of economics.

So far, during my mandate, I have had the opportunity to travel to the region three times. To deepen our cooperation, in 2021, I visited Tashkent for the [Central and South Asia Regional Connectivity Conference](#) and Dushanbe for the [EU–Central Asia Ministerial Meeting](#). Then, in 2022, I co-hosted the [EU–Central Asia Connectivity Conference: Global Gateway](#) in Samarkand.

[Last October](#), for the first time, the foreign ministers of the 27 EU Member States met with the five central Asian foreign ministers in Luxembourg – some of you were there – demonstrating our commitment to the region.

An ambitious roadmap for the European Union and central Asia

At that meeting in Luxembourg last October, we endorsed an ambitious [joint roadmap](#) for deepening ties between the European Union and central Asia. We want to do that in mutually beneficial areas including reforms, economy and trade, connectivity, green energy, security and people-to-people contacts. In the end, you will not build a true partnership if you do not put people in touch with people. It is not enough to have governments and officials meeting. It is not enough to have agreements signed by high-level personages; we need people-to-people contacts to get to know each other better. And this meeting is one of the 80 concrete actions that we defined in that roadmap, which we are now implementing.

The next step will be the first region-to-region summit later this year, which will be kindly hosted by Uzbekistan. The first region-to-region summit – I think it is going to be another important step in our relationship.

Excellencies, we talk a lot about borders today. Borders are being violated. Borders are the front line of confrontation. But borders are also the scars left by history on the skin of the Earth. History has been carved by borders in the skin of the Earth, sometimes by fire and fighting.

We need to overcome borders. We need to go beyond borders in order to get in touch with the people on the other side. We need to make borders transparent. They will exist, but we will not see them. That is what is happening here in the European Union.

Yes, certainly, in Europe borders have been the scars of history, but today you can go from Gibraltar to Helsinki, crossing many borders, without seeing them. You don't have to stop. Nobody asks, 'Who are you? Where are you going? Open your suitcase. Show your papers' – and this is extraordinary.

Borders are still there, but you do not see them. Travel and exchanges are much easier and much more beneficial. This is something that the whole world can do – make borders transparent in order to let people, goods and services go from one country to another as easily as possible.

Invest more in connections between Europe and central Asia

We have to invest much more in physical connections between Europe and central Asia to allow us to overcome past dependencies, to diversify and find new alternatives for transport, for energy and for supply chains. It will breathe new life into the ancient Silk Road, linking up also with our partners in Türkiye and South Caucasus. This is our challenge. That is why we are here: to look for the financial resources that can make it a reality, changing the skin of a region, linking it to the borders of other countries and regions such as Türkiye, South Caucasus and Europe, on the road to China.

This is a challenge for which both Europe and central Asia need to strengthen our resilience and diversify our political and economic relationships. I want to insist on this sentence: diversify our political and economic relationships.

I am sure this forum will be an important step in that direction. That is why I thank you very much for being here.

THE EU AND THE INDO-PACIFIC: PARTNERS FOR A MORE STABLE WORLD

31 January 2024 – Op-ed. *Ahead of a series of events concerning the EU–Indo-Pacific relationship, I published this op-ed in several media outlets in the region to outline the importance the EU attaches to its links with the Indo-Pacific and what we propose to do together.*

At the start of 2024, Europeans are of course deeply concerned by the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and by the conflict that has broken out again in the Middle East. However, we are not forgetting the broader picture: the centre of gravity of the world's economy has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region, with close to 50 % of the world's GDP and 60 % of the world's population. Peace and stability in this region are crucial for Europe and the world.

Improving the EU's cooperation with the region

In recent years, the EU has worked steadily to improve its cooperation with the region, in particular by becoming a strategic partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2020, launching its Indo-Pacific strategy in 2021, holding a successful EU–ASEAN summit in 2022 and adopting the Samoa Agreement with Pacific countries in 2023. We will accelerate progress in 2024.

The economic links between the EU and the Indo-Pacific region have reached an impressive level, unimaginable 40 years ago. Maritime routes in the region have become the arteries of the world: every day 2 000 ships transport goods across the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea to Europe and back. However, the security environment is deteriorating. Major tensions are rising, from the South China Sea to the Taiwan Strait, the Korean peninsula and the Red Sea. There is less trust among the main global and regional players, and less respect for international law and multilateral agreements; force and coercion are on the rise. We are at risk of going back to a world where 'might makes right'.

The EU intends to counter this trend. Multilateral solutions and regional approaches are in our DNA and we will always defend international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the non-proliferation

regime. To defend the rules-based world order, we want to cooperate more closely with our partners committed to multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region.

The EU maintains regular security and defence dialogues with China, Japan, India, Australia, South Korea and other nations. However, our cooperation increasingly extends beyond dialogue to concrete and operational activities.

Under our strategic partnership with ASEAN, security cooperation is also becoming more and more a major component. We are participating with members of ASEAN in regional navy exercises, and the navies of our Asian partners are cooperating with us in Operation Atalanta, near the Horn of Africa. These are good examples of what we can do together.

To go further, we propose to use our Member States' advanced capabilities to become a 'smart security enabler', helping to build the capacities of our partners in the region on maritime security, cybersecurity, counterterrorism and foreign information manipulation and interference.

We need each other to help stabilise the world

We need each other to help stabilise this world. The challenges we are facing do not allow us any alternative to cooperating closely to help avoid conflicts and ensure respect for international law. To protect freedom of navigation, EU Member States are already increasing their deployments between the EU and the Indo-Pacific. The region can count on us as a reliable partner.

On the economic side, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shown us the high cost of the EU's excessive dependency on Russian gas. We are therefore focusing on improving the EU's economic security by reducing this type of excessive dependency. However, this does not mean closing our borders. On the contrary, it should lead to developing our economic ties with many countries in the Indo-Pacific region, in order to de-risk our economy and diversify our supply chains.

In this context, the EU has recently signed a free trade agreement with New Zealand, and negotiations are ongoing with India, Indonesia and Thailand. We are also engaging with Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India to ensure stable and diversified supply chains in the field of digital technologies, and we have proposed to our Indo-Pacific partners that we work together on the sustainable extraction and processing of critical raw materials, necessary for the green and digital transitions.

The EU also wants to cooperate more actively with Indo-Pacific countries towards a green and sustainable future. The Green–Blue Alliance for the Pacific is helping to strengthen the climate resilience of the Pacific islands. Together with our G7 partners, we have also agreed just energy transition partnerships with South Africa, Indonesia and Vietnam, and the European Investment Bank is already investing €500 million to accelerate Vietnam’s green transition in a way that benefits both people and the planet.

In short, we are well aware of the crucial importance of the EU’s engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. We are demonstrating it with a Pacific Day in the European Parliament on 1 February, highlighting our burgeoning cooperation with our Pacific island partners. The next day, our third Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum will bring together foreign ministers from the region and the EU. We will then hold our biennial EU–ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.

In a world of geopolitical turbulence and great-power rivalry, these three high-level meetings illustrate the strong and shared interest that the EU and the Indo-Pacific countries have in cooperating more closely in order to enhance their security, prosperity and resilience.

THREE POINTS ABOUT THE SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

1 June 2024 – Speech. *The Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore is Asia's equivalent of the Munich Security Conference in Europe: the place where the most important experts and players on security issues in this region meet. In June 2024, I presented our vision of how the EU could act in favour of peace and stability in this region, which is distant, but crucial for us.*

Thank you. Thank you for your invitation and thank you for your attention. In the interests of time, I will go directly to the subject. There are many things that happen around the world, and some of them in our immediate neighbourhood, but I will resist the temptation of talking about them and focus on the title of this panel.

I want to make two points about the European Union's approach to security and the cooperative answer to the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. First, I want to stress how important security in the Indo-Pacific is for Europe. Second, I want to talk about why and how the European Union in the current geopolitical context is a valuable and credible piece of the regional security architecture through cooperation and tailored partnerships based on common trust.

Strategic and economic interests are intertwined

First, why is the Indo-Pacific important for us in the current geopolitical context? We have to look at each other in a more comprehensive way than simply through an economic lens, because strategic and economic interests are intertwined more than ever. Economics and strategy are two sides of the same coin. And now the Indo-Pacific is the beating heart of the world.

The EU accounts for 15 % of world trade. The Indo-Pacific accounts for 45 % of world trade. Altogether, combined, we account for almost two thirds of world trade. Security in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific are increasingly interlinked. Your security is an important part of our security. China's so-called no-limit partnership with Russia, although everything has limits, and the military support of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to Russia's invasion of Ukraine show the

direct impact on European security of the prolongation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Forty per cent of our trade passes through the South China Sea. That's why avoiding tension in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait is of the utmost importance for us. And here, today, I've been listening to different approaches to and different evaluations of this tension in the South China Sea, but certainly they are.

All this happens in an international context in which we are confronted by a return, in both Europe and Asia, to a challenging interstate rivalry, which is taking place through different modalities, including war, interstate war, high-intensity conventional war, such as the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, where one country is trying to crush its neighbour in a blatant violation of international law. I do agree that it is not the only place where international law is being violated. It's not the only one.

And that's why we need to be consistent with our principles and prevent the practice of double standards. Yes, in Gaza, we have a clear situation where we have to avoid double standards. And, if we applaud when the International Criminal Court acts against Putin, we should be able to do the same thing when the same court acts against players in the Middle East.

Economic rivalry with weaponisation of trade

Second, there is economic rivalry accompanied by weaponisation of trade, including putting strain on global shipping and supply chains, which are vital for both Europe and Asia.

And, third, there is interstate political rivalry, which leads to political realignment and certainly hedging strategies.

The second issue is, in the face of all this, how we are adjusting our strategy and our offer to the region? What is the European Union offering to the region in order to build a cooperative approach to security?

We are a geopolitical actor with no hidden agenda, with a strong commitment to security based on international law and the United Nations Charter, and we have significant experience of conflict and crisis management. That's why I think we can offer a unique contribution to security in the Indo-Pacific, and we presented a strategy on that issue in 2021. And since the invasion of Ukraine we are gradually accepting

the idea that we have to take charge of our own security. In 2022, we published a Strategic Compass, which is our first EU strategy on security and defence.

We know we have a lot to do, a lot to achieve. But certainly the era of strategic naivety is over. And that's why we are multiplying our partnerships with the region: more precisely, security and defence partnerships that are currently being negotiated with two key partners, as well as the important memorandum of understanding signed last week with Australia on critical raw materials.

Your security is also our security

Yes, as has been said this morning, your security is also our security. That's completely true. And, in regard to all this, I would like to convey three messages from Europe.

First, we are a credible and committed partner in security and defence. Last year I said, and I want to repeat this year, that we are a smart security enabler. This means that the European Union has know-how and added value in non-traditional security domains, and we are willing to build close cooperation in these areas: in cyber, in disinformation and foreign interference, and in the maritime domain – where we have launched several navy operations: Operation Aspides in the Red Sea to protect merchant vessels, and Atalanta in the north-western Indian Ocean – and we contribute to maritime security awareness. We are also developing cooperation on economic security, on non-proliferation and disarmament, on counterterrorism and on space.

Second, Europe is a principled entity. We believe in some basic principles and we try to be consistent with them. We are far from being perfect. And certainly important questions are being asked about what's happening in Ukraine, in Gaza and in the South China Sea.

The important thing is not to say that people have to abide by international law and to fulfil humanitarian law when they are at war. The question is: 'What happens if they don't? What's happening when they don't?' And, in some cases, it is clear that they are not doing so. This is the real question that the international community has to be able to answer.

We will look at the best way of doing that: building cooperation and avoiding confrontation. Our Member States rarely oppose major resolutions at the United Nations Security Council. And those who have a veto power do not use it.

And, third and finally, Europe has to learn from Asia. You know how much this region is innovating and creating value. I am always interested by the views of ASEAN and in particular of our Singaporean friends. When they talk about Asia, it is because they have the capacity of carrying an Asian vision of the world, the coming world, while remaining closer to the West, to us, to the Europeans. So let's work together and learn from each other. Thank you.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS: PARTNERS FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

27 July 2024 – Speech. *I was invited to participate in the 31st ASEAN Regional Forum in Vientiane in Lao. It was an occasion to reassert the importance the EU gives to its bilateral relations with this other regional organisation, with which we share the same will to work for peace and stability globally and in the Indo-Pacific region.*

The people in this room are very diverse, representing major geopolitical players, smaller states and regional organisations.

But only by acting together in partnership can we tackle the challenges facing our world. That is why ASEAN centrality is so important: you – the ASEAN Chair – invite us to engage. And here we are.

And, in today's world of crises and confrontations, Europe and ASEAN must stand together. We both champion a world order based on the UN Charter, in which the rights of all countries, large or small, are protected.

An increasingly dangerous security landscape

At a time when the economic ties between Europe and the Indo-Pacific are at their strongest, the security landscape around us is increasingly dangerous.

Conflicts threaten the stability of both regions: the war of aggression against Ukraine, turmoil in the Middle East, and tensions in the Red Sea and the South China Sea.

On Ukraine, war has returned to Europe after Russia's aggression against Ukraine – because it is clear that there is an aggressed and an aggressor! But the war in Ukraine affects us all.

Yes, peace is needed, but it must be just and it must respect international law. It must respect the UN Charter and not reward aggression.

Today, North Korean missiles threaten not only the Indo-Pacific but also Europe. North Korean missiles are being used by Russia in Ukraine.

By aligning with Russia in the Ukraine war, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is jeopardising non-proliferation efforts and violating UN Security Council resolutions.

Such illicit transfers of arms must stop, as should its persistent missile launches and advances in its nuclear programme.

Vital not to aid Russia

It is vital not to aid Russia, either directly or through the provision of dual-use components. Doing so further undermines the rules we are all committed to, prolonging this war of aggression.

If we do not stop this unjustified war, Russia will encourage other countries to threaten or use force for territorial gain. A world where might makes right puts global stability at risk.

When it comes to the Middle East, the region is on the verge of a wider spillover. We have to prevent regional escalation in the Red Sea and across the Lebanon border – many of you have said that.

The Houthis' activities in the Red Sea are disrupting a critical trade artery between our regions. 40 % of Europe–Asia trade passes through the Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Many countries here in Asia are the first to suffer from the escalation in the Red Sea. That is why the European Union launched a new maritime operation, Operation Aspides, to protect commercial vessels.

The situation in the Red Sea is a direct result of the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. I have heard many countries expressing their concerns about the large number of civilian casualties in Gaza caused by the Israeli forces. The Hamas terrorist attack was a horror, but one horror does not justify another horror.

What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating – the images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time.

We talk about a humanitarian catastrophe. Yes, but this is a man-made humanitarian catastrophe, which means it is not in our destiny. And it must stop.

The unbearable suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza must end. The violence against Palestinians in the West Bank must end. A hostage deal should be reached now.

We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to this human suffering.

Many world leaders have said too many innocent civilians have been killed. How many are too many? Ten, twenty, thirty, forty thousand? How many are too many?

Certainly, the number of casualties is completely disproportionate to the military end pursued.

As the International Court of Justice has said:

- the occupation of the Palestinian territories is unlawful and needs to be brought to an end;
- settlement activities must cease immediately.

We should all ask for the fulfilment of international law. Everywhere. This is equally true in the South China Sea, in Ukraine and in the Middle East.

Dear ministers, the Palestinians deserve to exercise their right to self-determination. There is a consensus that only a two-state solution will resolve this endless conflict. Let's engage every one of us to this end. We need to redouble our efforts to implement it.

Ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains pacific

On the Indo-Pacific, we must ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains pacific.

Yes, Europe faces wars on its borders, but the epicentre of global competition is in the Indo-Pacific. It is right here. Nothing is far away in a globalised world.

If Asia is the beating heart of the world economy, its trade routes to Europe and the Americas are vital arteries. Reducing tension is essential and we support efforts to this end.

Our compass is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. There are no solutions in the use of force.

A conflict in the South China Sea would have far more serious ramifications than those seen in the Red Sea. We have a direct interest in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and we oppose any unilateral attempt to change the status quo through force or coercion.

Finally, we stand ready to support the ASEAN leadership in addressing the escalating violence in Myanmar, which could irreversibly divide the country and the region.

Uniting diverse nations under a shared vision

Dear colleagues, this is the last time I shall participate in the ASEAN Regional Forum. I'd like to thank you for your conviction and friendship.

My conviction remains strong: the strength of the EU and ASEAN lies in uniting diverse nations under a shared vision for a better world – a world where the rule of law is not selective, and where peace and prosperity are shared by all.

Let's invest in connectivity in order to get close to each other. Let's invest in connectivity instead of conflicts.

Whether our countries are large or small, let us all live by our international commitments and make a rules-based international order based on the UN Charter the foundation of our relations.



6.4 LATIN AMERICA

IN DEFENCE OF DEMOCRACY IN GUATEMALA AND ELSEWHERE

21 January 2024 – Blog post. *I attended the inauguration of Guatemala's new president, Bernardo Arévalo. The transfer of power has been marked by persistent attempts to overturn the election results. The EU stood firm in support of the rule of law. The preservation of Guatemala's democracy shows what we can achieve when we cooperate with our partners and use EU foreign policy tools in an integrated way.*

Last week, I travelled to Guatemala to attend the inauguration of President Bernardo Arévalo, following his clear victory in the presidential election on 20 August. It was the first visit by an EU High Representative to Guatemala and a clear sign of our commitment to support the people of Guatemala and their democracy – a democracy that has been repeatedly under threat from within.

Our engagement with Guatemala over the past few months serves as a case study of what is possible when the EU's foreign policy tools are used in a mutually reinforcing way. The EU's Election Observation Mission played a decisive role in strengthening confidence in the process, upholding the election results and refuting false accusations of fraud. After the elections, we engaged in diplomacy to strongly condemn persistent attempts to overturn the results and efforts to suspend President Arévalo's political party, *Movimiento Semilla*. Immediately prior to the inauguration, we adopted a [sanctions framework](#) that will allow the imposing of measures – such as travel restrictions or asset freezes – on those who have been undermining democracy, the rule of law and the peaceful transfer of power in Guatemala.

When I travelled to Guatemala City, I did so knowing that the presence of numerous international guests would send not only a strong message of support to democracy in Guatemala but also a strong signal to obstructionists that circumventing democratic processes would not be tolerated by the international community. However, attempts to delay or obstruct President Arévalo's inauguration persisted until the very last minute. These attempts were met with a [firm response from the international delegations](#) present in Guatemala City and were ultimately overcome. Now, with the rightful president in office, we can look forward to closer cooperation between the EU and Guatemala.

The invisible infrastructure that sustains democracies

I have invited President Arévalo to Brussels and proposed that we sign a memorandum of understanding that had been put on hold because of concerns about the efforts to overturn the election result. This will provide a strengthened basis for our political dialogue and our cooperation to defend and develop the invisible infrastructure that sustains democracies: inclusive governance, the separation of powers, the protection of the rule of law and access to justice, respect for human rights, social cohesion, and the promotion of equality and respect for diversity. This invisible infrastructure also featured prominently in my meetings with human rights defenders, justice operators, journalists and indigenous authorities. We also intend to collaborate with the new government in combating climate change – which greatly affects Central American countries.

The EU is certainly an important partner for Guatemala. We are its fourth-largest export destination, following the United States and Guatemala's neighbours Honduras and El Salvador, and our trade has more than doubled in the last decade. We are also already the second-largest investor in the country and, if the rule of law and democratic stability improve, Guatemala can become an even more attractive destination for European investments. We are also engaged with important development programmes.

After the inauguration in the capital, I travelled to the department of Petén to meet the beneficiaries of a €50 million package aimed at supporting the green transition over the coming years. In the heart of the Guatemalan rainforest, I [met the people](#) living there, who use the forest for their livelihood and, at the same time, preserve it. I saw how the forest can be sustainably managed and its wood used as a sustainable economic activity by the local people. Our support is designed to ensure that indigenous communities can continue to live there, while also having access to health services and higher education.

Almost half of Guatemala's population is indigenous, yet, until now, they have not been sufficiently represented in the social and political life of the country. However, I am hopeful that under the new government we will see greater efforts to improve things in this area. Over the past few months, indigenous leaders and thousands of Guatemalans took to the streets and were key in the defence of democracy and the election results.

Strengthened ties with Latin America

The mission to Guatemala marked my seventh visit to Latin America and the Caribbean in my capacity as High Representative. Since the beginning of my mandate, it has been my priority to place this region on the strategic radar of the EU as an indispensable partner and to give renewed political impetus to the sense of community that binds Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean – a sentiment that has been forged by the journeys of millions of people across the Atlantic, united by shared histories, languages and cultures.

At the margins of the inauguration, I met the President of Chile, [Gabriel Boric](#), to discuss the possibilities arising from the recently signed modernised EU–Chile Association Framework Agreement. With the Foreign Minister of Mexico, [Alicia Bárcena](#), I exchanged views on our bilateral relationship and the modernisation of the EU–Mexico Global Agreement.

Since the beginning of my mandate, it has been my priority to place Latin America and the Caribbean on the strategic radar of the EU as an indispensable partner.

I also met, for the first time, with [Santiago Peña](#), the President of Paraguay, and with Brazil's Vice-President [Geraldo Alckmin](#). In both cases, the prospects of successfully concluding the EU–Mercosur agreement were a major focus. In this matter, the ball is currently also in the European court. We Europeans need to show that we also want this final negotiation to succeed.

In all my discussions, we also delved into the situation in Latin America, with the worrying developments in Ecuador and the upcoming elections in Venezuela being on everybody's mind.

In Ecuador, the situation has reached a critical level, as a wave of organised-crime-driven violence is sowing chaos. At the root of these problems lie transnational drug-trafficking networks. This is not just a national problem for Ecuador; it is an international challenge that also affects the European Union and weakens public institutions, prosperity and social cohesion in many countries around the world. Ecuador's government and democratic institutions can count on our support in their efforts to re-establish public order, defend the rule of law and protect human rights.

Democracy can prevail!

The battle is not over but Guatemala demonstrated that democracy can prevail. 'Sí, se pudo!' – this was the proud chant of the many Guatemalans gathered for the inauguration of President Arévalo. Whether in Guatemala, Venezuela or elsewhere, the EU stands ready to support democracy, which is increasingly under threat globally.

DEEPENING EU-LATIN AMERICA COOPERATION AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME

30 January 2024 – Blog post. *In January, I discussed with members of the European Parliament and think tanks how best to help the digital, green and social transitions in Latin America. I also spoke with Ecuador's president, Daniel Noboa, about EU support in tackling the security crisis in his country. Latin America and Europe must cooperate more closely on fighting organised crime.*

A few days after I [returned from Guatemala](#), Latin America was again high on my agenda last week. I joined the [European Parliament](#)'s delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly and Fundación Euroamerica to debate how best to advance our cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean. Our discussions concentrated on areas such as the fight against organised crime that operates between our two continents, the digital, green and social transitions, and how to build and maintain the invisible infrastructure that sustains democracies.

In my interactions with leaders from emerging countries, I am often told that what really differentiates us is not different values but different priorities. In many parts of the world, a stable supply of electricity is not a given, and achieving basic literacy remains a challenge. In such an environment, our calls for digital and green transitions often sound outlandish. In many countries, these transitions will only be feasible if they go hand in hand with the fight against inequality and for social inclusion. Neglecting the social transition, while pushing forward technological innovation for the green and digital transitions, may even widen the divide between the haves and the have-nots.

Latin American economies have for a long time experienced sluggish growth. The region has immense potential and it could achieve much faster growth by enhancing human capital, bolstering legal security and modernising regulatory frameworks; however, it is frequently held back by high levels of poverty, inequality and violence.

A 'zone of peace' challenged by organised crime

This violence is quite paradoxical. The region is characterised by largely peaceful interstate relations: there have not been any wars between Latin American countries for decades, and borders are largely uncontested. It is also the only

region in the world that has declared itself nuclear weapon free, back in 1967, with the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

On the other hand, as highlighted by the latest [UN global study on homicide](#), eight of the ten countries with the highest murder rates worldwide are in Latin America or the Caribbean. Unfortunately, the trend is worsening. For instance, Costa Rica, often referred to as 'the Switzerland of Central America', used to report annual murder rates in single digits; it now experiences high levels of violence. Similarly, Ecuador has seen its murder rate increase by 95 % between 2021 and 2022.

At the heart of this violence are organised crime and drug trafficking; they account for half of all homicides in the region. The scale of criminal gangs is immense, rivalling smaller countries in GDP and matching, if not surpassing, the state institutions in influence. This undermines the social fabric and trust in institutions, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates and intensifies corruption and impunity. The greater the corruption and impunity, the easier it becomes for trafficking to thrive. Increased trafficking, in turn, leads to more corruption and impunity. This downward spiral ultimately threatens the integrity of states and democracy itself.

Supply and demand – a transatlantic challenge

Last Thursday, I discussed these challenges with the [Ecuadorian president, Daniel Noboa](#). Our conversation focused on how the EU could best support Ecuador's democratic institutions in restoring public order and how best to cooperate in combating the transnational criminal groups that operate across our continents.

Europeans should not think that Ecuador is far away or that those problems do not affect us. The growing demand for narcotics, such as cocaine, on our side of the Atlantic contributes to a vicious circle. Last week, my colleague Commissioner Johansson launched the [European Ports Alliance](#) to better control the influx of containers at major ports. She explained that there is now more cocaine on the European market than ever before. Last year, a record 120 tonnes were seized in the port of Antwerp, and in Rotterdam a single raid this summer resulted in the confiscation of 8 tonnes. Addressing organised crime and drug-related violence, Commissioner Johansson warned against thinking, 'That's South America, and it can't happen here.' Because it is already happening: along with drugs, we are importing the associated violence. In the EU, 50 % of all homicides are linked to drug trafficking. To halt this violence, we need to intensify our efforts on both sides of the Atlantic.

We must strengthen our security cooperation. This includes exchanging more intelligence and facilitating joint operations between Ecuador and European security agencies, with Europol at the forefront. Work is under way to station an Ecuadorian liaison officer at Europol and to finalise an agreement on the exchange of personal data between Europol and Ecuador. Moreover, the mayors of Rotterdam, Antwerp and Hamburg, which are Europe's largest ports, the President of the Belgian Anti-Drugs Commission and the EU's Service of Foreign Policy Instruments have scheduled visits to Ecuador.

However, as I discussed with President Noboa, it is crucial not only to address the symptoms but also to tackle the underlying social causes that serve as the breeding ground for the security crisis. If your neighbour goes to bed without dinner, you will not live in security. Equality and social inclusion, and in particular opportunities for young people, are key to security.

Unfortunately, security is all too often sought at the expense of freedom, leading to authoritarian rule by an iron fist. It may seem effective in the short term, but it does not last and often lead to greater problems in the medium term. Latin America and Europe have already succumbed to these temptations in the past with devastating consequences.

In the longer term, democracy is the only system capable of combating violence effectively by establishing the rule of law and a balance of power, and by organising public services and social transfers. Our partnership must increasingly encompass fighting organised crime and addressing the social and institutional root causes of violence.

A partner of choice on global challenges

We must focus on these security and social challenges, but we should not overlook the enormous potential of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve global environmental goals and the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The region accounts for 60 % of terrestrial species, and the Amazon alone represents 56 % of the world's rainforests. Without the colossal natural richness of the Americas, the world cannot protect its ecological balance and build the sustainable economies of the 21st century. That is why the EU wants to be the region's partner of choice on issues such as energy, biodiversity, strategic raw materials and fighting climate change. Our ambition is to modernise and strengthen ties with the region in a spirit of partnership, not to create dependencies following the 'extractivist' logic of the past. The countries of the region want to leverage the

green and digital transitions to industrialise key sectors and add value at home, while safeguarding the highest sustainability standards.

The EU is already heavily invested in Latin America's future. European companies are the main investors in the region, reflecting their long-term commitment and the depth of the ties between our economies and societies. Through the [Global Gateway](#) investment agenda, the EU has identified more than 130 projects in the region, to strengthen our connections and build the physical infrastructure the region needs, while accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, what unites the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean more than anything else is the desire to live in freedom and dignity. Our cooperation therefore must not only foster growth and prosperity, but also help improve the invisible infrastructure that sustains societies: inclusive governance, the separation of powers, the protection of the rule of law, respect for human rights, social cohesion, women's empowerment, and equality. This invisible infrastructure, which is at the core of democratic societies, is even harder to build and maintain than roads, bridges and ports.

THE WILL OF THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE MUST BE RESPECTED

12 August 2024 – Blog post. *In August, my attention was focused on the crisis in Venezuela following the presidential elections. Respect for the will of the Venezuelan people and reconciliation are the only way to solve the current crisis. And the international community must help to achieve it.*

The European Union has for years maintained a firm position supporting the electoral and democratic path as the only solution to the Venezuelan crisis. That is why we have put all our political and diplomatic tools at the service of this objective, including our Election Observation Mission to the municipal and regional elections of 2021, whose recommendations continue to be a reference for civil society and the opposition in Venezuela. If there was no EU Election Observation Mission in these last presidential elections, it is because the Venezuelan authorities withdrew their invitation.

A serious violation of electoral principles

The Venezuelan National Electoral Council (CNE) announced the results of these elections on 2 August, declaring Nicolás Maduro president-elect even before the votes had been counted. The Carter Center, which was invited by the Venezuelan government along with the UN Panel of Experts, and was able to send a small mission of observers and experts, stressed that ‘Venezuela’s 2024 presidential election did not meet international parameters and standards of electoral integrity (...) The failure of the electoral authority to announce results broken down by polling station constitutes a serious violation of electoral principles’. Indeed, to date, the CNE has not made public the official polling station results, despite its commitment to do so. Instead, the Venezuelan executive branch has mandated the judiciary to certify the validity of the results announced by the Venezuelan electoral branch, one of the five branches of government in Venezuela. However, this is not the usual procedure under the Venezuelan constitutional order. As the foreign ministers of Brazil, Colombia and Mexico stressed in their joint communiqué, the CNE is the body that is legally responsible for the dissemination of electoral results.

At the same time, the opposition, in addition to making a great effort of coordination, organisation and mobilisation in defence of the vote, has acted with transparency. Thanks to the presence of almost 90 000 opposition polling station witnesses in the voting centres and the courage and democratic spirit of the Venezuelan people, they have managed to scan and register more than 80 % of the certified electoral minutes issued by the voting machines, digitise them and publish them.

The system is simple: when voting closes, polling station members, witnesses and operators sign the tally sheet on the screen, which includes the number of votes received by each candidate, broken down by political party. The voting machine prints the tally sheet and sends the results to the CNE through dedicated and encrypted lines. Finally, witnesses from different parties receive paper copies of the official tally sheets, which are the ones that the opposition has managed to collect and publish. Several independent organisations and media outlets, including the Carter Center, have analysed them and confirmed them as reliable. On the basis of the minutes published by the opposition, as I have announced on behalf of the EU in a statement agreed by the 27 Member States, Edmundo González Urrutia appears to be the winner of the presidential elections by a significant majority.

The solution lies in respect for the will of the Venezuelans

The solution to this impasse lies in dialogue, transparency and respect for the sovereignty and will of the Venezuelan people. That is why we have insisted so much, and continue to insist unanimously, all 27 Member States of the European Union, on the publication of the tallies and their independent verification as the only way to guarantee the integrity of the election results in accordance with the sovereignty of the people. The delay in the full publication of the results only casts further doubt on the credibility of the officially published results. The UN, building on the work done by the panel of experts, could play an active role in ensuring an independent verification process.

Venezuela is going through critical times. The international community must defend the democratic process and guarantee the conditions for the Venezuelan people to exercise their civil and political rights. The political fracture must be prevented from degenerating into confrontation in the streets. To this end, political dialogue between the Venezuelan parties is indispensable. And the international community must support it. But not just any dialogue. If there is a

false solution to this crisis, a solution that does not reflect the will of the people as expressed at the ballot box, if a democratic transition does not begin, the Venezuelan people, who have already suffered so much, will pay the price. The Venezuelan economy will pay for it. And the region will pay for it, as hopelessness and lack of horizons will push many Venezuelans into migration and exile, in addition to the more than 7.7 million Venezuelans who have already fled the country. A new wave of migration would further affect countries that have been very generous but are experiencing difficult social and economic situations.

The decade-long Venezuelan crisis transcends borders

The political and social impact of this decade-long crisis in the heart of South America transcends borders and affects the very defence of democracy. As President Boric's position reminds us, we must prevent the debate on Venezuela from turning into an ideological confrontation. This is not an ideological issue, but something much more important: respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of Venezuelans. Respecting the will of the Venezuelan people remains the only way for Venezuela to restore democracy and resolve the current humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis.

I have always said that what unites Europeans and Latin Americans most is the will to live in freedom, the dignity of settling our differences through dialogue and democratic elections. The rule of law is based not only on transparent and competitive elections but also on strong institutions that respect and enforce fundamental rights. That is what Venezuelans want and deserve.

That is why I have appealed for unity in Latin America to tackle this crisis and why the European Union will continue to support the efforts of the region, including the mediation led by Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, with whose foreign ministers I am still in contact, to find a democratic and peaceful solution, with guarantees for all.

But in the meantime the authorities have unleashed a wave of repression on the country, particularly in areas far from the media focus of Caracas. Right now, in addition to the publication of the minutes and a frank dialogue to restore democracy, the most urgent thing is for the Venezuelan authorities to put an immediate end to arbitrary arrests and repression of members of the opposition and civil society, and for all political prisoners to be released. Harassment and threats against democratic opposition forces, and against journalists and media, must stop. Freedoms, including freedom of expression and information, must be

protected. This is why the EU continues to advocate that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights be allowed to return to Caracas without further delay.

ANNEX

GLOBAL EVENTS AND KEY ACTIVITIES DURING 2024

JANUARY 2024

AFRICA. The European Commission and the African Development Bank Group unlock new funding for African infrastructure projects under the Global Gateway, now amounting to €972 million in blending operations and guarantees.

BRAZIL. I meet with the Vice-President of Brazil to discuss the Mercosur negotiations, and the global agenda during Brazil's presidency of the G20.

CHILE. I meet with President Boric of Chile to discuss the EU–Chile association agreement, and the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

ECUADOR. I speak with President Noboa of Ecuador to support his government in confronting the security crisis in the country.

EGYPT. I co-chair the 10th meeting of the EU–Egypt Association Council with Sameh Shoukry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt. We confirm our robust and multifaceted partnership.

GUATEMALA. I travel to Guatemala to attend the transfer of power and support democracy in the country. I meet with human rights defenders, journalists and indigenous authorities. Ahead of my visit, the Council of the European Union imposed sanctions on those obstructing a democratic transition following the 2023 general elections. This is the first time an EU High Representative has visited the country, and my sixth visit to Latin America during my current mandate.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE. At the European Parliament, I participated in a debate on the situation in Gaza, condemning the declarations of two Israeli ministers suggesting the displacement of the Palestinian population. Forced displacements are a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

LEBANON. I meet with the Prime Minister of Lebanon to discuss the situation in southern Lebanon, the impact of the war in Gaza and the situation in Syria.

I also have an exchange with the Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as well as with the Lebanese Foreign Minister.

MIDDLE EAST. In Riyadh, I meet with the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to discuss steps towards de-escalation, a ceasefire, and how to avoid regional spillovers and implement the two-state solution.

OMAN. I meet with the Foreign Minister of Oman to discuss the tensions in the Red Sea.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. I call for Russia to be held accountable after it targets Kyiv, Kharkiv and other Ukrainian cities with over a hundred missiles and drones. The Foreign Affairs Council discusses Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and renews economic sanctions for a further six months. The European Council agrees on a new support mechanism for Ukraine: the Ukraine Facility. Moreover, I address the European Parliament on military assistance for Ukraine.

SUDAN. I debate the issue of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sudan with members of the European Parliament and the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan.

DISINFORMATION. At a conference in Brussels, we present the *2nd EEAS report on foreign information manipulation and interference threats*.

FEBRUARY 2024

AFRICA. During the Foreign Affairs Council, we discuss the situation in the Sahel. The Commission announces €1.8 billion of humanitarian aid for 2024, of which €200 million for the Sahel, Central African Republic and the Lake Chad basin. €346 million will support East and South Africa.

ARMENIA. The EU–Armenia Partnership Council meeting takes place in Brussels.

ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC. The third EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum takes place, and I co-chair the EU–Association of Southeast Asian Nations ministerial meeting in Brussels.

BELARUS. The Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels discusses the situation in Belarus and the mass arrest of opposition activists.

BELGRADE–PRISTINA DIALOGUE. During the Munich Security Conference, I meet with the Prime Minister of Kosovo, Albin Kurti, and Serbian President

Aleksandar Vučić without making progress towards the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

BRAZIL. I travel to Brazil for the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. I stress that our priorities must be achieving a just peace in Ukraine and bringing an end to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

COLOMBIA. At the Munich Security Conference, I meet with the Colombian president, Gustavo Petro.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP. Almost €470 million of humanitarian funding from the EU will be directed to south-eastern Europe and the European Neighbourhood.

GEORGIA. I chair the EU–Georgia Association Council meeting in Brussels.

GULF STATES. At the Foreign Affairs Council, we launch EU Naval Force Operation Aspides, the EU's defensive maritime operation to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. €111.6 million of EU's humanitarian aid will be allocated to Central America, South America and the Caribbean for 2024.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. At the Munich Security Conference, I meet with the UN Secretary-General and the foreign ministers of China, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. I also meet with the Lebanese prime minister, Najib Mikati, to discuss the escalation on the Lebanese border.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. At the Gymnich meeting in Brussels, EU foreign ministers discuss the EU's long-term strategy for Ukraine. The European Council decides to set aside revenue stemming from Russian frozen assets and sets up the €50 billion Ukraine Facility for 2024–2027. The Foreign Affairs Council welcomes Yulia Navalnaya after the death of Alexei Navalny. The Commission announces €83 million in humanitarian aid for Ukraine in 2024. I travel to Poland, where I meet with the Polish minister of foreign affairs, Radosław Sikorski. To mark the second anniversary of the Russian war of aggression, I travel to Ukraine. There, I visit the headquarters of the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM), and meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov. I speak before the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. The first ever UK–EU Counter-Terrorism Dialogue takes place in Brussels. The Hungarian parliament ratifies Sweden's accession to NATO. A total of 23 EU Member States are now part of the alliance, including Finland.

MARCH 2024

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. EU leaders give the green light for the opening of negotiations on the country's accession to the EU.

GREENLAND. A cooperation agreement is signed to strengthen the EU's partnership with Greenland.

IRAN. I speak with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran on the need to release detainees and avoid the regional escalation of the war in Gaza.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. The EU announces €50 million of funding for the UNRWA and an increase in emergency support for Palestinians of €68 million in 2024. I participate in a debate at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in New York and meet with UN Secretary-General António Guterres and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. At the Foreign Affairs Council, we agree on sanctions against Israeli extremist settlers.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. At the funeral of Alexei Navalny in Moscow, hundreds of Russians gather despite a heavy police presence. The EU imposes new sanctions on Russian and Belarusian products. We also condemn the terrorist attacks at Crocus City Hall in Moscow. The presidential elections in Russia take place in a highly restricted environment and we condemn the illegal holding of 'elections' in the occupied Ukrainian territories. During the Foreign Affairs Council, we discuss with the US Secretary of State the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the Israel– Hamas war, China and the Indo-Pacific. The Commission disburses the first €4.5 billion for Ukraine under the Ukraine Facility. I call for a Council decision to use windfall revenues from Russian frozen assets. I attend the EU–Ukraine Association Council with Prime Minister Shmyhal. I welcome the negotiating framework for Ukrainian and Moldovan accession to the EU.

SOUTH KOREA. At a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, I meet with the Korean foreign minister, Cho Tae-Yul, to discuss the importance of stepping up security and defence cooperation.

SUDAN. Together with Commissioner Janez Lenarčič, I condemn the ban by the Sudanese de facto authorities on cross-border humanitarian assistance. Together with the UN Secretary-General, I call for an immediate ceasefire during Ramadan.

UNITED STATES. In the United States, I meet with the UN Secretary-General to discuss the ongoing Ukraine and Gaza wars, respect for international law and other global challenges, and I deliver my annual address at the UNSC on EU–UN cooperation. I also meet with the US Secretary of State and Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank, and speak at Georgetown University.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. I co-present the first-ever EU defence industrial strategy to support the competitiveness and readiness of our defence industry. The EU carries out a space threat response architecture exercise to test our response to a situation in which an attack targets space services essential for governments, businesses and citizens.

APRIL 2024

ARMENIA. Together with the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, I meet with the US Secretary of State, the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, Samantha Power, and the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan. We discuss supporting Armenia's sovereignty, democracy and resilience.

BELARUS. I meet with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian opposition.

GEORGIA. After Georgia makes known its intention to adopt a 'transparency of foreign influence' Russian-type law, we say that this development will impede Georgia's progress on its path towards accession to the EU.

GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL. In Luxembourg, I chair the first ever EU–Gulf Cooperation Council High Level Forum on Regional Security and Cooperation.

IRAN. After the attack on an Iranian diplomatic facility in Damascus, I speak to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs to ask Iran to show restraint. An extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council meeting takes place following the massive drone and missile attacks against Israel by Iran. At the European Parliament, I deliver a speech on the need for de-escalation.

LEBANON. President von der Leyen announces a €1 billion package of EU funding.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. Together with Commissioner Lenarčič, I demand the urgent and unfettered expansion of the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. I travel to Saudi Arabia to speak at a meeting of the World Economic Forum. I meet with the President of Yemen to discuss the UN-led peace process, the escalation of conflict in the Red Sea and the situation in Gaza. I also meet with the Norwegian foreign minister, to discuss sustainable solutions to regional conflicts; with the Turkish foreign minister, to discuss EU–Turkey cooperation; and with the Saudi Arabian foreign minister, to discuss de-escalation efforts and a two-state solution. I also speak before the European Parliament several times on the situation in the Middle East.

SUDAN. With Commissioner Lenarčič, I co-organise an International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan and its Neighbours, together with Germany and France. The event marks one year of conflict, which has generated the largest-ever displacement crisis worldwide.

UKRAINE. The European Commission endorses the Ukraine Plan, Ukraine's comprehensive reform and investment strategy for the next four years, paving the way for regular payments under the Ukraine Facility. We announce an additional €1.5 billion in bridge financing to Ukraine.

MAY 2024

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE. The Council establishes the first-ever European Diplomatic Academy to train EU diplomats.

GEORGIA. I condemn intimidation and physical assaults on civic actors, politicians and journalists. The EU condemns the adoption of the 'transparency of foreign influence' law in Georgia.

IRAN. I speak with the Iranian foreign minister to stress the need for de-escalation, and to keep working on nuclear non-proliferation. I explained the EU's sanctions on Iran's unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. The EU–Central America Association Agreement enters into force.

LEBANON. I meet with the Lebanese foreign minister, Abdallah Bou Habib, to discuss the many challenges Lebanon faces, including the war at its southern border.

MOLDOVA. The EU–Moldova Association Council takes place. I meet with Prime Minister Dorin Recean and express the EU's readiness to support Moldova against Russia's rising hybrid threats.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. I condemn the Israeli military operation in Rafah and take note of the arrest warrants asked by the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court against Israeli political leaders, as well as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) order to halt the operations in Rafah, in the context of the South African case. ICJ orders are binding and have to be fully implemented. The Commission disburses €25 million to the Palestinian Authority and €16 million to UNRWA.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. Russia keeps targeting democratic processes and critical infrastructures of EU Member States and partners. I express our readiness to use all available tools to deter and respond to those who seek to disrupt our

democracies. I welcome the Council decision to use windfall revenues from immobilised Russian assets for Ukraine. With Canada, the United States, Australia and others, we impose new sanctions against North Korea for the unlawful transfer of arms to Russia. I host the EU–Ukraine Defence Industries Forum in Brussels, to boost industrial cooperation in the area of defence between the EU and Ukraine.

SINGAPORE. I travel to Singapore to participate in the Shangri-La Dialogue, one of Asia’s most important security and defence conferences. I meet with the Singaporean prime minister, Lawrence Wong, and Singapore’s foreign minister, and with the defence ministers of China, South Korea and Philippines, to discuss Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and the rising tensions in the South China Sea.

UNITED STATES. I travel to California to meet with American politicians, and key players from the business sector and civil society. I have discussions with Nvidia’s chief executive officer, Jensen Huang, among others, on generative artificial intelligence, and with Waymo leadership on autonomous mobility. Our approach to tech regulation is viewed largely positively in California. I also speak at Stanford University, where I studied 50 years ago.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. On behalf of the EU, I sign a new agreement for a defence partnership between the EU and Norway.

JUNE 2024

ARMENIA. I meet with the Armenian foreign minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, to discuss the normalisation of Armenia–Azerbaijan relations.

BELARUS. I meet with Sviatlana Tsihanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian opposition, during the meeting of the EU Consultative Group with the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society. The Council imposes additional sanctions on Belarus for its involvement in Russia’s war of aggression, targeting trade, services, transport and circumvention.

BELGRADE–PRISTINA DIALOGUE. In Brussels, I host a high-level meeting of the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue, with President Vučić and Prime Minister Kurti.

CHINA. At the 39th EU–China human rights dialogue in Chongqing, the EU reiterates its concerns about restrictions on fundamental freedoms, labour rights, judicial independence, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion or belief, and the right to equality and freedom from

discrimination, including women's and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex rights.

GEORGIA. In the context of intensified intimidation against Georgian civil society, political leaders and journalists, I meet with President Salome Zourabichvili. We discuss the situation in Georgia at the Foreign Affairs Council.

IRAN. I discuss with the acting foreign minister of Iran the Iranian nuclear programme, the war in Gaza and tensions around the Blue Line in Lebanon. I emphasise that all players must exercise utmost restraint to prevent regional escalation.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. On behalf of the EU Member States, I support President Joe Biden's three-phase roadmap to an enduring ceasefire and the release of hostages. We welcome the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2735. The Council extends the mandates of the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Rafah and the EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support, which could play a significant role in supporting Palestinian state-building efforts.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. The EU signs a €1.4 billion grant agreement to support Ukraine's recovery. The Summit on Peace in Ukraine takes place in Switzerland, where I meet with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba. The Council adopts a 14th package of sanctions, targeting high-value sectors of the Russian economy and making circumvention more difficult. The EU and Ukraine sign joint security commitments, ensuring the delivery of long-term military, diplomatic and financial support to Ukraine. Russian authorities decide to block access to over 80 European media outlets in Russia, further restricting access to free and independent information in Russia. The EU opens negotiations with Ukraine for its accession.

SUDAN. The Council adopts sanctions against six individuals. I welcome the UNSC resolution demanding that Rapid Support Forces halt their siege on El Fasher.

JULY 2024

ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC. I travel to Laos to participate in the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum. I meet with the foreign ministers of Brunei, China, India and Thailand. The unifying power of regional integration in Asia and Europe makes us stronger in the international scene.

ALBANIA. The European Council decides to support the Albanian Armed Forces with €13 million from the European Peace Facility.

ARMENIA. The EU adopts its first-ever assistance measure for Armenia under the European Peace Facility.

CENTRAL ASIA. I travel to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to further develop the EU's relations with both countries and the whole of Central Asia.

DJIBOUTI. I travel to Djibouti to visit EU Naval Force Operation Atalanta and Operation Aspides. I meet with President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh and Foreign Minister Ali Youssouf. Djibouti is an essential partner in the Horn of Africa and in our maritime security operations in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Gulf.

ESTONIA. In Estonia and Latvia, I discuss with the authorities the most pressing EU foreign policy issues in the field of defence. I visit the Tapa Army Base.

JORDAN. An EU–Jordan Association Council takes place. The EU decides to deploy an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to observe the upcoming parliamentary elections, at the request of the Jordanian authorities.

MOLDOVA. During the European Political Community Summit in Oxford, United Kingdom, I meet with President Maia Sandu. I reaffirm the EU's support for the country and for accession negotiations.

PALESTINE. The European Commission and the Palestinian Authority sign a letter of intent on the critical budgetary and fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and of the Palestinian economy. The EU will provide €400 million in financial assistance to the PA.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. Russia conducts large-scale attacks on Ukrainian cities, causing a great number of civilian casualties. Okhmatdyt, the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, was hit. At the third EU–Ukraine Cyber Dialogue, we agreed to deepen our cooperation on cybersecurity.

VENEZUELA. I declare that the official results of the presidential elections in Venezuela cannot be considered representative of the will of the people of Venezuela until all records from polling stations are published and verified.

WESTERN BALKANS. The European Commission announces the sixth investment package under the EU's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, expected to mobilise €1.2 billion.

EUROPEAN POLITICAL COMMUNITY. I travel to the UK to participate in the European Political Community meeting and discuss support for Ukraine, security and defence, migration, energy and connectivity.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. The 2024 NATO Summit commemorates the 75th anniversary of the alliance. Leaders reaffirmed support for Ukraine and EU defence. We also discussed common security challenges with our Indo-Pacific partners.

AUGUST 2024

AFGHANISTAN. I vigorously condemn the Taliban's decree placing severe restrictions on the life of Afghans, and in particular women and girls.

AFRICA. The EU works with global partners to secure 215 000 vaccine doses against the mpox virus for a donation to the African Union.

BELARUS. The Council imposes additional restrictive measures on 28 individuals for their role in the ongoing human rights violations in Belarus. The EU continues to stand for a free and democratic Belarus.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. I express the EU's concern about the continuing destruction of key civilian infrastructure, including a water treatment plant in Rafah. We support the call from the leaders of Egypt, Qatar and the United States to conclude the ceasefire and the hostage release deal. I reiterate to the Jordanian foreign affairs minister, Ayman H. Safadi, the EU's steadfast commitment to upholding the status quo of the Holy Sites, including the historic Jordanian custodianship.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. I discuss with Foreign Minister Kuleba the Kursk counteroffensive. During a Foreign Affairs Council meeting, we discuss developments at the front line, military support for Ukraine and EUMAM. I condemn Russia's continued military presence in the occupied breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia on the 16th anniversary of the outbreak of the war between Georgia and Russia.

SRI LANKA. The EU deploys an Election Observation Mission.

TÜRKIYE. I chair an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers to discuss with the Turkish foreign minister EU-Türkiye relations and the Türkiye-Cyprus conflict.

VENEZUELA. I reiterate to Edmundo González, leader of the Venezuelan opposition, that only complete and independently verifiable electoral results will be accepted by the EU.

COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY. At an informal meeting of the EU defence ministers, we provide updates on developments at the Ukrainian front line; review our progress in providing military support to

Ukraine; and address EUMAM and further cooperation with NATO. Ministers also discuss the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and challenges in the Red Sea and Gulf states, including Operation Aspides.

SEPTEMBER 2024

ARMENIA. The EU and Armenia launch the Visa Liberalisation Dialogue.

BELARUS. In New York, I meet with the leader of the Belarusian pro-democratic forces, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, during the UN General Assembly.

EGYPT. I travel to Egypt and Lebanon to help de-escalate the tensions in the Middle East. I discuss the situation in Gaza with President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi in Cairo. I visit the blocked Rafah Border Crossing.

IRAN. The EU strongly condemns the transfer of Iranian-made ballistic missiles to Russia.

PALESTINE/ISRAEL. The EU condemns the murder of several Israeli hostages. I meet with the former Palestinian foreign minister Nasser Al-Qidwa, who presents his joint peace initiative with the former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert. In Madrid, we meet to discuss the implementation of a two-state solution, and in New York, at the UN General Assembly, we launch a Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution. I meet also with families of Hamas's hostages and victims, demanding their liberation. In Lebanon, I go to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon headquarters, paying tribute to the 10 000 peacekeepers there. With my Lebanese counterparts, including Foreign Minister Bou Habib, caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, I discuss, in particular, the need to proceed to elect a president. With global partners, we call for an immediate 21-day ceasefire across the Lebanon–Israel border to provide space for diplomacy towards the conclusion of a diplomatic settlement consistent with UNSC Resolution 1701, and in parallel with the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2735, in Gaza.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE. I condemn the Russian shelling of an International Committee of the Red Cross truck carrying humanitarian aid in the Donetsk region. During the UN General Assembly, I meet with Chinese State Councillor Wang Yi and reiterate that China's ongoing support for Russia fuels the illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. After Kuleba's resignation as Foreign Minister of Ukraine, I pay tribute to his work in representing his country and

advancing the EU–Ukraine relationship. I also welcome Andrii Sybiha, the new foreign minister, with whom I also have the chance to meet.

SUDAN. On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, I co-chair a ministerial meeting on Sudan, together with France, Germany and the United States.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. In New York, I meet with foreign ministers of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and with Mercosur's foreign ministers to discuss the EU–Mercosur trade agreement.

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EUROPE IN THE 'ARC OF FIRE'

EU foreign policy in 2024

2024 has confirmed how much Europe is in danger.

From Ukraine to the Middle East, via South Caucasus, the Horn of Africa or the Sahel, conflicts and crises have been multiplying on our doorstep. Not forgetting the rising tensions in the South China Sea. All of this at a time where the US commitment to European security is becoming much more uncertain.

We have continued to support Ukraine, but we have not managed to provide enough resources to stop Russia's constant attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructures and its advance into Donetsk.

In the Middle East, our call and the call of the international community for a ceasefire, the release of hostages and the respect of international humanitarian law has not been heard and the conflict has spread further in the region.

In this very dangerous geopolitical context, we urgently need to boost our defence capabilities and our defence industry.

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 2024.

Josep Borrell Fontelles is the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.



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