

# The foreign policy implications of the pandemic

During the November II plenary session, the European Parliament is due to debate an own-initiative report on the foreign policy consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Considering the pandemic a 'game changer', the report makes the case for stronger and more effective EU external policies, along with a set of recommendations.

## Background

The coronavirus crisis has amplified [existing trends](#), some of them negative, such as the backlash against democracy and human rights, the crisis of multilateralism, growing economic inequalities, but has also fed multiple calls for global solidarity and great expectations that in the end it will be deeply transformational, for the better. It has been the first global crisis in the absence of global leadership, and has clearly highlighted the crucial importance of multilateral cooperation. It has deepened tensions between liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes, particularly China, which stirred a [global battle of narratives](#). [Developing countries](#) have faced serious economic, financial and social consequences because of the fall in commodity prices and the disruption of supply chains, requiring an increase in aid and debt relief.

## European Union foreign policy response to the crisis

The EU has redirected important amounts of its development and humanitarian aid towards tackling the pandemic with the 'Team Europe' external package launched in April 2020, totalling over [€20 billion](#). The EU also adopted a package of [macro-financial assistance](#) to enlargement and neighbourhood partners totalling €3 billion. The [Common Security and Defence Policy](#) missions and operations have been adapted to provide support to host countries in tackling the health crisis and remain operational. The EU has supported multilateral cooperation to respond to the health crisis in the framework of global forums and organisations such as the [G7](#), [G20](#), [United Nations](#), [World Health Organization](#) and the [World Food Programme](#). The EU has developed a new vision for its geopolitical role to respond to the changing international context. The [roadmap for recovery](#) published in April 2020 emphasised the need for '[strategic autonomy](#)' for the Union.

## European Parliament position

On 26 October 2020, Parliament's Committee for Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted an [own-initiative report](#) on the foreign policy consequences of the pandemic. The report considers the pandemic a 'game changer' in the international environment, a risk multiplier and a catalyst of change in the global order. According to it, in the post-Covid world, the EU will need a stronger and more effective common foreign and security policy. The EU should 'lead by example' and play a stronger role in defending and rebuilding the multilateral order. It should revive its partnership with the United States, based on common values. With China it advocates a more assertive strategy, based on cooperation when possible, but also on the strong defence of EU values wherever needed. It also suggests the creation of a new forum for multilateral cooperation among liberal Western democracies. It emphasises the need for a more united EU possessing open strategic autonomy and backed up by sufficient and credible military capacities. The other proposals include moving to majority voting on certain common foreign and security policy issues; the need to reduce dependency on third countries in strategic sectors, such as health; the rapid adoption of an EU global sanctions regime for human rights violations; providing a clear accession perspective for Western Balkan countries; and supporting recovery efforts of countries in the EU neighbourhood, in Africa and Latin America.

Own-initiative report: [2020/2111\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Hilde Vautmans (Renew Europe, Belgium).



