European Parliament

Protecting, promoting and projecting Europe's values and interests in the world

SUMMARY

In its foreign policy, the European Union (EU) is committed to 'promoting its values and interests', which include democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, pluralism, peace and security, and multilateralism. Worldwide, however, the values and interests that the EU stands for are under mounting pressure, pressure that the pandemic has further intensified. Growing strategic great power rivalry – witnessed in the 'extraterritorialisation' of US-China tensions, growing pressure on human rights, and the (strategic) undermining of multilateralism – have left something of a moral global leadership vacuum. The need to reinforce the protection, promotion and projection of the EU's values and interests in the world has thus become much more pressing. At the same time, attacks on democracy worldwide during the pandemic have sparked increased global public awareness about fundamental rights, equality and human dignity – values at the heart of the European project. In this sense, the pandemic could be a turning-point when the EU seizes the moment to protect, promote and project its values and visions for the common global good in the century ahead.

Introduction: Navigating rougher seas during the pandemic

In 2004, Jeremy Rifkin asserted that the 'European Dream' was 'quietly eclipsing' the American Dream; emphasising 'sustainable development over unlimited material growth, ... universal human rights ... and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power'. Sixteen years later – 75 years after the end of World War Two, and 70 years since the Schuman Declaration marked the foundation of the Union based on peace and solidarity – the coronavirus pandemic appears to be accelerating history. The socio-economic and geopolitical repercussions are still unfolding, in many cases magnifying existing global challenges. It is the first major global crisis during which the United States (US) – increasingly inward-looking under President Donald Trump – has not so far played a leading role. Trump's vision of 'America First' appears to be becoming a nightmare for democracy, multilateralism, solidarity and transatlanticism. The failure of the US and China to step up as soft power champions has left a leadership vacuum, further eroding the post-Cold War world order.

Both experts across the world and Members of the European Parliament have highlighted the potential game-changing effect of this multidimensional crisis. Systemic competitors to the liberal order seem to be using the crisis as an opportunity to gain advantage and promote their systems as the most effective. Both Russian and Chinese anti-EU influence campaigns have capitalised on EU Member States' preoccupation with the crisis in their own countries, seeking to erode trust in the ability of democracies – including the EU – to respond. The crisis has further highlighted the systemic rivalry between authoritarianism and democracy and the strategic pressure on democratic values, including the EU's fundamental values. Moreover, key risks linked to coronavirus (see below) threaten the EU's global interests as laid out in the 2016 Global Strategy: peace, security, prosperity, sustainable development, democratic resilience, a rules-based world order and multilateralism.

Europe's values and interests are intertwined. Protecting, promoting and projecting its values is in the interest of the common, public good. Fostering stability and prosperity in the world, protecting a rules-based world order, is a basic precondition for protection of the Union's values. This seems more pertinent than ever in a world where the pandemic has laid bare the consequences of the great power rivalry, placing increasing pressure on the 'European way of life', as expressed in the 2020 work programme. of the European Commission The 'geopolitical'[1] Commission's foresight-based vision – 'to strive for more at home in order to lead in the world', anchoring growth in the European Green Deal, making Europe fit for the digital age, putting social fairness at the heart of the economy, updating and upgrading the rules-based global order, promoting solidarity, equality and fairness as the 'European way of life', and making a new push for democracy and a stronger Europe in the world – was immediately put to the test.

> **The European Union's values and interests**
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> Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states that 'The Union is founded on the **values** of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'.
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> The TEU states that 'in its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights'. It adds that the EU must 'work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to safeguard its values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity'.
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> The EU Global Strategy defines the **main interests** guiding EU external action as follows:
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> - promoting peace and guaranteeing the security of its citizens and territory;
> - advancing the prosperity of its people, including by achieving the sustainable development goals worldwide and in Europe; establishing an open and fair international economic system; securing sustainable access to the global commons; and fostering the resilience of its democracies; and
> - promoting a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core.

Impact of the pandemic on Europe and the world

The pandemic has increased the pressure on human rights, democratic values and the rule of law worldwide, and not only in authoritarian countries. Europe's close, powerful, continental 'sister democracy' – the United States of America – is witnessing increasing internal and external pressure on its values and system. President Trump's dysfunctional response to the pandemic has weakened not only the halo of US democracy, but also many of the values and interests that the EU seeks to protect and promote. Before the outbreak, the Trump administration had been disconnecting from its commitments to the multilateral rules-based order by withdrawing from the Iran Deal (JCPOA), the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) Treaty and the Paris Agreement, among others. During the pandemic, the collision course has continued: Trump has withdrawn from the Open Skies Arms Control Treaty; attacked news media; abandoned science; contributed to a war of words with China; devalued democratic alliances and multilateral institutions; and suspended US membership of the World Health Organization (WHO). Joseph Nye, who coined the term 'soft power', has argued that 'Trump has shown less concern for morality than previous presidents', that the pandemic has hurt both US and Chinese soft power, and that 'the world needs a stronger and more effective Europe'.

EU response to the pandemic

Ursula von der Leyen's 'geopolitical Commission' made a 'stronger Europe in the world' its fourth priority, building on the Juncker Commission's efforts under the priority 'Europe as a stronger global actor'. Under this priority, the Commission is striving to take an ambitious, strategic and assertive approach to the EU's action in the world and to secure stronger links between internal and external

policies. The aim is also to boost the EU's capacity to protect and promote its interests and values – including through strong trade defence mechanisms and more assertive action to protect human rights, democracy and equality – in the world; to build its strategic autonomy, by using its external action power; and by presenting a more united front in its global presence and actions.

During the outbreak in Europe, the EU – which, despite not having primary responsibility for health policies was criticised for lacking a coordinated response – swiftly translated its core principles and human-centric values into global action in the face of the evolving global crisis. The EU's internal goals seem to have blended seamlessly with its external action, with an explicit focus on human rights, human dignity, health, sustainability and solidarity, as well as efforts to lead a coordinated multilateral response. This was also reflected in the European Parliament's intense activities in this field. All internal and external tools have been mobilised, including the new Next Generation EU recovery instrument – amounting to €750 billion and tied to fundamental rights and respect for the rule of law – as well as a boosted long-term EU budget for the 2021-2027 period, bringing the total financial weight to €1.85 trillion, to counter the impact of the recession and secure economic convergence.

'Team Europe' package

On 8 April 2020, the European Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) presented plans for a strong and targeted EU global response to help partner countries cope with the pandemic. It ties in with the Union's strategic objectives vis-à-vis environment and climate, in line with the European Green Deal and the digital agenda. The collective 'Team Europe' package addresses the pressing health crisis and humanitarian needs, bolstering partner countries' health, water and sanitation systems as well as their research and preparedness capacities, and mitigating the wider impact on societies and economies, to help reduce the risk of destabilisation. 'Team Europe' combines resources from the EU, Member States and financial institutions, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), to help the most vulnerable countries in Africa, the EU's neighbourhood, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Consistent with the EU's fundamental values, core interests and global strategy, the joint communication underlined the commitment to good governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination, decent work conditions, fundamental values and humanitarian principles. It explicitly underlined that the 'special and extraordinary measures required to contain the pandemic must not lead to backtracking on the fundamental values and principles of our open and democratic societies', and that the EU's action will be fact-based and fight any attempts at disinformation inside and outside the EU. As a global actor and the world's leading international aid donor, the EU put its weight behind a coordinated multilateral response, together with the United Nations (UN), international financial institutions (IFIs), the G7 and the G20.


Global risks threatening EU values and interests

- The pandemic is forecast to spark the worst global recession since WW II; twice as bad as the 2008 crisis.
- 500 million people worldwide risk poverty; inequality is rising.
- As the EU economy is weakening, Beijing is using its economic clout to garner support for its system.
- Human rights and democracy are under threat worldwide.
- Increasing surveillance during the pandemic is boosting digital authoritarianism.
- Global supply chains are suffering protracted disruption.
- The pandemic may amplify conflicts, threatening peace and security in the EU's neighbourhood.
- Rising far-right and religious extremism could challenge democracies from within.
- Increasing (youth) unemployment and socio-economic inequality are adding pressure on groups that are already vulnerable within (conflict-affected) societies.
- US-China tensions, the main axis of global politics, are heightening the pressure on the EU and on other democracies and powers to pick sides.
- Pressure on multilateralism will intensify the need for continental alliances, with both like-minded and challenging partners.
- Cyber-attacks and data fraud are on the rise owing to a shift in working patterns.
- There is a risk of parliaments being sidelined as governments accumulate power.

How EU citizens view the EU's values and global role

As the key 'stakeholders' of democracy are arguably the citizens, protecting democracy starts with protecting their rights, freedoms and future. This corresponds with the 2019 'Parlemeter' survey, where respondents saw human rights worldwide (48 %), freedom of speech (38 %), gender equality (38 %) and solidarity between Member States (33 %) as the main fundamental values to preserve in the EU. 32 % wanted Parliament to address climate change as its first priority.

Before the pandemic, a survey published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) in late 2019 indicated a shift in opinion of the world and the EU's global role, with citizens in favour of a more coherent and effective EU foreign policy in a dangerous, competitive world: 'The public want the EU to be a responsible actor in a dangerous world [and] chart its own course … in a highly competitive, multipolar environment, avoiding fights that are not of its making but standing up to other continent-sized powers and tackling crises that affect its interests. They want EU foreign policy to turn on the logic of Europe's collective interests'.

Both the US and China have seen their reputation in Europe collapse during the pandemic. Over 60 % of respondents in France and Denmark said their views of China had worsened. At the same time, 71 % in Denmark, 70 % in Portugal, 68 % in France, 65 % in Germany and 64 % in Spain said their view of the US had worsened. The ECFR assessed that negative perceptions of the US should be seen as a response to 'a US divided in its response to the present crisis'. A majority of all respondents said they did not want their country to take sides in favour of either the US or China in a conflict between the two.
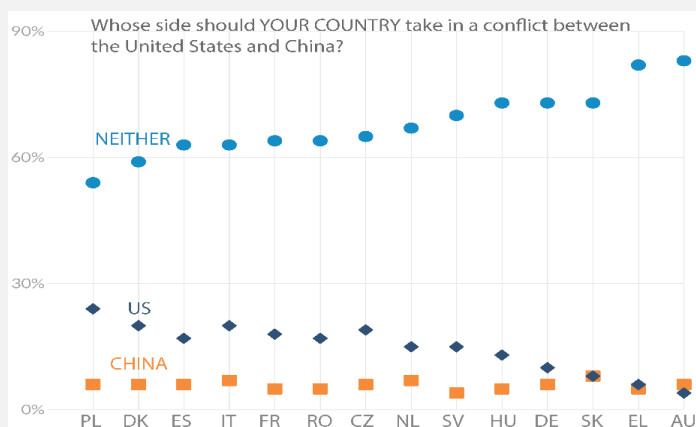
Data source: ECFR.

The development and distribution of an effective and safe vaccine against the coronavirus is at the heart of the EU's coronavirus response. By July 2020, the EU had already raised €15.9 billion in pledges for universal access to affordable coronavirus vaccines, treatments and tests, in line with the UN Secretary General António Guterres' call for any vaccine and treatment to be considered global public goods. Von der Leyen has said explicitly that the EU 'will do all in its power to ensure that all peoples of this world have access to a vaccine, irrespective of where they live'. Moreover, in June 2020 the EU presented a European strategy to speed up the development, manufacturing and deployment of vaccines against coronavirus. The strategy aims to ensure the quality, safety and efficacy of vaccines; swift access to vaccines for Member States' populations while leading the global solidarity effort; and equitable access to an affordable vaccine as early as possible.

European Council strategic agenda for 2019 to 2024

At its 20 June 2019 meeting, the European Council agreed on an agenda for the EU for the next five years. It focuses on four main priorities: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; and **promoting European interests and values on the global stage**. In order to act strategically, boost its capacity to act autonomously to protect its interests, uphold its values and way of life, and help shape the global future, the European Council has agreed to support the UN and key multilateral organisations; promote sustainable development and implementation of the 2030 agenda; cooperate with partner countries on migration; uphold the European perspective for European states able and willing to join the EU; develop a comprehensive partnership with Africa; ensure an ambitious and robust trade policy, within the reformed WTO and at the bilateral level between the EU and its partners; and cooperate closely with NATO. The strategic agenda explicitly underlines the need for the EU to be more 'assertive and effective' in order to defend its interests and values better.

The guiding principles of **Germany's current, six-month Presidency of the Council of the EU** specify that 'In a world of increasing rivalry between major powers, European policy must strengthen Europe's ability to act in the wider world in order to defend European interests and values and to assume our responsibility in the world.' In addition to the commitment to an international order based on rules and human rights, in which the EU plays a role in shaping standards and norms worldwide, Germany wants to boost political dialogue on the rule of law, based on the Commission's new annual rule of law report.

Seizing Europe's moment: The way forward

As reflected in the EU's global response to coronavirus, its external action is steered by over-arching values and objectives. The EU's future path – carved out by actions rather than words – entails a conscious distinction from the ongoing 'great power rivalry', as the Union moves to promote its interests as the fundamental aim of its foreign policy. In July 2020, the HR/VP, Josep Borrell, argued that, 'As we battle the pandemic and its consequences, Europe must protect the openness of our model and the democratic nature of our system' as 'the source of our success. ... we cannot accept that our choice for democracy is derided or undermined'. Emerging and potential responses to the risks listed above, are outlined below, clustered around five inter-related avenues of action.

A Strategic Compass for Europe's future course in the world

The European Council's strategic agenda states that the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and common security and defence policy (CSDP) (its 17 missions and operations making it one of the UN's main peacekeeping partners) must 'be better linked to the other strands of external relations'. In June 2020, anticipating rising global tensions and conflicts on Europe's doorstep, Borrell noted 'increased momentum to strengthen our collective capacity for action' in the preparation of the Strategic Compass. The process towards a common strategic culture will begin with an intelligence-led threat analysis by the end of 2020, with an agreement on the 2021-25 priorities for permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) expected at the same time. A new €8 billion European Peace Facility should boost the credibility of the EU's efforts to 'collectively promote peace and security beyond our borders'. Borrell has also highlighted the urgent need to boost tools to counter hybrid threats – including disinformation and cyber-attacks – that have become more visible during the pandemic. Pressure on Europe's democratic systems has previously prompted Borrell to argue for a new form of globalisation 'striking a balance between the advantages of open markets and interdependence, and between the sovereignty and security of countries'.

The pandemic has sparked reflection on the security dimension of public health and on a number of societal challenges. The EU is recognising public health as an internal and external security issue that highlights the interlinkage of problems, and the multifaceted repercussions of related crises in the EU's neighbourhood, as well as the interdependence of societies and countries in their response. Similarly, recognition of malign information campaigns and conspiracy theories as security issues can help boost political and public awareness and resilience.[2] The Parliament's creation in June 2020 of a new special committee on foreign interference, including disinformation, is an important step towards coordinated action on this front, and could provide impetus for cooperation with parliaments across Europe and the world in this crucial field, reinforcing the EP's role in protecting, promoting and projecting democratic values and sharing good practice, including administrative best practice. Defining the concrete threats to democracy will facilitate cooperation with other democracies (such as the US, Canada, Australia and Japan) to find joint action to be replicated by others.

Many of the risks facing the EU are linked to developments in the EU's neighbouring regions and Africa, where China is an increasingly assertive systemic rival. The socio-economic and security-related repercussions of the pandemic have further highlighted the importance of stability in these regions. A destabilised neighbourhood exacerbates terrorism threats, rekindles conflicts – for example, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan – and challenges stemming from

unregulated flows of migrants. Against this backdrop, a new approach to EU enlargement and the recent EU-Western Balkans summit recalled these countries' European perspective. The growing momentum in EU-Africa relations has been reinvigorated by the pandemic, which has underlined the importance of supply chain diversification and the new opportunities this can bring. Against this backdrop, the sixth EU-African Union summit, to be held in the autumn, provides opportunities not only to focus on the repercussions of the pandemic, but also to further boost ties with African partners in the context of a new joint strategy. With the conclusion of negotiations on the new partnership agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states, 2020 will be crucial for a stronger EU-Africa partnership. The German foreign minister, Heiko Maas, has confirmed that closer political and economic cooperation with African countries, with a focus on peace, security and sustainable development, is a priority for his country's six-month presidency of the Council.

Boosting multilateralism in a multipolar world

The EU's efforts to promote and defend its values in the world through multilateral formats in the areas of trade, climate, security, human rights and development – and by contributing to rules-based multilateral governance in artificial intelligence, cyberspace and space – are part of its very essence. However, this principle has come under increasing pressure in recent years, not only from authoritarian state actors such as Russia and China – who have long challenged the liberal, rules-based order – but also by the US, and this is another trend that has been further accelerated by coronavirus. On 10 July 2020, the HR/VP diagnosed 'a real crisis of multilateralism: the G7 and G20 are absent; the UN Security Council is paralysed, while many "technical" organisations have become arenas where countries compete for influence'. He warned against tensions between respect for science and evidence-based policy-making and the appeal of nationalism and authoritarian politics. Evidence-based multilateral action is key to addressing major global challenges that risk being overshadowed by the acute priorities driven by Covid-19. A case in point is the climate emergency, which requires immediate, sustained action. The first ever European Climate Law, adopted by the Commission in March 2020, commits the EU to achieving climate neutrality by 2050, but requires the rest of the world to join forces if it is to succeed. Similarly, multilateralism is key to coordinating international development aid initiatives aimed at achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030.

In further exploring its avenues towards strategic autonomy, the EU is looking into the potential for multilateral partnerships with allies in Europe and beyond – including Canada, Japan and Australia – as well as other partners in vital areas such as security and defence, health, technology, energy, critical infrastructure and intelligence, including protecting and projecting democracy and securing a safe, secure and sustainable infosphere. In the tech realm, the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), founded by the European Commission and 14 countries, was launched on 9 June 2020. A nexus for international cooperation for the development of AI, GPAI will draw on international experts to evaluate emerging AI technology and advise its member states accordingly. These efforts feed into the EU's overall efforts to achieve strategic autonomy. Boosting European defence cooperation can result in a 'powerful European pillar within NATO', simultaneously strengthening NATO and a strategically autonomous EU. In addition to intensified cooperation within the G7, the G20, the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, the EU should continue to explore avenues for cooperation beyond 'like-minded' (continental) democracies.

With multilateralism at the core of its foreign policy, the EU is playing a lead role in efforts to reform, strengthen and revitalise multilateral institutions. This includes the independent investigation into the WHO's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, as well as work to secure the future financing of the body. In the midst of the pandemic, the WHO and the EU have reinforced their cooperation on universal health coverage to reduce health inequality across the world. The pandemic has demonstrated that 'health is no longer a purely private matter, but a public international good'. By making health a European foreign policy priority, as the EU Institute for Security Studies has

suggested, the EU could promote its human-centric approach in new alliances and cooperation, projecting its values and interests even beyond the circle of 'like-minded' democracies.

Promoting democracy, human rights and rule of law at home and abroad

The EU traditionally plays a prominent role in promoting democracy, human rights and rule of law abroad. But some academics see a third wave of autocratisation eroding democracy, also in Europe, from within. While earlier waves have occurred by sudden, obvious changes – military coups or invasions – the subtle and gradual nature of the third wave, often veiled in legal changes, makes it 'increasingly difficult to pinpoint the end of democracy'. Anu Bradford argues that, as the work to promote human rights and rule of law abroad is eroded by violations of these rights in some Member States, the EU should increasingly use its regulatory power to project the EU's 'power and relevance, at home and abroad', as it 'can more easily be insulated from its internal struggles'.

Before the pandemic, the state of the rule of law – as indicated in the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators – gave cause for concern in 17 EU Member States from 2009 to 2018. This led to the initiation of the Article 7 procedure for protecting EU values, by the Commission against Poland (2017), and by Parliament against Hungary (2018). Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2020 report found that democracy has been in decline for 14 years in a row. This trend has also been fuelled by the pandemic: governments across the world have used emergency powers to curb the spread of the virus, sometimes undermining human rights and democratic processes. In the EU, restrictive measures in response to the pandemic have enabled states to limit freedoms and checks and balances temporarily. Human rights groups warn that authoritarian regimes are using the crisis to silence critics and tighten their political grip, sidelining parliaments to evade oversight. Against this backdrop, the EU has teamed up with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) to launch the Global Monitor of coronavirus's impact on democracy and human rights. The tool draws on expertise from think-tanks, universities and organisations in gathering and sharing information on the situation in 162 countries, including the EU itself.

The need to support democracies both at home and abroad – not least in the EU's neighbourhood – continues to top the EU's and the Parliament's agendas. Unprecedented support for Ukraine, under hybrid attack from Russia, is a case in point, and a good example of cooperation with partners across the world, including democratic state actors, NATO, the OSCE, the UN and international financial institutions. Support for democracy in the Western Balkans seems particularly pertinent. Before the current pandemic, the region had seen over a decade of democratic backsliding, rising support for strongmen and declining support for democracy. Similarly, in Africa, choice of system – one based on individual rights, sustainable development and governments accountable to the people, or an 'alternative' – will shape the continent's future, with potential long-term repercussions for Europe.

Authoritarian technology and science diplomacy, with underlying hard power considerations, pose a threat to democracy and human rights across the world. Use of surveillance technology has accelerated during the pandemic, benefiting not least Chinese surveillance tech companies. Recent media reports on cooperation by Danish researchers with scholars linked to Chinese tech company Hikvision – sanctioned by the US over human rights abuses in the surveillance of minorities – on the development of surveillance algorithms have prompted the creation of a committee to explore security-related and ethical boundaries for research collaboration with foreign partners. In order to avoid situations where Member States inadvertently facilitate digital authoritarianism via research cooperation, the EU could consider setting up a special task force – for example under the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) – to help universities screen foreign cooperation partners.

To preserve its credibility, the EU must practise what it preaches and avoid facilitating the advance of authoritarian forces, even if only passively. An EPRS European Added Value Assessment, feeding into a legislative own-initiative procedure, diagnosed a gap between the proclamation of fundamental rights and values and actual compliance, owing to 'weaknesses in the existing EU legal and policy framework on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights'. This gap weakens the EU's attractiveness and credibility. The Parliament has called repeatedly – most recently in January

2020 – for an EU 'pact' on fundamental rights, to complement existing mechanisms such as the EU Justice Scoreboard, the European Semester for coordination of Member States' economic policies, and the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism for Bulgaria and Romania.

Strategic autonomy: Looking at the world through a European prism

HR/VP Borrell has argued that strategic autonomy is 'a way of framing our choices', looking at the world 'through our own prism' and defending 'our interests, by ourselves if necessary'. However, he admits that the EU needs to 'learn to speak the language of power'. Indeed, coronavirus seems to have rekindled the discussions on how the EU can make its soft power 'smarter' or harder. Borrell has called for the Union to complement its soft power with hard power, warning that the EU can only meet its level of ambition in the face of great power politics by allocating appropriate funding to security and defence. Several inter-related mechanisms, including PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF), have been established in order to help build defence capabilities and allow for greater cost-sharing, but the post-coronavirus recovery might lead to the prioritisation of other policy areas.

In June 2020, the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) suggested that the EU use 'lawfare' (law 'as a substitute for traditional military means') to reach its goals. Based on previous legal battles to defend its autonomy and promote its norms internationally, the author argues that the EU should 'use the law more adroitly to defend its interests and advance its security objective'. One example is the EU's room for shaping standards in the global tech industry, which is largely dominated by the US and China, sparking concern over the tech giants' impact on key sectors of the EU economy – the 5G debacle is the most prominent case in point – hampering Member States' sovereignty regarding copyright, data protection, taxation, transport and e-commerce. As EPRS has noted, coroanvirus has made the EU's data dependency even more visible, as (foreign) data analysis tools may be needed to screen populations, assess infection risks, optimise clinical trials for treatments and find vaccines.

The Commission is working to improve cybersecurity and 5G network security and secure trust, transparency and fairness in the EU's online platform environment, envisioning a safer digital environment in line with EU values and principles, and a framework for trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI) with transparent AI systems that guarantee human oversight. At the same time, there is increasing acknowledgement of the need for the EU to protect itself against foreign state ownership and distortions by big tech companies.[3] The platforms are criticised for paying 'virtually nothing' in taxes in the EU. The efforts by the Commission and some Member States, for example France, are often hampered by a lack of internal solidarity. The Commission has long pressed for harmonised corporate tax regimes and argued that (tech) giants – including Facebook, which has drained the EU ad market for revenues with severe repercussions for our infosphere – should pay taxes. Despite the July 2020 EU General Court annulment of a 2016 ruling saying that Apple had been given illegal tax breaks by Ireland, the EU will continue to push for coordinated tax practices, including through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

In the same way that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has become a global 'gold standard', the EU's Digital Services Act could project the EU's values and norms in the digital sphere far beyond the continent (the 'Brussels effect') as the global vanguard of digital rights. Related to the EU's digital sovereignty, in June 2020 Parliament decided to set up a special committee on artificial intelligence in a digital age to analyse the future impact of AI, defining common medium- and long-term EU objectives and the steps to reach them, drawing on recent Commission communications.[4]

Projecting the prism of European power: Strategic communication

Coronavirus-related information campaigns have increased calls for more targeted and coordinated strategic communication about the EU's role, including in the pandemic, as well as its values and interests. The EU's efforts to strengthen strategic communications have increased since 2015, when the East StratCom Task Force was set up in the European External Action Service (EEAS) to address

the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns. The June 2020 joint communication on tackling Covid-19 disinformation underlines the need to further improve the EU's capacity to 'deliver timely, consistent, coherent and visible messages to external audiences globally, not least the EU's immediate neighbourhood, Africa, Asia and Latin America'. The Commission and the HR/VP will further invest in strategic communication capabilities, in line with the 2018 action plan against disinformation. This feeds into future EU efforts to counter disinformation, including the upcoming evaluation of the code of practice as well as the European democracy action plan.

Strengthening the 'infosphere' to increase collective cognitive resilience

The EU's 'infosphere' is increasingly dominated by asymmetric knowledge and unequal access to information. The knowledge-power nexus is constantly evolving: in authoritarian thinking – including what some call 'the dictatorship of algorithms' – knowledge rests with and is controlled by those in power.[5] In democratic thinking, knowledge is shared to multiply (people's) power to make informed decisions: democracies rely on access to facts for all. Before the pandemic and the accompanying 'infodemic', the EU had already taken on the role as democracies' bellwether, with a code of practice to make key online platforms counter disinformation. This push was further intensified during the infodemic. The code is to be expanded in the Digital Services Act, in line with the recommendations of the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services. With the business models of traditional news media further eroded during the pandemic, while search engines and social media have benefited, there is acute need for democracies across the world to increase the pressure on online platform to pay media companies for the news content they use.

Intensifying information campaigns by foreign actors have underlined the need for shared realities in a European public sphere. Looking more broadly at our collective cognitive resilience, the EU and its Member States could – in addition to efforts to bolster media literacy – work to make citizens more resistant to manipulated information by launching a new collective enlightenment effort to empower citizens of all ages through trustworthy knowledge and verified information. In addition to independent public broadcasters that enjoy high trust among citizens and arguably help boost immunity to foreign information operations, virtuous circles of trusted knowledge allies could build on the nascent network of verified national online encyclopaedias (for example in Croatia, Denmark, Latvia and Norway). Such resources can be used to inject reliable content into the infosphere, and – through EU languages widely spoken in the world – even **project collective cognitive resilience** beyond Europe. This could contribute to a 'return to scientific expertise and evidence-based assessments' amid tentative signs that Covid-19 has increased public trust in science and knowledge in some countries.[6] The EU and Parliament could also boost science and knowledge diplomacy.

Outlook: Leading the sustainable course

In 2018, the then German foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, called the EU a vegetarian 'in a world full of carnivores'. Two years later, as some of the world's strongmen and 'wolf warriors' appear to be caught up in a Cold War II that is undermining the global order and multilateralism, the moment for sustainable, peaceful, empathetic global conduct – or geopolitical 'vegetarianism' perhaps – seems to have arrived. Coronavirus has further highlighted the need for a resilient, responsible, sustainable and fair recovery path without hampering efforts to address the climate emergency; for global collaboration as opposed to deglobalisation; for peace and stability rather than a new Cold War; for defending and promoting human rights rather than preying on them; for shared medical solutions as a global public good as opposed to a race to secure the vaccine for oneself; for evidence-informed policies and reliable information for all rather than mis- and disinformation. As Covid-19 accelerates the 'new world disorder', the EU's need to protect, promote and project its values and interests, for the global common good, is mounting. To prevent the 'European Dream' from turning out to be a mirage, it needs to be anchored firmly in reality and action – and the EU must walk the talk at home.

Potential initiatives

	Project	Likely lead actor	What should be done?	
1	Make the EU a democracy champion, at home and abroad.	All	Reference to EU values in all relevant regulation; Make democratisation a cross-cutting priority in regional development programming; Support for thematic programming on human rights and democracy; Support for civil society organisations (CSOs) in boosting democratic accountability and participation in democracy; Expansion of European Parliament democracy support, including by setting up science media hubs in third countries and boosting election observation and monitoring (see below); EU 'pact' on democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights (DRF); Action to ensure that EU funds do not aid democratic erosion.	
2	Fight foreign interference in unison with democratic allies.	All Member States and democratic allies	The work of Parliament's special committee on foreign interference could be used as the basis for a holistic European approach to countering authoritarianism with a smart democratic toolbox.	
3	Introduce a mechanism to screen universities' foreign cooperation partners.	Commission Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) Democratic allies	Special task force to help universities in Member States screen foreign cooperation partners.	
4	Boost democratic identities and values.	All partner countries, citizens	Regular conferences on the future of Europe with satellite sub-conferences in Member States feeding into a stronger European identity; European democracy festivals, inspired by citizens festivals in the Nordic and Baltic countries; Expansion of the 'European Houses of Culture' pilot project to Member States and third countries.	
5	Defend media freedom and pluralism worldwide.	All, Member States, UN, Council of Europe, OSCE, non-governmental organisations, CSOs	More support for independent journalists and the media industry whose financial strains have been aggravated by Covid-19; Coronavirus plan for the media. Join Australia's efforts to make online platforms pay for news content.	
6	Invest in winning the information contest.	All democratic allies multilateral organisations	Work with like-minded allies to protect the infosphere against manipulation, monetisation and monopolisation. Efforts to secure universal internet governance models, rather than a 'splinternet'; Action to tackle the security dimension of disinformation by including it in the security union strategy.	
7	Improve external strategic communication.	EEAS (lead) Commission Parliament Member States	Further investment in stratcom, increasing cooperation and coordination with Member States. Boost stratcom and public diplomacy capabilities of EU delegations, in cooperation with EU Member States' diplomatic networks, civil society, third countries.	
8	Boost the EU's capacity to detect disinformation.	All EU Member States	Increased budget for the EEAS task forces, with all Member States contributing staff	
9	Improve and expand the code of practice.	Commission	Transparency on the implementation of the code; Expansion of the number of signatories of the code under the Digital Services Act;	

			Legal requirement for platforms to provide access to data for researchers to evaluate signatories responses.	🟨
10	Reinvigorate transatlantic cooperation.	All	Action to counter authoritarianism, foreign interference, hybrid threats, terrorism, and climate change, and protect human rights.	🟨
11	Prioritise health in foreign policy.	All	Greater efforts to strengthen health and the vaccine strategy and work with WHO on universal health coverage to reduce health inequality.	🟩
12	Introduce a global tax framework for tech giants .	Commission Member States democratic allies OECD	Agreement on taxation of multinational technology companies.	🟨
13	Build collective cognitive resilience through shared realities, access to verified knowledge.	All, Member States, public service broadcasters, universities, House of European History	Support for the creation, updating and networks of verified national online encyclopaedias; Stable funding for and independence of public service broadcasters creating shared realities within and beyond the EU; Measures to boost knowledge/science in European identity	🟨
14	Secure a resilient digital transition, including cyber security.	Commission	Proposed digital Europe programme (including €1.8 billion for cybersecurity)	🟨
15	Expand activities of the European Digital Media Observatory to third countries.	EEAS European Parliament OSCE/ODIHR	Parliament could lead the push for hubs to be established in third countries to align monitoring and research of mis- and disinformation across the world, feeding into election observation efforts	🟥
16	Increase cooperation with third countries and international partners.	Commission/EEAS, G7, NATO, D10, OSCE, Council of Europe	Stronger partnerships on issues of mutual interest (including countering disinformation and foreign interference); extend cooperation to international/regional organisations and alliances; Join Paris call for trust and security in cyberspace.	🟨
17	Protect critical European assets and technology	EEAS Commission Member States	Maximum use of the Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation; remaining Member States to set up screening mechanisms (building on the Commission's March 2020 guidelines and June 2020 white paper on an instrument addressing the distortive effect of foreign subsidies).	🟨
18	Build a European strategic culture.	All Member States SIAC	Definition of the strategic threat landscape to be able to react, respond and adapt more swiftly and flexibly; Expansion of cooperation on sharing defence intelligence; Increased use of foresight to update, expand and adapt the EU's global role beyond 2030.	🟨
19	Make collective security and defence a top priority for the Union.	EEAS Commission EUCO Member States NATO	Strategic Compass, addressing crisis management, capability tools, partnerships, protection, resilience; Threat analysis by the end of 2020 to pave the way for a coherent strategic approach and guidance.	🟨
20	Strengthen EU security and defence.	EEAS Commission Member States NATO	Collective response to external conflicts and crises; Support for partners to protect their own populations; Protection of the Union and its citizens.	🟨
21	Enhance Europe's resilience and strategic autonomy.	Commission Member States	Development of European defence industrial and technological base to reduce dependencies on external suppliers, using the European Defence Industrial Development Programme under the EDF.	🟨

22	Reinforce global partnerships as a cornerstone of EU security and defence.	Commission Member States NATO UN	A stronger transatlantic alliance, further developing the partnership with the United Nations, as a concrete demonstration of EU's commitment to a rules-based international order.	
23	Take on more responsibility as a global security provider.	EEAS Commission	European Peace Facility; off-budget fund to build peace and strengthen international security.	
24	Lead efforts to reform, strengthen and revitalise multilateral institutions.	All Member States partner countries civil society	Investigation into the WHO's handling of Covid-19; Action to secure the future financing of the WHO. A permanent seat in the UN Security Council and a single seat in IMF; A strong European pillar within NATO.	

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ENDNOTES

[1] As noted by Carnegie Europe, the use of the term 'geo-political' by EU politicians usually implies 'an approach to foreign policy focused on the distribution of military and economic power and the resulting power dynamics'.

[2] Conspiracy theories alleging a link between 5G technology and coronavirus have already exemplified the links between false information and security. In 2019, the FBI identified conspiracy theories as a significant new terrorism threat.

[3] A UK report found that Google, Amazon and Facebook made 299 acquisitions between 2008 and 2018. The OECD deemed a large part of those 'killer acquisitions' aiming to eliminate competition.

[4] Shaping Europe's digital future; A European Strategy for Data; White paper on artificial intelligence; Report on the safety and liability implications of artificial intelligence, the internet of things and robotics.

[5] For surveillance capitalism, as Shoshana Zuboff calls it, knowledge is 'instrumentarian power'; controlling access to data and monetising the public debate, not only shaping people's ability to form opinions, but even modifying their behaviour.

[6] These surveys are not conclusive. A poll published by the ECFR in June 2020 indicated that a majority of citizens in most of the nine Member States surveyed do not trust experts or authorities (this varies greatly from country to country).

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