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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P9\_TA(2020)0322**

#### **Foreign policy consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak**

##### **European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2020 on the foreign policy consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak (2020/2111(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 8 April 2020 on the Global EU response to COVID-19 (JOIN(2020)0011),
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 April 2020 on providing Macro-Financial Assistance to enlargement and neighbourhood partners in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (COM(2020)0163),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery, Commission contribution ahead of the EU-Western Balkans leaders’ meeting on 6 May 2020’ (COM(2020)0315),
- having regard to the Declaration by the High Representative Josep Borrell, on behalf of the European Union, on human rights in the times of the coronavirus pandemic of 5 May 2020,
- having regard to the UN Security Council resolution 2532 (2020) on cessation of hostilities in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and supporting the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres,
- having regard to the call by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to re-evaluate the impact of broad economic sanctions regimes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,
- having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 10 June 2020 entitled ‘Tackling COVID-19 disinformation – Getting the facts right’ (JOIN(2020)0008),

- having regard to the European External Action Service (EEAS) Special Report Update: short assessment of narratives and disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic of 1 April 2020 and 20 May 2020,
- having regard to the State of the Union address delivered by the President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen on 16 September 2020,
- having regard to the Commission guidelines of 25 March 2020 on protecting critical European assets and technology in the current crisis,
- having regard to the Commission consultation note of 16 June 2020 entitled ‘A renewed trade policy for a stronger Europe’,
- having regard to Council conclusions on ‘Team Europe’ Global Response to COVID-19 of 8 June 2020,
- having regard to European Council conclusions on the recovery plan and multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027 of 17-21 July 2020,
- having regard to the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy of 28 June 2016,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 13 July 2020 on the EU priorities at the UN and the 75th UN General Assembly, under the theme ‘Championing multilateralism and a strong and effective UN that delivers for all’,
- having regard to the Declaration of 30 March 2020 by the Co-Presidents of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) on the COVID-19 pandemic,
- having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2020 on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015, and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),
- having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2018 with recommendations to the Commission on Humanitarian Visas<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the EU guidelines of 8 December 2008 on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them,
- having regard to the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters,
- having regard to the annual reports from the Council to the European Parliament on the common foreign and security policy,
- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2020)0054.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 11.

- having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0204/2020),
- A. whereas COVID-19 has caused a global pandemic which is affecting millions of human lives, giving rise to an unprecedented global health, economic, social and humanitarian crisis, triggering systemic tensions of global governance with far-reaching and long-term consequences for international relations, which affect key aspects of EU foreign policy and security and defence, both within and outside the European Union; whereas the EU has been the target of disinformation, cyber-attacks and other malign third-party interference aimed at destabilising the EU institutions and the Member States;
- B. whereas the pandemic disproportionately affects the most vulnerable countries, and whereas some countries worldwide have not reacted and have not taken swift and adequate security measures to curb the epidemic; whereas the Chinese Government downplayed the initial COVID-19 outbreak; whereas narratives stressing geography rather than medical terminology to refer to COVID-19 are stigmatising; whereas the virus has killed around a million people globally and demonstrated that only through coordination and solidarity between countries can it be controlled and mitigated;
- C. whereas the EU has a responsibility to act as a global player and adjust its priorities and policy, including foreign policy, in line with the changing geopolitical situation in the world and the global fight against COVID-19; whereas the EU has to lead in a predictable manner and by respecting its commitment to fundamental freedoms and the rule of law as part of multilateral and international efforts, and in accordance with its position in the global economy; whereas the COVID-19 crisis has once again highlighted the need to strengthen multilateralism and the rules-based order to better address global challenges;
- D. whereas the pandemic and its economic and social effects can further contribute to political grievances deriving from perceived inequality and marginalisation; whereas the global economic decline has had a particularly severe impact on the most vulnerable economies; whereas the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated the persistent problem of medicine shortages worldwide, with acute consequences in developing countries;
- E. whereas the pandemic has aggravated the critical humanitarian situation of vulnerable people, notably in conflict zones, refugee camps and fragile states, and among indigenous communities; whereas the EU has echoed the UN's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire and to ease sanctions in the light of the pandemic so as to ensure that essential equipment and supplies needed to fight the coronavirus are delivered; whereas we are consequently witnessing a decline in global liberties and democracy, which is putting further strains on a multilateral order already in crisis;
- F. whereas women around the world in violent relationships were forced to remain at home, where they were exposed to their abuser for longer periods of time; whereas while domestic violence helplines and shelters across the world are reporting rising calls for help, in a number of countries, reports of domestic violence and emergency calls have surged upwards of 25 % since social distancing measures were enacted;
- 1. Affirms that the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is a game changer in the international environment, a risk multiplier and a catalyst of change in the global order; stresses the fundamental importance of strengthening the EU's internal resilience, developing new partnerships and strengthening its multilateralist vision on a global

scale, with an assertive and coordinated foreign policy response;

2. Welcomes the Team Europe and Coronavirus Global Response support initiatives, which are helping partner countries to tackle the impact of the coronavirus on cross-border coordination; welcomes the EU's coordination with the G7, G20, UN, World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme and other international partners, which serve to foster a coherent and inclusive global response to the pandemic, to mitigate the wider impact on societies and economies, and to help reduce the risk of destabilisation;
3. Regrets the lack of global leadership and a coordinated international response during the initial phases of the COVID-19 crisis; condemns the withholding of critical information; rejects the pursuit of isolationist solutions; strongly objects to the rise of authoritarian nationalism, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and the promotion of false narratives which foment distrust and undermine democratic societies and international cooperation and raise questions about the EU's role in the world; underlines that global cooperation, an inclusive global approach and coordination are essential to tackle the global health crisis and other global threats effectively;
4. Underlines that notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic, EU partner countries should not deviate from the path of reforms during the legislative process, should take the fight against corruption seriously and should commit themselves to abiding by and implementing fundamental human and minority rights in line with their international obligations and commitments;
5. Deplores the fact that a number of governments and political leaders across the globe are using the crisis as an opportunity to furnish themselves with excessive powers and pursue their own political agendas by limiting human rights, undermining democratic standards, weakening the rule of law, diminishing the role of parliaments, limiting media freedom, inciting campaigns of hatred against minority groups, launching disinformation campaigns that target pro-EU reforms and values, and harming international cooperation; insists that any state of emergency must contain a termination clause; is concerned that the rallies protesting against coronavirus restrictions which are taking place in various cities around the world are often infiltrated and manipulated by extremist groups, with demonstrators calling the virus a hoax;
6. Deplores the fact that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated global socio-economic inequalities and disproportionately affect the poorest and persons in the most disadvantaged, marginalised and unprotected social categories, including migrants; condemns all forms of exclusion and discrimination against those infected with COVID-19 and calls on third countries and the EU Member States to mitigate the social effects of the pandemic;
7. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) to review the 2016 Global Strategy in the light of the global impact of the crisis, reflecting these geopolitical shifts, to ensure more strategic EU action and that the EU plays its part in defending, promoting and developing the rules-based multilateral world order that has been created since the Second World War, and to include democracy support and protection of human rights as a Team Europe priority, involving the European Parliament in this task through its existing democracy and rule of law support tools and mechanisms;

### ***A changed geopolitical balance after COVID-19***

8. Notes with concern that geopolitical competition and tensions have accelerated following the COVID-19 outbreak, and recognises that the European Union still has to position itself in this new geopolitical environment; agrees that the post COVID-19 world will look fundamentally different and will have far-reaching consequences for EU external policy, and believes that COVID-19 has confirmed the need for a stronger and more effective EU foreign and security policy;
9. Insists that the transatlantic partnership should be reinvigorated in order to fight more effectively against the pandemic and other major international challenges such as climate change; acknowledges the need to find a new basis for cooperation between the EU and the US, emphasising mutual respect and a joint agenda upholding multilateralism, international justice, the rule of law and human rights against nationalistic, authoritarian and hegemonic ambitions;
10. Considers that in this changing context, the EU must step up and lead by example, championing multilateral solutions, working with international organisations, notably the UN and its agencies, the WHO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and international regional organisations, such as NATO, seeking stronger cooperation with like-minded countries, including from the southern hemisphere, promoting collaboration between democratic regimes and strengthening democratic values; recalls that the pandemic has emphasised the need to work together to find common solutions to problems that concern all humankind;

### ***United States***

11. Is concerned about the lack of cooperation by the United States Government, its reluctance to take a leading role in response to COVID-19 and the lack of participation in joint initiatives on vaccines; believes that the alternative facts and false information denying the severity of the pandemic have been very misleading in the joint fight against the virus; calls for both the EU and the US to strengthen cooperation and solidarity on the basis of a science-oriented approach in the common fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, including the timely exchange of information, research and development of the vaccine and strategic medical equipment, as well as to tackle other global challenges together;
12. Encourages the authorities to incorporate good practices from the Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which also contains guidelines for organising elections during the pandemic period;
13. Recalls that transatlantic cooperation remains an essential pillar of EU foreign policy and that it is paramount for the mutual security and trade interests of the EU and the US; expresses continued support for the transatlantic alliance and closer strategic transatlantic cooperation; regrets the unilateral measures taken during the COVID-19 crises such as travel restrictions from the EU Schengen area to the US without prior consultation with the EU;
14. Regrets the decline of US engagement globally and the decision of the US Government to withdraw funding from the World Health Organization (WHO) and to pull out of the Open Skies Treaty, and the general tendency of the current US administration to stand

aloof from multiple multilateral organisations that were created to establish a rules-based liberal world order, or for it to undermine them (such as in the case of the International Criminal Court);

15. Stresses the need to consolidate and enhance cooperation between the EU and the US, based on mutual respect and a joint agenda to defend multilateralism, international law, shared democratic values, the rule of law and human rights; notes that, in a world marked by competition between the great powers, the European Union and the United States share common values linked to the existing international structures and remain indispensable partners in the current volatile international environment;

### ***China***

16. Notes the strengthening of the People's Republic of China's assertive public diplomacy worldwide following the COVID-19 outbreak, seeking to fill the political vacuum in the multilateral system left by a more isolationist US and trying to position itself as the dominant global player with an alternative governance model; is concerned about the PRC's efforts to achieve stronger power projection in the region, resulting in border disputes with many of its neighbours and its promotion of national strategic interests through multilateral organisations; is concerned about the possible shift of power in global politics related to the change in China's leadership; objects to the fact that the Chinese Government used the momentum of the pandemic's outbreak to impose the national security law and crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, to increase the threats against Taiwan and to increase its activities in Tibet and the South China Sea, as well as the brutal persecution of Uyghurs in Xinyang and condemns the repeated attacks and pressure by Chinese representatives on Member States' governments and democratically elected politicians in the EU, such as the Czech Senate's President and Sweden's Minister for Culture;
17. Notes that after the outbreak of COVID-19, China provided emergency contributions to fight the virus and regrets that some were faulty or of inferior quality; also recognises, however, geopolitically and geo-economically motivated efforts bolstered by 'virus and wolf warrior diplomacy' disinformation campaigns and aggressive propaganda; condemns the attempts by China to use this 'virus diplomacy' against the EU with the ambition of shaping its global image as a benevolent power; regrets China's isolation of Taiwan in the WHO; calls on the Member States to advocate Taiwan's membership as an observer in the WHO/WHA and other international organisations, in view of its effective handling of the virus domestically, and without it being able to contribute with its expertise to the international response to the current health crisis; praises the aid provided by the Taiwanese authorities;
18. Is concerned about a number of mistakes and a lack of transparency related to the initial Chinese reaction to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, involving covering-up the magnitude of the problem, attempts to manipulate and withhold information, poor communication with the WHO, censorship, the suppression, threatening, persecution and forced disappearance of whistle-blowers, human rights activists and citizen journalists, and creating doubts about the official death toll of COVID-19 victims, all of which had a damaging impact on the EU's ability to anticipate, prepare for and face the COVID-19 crisis, and has cost lives; therefore urges the Chinese Government to fully cooperate with an independent international investigation into the origins of COVID-19, and calls on the Member States to develop

a comprehensive approach towards a rising China and to protect the EU's strategic autonomy;

19. Calls for a European response to China's intensified expansion towards the most exposed Member States and the EU's neighbours; points out that the current rush to contain the economic fallout of the pandemic will be an opportunity for Chinese strategic investments in key sectors such as telecommunications, transport and technology;
20. Is concerned about the potential 'debt trap' that might affect African countries as a result of COVID-19, as well as increasing political and economic dependencies of third countries on China, since the economic downturn will make it difficult for them to reimburse Chinese loans that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative; urges the EU and its Member States to promote the search for viable solutions regarding debt relief for third countries within international forums; calls for the EU and its Member States to ensure that humanitarian exemptions from sanctions have an immediate and practical effect in terms of the swift delivery of medical equipment, supplies and other forms of assistance to the countries affected;
21. Calls on the VP/HR to recognise these concerns, review EU-China relations and simultaneously create an atmosphere of dialogue, engagement and genuine cooperation and competition based on a new, coherent and more assertive strategy adapted to the changed geopolitical and geo-economic landscape and long-term strategy towards China, in which the EU and the Member States cooperate where possible, compete where needed and confront where necessary to defend European values and interests; is of the view that, as part of this new strategy, the EU should seek closer collaboration with like-minded countries in the region and other democracies, including India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea, and work towards a European strategy for the Indo-Pacific, for which the EU connectivity strategy should be used to the fullest extent;

### ***India***

22. Notes with concern that, in parallel with the upsurge of the COVID-19 outbreak in India, where more than 90 000 deaths have been reported so far, political repression against human rights defenders and individual freedoms is continuing against the backdrop of community-based tensions, and considers it essential that this issue be put on the agenda of the next EU-India High-Level Dialogue;
23. Stresses the importance of the EU-India Strategic Partnership, the need to promote it and to work together on stability and security, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific;

### ***Russia***

24. Expresses the utmost concern over the systematic attempts of the Russian Federation to undermine EU unity and its crisis response, create mistrust between the EU and Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries by the intensification of disinformation campaigns since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and cyber-attacks against research organisations, as well as the politicisation of humanitarian assistance; commends the EEAS and the StratCom East department on their efforts to

identify and suppress disinformation campaigns by Russian-related media outlets in several Member States and calls on the Commission to increase its efforts and funding dedicated to combating Russian fake news;

25. Recognises the clear geopolitical and geo-economic dimension of what was offered by Russia, bolstered by ‘virus diplomacy’ and a battle of narratives; notes with concern that Russia is taking certain assertive steps in the international arena with the aim of promoting its own geopolitical agenda; calls for the EU not to dismiss this and to keep on the agenda the conflicts in which Russia has an interest, such as those with Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Crimea, Syria and Libya;
26. Expresses deep concern about Russian attempts to use the pandemic to further diminish the human rights space in the country, support authoritarian regimes and continue its aggressive foreign policy; highlights that we must not allow countries like Russia to use the crisis to distract from their own significant domestic problems; is concerned about the Constitutional Referendum, in which the Russian President used the current crisis to enact crucial constitutional amendments that prolong and bolster his authoritarian rule in Russia;
27. Condemns the attempt on Alexei Navalny’s life and calls for an independent and transparent investigation into Mr Navalny’s poisoning without any delay;
28. Calls on Russia to meaningfully contribute to a global response to the crisis, in good faith and as part of the international rules-based order; is concerned about the effectiveness and safety of the new Russian vaccine now in use; recalls that the quality of medical products delivered by Russia in some cases was very low and hence ineffective;

***A more assertive EU foreign policy to defend Europe’s interests, its values and the multilateral world order***

29. Recognises the global security, socio-economic, environmental and political risks that could be caused by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and is worried about the fact that global powers such as China and Russia are prepared to skilfully use the crisis to unravel the rules-based world order underpinned by multilateral organisations;
30. Stresses that the multilateral rules-based world order is vital for global peace, the rule of law and democracy; believes that a geopolitical EU, together with like-minded partners, must play a firmer role in defending and rebuilding it; believes that the EU must seek ways to de-escalate tensions between powers, in particular when these tensions hinder multilateral action; notes that the COVID-19 crisis has shown both the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation, particularly in global health governance, and the need to reform international institutions; calls on the EU Member States and the VP/HR to draft an ‘EU road map on multilateralism’ to promote and initiate structural reforms in multilateral organisations;
31. Calls for the possibility of creating a new forum for multilateral cooperation among Western allies, i.e. the EU, the US, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, to be explored, drawing on the legacy of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Strategic Export Controls; requests that the remit of a new committee should cover the monitoring and control of the export of technologies, trade flows and



sensitive investments to countries of concern;

32. Notes that EU geopolitical ambitions need to be underpinned by adequate budgetary allocations through the upcoming multilateral financial framework (MFF) and regrets that the European Council has proposed cuts to the budget lines for external policy instruments; calls for the EU's budget for external action in the MFF 2021-2027 to be strengthened and sufficient so as to ensure that the EU has the necessary resources to address the challenges in its neighbourhood, the geopolitical consequences of COVID-19 and that it can live up to its ambition to become a responsible geopolitical actor;
33. Stresses that only a strong and more united EU possessing open strategic autonomy and backed up by sufficient and credible military capacities, as well as tools and mechanisms to support partners, will be able to play a strong role in the new geopolitical environment and conduct a strong foreign policy, and believes that Member States should give the VP/HR a stronger, well-defined mandate in speaking on behalf of the EU, for example by establishing a European seat in multilateral organs; welcomes President Charles Michel's conclusion that 'it is of the utmost importance to increase the strategic autonomy of the Union';
34. Believes that the end of the unanimity rule in certain foreign policy areas would help the EU to conduct a foreign policy that is more effective, more proactive and better suited to responding swiftly to emergencies; calls on the Council or the European Council to follow the Commission and Parliament's call to move to qualified majority voting, at least on human rights or sanctions, by activating the *passerelle* clause; stresses that the EU's leverage is greatest when the Member States act in unison;
35. Underlines the important role of the armed forces during the COVID-19 pandemic; welcomes military assistance to civil support operations, in particular through the deployment of field hospitals, patient transport and equipment delivery and distribution, and believes that a more in-depth joint operation and coordination of Member States' armed forces within existing frameworks – such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) project and the European Medical Command – or within new frameworks – such as military hospital trains – could lead to greater efficiency and contribute to the EU's preparedness to fight pandemics; recognises the need for military personnel to be sufficiently trained, prepared and equipped to deal with these kinds of essential tasks in support of their fellow citizens;
36. Recognises the need to review the EU's security and defence strategies to develop strategic autonomy, including in the health sector, to become better prepared and more resilient to the new and hybrid threats and technologies that have made the nature of warfare less conventional and challenge the traditional role of the military, as well as for a future in which Russia and China are becoming more assertive; underlines the need for military mobility to be strengthened in order to help Member States to act faster and more effectively in the context of a future possible conflict; stresses that the future Strategic Compass for security and defence should reflect these developments, take into account the broader geopolitical implications of COVID-19 and address the full spectrum of threats such as a new pandemic, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats and foreign interference, including disinformation or cyber-attacks; believes that, given the new political balance and a potential worsening of the international security environment following COVID-19, the EU defence budgets in general, and the military mobility budget in particular, must not be cut;

37. Supports the need for continuing and strengthening cooperation and, where needed, coordination between the EU and NATO, including the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) or NATO's Centre for Excellence for Military Medicine, as well as to counter COVID-19-related disinformation and cyber-attacks; calls for strong coordination with and support from the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and for cooperation on the planning and development of military capabilities;
38. Calls for a new institutional approach to strategic communication in order to tackle the challenges and risks facing Western liberal democracies, as well as for the expansion and modernisation of EU communication strategies so that EU values and actions are sufficiently visible both within and beyond the EU, especially in neighbouring areas; urges the EEAS to further strengthen its capacities to counter malicious foreign interference and disinformation, hybrid warfare, propaganda and espionage, including the creation of dedicated StratCom Task Forces focused on the activities emanating from (a) China, and (b) the Middle East, including Iran, and imposing costs on countries and non-state actors that deliberately spread disinformation to divide and harm the EU and its Member States; reaffirms its dedication to developing legislative and non-legislative coordinated frameworks and improving coordination efforts and information sharing among the Member States at EU level to counteract disinformation;
39. Welcomes the work of EUvsDisinfo and the role played by civil society, grassroots organisations, independent journalists and media organisations in the fight against disinformation; underlines the importance of a principled EU stance on fighting disinformation linked to the spread of the COVID-19 virus and cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure; calls on social media platforms to act proactively and adopt measures that prevent the spread of disinformation and hate speech regarding the COVID-19 virus, and the need for them to invest in the fight against cyber-crimes and to raise awareness of this increasing threat;
40. Stresses that its biggest global consumer market of almost 500 million people gives the EU significant leverage on the world stage, and believes that a geopolitical Commission should use this leverage, including through its trade policy, to defend the EU's interests when other countries are not prepared to comply with human rights, the rule of law or international treaties;
41. Notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the need to reduce the EU's dependency on third countries in certain strategic and existential sectors such as health and strongly supports the diversification and relocation of its most critical supply chains; points out that COVID-19 has revealed the vulnerabilities of interconnectedness and interdependence and led to growing protectionism; underlines, therefore, the importance of striking the right balance between improving the resilience of our value chains to achieve strategic autonomy, strengthening the EU's global competitiveness and maintaining trade relations which are as open as possible;
42. Recalls its urgent request for a strong global sanctions regime to address serious human rights violations before the end of 2020, which would be the EU equivalent of the so-called Magnitsky Act; stresses that it should include acts of high-level corruption as a criterion for sanctions; welcomes the announcement by President von der Leyen that the Commission will soon come forward with a proposal and calls on the European Council to adopt the global EU human rights sanctions mechanism as a decision relating to the

Union's strategic interests and objectives under Article 22(1) of the TEU;

43. Is deeply concerned at the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and refugees; urges governments, in their foreign policies, to engage in responses based on respect for human rights and dignity, and solutions to address migrants' and refugees' vulnerability and their need for protection, in line with the principles of solidarity and partnership, and allowing for adequate and accessible legal pathways for migration; stresses the importance of upholding the right to asylum worldwide;
44. Calls on the EU to engage in a global campaign to promote the UN recommendations on reducing prison populations by implementing schemes of early, provisional or temporary release of low-risk offenders; urges, in particular, that all persons detained for expressing critical or dissenting views or for their human rights activities be released and advocates reducing the use of immigration detention and closed refugee camps;
45. Recognises the decisive role women have played in coping with the COVID-19 crisis and the gendered impact of the pandemic; remains deeply concerned by the unprecedented toll the COVID-19 crisis has taken on gender equality advances worldwide in terms of the unequal division of both domestic and public care work, with women making up around 70 % of the global health workforce and calls for the needs of women and marginalised groups to be taken into account in a global response to the pandemic, as they are still rarely represented at the negotiating tables where crisis responses are laid out;
46. Is convinced that a human rights-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes the most effective, inclusive and sustainable approach to manage the current crisis; recalls that third countries' response to the COVID-19 crisis must not violate human rights or international law, must be limited to strictly necessary, proportionate measures and be both subject to regular scrutiny and time-bound; calls on EU delegations to closely monitor the global human rights situation, identify trends and support international, regional and local organisations, citizens and civil society in their efforts to reverse the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on human rights worldwide, and calls on the Commission to ensure that the consequences of COVID-19 do not undermine the implementation of the EU values and commitments on human rights already established in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024;
47. Underlines the strategic importance of EU leadership and support in its neighbourhood, both in the East, the South and in the Arctic region, by helping its neighbours in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic; calls for increased support for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and reforms in the neighbourhood;
48. Stresses that the EU must give Western Balkan countries that are not yet part of the EU a fair chance to join the EU and that the EU must consolidate its efforts to invest in the region; stresses that the EU enlargement process and the EU's focus on supporting the reform processes in the Western Balkans is continuing despite the ongoing pandemic; commends the Commission's financial assistance initiative and the inclusion in the EU joint procurement of medical equipment to support the Western Balkans in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic; calls for the inclusion of all Western Balkan countries in the EU Solidarity Fund and reiterates that aid to our partners must be accompanied by a

robust communication campaign;

49. Stresses that the COVID-19 crisis could destabilise countries in Africa which often have a fragile health infrastructure and high debts, acting as a ‘conflict multiplier’; calls for EU-Africa cooperation to be strengthened and more effectively coordinated, for private investment to be expanded, financial assistance and recovery plans to be fostered and for an alternative to Chinese investments to be provided; calls for the EU to continue an enhanced dialogue leading up to the holding of the EU-Africa Summit and working to build Africa up into a long-term, reliable and close partner of the EU;
50. Underlines that sanctions should not impede a comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic; stresses in the specific case of Iran that the scope of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) needs to be broadened and that this mechanism should be used to enhance our humanitarian response;
51. Highlights that the EU’s partners in the Sahel-Saharan and Horn of Africa regions are facing the unprecedented consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to their ongoing struggle against armed terrorist groups, including jihadists;
52. Considers that relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean are of strategic and crucial interest; stresses that Latin America has been one of the regions hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic; calls on the Commission to keep engaging with Latin American countries, establish enhanced cooperation to tackle COVID-19, help with the recovery plans and support these countries politically with a view to preventing their excessive dependence on aid from other geopolitical players; calls for the European Union and its Member States to implement Agenda 2030 and the SDGs as a roadmap for the recovery;
53. Notes that the current COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the existing common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions, in particular on EU training missions in places such as Mali, Somalia or the Central African Republic; recalls that a European presence and credible commitment is crucial in mitigating the humanitarian and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; calls for the CSDP missions tasked with conflict prevention or mitigation to be strengthened, notably those in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood, to help stabilise already fragile settings and prevent a relapse in conflicts and violence due to additional tensions caused by COVID-19; calls on the Member States to make more civilian and military personnel available for such missions and operations, and further calls in this regard for a swift adoption of the European Peace Facility; urges the EEAS to work on the resilience and sustainability of CSDP missions and operations during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic; insists on the importance of maintaining the continuity of CSDP missions and operations in such contexts; calls for a full review of the impact of COVID-19 on the preparedness, readiness, force generation, the safety of personnel and the continuity of CSDP operations and missions;
54. Calls on the EEAS, the Commission and the Member States to integrate gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and an intersectional perspective, including equal and diverse representation, into the EU’s foreign and security policy, and to acknowledge the diverse experiences of women and other marginalised groups on whom this pandemic has had detrimental effects;

55. Strongly believes that climate change cooperation could serve as the foundation for building broader global cooperation in response to COVID-19, bolstering the multilateral system and rebuilding faith in the need for a rules-based system;
56. Is of the opinion that the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted certain weaknesses of our Union and has shown the urgent need for an effective, efficient and autonomous Union, both internally and on the world stage, with mechanisms for preventing and combating crises, including with financial instruments; believes that the Conference on the Future of Europe will provide a good platform to move forward in constructing more efficient decision making in EU external policies; is therefore determined to start the Conference as soon as possible;
57. Notes the impact that COVID-19 has had on more vulnerable regions, including conflict regions and least developed countries; urges the VP/HR to push for local and regional ceasefires and truce agreements and support the initiative of the UNSG António Guterres for a global ceasefire; recalls the need to comply with the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality in the delivery of aid, including in response to COVID-19-related needs; calls for the EU to defend humanitarian access to remote conflict zones, promoting humanitarian corridors and underlines that any external action in conflict-affected countries needs to be based on a conflict-sensitive risk and vulnerability assessment, including the perspectives of women and with a special focus on peacebuilding;
58. Welcomes the EU's rejection of vaccine nationalism; reiterates that the EU has a leading role to play in facilitating access to vaccines in an equitable manner for all people across the world; calls on the Commission to work with its international partners to ensure that no one will be left behind once a vaccine has been made available;

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59. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Member States.