



EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
SECURITY POLICY

Brussels, 17.2.2021
JOIN(2021) 3 final

**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE
COUNCIL**

on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism

I. Introduction

Our world is in a period of **transition**, marked by major geopolitical and economic power shifts. Emerging players are creating new dynamics. Relations between major powers are increasingly confrontational and unilateralist. **Competing visions and agendas** on the global order are at play, which challenge established multilateral rules and organisations. Yet growing global challenges call for **more multilateral governance and rules-based international cooperation**.

Current geopolitical rivalries have a negative impact on efforts to promote peace and prevent conflict: they hamper humanitarian responses, undermine trust and complicate the provision of global public goods. Basic principles of international law, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are being challenged. Existing institutions upholding such values are all too often bypassed or misused for narrow national or ideological interests. Strong non-state actors, including digital platforms and multinationals, have become shapers of international norms outside established channels. Citizens feel increasingly disconnected from all levels of governance. The result is a **more unpredictable and unequal** world.

The COVID-19 crisis nevertheless exemplifies the need for multilateral solutions: a major global threat, it has created much-needed momentum for a coordinated, global crisis response. Throughout 2020, international fora and organisations led the global response and delivered tangible results, such as the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) and its COVAX facility or the G20 Action Plan to respond to the pandemic¹.

By its very nature, multilateralism is subject to continuous adaptation. It is a complex system, but **delivers tangible benefits** for all. Important and lasting achievements include the international human rights and international humanitarian law instruments, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the rules that govern international trade and investment. The decision of the new US administration to rejoin the Paris Agreement and remain in the World Health Organisation are welcome steps that will provide positive momentum overall for the achievement of ambitious multilateral objectives over the next years.

This **multipolar world** is a major and urgent challenge that the EU can face successfully, on two conditions. The EU needs to become more assertive in the light of the more transactional nature of the global system and build and reinforce coalitions of like-minded partners on key priorities. Multilateralism has been and will remain the cardinal principle of the EU as the most effective means to govern global relations in a mutually beneficial way. But we cannot be multilateralists alone nor only for the sake of it. Multilateralism must be effective, fair and deliver results that serve both EU and global interests and values. This means the EU must be firm on its principles, and agile in its conduct.

This Joint Communication therefore:

- defines more clearly **what the EU wants** for and from the multilateral system,
- sets out **how the EU can achieve what it wants** by reinforcing the system and its ability to deliver, and

¹ Out of the €15.9 billion raised btw 4 and 28 May 2020 in the EU-led Coronavirus Global Response, €11.9 billion were pledged by Member States, the Commission and the European Investment Bank. The EU budget has contributed with €1.4 billion to the (ACT) Accelerator. The EU and its Member States contributed €853million to COVAX.

- shows **what the EU can do** to leverage its strength more effectively.

What the EU wants: The EU wants to promote global peace and security and defend the fundamental rights, universal values and international law that form the bedrock of cooperative relations between countries and peoples. It will remain at the forefront of the response to the existential climate and biodiversity crises that threaten humanity, and this too will guide our approach to the multilateral system. The EU intends to push forward cooperative solutions to “build back better” – strengthening the global recovery, tackling inequalities, promoting sustainable development and public health, the digital and green transitions including clean energy transition, defending human rights and the rule of law. These efforts go hand-in-hand with a **more interests-based approach**.

How the EU can achieve it: the multilateral order needs to be reinvigorated to make it fit for purpose so that it can cope with the global challenges and geopolitics of the 21st century. To remain legitimate, it must respond to the growing demands of citizens in terms of transparency, quality, inclusiveness and delivery. The EU and its Member States are and will remain firm supporters of the rules-based international order with the UN at its core. However, the world no longer resembles what it was when the UN was set up 75 years ago. The process initiated at the “UN at 75” Summit in September 2020² provides an opportunity to rejuvenate multilateralism so that it delivers more effectively and inclusively. The EU should engage actively in support of the UN Secretary-General’s process of reflection in this regard (“Our Common Agenda”). The EU should also promote the ambitious modernisation of key institutions such as the WTO and WHO and spearhead the development of new global norms, international standards and cooperation frameworks in areas such as digital, including Artificial Intelligence and other new technologies.

What the EU can do: The EU must develop a more stringent and strategic approach to its multilateral engagement, and contribute to an effective reform of the multilateral institutions. This requires more efficient coordination mechanisms between the EU and its Member States around joint priorities, and a greater willingness to **leverage the EU’s collective strength** to project its values and priorities abroad. The EU will leverage more effectively its regulatory power and unique single market and social market economy, its position as the world’s first trading superpower and the relevance of the Euro³. The EU will step up its leadership and make better use of its ability to act as a convenor, honest broker and bridge-builder. The EU’s democratic and regulatory strengths are assets to help build a better world, while its credibility as a peace actor and its security and defence structures can help support multilateral efforts to keep, sustain and build peace.

Successful global engagement also means that the EU must deepen **partnerships and alliances** with third countries, multilateral and regional organisations, as well as other partners, especially those with whom we share democratic values and priorities. But the EU will also seek common ground on an issue-by-issue basis with others – not least on global public goods.

Increasing the EU’s capacity to be a global actor also means **ensuring consistency between the EU’s external actions and its internal policies**. A united and coherent EU voice in global fora is essential in order to maximise our role and influence. **The EU must ‘deliver as one’ to ‘succeed as one’.**

² Declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: resolution adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/75/1

³ COM(2021) 32 “The European economic and financial system: fostering openness, strength and resilience”

II. A multilateral system that is “fit for purpose”

The EU’s strategic interests in the multilateral system are twofold. On the one hand, it has to sharpen the priorities that it wants to pursue within the multilateral system. On the other hand, a well-functioning multilateral system is a strategic interest for the EU in its own right.

1. Focusing the EU’s multilateral agenda (*“what the EU wants”*)

The EU must define clearer strategic priorities and objectives for its multilateral action. This is perfectly compatible with a multilateralist stance, as the principles that underlie the European Union are the same as those of the United Nations. The EU stands strongly behind the international rule of law and universal agendas, as set out in the United Nations and beyond, such as human rights and gender equality, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, the global biodiversity framework and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. They continue to guide the EU’s actions, domestically and externally.

(i) Making the world safer

In a world of increasing geopolitical tensions, conflicts and threats to international and regional stability, the EU has a deep interest in enhancing its efforts to prevent conflict, promote peace and security, uphold fundamental values and strengthen its capacity to act, together with other partners. The EU relies heavily on global stability and good governance, sustainable development, unhindered trade flows and supply chains, as well as the free flow of ideas and knowledge.

With its political leverage, policies and financial instruments, including in the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU contributes to the maintenance of **international peace and security** in accordance with the UN Charter. In line with UN efforts, the EU follows an integrated approach to conflicts and crisis, from **conflict prevention** to **crisis management** and **peacebuilding**⁴.

The EU also cooperates closely with the UN and other partners on tackling global terrorism⁵, violent extremism, transnational organised crime and cybercrime⁶, money laundering and terrorism financing. In this context the EU should therefore use all its relevant tools identified in the **EU Security Union Strategy**.

In order to preserve peace and stability as well the multilateral order in the region, the EU should further strengthen its partnerships with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as other regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

⁴ Out of 17 EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, 13 are deployed alongside UN missions in the Sahel, the Central African Republic, Libya, and the Western Balkans, supporting or directly contributing to the implementation of the UN mandates.

⁵ COM(2020) 795 final, ‘A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond’.

⁶ EU Security Union Strategy COM (2020)605 final, 24.07.2020.

At the same time, the EU should be a driving force behind UN actions in response to conflicts that cause harm to civilians and threaten global security and stability. When defining the next set of EU-UN priorities on peace operations and crisis management for 2022-2024, addressing the consequences of the changing global context and enhancing cooperation on threats such as climate change and environmental degradation will be a key focus for the EU.

It is fundamental for all members of the international community to uphold and improve the implementation of international norms on **arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation**, while ensuring that they keep up with new technological developments. To that end, the EU will play an active role in defending its security interests which are grounded in multilateral arrangements. It will consolidate the achievements of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran as a key pillar of the global non-proliferation architecture⁷.

The EU is a natural ally of the UN and regional organisations (e.g. Council of Europe, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe,) in supporting democracy and promoting and protecting **human rights, fundamental freedoms**⁸ and the respect for human dignity including gender equality⁹, the rights of the child¹⁰, and LGBTIQ rights¹¹. The EU will defend and promote those principles, and push back against attempts to undermine them. It will stand up against any attempt to backtrack on the principle that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The EU will team up with all those who support democracy, access to justice and accountable and inclusive institutions.

The **EU's humanitarian policy and action** is premised on the UN's central coordinating role in emergencies. The **Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus** is a key concept for the EU, in line with its position as a leading development and humanitarian donor and policy maker¹². The EU will remain a vocal defender of **International Humanitarian Law**, unimpeded access to people in need, and the principled delivery of humanitarian aid.

(ii) Building back better

The COVID-19 pandemic shows how **intertwined global challenges** are. The global health system is only as strong as its weakest link. Tackling global poverty, inequality, climate change and environmental degradation is an integral part of avoiding future pandemics and ensuring better preparedness.

As the world emerges from this crisis, the EU emphasises the need to **build back better** and consistently promotes multilateral solutions that focus on building sustainable and resilient systems – be it on health, transport services or global supply chains, access to affordable quality education – but also deliver green and digital investment frameworks and ensure sustainable long-term development financing. Tackling global poverty, inequality and supporting human development are also an integral part of ensuring better resilience to future crisis of any sort.

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015). The EU will continue to support verification organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

⁸ JOIN (2020) 5, 25.03.2020, EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024.

⁹ JOIN (2020)17 final, 25.11.2020, EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III; see also Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,

¹⁰ COM (2020) 607 final, 24.7.2020, EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse; see also the upcoming EU strategy on the rights of the child (2021-24).

¹¹ COM (2020) 698 final, 12.11.2020, Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

¹² In 2019, the EU spent over EUR 75.2 billion in official development assistance and mobilised almost EUR 2 billion for humanitarian aid operations in over 80 countries. About 60 % of the EU's annual humanitarian budget is provided to UN partners and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

In response to the pandemic, the EU has led international solidarity and cooperation efforts by gathering world leaders and civil society around a pledging event to boost funding for research and a fair and equitable access to **vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics against COVID-19**. The EU is working closely with ACT-Accelerator and the COVAX facility to ensure that the development, production and equitable delivery of safe COVID-19 vaccines is ramped up worldwide and will help its partners through its development assistance programmes. Reforming and strengthening the World Health Organisation and its role in coordinating global health action, as well as the implementation of the “One Health” approach¹³ are key in this respect.

The severe economic crisis brought about by the pandemic is affecting the progress made in achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs). The global recovery must be green, digital, inclusive, just, and sustainable. It must be geared towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the goals of the Paris Agreement, and the preservation of biodiversity, the natural environment and its resources, as well as fighting pollution. This is why the Commission has proposed a **Global Recovery Initiative** linking investment and debt relief to the 2030 Agenda to secure a truly transformative, post-COVID-19 path. The EU is already working on multilateral actions to promote sustainable financing, as well as debt relief in line with existing initiatives, including the G20-Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and the new Common Framework for Debt Treatments.

Economic recovery also goes hand in hand with social justice, social protection and **decent work**. International labour standards set out in the International Labour Organisation provide a tried-and-trusted foundation for inclusive recovery but more can be done to promote worldwide ratification of important ILO conventions¹⁴. A well-functioning world economy also requires multilateral rules, adapted to the realities of the 21st century that allow for **open, fair and rules-based trade**, and ensure a level playing field for all economic actors. Keeping markets open, avoiding an escalation of trade conflicts and modernising trade rules are critical for a fair and sustainable recovery.

The **European Green Deal** is the EU’s growth strategy, setting out a model for sustainable growth and green global recovery that leaves no one behind. The EU will also continue to encourage others to raise their climate ambitions, meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement and other environmental agreements such as the Convention on Biodiversity to achieve climate neutrality by mid-century and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. The 2021 UN Conferences of the Parties on Biodiversity (COP15) and on Climate Change (COP26), and the UN Food Systems Summit will be key moments in this respect.

Moreover, the EU External Investment Plan¹⁵ and the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)¹⁶ represent a major push for **sustainable investment, growth and jobs** in EU partner countries, with the private sector fully engaged. **Digitalisation** is another key enabler of sustainable development and a space of strategic competition but also of inadequate multilateral governance. As it embarks on its “Digital Decade”, the EU will prioritise the digital transformation in its international cooperation and partnerships. The EU will therefore continue to **push for more ambitious global standards**

¹³ This includes improving the detection and control of emerging diseases and the zoonotic transmission of diseases, notably in coordination with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

¹⁴ UN Secretary General Report ‘Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19’.

¹⁵ COM (2018) 644 final, 12.9.2018.

¹⁶ COM (2018)460, 14.06.2018.

and regulatory approaches in the digital economy (see also p. 8). In this regard, the EU leads global efforts in building fit-for-purpose laws for all digital services.

Finally, comprehensive and well-managed **migration** policy is essential to achieve a fairer world, and contribute to growth, innovation and social dynamism. The Commission's 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum'¹⁷ provides a strengthened basis to achieve a sustainable and long-term response in terms of migration and asylum management, fully grounded in European values and international law and carried out through enhanced and mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries and international organisations. This will be done in a comprehensive manner and taking into account the EU and partner countries' interests. As the global leader on resettlement of persons in need of international protection, the EU will also continue to engage with the UN and partner countries to step up global efforts in this regard.

2. Strengthening the multilateral system (*"how the EU can achieve it"*)

A **well-functioning multilateral system** is an EU **strategic interest in its own right**. Multilateral organisations have to remain effective in delivering global public goods. The EU should continue to support necessary reforms and modernisation of multilateral institutions. In June 2019, the Council adopted Conclusions setting out a strategic approach to help strengthen rules-based multilateralism and its institutions: **uphold** what works, **reform** what needs to change and **extend** global governance to new areas.

The EU will work towards ensuring a truly **inclusive multilateralism**, where the voices of civil society, the private sector, social partners and other key stakeholders count. This is a crucial part of ensuring the relevance of the multilateral system and preserving its legitimacy.

Uphold international norms and agreements

The EU will support the implementation of all key international frameworks that are aligned with its priorities or to which it is a party.

The EU has a strong interest in making sure the **UN Security Council** can fulfil its role in the face of increasing geopolitical tensions and rivalries paralysing its work and preventing it from fulfilling its responsibilities. The EU recognises the importance of active and consistent outreach efforts towards Security Council members. Ensuring full compliance with all relevant principles of international law, the EU will uphold and implement restrictive measures (sanctions) adopted by the UN Security Council and continue to impose its autonomous sanctions, whenever necessary, and will continue to report regularly to the UN Security Council about the wide-ranging EU-UN cooperation on international peace and security. The EU will also work to enhance the advisory role of the **UN Peacebuilding Commission** as well as its own engagement with this body.

The EU will seek to ensure that the **UN Human Rights Council** acts more efficiently, addresses relevant thematic rights and country situations effectively and credibly, and ensures synergies with other multilateral human rights fora. To safeguard the integrity and independence of UN human rights mechanisms the EU will encourage increased public scrutiny of Human Rights Council membership responsibilities and mandatory pledging events at the UN General Assembly with candidates to the Human Rights Council.

¹⁷ Adopted on 23 September 2020

The EU will continue supporting the **international judicial, arbitration, and enforcement bodies** that underpin the rules-based international order – in particular the International Criminal Court, the UN’s Human Rights compliance architecture, the European Court of Human rights – as regards both their jurisdiction and their effectiveness¹⁸.

The EU will firmly **push back against any attempts to undermine international law** – especially with regard to the universal values that underpin the United Nations and International Humanitarian Law – or attempts to create parallel institutions or to use the existing institutions for national or ideological interests that are at odds with the common good. The EU calls on all States to pay their assessed contributions to international organisations in full and on time. Organisations that are critical for upholding international law and commitments must be appropriately funded.

Reform multilateral organisations to make them fit for purpose.

In the current context, effectiveness and coherence of the multilateral system is paramount, so that it is soundly managed and financed sustainably, and that universal values and international law are protected.

The follow-up of the 75th anniversary of the UN, including the implementation of the Declaration commemorating it, represents a unique moment to ensure that there is a genuine renewal. The EU looks forward to engaging with UN Secretary-General Guterres as part of a broad and inclusive consultation process leading to the presentation of his report in September 2021. A reinforced UN **‘delivering as one’** needs to advance efficiently peace and security, human rights and sustainable development, to implement the 2030 Agenda, and to support and monitor effectively the implementation of international agreements. The EU will structure its engagement in a way that helps UN agencies, funds and programmes to work in this direction, including through acting more coherently internally, and with other aid actors and non-governmental organisations, as well as with the International Financial Institutions.

The EU supports the **reform process initiated by the UN Secretary-General** to make the UN ‘fit for purpose’¹⁹. The EU was instrumental in securing the adoption of the General Assembly resolutions that have enabled progress on the reform's three strands – management, peace and security architecture, and development system. A more accountable, transparent and efficient UN system will be in the interest of all. The EU therefore stands ready to support addressing remaining challenges and the implementation and impact on the ground, including through the UN Resident Coordinators. The revitalisation of the General Assembly, as well as a comprehensive reform of the **UN Security Council**, will be essential to ensure that the UN can truly live up to its responsibilities under its Charter in the 21st century.

Modernisation and reforms are also crucial in specific UN agencies and international organisations. This is why the EU is leading the process of strengthening the **World Health Organization**, around a concrete proposal to reinforce its international preparedness and response capacity to health emergencies. We must ensure that the WHO is given a stronger and more independent mandate and is adequately and sustainably resourced to carry it out. Furthermore the EU is leading efforts to reform and modernise the **World Trade Organization** in all its functions²⁰ to provide stability, certainty and fairness in the global

¹⁸ In the same vein, the EU will also continue its leading role in creating a Multilateral Investment Court, within the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law

¹⁹ For example, the EU will support the UN Secretary-General’s effort to improve global digital cooperation. See the UN Secretary General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation..

²⁰ See Commission’s Trade Policy Communication of 17 February 2021 and its Annex “Reforming the WTO: towards a sustainable and effective multilateral trading system”.

trading system²¹. The reform of the WTO will play a critical role in facilitating the economic recovery from the pandemic, in delivering on the objectives in the field of sustainability, and in developing trading rules that are more relevant to today's digital world.

The **International Financial Institutions**, in particular the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, are amending their governance structure to better reflect today's global economy, increasing the quota and voting shares of developing and emerging members and focusing their work on current challenges²². The EU supports these institutions in their modernisation to enhance their transparency and efficiency. At the same time, the EU should leverage the combined weight of its Member States in these fora more effectively, with a view to fostering their contribution to building back better globally, by speaking with one voice and moving towards a more coherent external representation²³. The European financial institutions, in particular the EIB and the EBRD, subject to the future European Financial Architecture for Development, will also closely cooperate with the International Financial Institutions.

Extending multilateralism to new global issues.

The EU has an interest in **extending international norms, standards and global cooperation in priority areas** where there is limited or no global governance or where reinforcement is needed such as democracy, rule of law, international taxation, digital cooperation, consumer protection, environmental degradation, oceans, natural resource governance and raw materials security and sustainability as well as green technologies and renewable energy.

To this end, the EU will further engage in active regulatory cooperation, including in international norm setting organisations, by leveraging its financial and regulatory power to help shape global norms and standards. Notable examples of such initiatives are the **Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI)**²⁴, the **Council of Europe's Ad hoc Committee on AI (CAHAI)**, the **International Platform on Sustainable Finance**²⁵, the **2020 G7 High-Level Transportation Principles in Response to COVID-19**, the **High Ambition Coalition on Biodiversity**, the **Global Coalition for a High Seas Treaty**²⁶ and the **Global Alliances on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency**.

The implications of new **digital technologies including artificial intelligence** need to be addressed globally, in full compliance with a human-centric and inclusive digital transformation, human rights and the rule of law, through **more ambitious global standards and rules**. The modern privacy rules in place in the EU and the recently proposed Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act aim in this regard to create a safe online environment for citizens and to foster innovation, growth and competitiveness in the single market. The EU's action in multilateral fora will need to strike a delicate balance between pursuing the need for technological sovereignty while upholding the openness of the internet and fundamental rights. To this end it must engage with all international partners on the ongoing

²¹ The reform of the World Custom Organization will also be important in this respect.

²² For example, the World Bank Group Umbrella 2.0 Trust Funds Reform and the idea to shape the portfolio of trust funds and financial intermediary funds around fewer, larger umbrella 2.0 programs.

²³ COM(2015)602 final, 21.10.2015 "Roadmap for moving towards a more consistent external representation of the euro area in international fora".

²⁴ Guides responsible development and use of AI, grounded in human rights, inclusion, diversity, innovation, and growth.

²⁵ Allows policy makers to discuss standard-setting and to establish best practices on how to drive investments towards green activities.

²⁶ The EU calls for the conclusion in 2021 of an international agreement on marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction) under the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas.

challenges to digital governance. This includes digital taxation, data protection and privacy, tackling disinformation, illegal content online, 5G, internet governance, cybersecurity, digital finance including payments and cryptocurrencies, and e-government where current rules are insufficient.

To this end, the EU will promote its policy and regulatory approaches, including the protection of personal data, the free flow of data with trust, net neutrality and the promotion of ethical principles in the context of human-centric and trustworthy artificial intelligence²⁷. The EU will also work in multilateral fora to fight abuses such as the disproportionate access of governments to personal data²⁸. Finally, the EU will contribute to finding common solutions in existing fora, as is the case for the ongoing work at the G20 and the OECD, with respect to a global consensus-based solution to address the **taxation of the digital economy**.

Access to and use of **outer space** should equally be shaped by international rules or standards and by a governance system aimed at guaranteeing the long-term, sustainable, responsible and peaceful use of space.

Actions:

- *Engage actively in the reflection process in follow-up to UN75 to support efforts to reinvigorate effective and inclusive multilateralism, leaving no-one behind.*
- *Support the UN Secretary-General's reform process, including a 'one UN' approach at country level, by working in priority through with Resident Coordinators and UN Country teams.*
- *Support the UN Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative by updating the EU-UN partnership on crisis management and peace operations and exploring opportunities for new partnerships, including EU-UN-African Union cooperation.*
- *Support the UN Secretary-General's call for a global cease-fire by taking forward the new EU mediation concept in support of multilateral responses to emerging or ongoing crisis situations.*
- *Lead and support the reform of the World Health Organization and of the World Trade Organization.*
- *Lead efforts to increase ambitions internationally with a view to the 2021 UN Conferences of the Parties on Biodiversity (COP15) and on Climate Change (COP26)*
- *Establish an annual Strategic Dialogue with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights policy and cooperation in the field.*
- *Conclude the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.*
- *Reinforce EU advocacy and action in support of compliance with International Humanitarian Law and the humanitarian principles.*
- *Align EU support with the implementation of reforms promoting openness, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in all multilateral institutions, including rationalised overhead costs, coordinated standards, collaborative approaches, good governance and transparency in the system,*

²⁷ As a concrete example, the Commission will launch a dedicated project with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) to develop a global toolkit for practical guidance towards an ethical and high quality artificial intelligence able to translate ethics into practice in the field of law enforcement.

²⁸ COM (2020) 66 final, 19.2.2020, 'A European strategy for data'.

adequate EU visibility, as well as innovative and simplified funding methods.

- Pursue a more active role in international technical standardisation and contribute to the development of new norms in areas which are insufficiently regulated, inter alia by supporting the development of normative frameworks for human-centric and trustworthy AI technologies*
- Support the development of normative frameworks for new weapons technologies and new dimensions of warfare such as cyber and outer space.*

III. A Stronger Europe partnering with the multilateral system (“*what the EU can do*”)

The EU’s strategic objective going forward will be to **better leverage** its role and contributions to the multilateral system to more effectively pursue its interests and defend its values.

The EU and its Member States are key **participants and contributors to the multilateral system**. Approximately one quarter of both the UN’s regular and the peacekeeping budgets comes from EU Member States, as does over 30% of funding (core and voluntary) of all development, peacebuilding and humanitarian activities²⁹. At the International Monetary Fund, EU Member States hold 26% of voting power at the Executive Board underpinning a third of IMF resources. Over 25% of the capital of various branches of the World Bank and over 30% of Trust Fund contributions come from the EU and its Member States.

(i) Strengthen EU coherence and coordination

Together, the EU and its Member States have a powerful influence in the multilateral system wherever they effectively use coordination mechanisms, representation and funding capacity as a bloc of 27, in support of the EU’s political objectives, values and role as an international standard-setter. This is however not the case across the board, resulting in some instances where the EU collectively punches below its weight.

To maximise that collective influence, **the EU should further strengthen its coherence, unity and solidarity in multilateral fora**³⁰. **The EU and its Member States must coordinate their positions, actions and messaging**, and act as one, in line with the Treaties.

To that end, the EU and its Member States must improve information sharing, consultation and coordination, including in the governing bodies and boards of multilateral bodies where the Union is not represented. For instance, the EU should work to establish coordination mechanisms in all International Financial Institutions (IFIs), similarly to what is already happening at the International Monetary Fund.

²⁹ The EU 27 Member States’ contributions account for 23.94% the regular UN budget and for 23.8% of the peacekeeping budget for the triennium 2019-2021.

³⁰ This cooperation is an obligation that follows from the duty of loyal cooperation under Article 4.3 TEU or Council decisions adopted under Article 218(9) TFEU and, for CFSP matters, from art. 34 TEU. The Treaty also provides that EU Member States should act in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity, and refrain from any action that is likely to impair the effectiveness of the Union as a cohesive force in international relations (art. 24.3 TEU).

As the presence of EU Member States on the UN Security Council is set to decrease to only two in 2022 (until earliest 2025), ensuring **effective EU cooperation on matters related to the UN Security Council** is a priority. This should build on the ongoing strengthening of cooperation between EU Member States who are members of the Security Council, whether permanent or non-permanent, and provide a channel to promote the EU's positions in that organ.

The often interdependent nature of the economic, political and security spheres demands **better coordination across policies** at all levels. Moreover, the EU should leverage its role as a global powerhouse in research and innovation **to ensure that multilateral action is informed by the best possible scientific evidence**³¹.

(ii) Speaking with one voice

The EU's ability to **participate actively, be represented effectively and speak with one voice is key**. The EU has all the necessary attributes to be a fully-fledged member in international organisations, or to participate in them with an enhanced observer status³². To ensure that the EU speaks with one voice and acts on matters falling within its competences, the external representation role of the EU in international organisations is vested with the European Commission³³, as well as with the High Representative for matters falling under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and with EU Delegations on their behalf.

The Commission and the High Representative will use their power of initiative in a more targeted way to improve the formulation of **EU positions to be taken in international fora**, not least in view of giving EU representatives more tactical flexibility. Furthermore, to be able to make decisions in a faster and more effective way, the Council also needs to use Treaty provisions that allow for constructive abstention and for the adoption of decisions by **qualified majority voting** in Common Foreign and Security Policy³⁴. This is particularly important when it comes to reacting to international law violations, including of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law. This approach would also allow the EU to be quicker and more effective in reacting to those violations by adopting EU sanctions. The adoption of the EU global human rights sanctions regime³⁵ is an important milestone in strengthening our collective action in this field.

In many instances and for various reasons, the EU does not have full membership rights of international organisations. This has not prevented formal arrangements in the form of participation as observer or even pragmatic *ad hoc* arrangements with Member States and/or the organisations concerned and their members, providing the EU and its representatives with the capacity to effectively intervene and act beyond its formal status. The EU is recognised as a reliable constructive partner and a deal maker. A recent example was the May 2020 World Health Assembly where, despite not being a member, the EU was the driving force behind the Resolution on COVID-19 response. Nevertheless, in other important cases such

³¹ Examples: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which have largely been supported by the EU Framework Programme for R&D.

³² Resolution 65/276 of the UN General Assembly of 3 May 2011 concerning the participation of the EU in the work of the United Nations is the clearest international recognition of the capacity of the Union to act at international level.

³³ For example, the EU is a member of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, where the Commission speaks on behalf of the EU on matters covered by EU exclusive competence.

³⁴ Art. 31 TEU. See also Commission Communication of 12 September 2018 A stronger global actor: a more efficient decision-making for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (COM (2018) 647 final).

³⁵ Council Regulation (EU) 2020/1998 and Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1999 of 7 December 2020 concerning restrictive measures against serious human rights violations and abuses, OJ L410I of 7.12.20.

arrangements either do not exist, are unnecessarily cumbersome, outdated, or prevent the Commission and/or the High Representative from speaking effectively on behalf of the EU in matters falling under EU competence. One case in point is the Food and Agricultural Organisation, where the EU's capacity to be effective is undermined by outdated arrangements with Member States that are not in line with the Treaties. The EU should therefore urgently **assess on a case-by-case basis whether its status** in a given international organisation, fund or programme requires adaptation or upgrade, in accordance with the EU Treaties, and do what is necessary to achieve the adaptation or upgrade.

(iii) Funding the multilateral system

In terms of **funding** the multilateral system at global, regional and country level, the **Team Europe approach**³⁶ allows for **more effective leveraging** of the collective contributions of the EU and the Member States, in support of and linked to the implementation of agreed policy priorities and more coherence in international fora. The EU should continue to make clear what it expects from its partners and make better use of this leverage. This means that, where necessary, the EU should be ready to calibrate its funding to specific multilateral initiatives or organisations in accordance with how such policy priorities are met. Generally, the visibility of EU support should be ensured.

(iv) The EU's presence in the multilateral institutions

When it comes to **leadership positions in multilateral organisations** the EU should support candidates with the highest professional, managerial, ethical and political standards. At the same time, there is an urgent need for a more coordinated and strategic approach and better exchange of information, including with third country partners. This also applies for elections to UN bodies such as the Human Rights Council. Consultations in Council should be intensified. Similarly, the EU should work on developing an EU staff exchange and presence policy in international organisations, at all levels.

Actions:

- *Better coordinate with Member States on candidacies for senior positions and on key elections in multilateral organisations.*
- *Better leverage the significant EU and Member States' funding to multilateral and regional organisations, including via the Team Europe approach and more coordinated messaging in the governing bodies of UN agencies, funds and programmes, in order to pursue the Union's values and interests more effectively also as regards reforms of those organisations.*
- *Clarify or upgrade the EU's legal status or prerogatives in international organisations, where necessary and in line with the Treaties.*
- *Further strengthen the EU's role and presence in the governing bodies of UN agencies, funds and programmes.*
- *Establish strong EU coordination mechanisms in International Financial Institutions by speaking with one voice and moving towards a more coherent external representation.*

³⁶ The 'Team Europe' approach draws contributions from all EU institutions and combines resources mobilised by EU Member States and financial institutions, while respecting the EU competences and decision-making procedures set out in the Treaties.

- *Increase the visibility of EU contributions through common narratives, positions and statements on UN resolutions and seek closer coordination with Member States on voluntary contributions to the UN.*
- *Enhance the visibility of EU's role as the only Regional Organisation party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.*
- *Leverage European research and innovation to strengthen the evidence base of multilateral policy-making.*

(v) **Alliances, Partnerships and regional co-operation**

In an increasingly multi-polar and interdependent environment, the EU is recognised as a stable and predictable partner and as a vocal defender and promotor of the rules-based multilateral system.

The current context calls for a **clearer and better articulated strategic approach to engagement with our international partners**. The EU should seek such partnerships not only to advance its own priorities, but as a common effort to find sustainable solutions to global challenges based on the rule of law rather than the rule of the strongest. The EU needs to diversify its global engagement by exploiting the potential for cooperation in multilateral fora, building on the following principles:

- ***Stronger cooperation with like-minded partners to defend universal principles and rules.*** The EU will better concert efforts with all interested partners in defending the multilateral *acquis*³⁷, especially with regards to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, including the possibility for third countries to align with EU statements in multilateral organisations and fora. We will work urgently with partners who share our values and principles to strengthen democratic institutions, fight corruption, authoritarianism and human rights abuses around the world, and promote a common agenda based on democracy, human rights, equality and the rule of law. In this regard, the arrival of the new US administration creates a positive momentum³⁸ and the EU should seize all opportunities to rebuild the EU-US relations and preserve strong links, for instance with the UK. Finally, in the boards of international financial institutions, we will also use the spread of EU Member States in regional groupings as an opportunity to systematically develop joint objectives with interested partners.
- ***Issue-based cooperation and common initiatives.*** The EU will extend its global engagement to deal with transnational challenges such as health, security threats, climate change, biodiversity loss, or other areas of common interest, such as education, youth, science, technology and innovation³⁹. Supply chain disruption during the pandemic has shown the importance of maritime routes for the global economy. The EU will work with partners to promote respect for basic principles of maritime passage, security and safety as well as protection of the oceans.
- ***Diversifying partnerships and working with regional organisations.*** The EU will make better and more coherent strategic use its cooperation with third countries and

³⁷ The Alliance for Multilateralism and the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency (Commission Decision C(2020)15) are a good examples of such political innovation.

³⁸ See Communication on 'A new EU-US agenda for global change'; JOIN (2020)22 final, 2.12.2020.

³⁹ Examples of this approach include the EU's cooperation on climate change with China and solar energy with India, the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency, the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People or the Mission Innovation on Clean Energy and the All-Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance.

regional and sub-regional organisations, in particular when a strategic framework or an international agreement covering international cooperation is in place. This is the case for the African Union (including in trilateral formats with the UN), but also – to take just one example – the members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), with which there is a common endeavour to enhance multilateralism. The more regional and global organisations work together, the stronger we are collectively and the more robust the multilateral system becomes. The EU will continue to engage in the promotion of regional cooperation through relevant multilateral regional organisations and multilateral platforms like the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

- ***Building alliances to promote standards and regulatory approaches.*** The EU will develop and improve alliances within international standard setting bodies⁴⁰. When considering or adopting new internal initiatives with an international dimension the Commission will in parallel engage internationally. The EU will for example seek to build a coalition of like-minded countries for a human-centric and rules-based governance of artificial intelligence technologies. It will propose early engagement with concerned partners on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

‘Non-traditional’ coalitions and formats should be explored, building on lessons from processes such as the EU, China and Canada co-convened Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action, the Paris Peace Forum and Finance in Common summit. **Multi-stakeholder** partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and the scientific community are key for shaping inclusive multilateralism and act as a catalyst for reform. For example, the EU has worked with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the GAVI initiative on the development and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.

To facilitate alliance-building, the EU will more actively use its network of 140 EU Delegations, working together with Member States’ Embassies to make the case for multilateralism and mobilise support for EU initiatives. In other words, the EU will ensure greater consistency between its multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, **“multilateralising” bilateral engagement, and “bilateralising” the multilateral approach.** The **multilateral dimension** should be integrated more systematically in all the EU’s **political dialogues** with third countries, from summits to working level contacts. The EU will make it clear that it expects partners to translate joint commitments into practice, and will use its network and leverage to this end.

Finally, the EU will further strengthen its role and influence in informal multilateral fora such as the **G20 and the G7** to increase their capacity to deliver, as they shape and reinforce the multilateral agenda and deliver strong crisis response and concrete solutions for global problems. The immediate priority here is to ensure a strong global economic and health policy coordination that helps the sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery. 2021 will be important in these fora, as Italy will chair the G20 and the UK will chair the G7, whilst the two will co-host the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). The EU will co-sponsor with Italy the Global Health Summit to strengthen pandemic preparedness in May 2021.

⁴⁰ For example, the International Organization for Standardization, the International Electrotechnical Commission and the International Telecommunication Union.

Actions:

- *Promote a common agenda with interested partners based on democracy, human rights, equality and the rule of law.*
- *Support new inclusive formats of multilateral engagement, such as the Alliance for Multilateralism, the Paris Peace Forum and the Finance in Common Summit.*
- *Ensure systematic follow-up of bilateral commitments with third countries to advance multilateral objectives.*
- *Boost the role of regional organisations in the UN system by proposing a yearly summit of heads of regional organisations.*
- *Assist partner countries to engage more effectively in the multilateral system, including through capacity building, knowledge-sharing, training or twinning.*

(vi) Working with Multilateral Institutions

The EU will **define its partnerships with multilateral organisations as a function of their alignment with universal agendas and EU interests** and their ability to pursue them. The EU and many multilateral organisations are natural allies. There are many success stories and areas where these partnerships have helped shape global governance, and above all made a difference in the field of global economic and financial policy coordination, development, humanitarian response, climate change, environment, and peace and security.

Multilateral actors, and in particular UN entities, are **key implementers** for the delivery of EU's development and humanitarian assistance. They can also be holders of important **normative and standard setting mandates**, as is the case for the UN Environment Programme with respect to environmental agreements, or the International Telecommunication Union in setting the internet's interoperable and open standards. They can also be important **policy and strategic interlocutors**, with whom joint priorities and structural issues are addressed – as for instance, through the regular high-level dialogues with the World Bank. On **peacekeeping and peacebuilding**, EU crisis management missions and operations and UN Peacekeeping operations active in the same operational theatre cooperate closely and provide each other with strategic, logistical, medical and security support.

A key element for such partnerships will be the establishment of **high-level political dialogues**. For example, the EU will seek to strengthen coordination with the UN through regular Leaders' meetings ('EU-UN Summits') analogous to the well-established high-level exchanges with the leadership of the Bretton Woods institutions. That work could be complemented by more regular political level stocktaking in priority areas for the EU (e.g. climate and the environment, digital, human rights and development), building upon existing frameworks.

The beginning of the **new EU financial cycle** and its innovative instruments, such as financial guarantees, has also the potential to drive multilateral reforms and efficiency. In the programming process under the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) the EU will better focus on what can be done together at country, regional and multilateral level, under a policy-driven approach. The Team Europe⁴¹ approach allows to define a common agenda and to leverage EU and its Member States' funding, normative power and strong country presence to engage with partner countries,

⁴¹ JOIN (2020) 11 final, 8.4.2020, Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19.

multilateral organisations⁴² and other partners around joint priorities at country, regional and multilateral level.

To increase the effectiveness of its external action, the EU will work towards **aligning its funding to the multilateral system more closely with its agreed policy priorities**, including development cooperation priorities, while respecting criteria for Official Development Assistance and principles for development aid effectiveness. The EU will also continue working towards a more strategic approach to quality voluntary funding for key UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies as well as other international organisations. It will regularly and strategically assess its funding to key multilateral organisations, International Financial Institutions and UN agencies, funds and programmes to identify and update clearer priorities per entity, track implementation, and increase its visibility.⁴³

Actions :

- *Establish a regular EU-UN Summit.*
- *Maintain and further strengthen annual Strategic Dialogues with major UN agencies, funds and programmes, and Bretton Woods Institutions.*
- *Define EU interests and priorities systematically across multilateral organisations and base the EU's engagement on its strategic interests and presence in those organisations, as well as their mandates, and potential to deliver on the EU's priorities.*
- *Engage the relevant multilateral organisations on the basis of EU defined priorities through Team Europe Initiatives at country, regional and multilateral level.*

IV. Conclusions

The peace and prosperity of the European Union and its citizens depend on the peace and prosperity of the rest of the world and on a healthy planet. A well-functioning, reliable and efficient multilateral system is essential to achieve those goals.

By acting multilaterally whenever it can and being ready to act autonomously if it must, the EU can best contribute to harness globalisation⁴⁴. This is at the heart of our work towards open strategic autonomy.

Principles of the EU's multilateral engagement:

- *The EU will work for a **renewed rules-based multilateralism serving global governance** and EU and global interests and values.*
- *The EU will defend **universal values and international law**, including human rights that form the bedrock of cooperative relations between countries and peoples, and will promote global agendas such as, the UN 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, and the Paris Agreement.*
- *The EU will **project its own strategic priorities** – especially in areas such as human*

⁴² In several multilateral fora (e.g. IMF, World Bank, Multilateral Development Banks), the Commission provides significant financial support despite not being a shareholder. In those cases, the Team Europe approach can enhance the impact and influence of the EU in those institutions.

⁴³ Financing should not only be assessed in absolute terms, but also *pro rata*. For example, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) operate under a relatively modest budget, with EU as largest voluntary contributor to projects.

⁴⁴ Commission Reflection paper on Harnessing Globalisation, COM(2017) 240 of 10 May 2017.

rights, democratic values and the rule of law, sustainable development and human security, climate and environmental protection and digital technologies – and will make the most out of its political, diplomatic, and economic leverage to defend its interests and promote its values.

- *The EU will promote **reform, effectiveness and efficiency of the multilateral system and a truly inclusive multilateralism** where governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders work together.*
- *The EU will step up its **leadership** and make better use of its ability to act as a convenor, honest broker and bridge-builder, deepen **partnerships and alliances** with third countries, multilateral and regional organisations, and reinforce coalitions on key priorities.*
- *The EU will be **the best ally of multilateral partners** but will demand focus conducive to transformation and truly strategic relationships.*
- *The EU will ensure greater **consistency** between its multilateral and bilateral diplomacy and will act with a **coherent and united voice** in global fora. The EU must **‘deliver as one’ to ‘succeed as one’**.*

The Commission and the High Representative invite the European Parliament and the Council to endorse the approach set out in this Joint Communication, and to work together on the implementation and review of its actions.