



euobserver
20th anniversary

20 years

of European journalism &
history

INTERVIEWS WITH

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EUobserver is a not-for-profit, independent online newspaper established in Brussels in 2000. We value free thinking and plain speech and aim to support European democracy by reflecting the voice of people and by giving people the information they need to hold the EU establishment to account.

OUR GOAL

European journalism is essential in making European democracy actually function. Today, there is a gap between the decision-makers in Brussels and the people they represent. Our goal is to fill this gap by reporting on how decisions are made in the European Union, and by giving people the possibility of making their voice heard within the European institutions.

We do this through our articles, our exclusive news stories, our cross-border investigations, our opinion platform and through our relentless quest for transparency and accountability.

OUR REACH

The EUobserver is the fourth-most influential news platform in the European institutions. With a small but dedicated team, we succeed in having an impact. Our reporting has made sure that issues were put on the EU agenda, that ordinary people from Europe and beyond have been heard in Brussels, and even forced officials to resign because they did not live up to the moral standards the EU should have.

www.euobserver.com

Cover Photo

European Commission

Introduction

Twenty years doesn't seem a lot. Certainly not in the light of European history.

But while we were writing this magazine for the 20th anniversary of EUobserver, we were surprised just how much happened in the European Union in those two decades.

Twenty years ago, there was no euro, no Treaty of Lisbon and no European External Action Service.

Not only that, the EU only consisted of 15 member states.

It was a time before 9/11, before the war in Iraq, before we realised that there probably would never be an 'end of history'.

During these 20 years, we have witnessed how the world moved from a unipolar to a multipolar order, with the spectacular rise of China.

We saw revolutions in the Balkans, in the South Caucasus, in Ukraine, the entire Arab world and now in Belarus.

Europe has been surrounded by wars in Ukraine, Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. These wars triggered unprecedented migration to Europe.

The Union has been hit by a financial and economic crisis, a euro crisis and now a pandemic crisis.

Not only has the European Union survived these crises, it came out stronger, more united and more integrated.

Despite some setbacks, the magic of European enlargement again turned formerly poor dictatorships into prosperous democracies.

In its initial goal to stop war and dictatorship, the European project has been extremely successful - indeed, it won the Nobel Peace Prize for precisely this reason. But it is a goal that needs to be worked continuously, even today.

This magazine gives an overview of the major events of every one of these 20 years, and for every event we talked to one of the key players. Some gave us new insights or facts previously unpublished. It makes this magazine a historic document.

EUobserver had the privilege of sitting in the front row at all of these events. With a small but independent team of dedicated journalists we have tried to cover these events, and explain what the impact on the lives of European citizens would be.

For 20 years, we have tried to provide our readers with objective expertise. We will continue to do so in the 20 years to come.

Koert Debeuf & Lisbeth Kirk



From Milošević to freedom – and back again

Europe's new century began with the peaceful overthrow of an old monster, Slobodan Milošević – but Serbia is less free today than it was before the revolution, Vesna Pešić said.

By Andrew Rettman

Europe's new century began with the peaceful overthrow of an old monster: the late Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević.

It was called the 'Bulldozer Revolution', after a man drove a bulldozer into Milošević's propaganda HQ, the radio and TV building in Belgrade, on 5 October 2000.

And Serbia's student-led uprising inspired similar ones in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and even as far afield as Kyrgyzstan, in the next few years to come.

But in 2020, Milošević's former propaganda chief, Aleksandar Vučić, is now sitting in Serbia's presidential throne.

The revolution's leader, Serbia's late prime minister, Zoran Đinđić, has been murdered, and most of his former allies live in silence and fear.

And even though Vučić gets red-carpet treatment in EU capitals, "internally, he looks more like the Lukashenko of Serbia," for Vesna Pešić, a former Bulldozer Revolution activist, referring to Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko.

"We had more freedom under Milošević than we do now," Pešić said.

The 80-year old academic started fighting for human rights in Serbia back when it was still Yugoslavia in the 1970s.

And on 5 October 2000, she found herself in a crowd of half-a-million people in front of the parliament, with no army or police in sight.

"The whole night was like an anarchic dream, everybody was free to do whatever they wanted ...

people entered the parliament building," she said.

"I felt very proud," she added.

"I was scared the military would react, but it didn't. Somebody did a good job. Thank you, whoever it might be," Pešić said.

One of the people Serbs ought to thank, she said, was Đinđić.

"He made a deal with the most dangerous elite police formation [the Red Berets] not to shoot people," Pešić said.

Another one was the then Russian foreign minister, Igor Ivanov.

"He [Ivanov] flew to Belgrade on 6 October, went to Milošević, and told him to recognise that he'd lost elections. The same day, Milošević went on TV and said he'd lost," Pešić recalled.

And behind Đinđić and Ivanov, stood the then US president Bill Clinton, the then-15 EU leaders, and Russian president Vladimir Putin.

"People were tired of Milošević, especially after the traumatic [Nato] bombardment of Serbia, years of sanctions, poverty, exclusion," she said, referring to Western reaction to Milošević's bloody 1990s wars.

"All the international forces joined together to help the Serbian opposition," she said.

Milošević's fall left intact the forces that had kept him in office, however.

And at 12.23PM, Brussels time, on 12 March 2003,

Vesna Pešić, 80, has been a human rights activist since the 1970s

Photo: boell.de



Serbia's "dream" was shattered by a sniper's bullet, which hit Đindić in the heart, as he was getting out of his government car in Belgrade to meet the foreign minister of Sweden.

The assassin came from the same Red Berets with which Đindić had made a deal back in 2000.

The killer is in prison, but even if no one knows who gave the order, everyone knows who benefitted from the crime, Pešić said.

Nationalist political chiefs, military, spy, and police commanders, and Serb mafias, such as the 'Zemunski Klan', wanted to stay in place, instead of being dragged to court on the way to Serbia's EU membership. Orthodox Church bosses also wanted things to stay the same.

"All of these people wanted a continuation of Milošević state-structures and policies ... so they plotted against Đindić," Pešić said.

The story of how they got what they wanted is more complicated than one bullet.

The nationalist bloc rounded against Đindić's reformers after his death.

It changed its name to the Serbian Progressive Party and got Western backing by "whispering" to EU leaders, Pešić said, that Serbia would, one day, recognise Kosovo, unlocking the Western Balkans' path into Europe.

It also got Russian support when Putin, 10 years ago, almost fell in Bulldozer Revolution-type protests and declared war on Western values.

And all the while, the young Vučić, Milošević's former

information minister, was navigating the labyrinths of power in Belgrade, going from Progressive party chairman, to Serbia's deputy prime minister, to prime minister, and to become president in 2017.

He took control of Serbia's judiciary, media, and state-owned firms along the way, creating "huge clientelism, putting his people everywhere," Pešić said.

Vučić also destroyed what was left of Đindić's Democratic Party, for instance, by jailing people on bogus corruption charges.

And he terrorised other opposition leaders, such as those in the Liberal Democratic Party, into becoming puppets in a democratic make-believe.

"A multi-party system is not forbidden, but, in reality, Serbia is a one-party system, since no other party has a chance to win elections," Pešić said.

"Serbia has become a full autocracy in which one man, Vučić, decides just about everything," she said.

And if Western leaders still trusted his "stabil-ocracy," they ought to know better, because "he [Vučić] will never recognise Kosovo, as the EU expects", she added.

He knows what the EU wants to hear, but he speaks nationalist rhetoric at home, and he is arming Serbia to the teeth with new weapons from Belarus and Russia.

But even if Serbia has gone full circle, for some the bulldozer-spirit never died.

And there is still pro-European optimism in Serbian society, where more than half the population wants to join the EU.

"We [Serbian people] haven't forgotten that once upon-a-time, 20 years ago, we were able to get rid of autocratic rule," Pešić said.

Vučić gets the red-carpet treatment in EU capitals

Photo: ec.europa.eu



Sherin Khankan: 'We are the first mosque in Scandinavia that conducts interfaith marriages.'

Photo: Sherin Khankan

the
year
2001

September 11 and the female Danish Imam

Sherin Khankan is a female Imam who runs the Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen. The idea for the mosque came a month before two planes slammed into the World Trade Center skyscrapers in New York on 11 September, 2001.

By Nikolaj Nielsen

Sherin Khankan is a 45-year old mother of four. She is also Denmark's first female Imam and runs the Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen.

"We are the first mosque in Scandinavia that conducts interfaith marriages," she told EUobserver.

The daughter of a Syrian political refugee and a Finnish mother, Khankan says Muslim women must be allowed to marry whoever they choose, regardless of religious beliefs.

"We also give Muslim women the right to Islamic divorce and have made a fusion between Danish legislation and Islamic guidance - in the sense that we do not marry people in a mosque, unless they are married through Danish law," she explains.

Khankan's idea for the female-led mosque came a month before two passenger planes slammed into the Twin Towers in New York City in September 2001.

It would take her another 15 years to make it a reality.

Twenty-six years old at the time of the attacks, Khankan had in August of 2001 set up the first Muslim organisation with a female Muslim leadership in Denmark.

The organisation was called the Forum for Critical Muslims, and sought to draw a clear distinction between religion and politics in the hopes of creating a better and more progressive understanding of Islam in Europe.

But the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 changed all that. The two jets that destroyed the lower Manhattan landmarks killed almost 3,000 people and injured over 20,000.

And despite Saudi nationals being behind the terrorist attack, US president George W. Bush then launched a protracted war against Iraq in 2003 under the false pretence it was harbouring weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam Hussein's brutal reign over the country would come to an end three years later, leaving in place a power vacuum that helped give rise to the Islamic State.

The Islamic State would later claim responsibility for a spate of attacks in Europe, killing innocent people in numerous cities over the past decade or so.

Mainstream and far-right politicians would then parlay those attacks as further justification to stigmatise Muslims and immigrant communities.

Lawmakers also took the opportunity to pass sweeping surveillance laws, often blurring the distinction between fundamental rights and discrimination.

For Muslims like Khankan in Europe, the collapse of the Twin Towers created an unjustified and intensified blowback against Islam.

"It was quite massive, the anti-Islamic rhetoric and propaganda," she said.

Khankan rues the fact that all the work started in August of 2001 for a more progressive understanding of Islam had come to a standstill.

"We suddenly had to shift focus onto defending the right even to be a Muslim, so I could really sense a change with September 11th," she said.

Nearly 20 years later, and that dynamic has since shifted, she said, noting the renewed interest in Islam also brought with it more understanding of the religion.

"You can identify it in two ways, a growing anti-Islam rhetoric, and propaganda, and Islamophobia - but also a growing knowledge about Islam," she said.

Among that "rhetoric and propaganda" was a wider debate on women in Europe who wear the Niqab and the Burka, garments that either cover the whole face or most of it.

"In Denmark, I think less than 200 [women] wear the Niqab, and fewer still wear the Burka," she said.

Similar debates led to a ban in France in 2010, then followed by Belgium.

"I think it is discriminatory against these women, and actually we are not defending women's rights by discriminating [against] some women," she said.

Defending universal human rights, says Khankan, also means fighting for a women's right not to have to wear a niqab or a burka.

"But if it is an individual decision, I mean we absolutely have to defend it," she said.

Say hello to your new currency, the euro

Together with the Schengen agreement of 1995 which abolished most border controls, the euro is the most important symbol of European unification.

By Koert Debeuf

In 2002, the first notes and coins of the new currency, the euro, started to circulate in 11 countries of the European Union, quickly replacing national currencies.

Together with the Schengen agreement of 1995 which abolished border controls within the European Schengen area, the euro is the most important symbol of European unification.

The introduction of the euro was decided in 1992, during the summit in Maastricht, but had a longer history than that.

Way back in 1929, Gustav Stresemann, foreign minister of the Weimar Republic, asked in the League of Nations for a European currency. You don't have to be a historian to know that the timing was not ideal.

When US president Richard Nixon in 1971 removed the gold standard for the dollar, it resulted in major monetary fluctuations in Europe and the rest of the world.

In 1979 the European Monetary System was created, a system that fixed exchange rates to a European Currency Unit (ECU), countering exchange rates and inflation.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, German reunification was inevitable, despite the opposition of France and the UK.

In a gentlemen's deal, French president François Mitterrand agreed to the reunification of Germany - if German chancellor Helmut Kohl committed to monetary unity.

The idea was to call the new currency the ECU, as it

had been since 1979, until it was found out that the écu was actually the name of gold coins of France during the reign of Louis XI.

As the word "euro" had no history in any European country, it was chosen as the name of the currency that would be introduced first in 1999 as a virtual currency, and then in 2002 as a hard currency.

In 1997, the European Commission created the Growth and Stability Pact, imposing a common budgetary policy in order to stabilise the currency.

Then in 1998 the European Central Bank replaced the European Monetary Institute, to guard the monetary policy of the euro.

Considering the likely teething problems of any new currency, the euro was considered a great European success - until the euro crisis of 2009-2012, when the financial and economic fallout almost caused the end of the eurozone.

The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 formalised the Eurogroup, a gathering finance ministers of the 19 euro-using member states.

Even though some populist politicians claim they want to go back to their country's old currency, the popularity of the euro remains high with a large majority of the Europeans.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Sweden are still in the process of joining the eurozone, but no date has been fixed yet. Denmark has an opt-out under the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, and rejected joining the single currency in a referendum in 2000.



Photos: defense.gov



Iraq: 'We're French! It's not our fucking war!'



The invasion of Iraq in 2003 split Western allies, cost millions of lives, destabilised and radicalised the Middle East – but there is still "no sense of failure" in America.

By Andrew Rettman

"WE'RE FRENCH! IT'S NOT OUR FUCKING WAR!", Robert Baer yelled out in Arabic, as a group of armed and "very hostile" Sunni-Muslim tribesmen confronted him and his wife, Dayna, in their jeep on the outskirts of Tikrit, some 180km north of Baghdad, on 11 April 2003.

"That stopped them, and we got through," he said, recalling the incident 17 years later.

He did have a French driver's licence, but, in fact, both he and his wife were American and both were former CIA operatives.

They had sneaked into Iraq from Jordan to cover events as freelancers for American TV broadcaster ABC, in a war which had just split Western allies, and which would go on to cost millions of lives, destabilise the Middle East, and delegitimise US power.

The US army, backed by the UK, had launched airstrikes on Baghdad on 19 March, followed by a ground incursion one day later.

But France, and most of the other Nato and EU nations had stayed out.

And even though Baer had lied about being French, it really wasn't his war, because he, and all the other Middle East specialists still in the CIA, thought the then US president George W. Bush had made a sickening mistake.

"For one, I knew there wasn't the intelligence to support an invasion," Baer said, referring to US and British claims that the late Iraqi president Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

"It was pure Trumpian fakery," Baer said, referring to the current and outgoing US president Donald Trump, who is known for lying.

"The feeling in the CIA was you couldn't destroy the Iraqi army, because that would let in the Iranians and cause a bloodbath," he added.

"But the White House was full of idiots ... they had no filter between fact and belief," Baer said.

"They thought they'd bring down Saddam and then there'd be this domino-effect of good triumphing over evil in the region," Baer added.

"It was very religious: 'God is on our side. We beat the evil Soviet Union and now we're going to beat evil in the Middle East'," he said.

And a domino-effect did happen - but not the one the White House imagined.

In the first brick to fall, Iraq's Shia-Muslim majority allied

with Shia-Muslim Iran and unleashed a civil war against Iraq's pro-Hussein Sunni minority.

In the next brick, the Sunni majority in Syria revolted against its Shia dictator, Bashar al-Assad, inspired, in part, by Hussein's fall in Iraq.

Hussein's disbanded Sunni army then joined Sunni jihadists in Iraq and Syria to fight for survival, in a force that would later morph into the Islamic State.

And in a final domino, US violence helped cause many Muslims of all sects to hate the West, making Iraq everybody's war.

The reason why the Sunni tribesmen were so hostile toward Baer and his wife that day in April 2003, for instance, was because a US airstrike on Ramadi, near Tikrit, had just flattened a three-storey building, killing 21 civilians, including children.

"Desperation and resentment turn to conspiracy theories and radicalism ... and now we have Paris and Vienna," Baer said, referring to two jihadist attacks in the EU in late 2020.

By the time Baer and his wife arrived in Baghdad, on 12 April, Hussein's army had been all-but defeated and US soldiers were already guarding the oil ministry.

"It was eerie, because the electricity was off and the city was burning - and that's what lit up our bedroom in the hotel," he said.

US jets were still bombing pockets of resistance in northern Baghdad.

Narrow alleys were littered with Iraqi tanks with holes blown in their tops by armour-penetrating missiles.

And you could feel the "hate and fear" between the Shia and the Sunnis on the streets, Baer said.

"I knew that nobody was going to put this back together," he said.

Meanwhile, looking back at Bush's diplomacy, Baer said White House-handling of its European allies compounded their strategic differences.

"No one [from the US] went to Paris and said: 'Hey. This is what we're doing, but how do you think it's going to go?', because they thought no one in Europe knew how the world works," Baer said.

"They went to Paris and said: 'Why are you being such girls about this?'," he said.

"It was pure arrogance and France's only role would have been to come in as a US handmaiden," Baer added.

And looking at the Middle East today, he said Western allies there were now less safe than they were before 2003.

Israel is dealing with "a much more threatening Hezbollah", Baer noted, referring to an Iran-allied Shia militia in Lebanon, which has gained war-fighting experience and weaponry on the battlefields of Syria.

And "the Iranians could be in Riyadh in a couple of days, if it wasn't for US protection", because Hussein's Iraq used to be Saudi Arabia's "shield", Baer added.

But geopolitics aside, for the ex-CIA man, the events also left a moral stain that will stay in the history books for good.

"My friends in Doctors Without Borders [a French NGO] say that between 1990 [the first US invasion of Iraq] and today, you can attribute 10 million deaths to these wars, not to mention US casualties," Baer said.

"Saddam was clearly a brutal man, but how can you trade one life for 10 million?", he added.

"It was an utter catastrophe," Baer said.

"And there's not even a sense of memory, of failure, in the US ... the Americans feel they got their pound of flesh, but how do you put a price on all those deaths?" he concluded.

Iraq president Saddam Hussein on trial in 2004, prior to his execution

Photo: pingnews.com



'BIG BANG' enlargement: A homecoming

the
year
2004

As enthusiasm for further enlargement withers, Donald Tusk said it's in the EU's interests not to let China or Turkey replace Europe as the "attractive role model" for millions whose dreams of freedom are similar to his from decades ago.

By Eszter Zalan

On 1 May 2004, the EU flags were raised in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

For millions of central and eastern Europeans it was a celebration of a homecoming.

That is what "accession" meant to many who felt that their countries - after decades of totalitarian rule - were returning to where they belonged, to Europe, as sovereign, independent states.

One of them was Donald Tusk, now the president of the European People's Party (EPP), but previously European Council president and Poland's prime minister.

"For me, the enlargement was my political dream that finally came true. I was genuinely moved," he told EUobserver.

"25 years of fighting to return to Europe, understood as a political and civilisational community - which, in other words, meant my whole adult life," Tusk said, on what enlargement meant to him.

As part of the same wave of accession, Romania and Bulgaria then joined in 2007, and Croatia became an EU member in 2013.

"The most tangible change is, of course, the transformation of the former countries of the Soviet bloc into well-prospering democracies. People who live there, and we are talking here about 100 million



Donald Tusk chaired the European Council meetings between 2014-2019

Photo: Council of the European Union

Europeans, have experienced an unprecedented leap forward in civilisation," Tusk said.

He added that the European perspective for Ukraine, Moldova and the Balkan countries has also triggered positive changes there as well.

When the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, one of the reasons cited was enlargement.

But the wave of accession, dubbed the 'Big Bang', also meant that consensus on often difficult issues facing the EU had to be reached across 27 member states (and 28 while the UK was still part of the bloc).

Cheap central European labour irked some in 'old' member states, and the 2015 migration crisis exposed deep political fault lines - exacerbated by illiberal tendencies particularly in Hungary and Poland.

Some have called for the creation of a 'two-speed Europe', in which a small group of EU countries pursue tighter integration, a prospect which central and eastern Europeans have rejected.

Yet 'multi-speed' is already a fact of life in the EU: Romania and Bulgaria have not yet been allowed to join the passport-free Schengen zone, while Cyprus, Malta, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have since introduced the euro.

Tusk said he "can understand those who are concerned with the crisis of liberal democracy in the countries of central and eastern Europe, especially in Poland and Hungary".

Tusk added, however, that this "phenomenon unfortunately has a much wider character", pointing to outgoing US president Donald Trump, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, while "we can also see the increasing significance of political radicalism in many European countries, for example in Italy or Spain".

"I am convinced, however, that this is a seasonal occurrence, and that democracy has taken root for good also in the eastern part of the continent, and that it still continues to have a pulling power for others - whose beautiful example is the revolution in Belarus," he said.

While support for EU membership remains at a record high in central and eastern Europe, there has been some disillusionment with the radical economic and political transition, which populist politicians in the region now exploit.

"I do not downplay politicians who are building their position on negative emotions and resentments, who use anti-European rhetoric, but frankly speaking, I do not see them as successful in a longer-term perspective," Tusk stated.

"People sometimes choose Orbans and Kaczynskis, but for other reasons than the membership in the EU," he said, referring to the Hungarian and Polish leaders.

The EU has nevertheless lost some of its appetite for further enlargement - even as several Balkan countries seek to join, and jump through hoops to meet the necessary conditions.



The last one to join: the accession treaty with Croatia, ready for leaders to sign in December 2011

Photo: Council of the European Union

Tusk said even with waning enthusiasm, it was "important that the EU does not resign from strengthening its presence in its closest neighbourhood - and does not give up on the idea of enlargement".

"It is in our interest that Ukraine or the Balkans should be more European than Russian, that China and Turkey should not replace Europe as an attractive role model and an end port for millions of people, whose dreams about freedom, stabilisation and prosperity are so similar to my dreams from a few decades ago," he concluded.

European Joint Undertaking ‘Fusion for Energy’ (F4E)

Start of ITER assembly brings fusion energy a step closer, supporting Europe’s economic recovery and contributing to the EU Green Deal



Fusion can play a role in the sustainable energy mix of the future

Fighting climate change and achieving a clean energy transition is the biggest challenge of the 21st century. These are the main priorities in Europe’s strategy for green, sustainable growth - the “European Green Deal” – aiming at a cut of CO₂ emissions by at least 55% by 2030, and climate neutrality by 2050.

Fusion can play a role in the sustainable energy mix of the future. While it is a longer-term solution, it fits perfectly with the objectives of the European Green Deal. Fusion has the potential

to complement renewable energy sources by providing a steady supply of “baseload” electricity when needed.

Scientists have often described fusion as the Holy Grail of energy; it powers the Sun, making life on Earth possible. It also combines a number of advantages: the fuel it requires is abundant, small amounts can release plenty of energy with no greenhouse gas emissions or long-lasting radioactive waste. Last but not least, fusion power plants will be inherently safe.



ITER cryostat base lift off operation. Moving from the Assembly Hall into the Tokamak Building, the home of the biggest fusion device © ITER Organization

ITER will be the most powerful fusion device ever and is considered the biggest international scientific collaboration in the field of energy. It brings together the EU plus Switzerland, China, Japan, India, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the US, collectively representing half of the world's population. The project presents us with an incredible opportunity to explore the potential of fusion energy. The EU is the host of this experiment (located in Southern France), providing half of its components, all of the buildings and infrastructure.

Fusion for Energy (F4E), responsible for Europe's contribution to ITER, is working together with hundreds of companies and research centres to design, develop and manufacture the complex components of the ITER device. This investment produces significant benefits to Europe's economy. Independent studies highlight that from more than 900 contracts placed by F4E for a value of 4.5 billion Euro, the cumulative gains for Europe's economy are in the range of 4.8 billion Euro creating 34000 job-years between 2008 and 2017. Supporting the project in the next Multiannual Financial Framework with similar funding levels will contribute to Europe's industrial recovery, ensure a leading position in the race of innovation, and broaden its energy options.

arrival of various components from different parts of the world continued in line with new health and safety provisions for the pandemic. F4E delivered two of the eighteen massive superconducting Toroidal Field coils and the first Poloidal Field coil, both part of the impressive system that will produce the magnetic fields to initiate, confine, shape and control the hot plasma.

To celebrate the start of ITER's assembly phase, France's President Emmanuel Macron, hosted a virtual event bringing together senior policy-makers from the different parties involved in the project. They all stressed the importance of this experiment and reminded us all that global challenges like climate change and energy supply require international collaboration, vision and ambition.

While ITER is planned to start operations towards the end of 2025, the fusion community will also be paying close attention to another fusion device - JT60-SA. The machine, about half the size of ITER and resulting from the collaboration between F4E and Japan, will be switched on in 2021. JT60-SA will be the largest superconducting fusion device in the world until ITER is complete. EU scientists and engineers will benefit from its operation improving our know how on various aspects of technology and the operation of fusion devices.

ITER is an essential step to bringing the "power of the Sun to Earth". It will generate new knowledge, which is fundamental in our quest for abundant, safe and sustainable energy in line with the goals set by the EU Green Deal. At the same time, investment in fusion energy is stimulating innovation and growth, creating jobs, business opportunities and fostering innovation.

JT60-SA advancement of assembly, January 2020



2020 proved to be a turning point for the ITER project, in spite of the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. In spring, the construction works carried out by Europe successfully allowed for the beginning of the machine's assembly. This paved the way for the spectacular installation of the lower base and cylinder of the cryostat – the 29m x 29m steel structure surrounding the ITER device ensuring an ultra-cool, vacuum environment - weighing 1 600 tonnes. The manufacturing and

Europe's first powerful superconducting magnet for ITER is ready. More than 40 companies counting 700 people, have received money from the EU to manufacture this component, March 2020.



France & Netherlands vote against the Constitution

the
year
2005

"Both referenda weren't about the constitution," Guy Verhofstadt says. "In France, it became a referendum on Jacques Chirac. In the Netherlands, it was about whether they paid too much – something some Dutch politicians have been repeating for 10 years."

By Koert Debeuf

Guy Verhofstadt MEP was Belgian prime minister from 1999 until 2008, the period that started with the Treaty of Nice and ended with the Treaty of Lisbon.

In between, in 2001, under his leadership, the Belgian presidency of the EU launched the Laeken Declaration which set in train the European Convention, chaired by France's Valérie Giscard d'Estaing.

The goal was to write a European Constitution. When that constitution was voted down in the referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005, the constitution was stripped of its constitutional elements, and became the Treaty of Lisbon.

"The idea of creating a European Convention with the mission of writing a European Constitution was born during the discussions in Nice in 2000," Verhofstadt says.

"We all realised that too many files were blocked by rigid decision procedures. There was also a lack of clarity on the competences of the EU."

"The European leaders decided to install a weighing of votes per country and the principle of subsidiarity, where countries could flag when they thought the EU was going beyond its competences. But in the last article of the treaty, we wrote that Europe needed a convention to give the EU a constitutional law."

The 'family photo' after the Laeken summit, with Guy Verhofstadt and the late Jacques Chirac (front line, centre)

Photo: Council



The declaration of Laeken launched the European Convention, with former French president Giscard d'Estaing as its chair and Giuliano Amato, former Italian prime minister, and Jean-Luc Dehaene, former Belgian prime minister, as deputy chairs.

"What we did in the declaration of Laeken was to formulate the problems that needed to be solved in a new treaty in the format of questions," Verhofstadt recalls. "For example, we asked what the role was of the European Parliament, or the role of the regions?"

"In the 1950s the European member states made a constitution, but it was voted away by the French Assembly. Now we wanted to give it another try, with all constitutional elements included, like a European flag and an anthem."

According to Verhofstadt, Giscard d'Estaing did a great job - but also followed his own agenda.

"Giscard started with the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt informal leaders' summits to discuss world politics. In the convention he made of the European Council a real institution."

However, the constitution was rejected in referenda in both France and three days later in the Netherlands. That was the end of the constitution - and the beginning of the road to the Lisbon Treaty.

"Both referenda weren't about the constitution," Verhofstadt says.

"In France, it became a referendum on Jacques Chirac, with a part of the socialists campaigning against. In the Netherlands, it was about the cost of the EU and whether the Netherlands paid too much - something some Dutch politicians have been repeating for 10 years."

EU leaders found a consensus on the text, after stripping its constitutional symbols.

It was no longer a European Constitution but the Treaty of Lisbon - on which no referendum was needed.

Yet just after the Treaty of Lisbon was signed in 2007, a global financial and economic crisis shook the world and cut deeply into Europe.



The EU summit in Laeken, 14-15 December 2001. The Belgian presidency of the EU launched the Laeken Declaration which set in train the European Convention, chaired by France's Valérie Giscard d'Estaing

Photo: Council

"The biggest weakness of the Lisbon Treaty is that it was agreed upon just before the financial and economic crisis," Verhofstadt says.

"That's why social and economic issues are not addressed. For this reason, the EU was incapable of addressing the crisis properly. Remember that one Eurosceptic party in the Finnish government blocked the decision to grant Greece the money they needed."

With the current Covid-19 crisis the EU reacted differently and decided to issue bonds for €750bn in order to finance a recovery package.

"Europe has learned something from the Covid crisis," Verhofstadt says. "More and more people realise that we can only deal with this kind of challenges on a European level."

In the meantime, European leaders launched the Conference on the Future of Europe. The European Parliament wants Verhofstadt to chair it, but some EU leaders do not agree.

"There are still some issues that complicate European decision-making," Verhofstadt says. "Look at the EU paralysis on Belarus, because of the need of unanimity in foreign affairs, or on migration."

"There is still a lot to be done", Verhofstadt concludes, "and the European reaction to the Covid crisis proves that it is possible."

Bolkestein Directive — a 'Frankenstein' Europe needed?

It might have made sense economically, but the infamous Bolkestein Directive directly foreshadowed later tensions over migrant workers and highlighted social anxieties that became more dominant after the 2009 economic crisis.

By Eszter Zalan

When he introduced the proposal in 2004, the Dutch commissioner for the internal market, Frits Bolkestein called the move "potentially the biggest boost to the internal market since it was launched in 1993".

It made sense economically, as services accounted for more than two-thirds of economic activity and jobs in the EU, with 450 million consumers.

But the "Services in the Internal Market Directive", later dubbed the 'Bolkestein Directive', also foreshadowed future tensions over migrant workers, and highlighted social anxieties that after the economic crisis became much more dominant.



French president Jacques Chirac called the services act 'unacceptable'

Photo: European Community, 2006

It had contributed to France and the Netherlands both voting against the draft Constitutional Treaty in 2005, and it even had repercussions in the Brexit referendum a decade later.

"There are two kind of politicians in Europe: the bridge-builders and the wall-makers," MEP Dacian Cioloş told EUobserver. Cioloş is the leader of the liberal Renew Europe group in the European Parliament, and at the time served in Romania as adviser to Romania's agriculture minister.

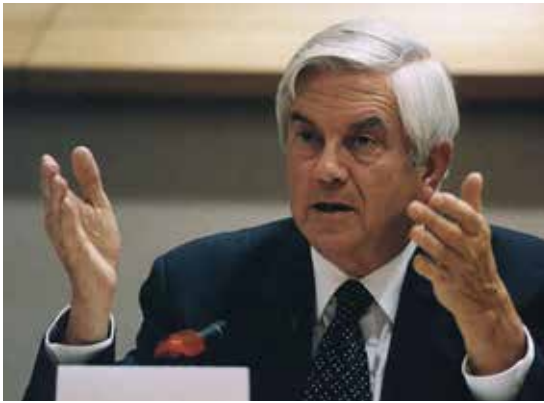
"Back in 2006, the latter tried to exploit an unfounded fear in order to threaten the enlargement of the EU. It was very easy for nationalists and populists to convince people at that time but history has proven them very wrong," Cioloş added.

One of the most controversial-ever pieces of EU legislation, it was soon dubbed the 'Frankenstein Directive', and sparked mass protests across Europe.

The legislation's aim was to integrate the market for services - not only for goods - in the EU, which would allow workers to move freely between countries.

Western European workers' fear was that introducing the so-called 'country of origin' principle - meaning that a cross-border service provider would mainly be subject to the laws of their home country - would lead to lowering labour standards and social dumping.

The directive met opposition in Germany, but it was mainly led by France, which was facing a referendum on the EU constitution.



EU internal market commissioner Frits Bolkestein called for a sweeping opening-up of the services across Europe

Photo: European Commission

The menace of the infamous 'Polish Plumber' appeared across western Europe (a term first coined by the French satirical paper *Charlie Hebdo*), symbolising concerns over cheap central European workers threatening hard-fought labour rights and jobs.

A Polish tourism board later tried to turn the stereotype around with a poster in 2015, inviting the French to visit Poland with model Piotr Adamski posing as a seductive plumber.

"Enlargement has brought great benefits to Europeans from East to West, from North to South. Western Europe not only benefited from great plumbers, but great doctors, nurses, engineers and teachers too," Cioloş, who later served as EU commissioner, and prime minister of Romania, added.

"Following the enlargement, western European investors benefitted from a healthy return on their investments in eastern Europe, and eastern European workers got new opportunities.

"Our divisions are seized as a golden opportunity for our enemies to use as propaganda for their nationalist agendas and to propagate irrational fear. We cannot pin all our failings on the Bolkestein directive. Europe was not built simply as an economic project. Our future prosperity depends on our shared values too," he said.

As the controversial initiative made its way through the EU legislative process, trade unions sounded the alarm all over Europe.

Originally, the directive would have covered all services, but after massive protests across the EU, labour law was ultimately exempted from the directive.

This meant rules on working time, minimum wages, holidays and the right-to-strike are those in force in the country where the service is provided.

Some public services, postal services, audio-visual services, temporary employment agencies, social services, public transport and healthcare were also exempted.

The phrase "freedom to provide services" was coined to replace the country of origin principle, which became the core of the compromise as the legislation passed through the European Parliament.

"Eastern Europe needs to continue to transform and progress but it is too simple to judge and criticise and it is an easy narrative for nationalists," Cioloş said.

"Reforming and transforming administrations, improving services, building an inclusive society is not an easy task and it takes time. But the benefits of having cross-border and seasonal workers is a tangible benefit that most of our citizens understand."

While now a Czech baker is free to set up shop in Germany without restrictions or limitations (except in cases of national security, public health and environmental protection), social tensions have only increased in the almost two decades since Bolkestein's name became a byword for the threat to the European social model.

"We have seen that our enlarged union is much stronger and better equipped today, not just to face a multitude of global challenges but to speak on an equal footing with China, the US or Russia.

"It is a very different union than of 2006. We have seen that the benefits of the freedom of movement of services has far outweighed the damage some led us to fear and the contribution it brings to our economies is very much needed - now more than ever," Cioloş concluded.

Barroso: An insider's guide to the Lisbon Treaty

Jose Manuel Barroso was European Commission president before and after the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in December 2009. He discusses how it impacted his work and the broader implications for an expanding European Union.

By Nikolaj Nielsen

When Gordon Brown as UK prime minister signed the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007, he did so in a quiet room with only a handful of other people present.

Among them was Jose Manuel Barroso, who as European Commission president at the time, had helped usher in the new treaty which overhauled the European Union and its institutions.

Barroso said Brown deliberately arrived late to eschew the official signing ceremony and group photo with the other heads of state and government at Lisbon's 15th-century Jerónimos Monastery.



'At the end of the day Europe is all of us, Europe is just not Brussels,' said Jose Manuel Barroso

Photo: European Commission

"In fact, he signed very discreetly the treaty with me and one or two other witnesses and without the media. For me the fact that Gordon Brown, someone who may be considered pro-European was not ready to sign publicly the Lisbon Treaty, that is a clear, clear signal of what could come later," said Barroso.

The Lisbon Treaty forms the constitutional basis of the European Union, amending two other treaties to meld cross-border rights and freedoms. It entered into force at the end of 2009.

Among the novelties it introduced at the institutional level was a more powerful European Parliament, a new European Commission foreign policy branch, and a new European Council presidency.

But it also included a new option for a member state to leave - which the UK subsequently did, following

the 2016 referendum that has since led to years of protracted and painstaking negotiations between London and Brussels.

Barroso first became European Commission president in 2004, the same year 10 states joined the union.

He was then reappointed in 2009, allowing him to experience the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the EU and its institutions first hand.

The German EU presidency, in the lead up to the treaty's signing, had helped create a political momentum, following the Berlin declaration over the 2007 summer months.

But negative referenda results in France and the Netherlands had initially threatened to derail it. Ireland was also at odds.

"I remember going there [Ireland] at least twice, engaging in debates with society and different groups. Frankly, one of the most difficult groups was, it is bizarre to say, but it was the meat producers and exporters," said Barroso.

Barroso said Ireland was wary of having its beef industry compete with other huge exporters, like Brazil. That issue was eventually settled, with Dublin's decision to support the treaty a factor that weighed in on Poland.

In his conversations with Poland's president at the time, the late Lech Kaczynski, Barroso said he saw a leader who was culturally conservative, but also very much someone who believed in an integrated European Union.

"I remember speaking about the possibility of the European army, he said to me, 'if one day there is a European army, I would like Poland to be the first to contribute, to the first division', so someone who says this I don't consider anti-European at all," said Barroso.

As for signing off on the Lisbon Treaty itself, Barroso said Kaczynski was ready to support it, but did not want to appear to be putting undue pressure on a smaller country like Ireland.

"And I asked him if he was ready to ratify the treaty because there was some delay and he said to me 'look, I am ready to do it today, if you tell me that Ireland does not see a problem'," said Barroso.

Ireland held a second referendum, backing the treaty, in October 2009. Poland's parliament then ratified it soon afterwards.

The changes at the EU institutions were profound. Not everything went smoothly, as a turf war over foreign policy broke out between the European Commission and the European Council.

Barroso had told Brown to send him a woman to take up the role of the EU's foreign policy chief, more formally known as the high-representative. Brown sent Catherine Ashton.

"I wanted to have a more gender-balanced commission, I made with him the same kind of 'soft blackmail' I made with several prime ministers, telling them look if you send me a man I will give



The Lisbon Treaty

Photo: European Commission

your commissioner a very secondary portfolio, but if you send a woman I can give her an important portfolio," said Barroso.

Barroso then also appointed Ashton as the vice-president of the European Commission, creating a dual role between the EU institutions. She then helped set up the new European External Action Service.

"If I want to be honest, there were some turf issues," said Barroso, noting not everyone at the commission was happy about delegating foreign affairs to another body.

Big EU states also wanted to keep Ashton close, and away from the commission, he said, noting some friction as well from the new European Council president.

"Once again being very honest, many people in the European Commission were looking at this position with suspicion," he said.

Some commission insiders saw themselves as the only institution that had a permanent full-time position on EU matters - while the European Council president post was a two-and-a-half year appointment.

Despite the teething problems, Barroso describes the EU foreign policy branch as a "silent revolution", given the current role of European embassies, missions and delegations around the world.

"I think we have to be proud of the work done with the Lisbon Treaty," Barroso concluded.

The years that almost broke the euro

The financial crisis eventually went to the core of the institutional infrastructure of the euro whose reform is still ongoing a decade later.

By Eszter Zalan and Koert Debeuf



The financial and economic crisis of 2007-2008, followed swiftly by the euro crisis of 2009-2010 and onwards, shook the world.

Some analysts declared the end of the euro, one of the most important symbols of Europe's unification.

The European Union wasn't ready to deal with both crises. The Great Recession plunged Europe into stagnation. Trillions of euros were lost.

Banks were collapsing because their system was built on garbage assets. Millions of people lost their house, their savings or their job.

Several European countries were unable to pay or refinance their government debt or bail out their banks.

Late in 2009, Greece announced that its budget deficits were higher than it had officially reported to the European Commission, and it was unable to control its deficit and its debt.

Under the protection of the euro, Greece had been able to finance its debt cheaply, compared with the sorry state of its finances in reality.

Credit agencies like Standard and Poor's lowered the Greek government's debt rating to "junk", making Athens' bonds useless.

As Greece was part of the eurozone, devaluation was not an option. But if Greece collapsed, the entire eurozone might collapse with it.

Then the same cracks started to appear in Cyprus, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The issue went to the core of the euro's infrastructure. Monetary policy was common, but fiscal policies remained with the member states, and common rules had been overlooked at times - even when broken by Germany and France.

A political problem quickly emerged as well: taxpayers in more fiscally-prudent countries felt it was unfair that they should finance what they saw as mistakes and overspending made by more fiscally-irresponsible governments.

Several governments, from Slovakia to Italy, fell as the EU struggled with its worst crisis to date.

Meanwhile, European leaders were not ready for the solution that would stop all speculation against the euro: a European banking union and European collateralisation of a part of the debt of each eurozone country.

That issue also provoked constitutional problems in Germany.

The European Central Bank (ECB) lowered interest rates so that people, businesses and countries could take loans at a low cost.

In May 2010, the European Commission introduced a European Financial Stability Facility in order to be able to give countries financial help where needed.

In January 2011, it also created the European Financial Stability Mechanism through which the European Commission would issue bonds, using the EU budget as collateral.

These bonds were immediately rated AAA+ by Standard and Poor's.

In July 2012, both mechanisms were fused into the European Stability Mechanism, a permanent rescue mechanism to help countries in need.

However, probably the most important intervention that stopped the collapse of the eurozone was a speech of the new ECB president Mario Draghi on 23 July 2012.

In that speech, Draghi calmed the market and stopped speculation against the euro by stating that the ECB would do "whatever it takes" to safeguard the common currency.

The restructuring of the euro remains ongoing, with plans to forge a banking union with common rules still on the negotiating table.

But the confidence in the euro has returned, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have joined the common currency in the years since the financial crisis.

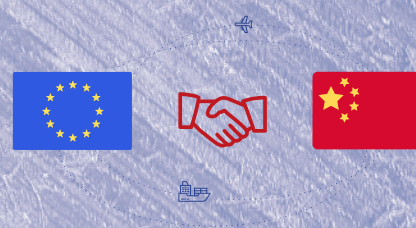


China and the EU signed the Geographical Indications Agreement last September. It is the first major trade agreement between China and the EU in recent years and a milestone in China-EU economic and trade cooperation. China is the world's largest importer of agricultural products and welcomes quality agri-food products from all countries. This agreement is expected to give a huge boost to the fast-growing China-EU agri-food trade. It also further demonstrates that our relations can deliver great benefits to our people. In this increasingly uncertain world, what we need is more confidence and cooperation.

— Ambassador Zhang Ming, Head of the Mission of China to the EU

CHINA - EU GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS (GI) AGREEMENT

This landmark agreement is China's first comprehensive and high-level bilateral agreement on geographical indications with foreign countries and **a milestone in China-EU economic and trade relations.**



PROTECTION OF GI PRODUCTS

The agreement will protect 100 Chinese GIs in the EU and **100** EU GIs in China.

The scope will expand to cover an additional **175** GIs four years after its entry into force.

PROTECTED CHINESE GIS

such as:



- Anji White Tea
- Gannan Navel Orange
- Yantai Apple
- Korla Pear
- Wuchang Rice
- Wuchuan Mooncake

PROTECTED EU GIS

such as:



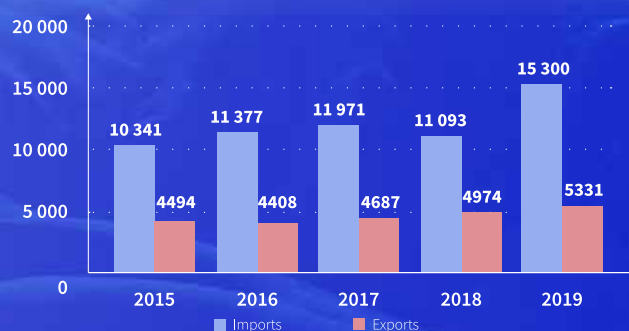
- Champagne
- Feta Cheese
- Münchener Bier
- Parma Ham
- Tokaj Wine
- Polish Vodka

BOOSTING BILATERAL TRADE

China is the EU's second-biggest trading partner and the EU is China's biggest trading partner. **The GI agreement will facilitate China-EU agri-food trade.**

Totalling 15.3 billion EUR, China's agri-food imports from the EU grew by almost 40% in 2019, the highest growth over Japan (15%) and the US (9%).

VALUE OF CHINA'S AGRI-FOOD TRADE WITH THE EU Million EUR



EU's new diplomacy in search of old élan?

EU diplomacy has changed from a man with a phone to "a very large ship", but growth in bulk came with loss of agility, French former diplomat, Pierre Vimont, said.

By Andrew Rettman

The EU foreign service has changed from a man with a phone to "a very large ship" in the past 10 years, for Pierre Vimont - one of its quintessential insiders.

But EU diplomacy needs to rediscover its former élan, Vimont said.

Back in 2009, the EU foreign service more-or-less amounted to Javier Solana, a veteran Spanish diplomat, and Vimont was France's ambassador to the US.

But in 2010, the EU launched the European External Action Service (EEAS) to "assist" its "high representative" in forging a collective foreign policy.

British politician Catherine Ashton took over from Solana and Vimont left the Quai d'Orsay (the HQ of the French foreign ministry), after 38 years in the French corps, to become Ashton's right-hand man, the EEAS secretary general, in Brussels.

Recalling the pre-EEAS days, Vimont, who now works for the Carnegie Europe think tank, said: "More than anything else, it [the EU foreign service] was Solana himself, with a few aides around him, and a telephone on which he could do his diplomatic work".

Solana still played a decisive role in multiple conflicts.

In one call to Moldova's president in 2003, for instance, he stopped Russian president Vladimir Putin from flying in to sign a shady peace deal, even though Putin's jet was already warming up on the runway in Moscow when Solana phoned Chişinău.

"Some people say European diplomacy is 'fair-weather diplomacy', not for times of crisis," Vimont noted.

"I don't agree, because Solana was very-much involved in the North Macedonia crisis, in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Vimont said.

Solana's successors now have a full EU institution, with some 4,500 staff, 140 embassies, and €730m a year to help make an impact.

Its ambassadors speak for Europe around the globe.

Its staff chair EU nations' talks in dozens of meetings in Brussels salons and draft decisions, such as Russia economic sanctions, of geopolitical gravity.

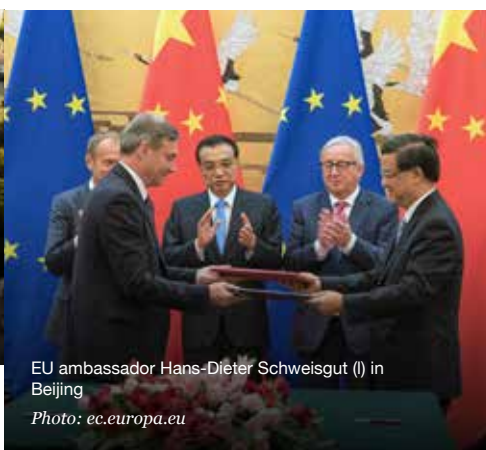
And it will soon help to spend a new €20bn EU budget for joint-defence.

"Solana had a very small boat and his successors had a very large ship," Vimont said.

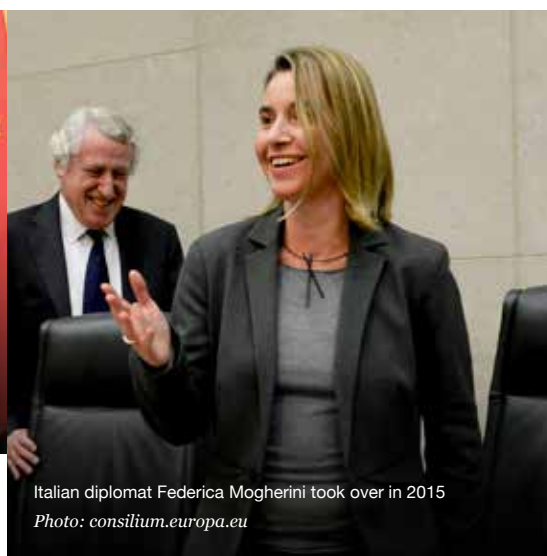




Aerial view of EEAS building in Brussels
Photo: consilium.europa.eu



EU ambassador Hans-Dieter Schweisgut (I) in Beijing
Photo: ec.europa.eu



Italian diplomat Federica Mogherini took over in 2015
Photo: consilium.europa.eu

The new EU foreign service is still young, not least by comparison with the French foreign ministry.

"Ten years is a very short time in the field of governance," the 71-year old French diplomat said.

But, for Vimont, the surge in bulk has come at a cost in "agility".

Comparing EU to French foreign policy, he said: "When you launch an initiative in the Quai d'Orsay, you talk to a few partners, even, sometimes, you just launch it and see the reaction of others, but in the EEAS you have to take into account the position of 27 member states".

The EU method was "cumbersome" and required "lots of energy, time, patience", he said.

Ashton also played a valuable role in Iran nuclear talks and Kosovo-Serbia peace talks, Vimont noted.

But Solana's successors, including Italian diplomat Federica Mogherini, have been weighed down by management, trying to forge an "esprit d'accord" among staff, who spoke 24 European languages, Vimont said.

EU top diplomats have also held been back by "turf wars", he added.

"Should it [the EU foreign service] be a 28th foreign ministry, a coordinating organisation, or a think tank for member states ... a spokesperson?", Vimont asked.

"It was never agreed between member states and, also, with the [European] Commission ... and, 10 years later, it's still not settled," he said.

The current EU foreign relations chief, Josep Borrell, is, like Solana, a veteran Spanish diplomat, inviting comparisons.

And EU foreign policy might benefit if Borrell was, once again, allowed to play a freewheeling, Solana-type role, Vimont said.

"What we've been missing is the kind of agility Solana had," Vimont noted.

"There has been loss of [EU] impetus and relevance, compared to pre-EEAS days," he added.

"It's quite striking, you see it in Syria, and Libya, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis," Vimont said.

Borrell's personality recalled the old spirit, Vimont indicated.

"Sometimes he [Borrell] takes the liberty of speaking his own mind, even if he doesn't have the consensus of all the member states. I, personally, think it's very good," Vimont noted, in an approach which also echoed the Quai d'Orsay's audacity.

"After all, he [Borrell] has the right of initiative in the Lisbon Treaty," Vimont said, referring to EU law.

"I even heard some foreign ministers saying he [Borrell] should use that right more than he does," Vimont added.

And even if Europe had no army in increasingly dangerous times, the EU flag had its own power, Vimont said.

"When I was [French] ambassador [in the US] and I was in discussion with executive heads of some very powerful enterprises, and I was telling them 'Europe is still a very small power', they were saying: 'Are you kidding?'," he recalled.

"If we [the EU] don't have an army, we have economic power. The single market, in terms of trade, technology is very powerful," Vimont concluded.



the
year
2011

The 'Arab Spring' was a great dream

"I was a very regular girl, working in sales and marketing. No one in my family was politically active. There was no justice anywhere, but we all kept silent. For some reason, I started to feel angry about it."

By Koert Debeuf

When Mohamed Bouazizi immolated himself on 17 December 2010 in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, it appeared to be the catalyst for a wave of revolutions across the entire Arab world, called the Arab Spring.

The Tunisian dictator Zine El Abedine Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January, 2011. On 25 January, people went to Cairo's Tahrir Square demanding freedom in

Egypt. Everyone was stunned when Egypt's long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak was forced from power on 11 February 2011. It triggered revolution and protests from Rabat in Morocco, over Bahrain to Damascus in Syria.

Not all outcomes of these revolutions were for the best. Tunisia became a functioning democracy, while other countries plunged into civil war, or into new

dictatorships. In 2011, the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to five representatives of the Arab revolution. Mohamed Bouazizi received the prize posthumously.

For Egypt, the prize was given to Asmaa Mahfouz. Nine years later, we talk to her about that incredible moment in 2011.

"I was a very regular girl, working in sales and marketing. No one in my family was politically active. Actually, no one in Egypt I knew had a dream. There was no justice anywhere, but we all kept silent. For some reason, I started to feel angry about it, and started to become politically active in 2008. I had no big ideas, but I thought, why not talk to people about justice and freedom? Why not try making people believe that change is possible? That's why I joined the April 6 movement [the youth movement that organised the 25 January Tahrir Square sit-in]. I wanted to convince people to stand up for freedom and justice," Asmaa Mahfouz recounts.

"When I saw what happened in Tunisia in December 2010 and January 2011, it made me even more angry. I wanted to convince people that it would

be safe to come out to the streets and posted my mobile number on Facebook to prove that. From 10 January on my phone didn't stop ringing, day and night. I tried to convince them that we will be with them and that we have to do this together.

"When I posted a video on Facebook, calling on men to show their courage and join women on Tahrir on 25 January, I was angry, but afraid. Back then, I thought, well, the worst that can happen is that I will be killed. But that didn't matter to me. We had to fight for our rights. But when I went to Tahrir, the protest was so much bigger than I and all the others had ever hoped for. People came out massively, without fear, believing things could be changed. Everyone cared for each other and helped each other, certainly on those days when we were attacked.

"Actually, on that day we never thought for a second this Tahrir protest would end with the resignation of Mubarak. We were very surprised and very happy to have accomplished this, and still be alive. Today, nine years later, it all seems like a distant dream.

"Because of my role in 2011, I don't find any work. Luckily, I have my children to care for. It's their future that is my purpose in life now."

Happy 75th anniversary, United Nations



The UN Charter recognizes the

"principle of self-determination of peoples"

Chapter 1, Article 1

Self-determination is democracy

#EuropeOfAllPeoples



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the
year
2012

The European Council president (l), Herman Van Rompuy, collecting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, together with European Commission president José Manuel Barroso (c) and European Parliament president Martin Schulz (r)

Photo: European Council

EU's Nobel Peace Prize for 'fraternity between nations'

In 2012, the Norwegian Nobel Committee unanimously decided that developments in Europe after World War II represented the "fraternity between nations" and "peace congresses" cited by Alfred Nobel as criteria for the peace prize in his 1895 will.

By Elena Sánchez Nicolás

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the European Union in 2012, with the citation "for over six decades [of having] contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe".

The Norwegian Nobel Committee unanimously decided that developments in Europe after World War II represented the "fraternity between nations" and "peace congresses" cited by Alfred Nobel as his criteria for the peace prize in his 1895 will.

During the prize ceremony in Oslo, German chancellor Angela Merkel and the then French president Francois Hollande stood up and, with their hands joined, saluted the crowd - leaving one of the most memorable images of the event.

Other heads of state and government also participated in the event, but the representative of a key country in Europe's history was missing. The decision of the former British prime minister David Cameron - several years before he called his Brexit

referendum - to be absent at the celebration of EU reconciliation still raises some eyebrows.

"The ceremony had a high symbolic value, emotionally and politically," said the then president of the European Council, Belgium's Herman Van Rompuy, who collected the prize together with European Commission president José Manuel Barroso and European Parliament president Martin Schulz.

"I think a lot of people had worked, for quite a long time, in the Nobel committee to give the prize to the European Union, because it is still the biggest peace project in the whole [of] European history," Van Rompuy told EUobserver.

The former head of the European Council described the event as one of the highlights of his political career.

In his acceptance speech, Van Rompuy invoked his own family history, pointing out how evident the memories of World War II remain today for many citizens across the bloc.

"We managed to push aside war, hopefully forever, but we should always recall this - even in times when there are no threats of war [in the EU]," he said, referring to one of the underlying messages of the prize.

"The other part of the message is still: be grateful, never forget [times of war] because it can always recommence," he said, adding that "history repeats itself, but never in the same way".

Some critical voices, and some former winners of the peace prize, slammed the choice of the EU for

the award, arguing that some of the bloc's policies opposed the principles and values associated with Nobel's prize.

However, Van Rompuy argued that "we cannot compare social conflicts or political antagonism, with the cruel wars between big nations in the previous centuries".

The European Union rose from the ashes of World War II, breaking a cycle of violence and vengeance on the continent, while aiming to bring a better future. But it is not perfect, and it cannot be idealised.

"In Europe, there will always be differences [among member states]," said Van Rompuy, adding that these contrasts are evidenced from north to south, and from east to west, in a wide range of areas, from the economy to migration-related challenges.

"The question is whether there is sufficient political will and political courage to find compromises and solutions, and to show solidarity - that is absolutely key," he said.

"In a society where individualisation is much more present for all kinds of reasons, solidarity takes an effort - it is not a natural feeling," Van Rompuy warned.

The Nobel Peace Prize itself consists of an amount of 8m Swedish Krona [€785,000 in 2020], a gold medal and a diploma. The prize money was given to projects that support children affected by war and conflicts, while the medal and the diploma were among the first objects of the permanent exhibition of the House of European History, which opened in 2014.



"The ceremony had a high symbolic value, emotionally and politically," said the then president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy

Photo: Bundesregierung/Bergmann

SNOWDEN WAS 'WAKE-UP CALL' FOR GDPR

The contentious negotiations on the EU's data protection rules (GDPR), very much influenced by intense lobbying from the US, radically changed after whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed in 2013 that US intelligence services were collecting worldwide user-data.

By Elena Sánchez Nicolás

the
year
2013

In the summer of 2013, American whistleblower Edward Snowden leaked highly-classified information from the National Security Agency, revealing that US intelligence services were collecting worldwide user-data from companies like Microsoft, Google, Apple, Yahoo, Facebook and YouTube.

At that time, the then EU commissioner for justice, Viviane Reding, was still trying to find majorities in the European Parliament and the European Council to update the 1995 Data Protection Directive, and replace it with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - which initially received a lot of criticism from MEPs and member states.

The contentious negotiations, very much influenced by intense lobbying from the US, radically changed after Snowden's mass-surveillance revelations.

"The Snowden scandal was a wake-up call, people suddenly understood that something very weird was going on and, all of the sudden, this triggered the question of individual digital rights," Reding told EUobserver.

"Citizens became upset against their governments, member states were aware that they could not block anymore [EU-wide] rules for the protection of digital rights, and European parliamentarians realised that their responsibility was to protect EU citizens rights", she noted.

"I got a huge majority, almost unanimity, in the council and the parliament thanks to the Snowden revelations, so actually this scandal brought about the GDPR," she pointed out.

The GDPR's primary aim was to harmonise legislation within the bloc, and give back control to individuals over their data – but, so far, it has proven insufficient to change the behaviour of tech giants.

Now two years after its implementation, Reding argues that policymakers should concentrate enforcement efforts on "the systematic stealing of personal data for commercial or political purposes", since big tech companies "continue to steal" the data of individuals, without people's awareness.

"It is not enough to have a law, people need to be aware of what is happening," she said, adding that one of the most deeply-rooted problems of the current online ecosystem is related to this lack of consent.

"The consent [forms] are so complicated that nobody understands them. The law says very clearly that it needs to be explicit consent but, unfortunately, as it stands today, it is a 'tick-the-box' consent," she added.

This meaningless style of 'consent' has entitled big tech companies to gather trillions of data points about their users, for the core purpose of profit-making.

"The ethical problem comes when people start handling their personal data without knowing the consequences of what they are doing," warned Reding.

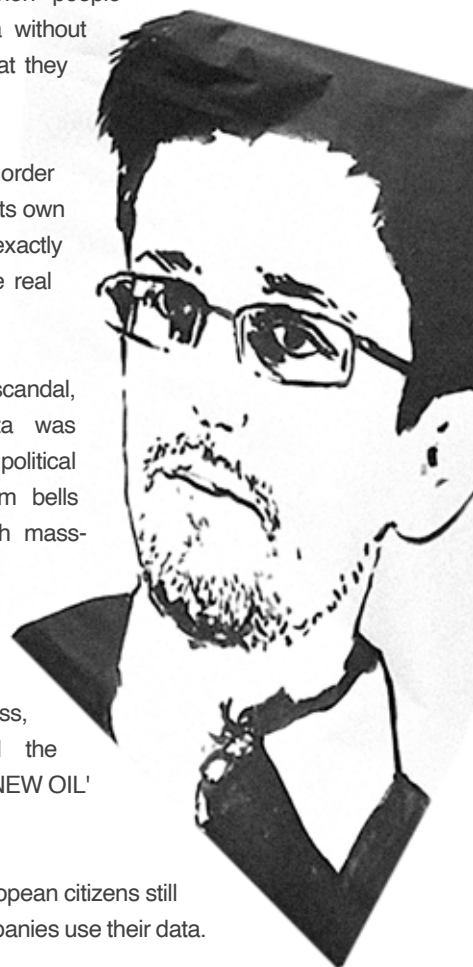
"But the misuse of personal data in order to influence the individual, against its own will and without that individual exactly knowing what is happening, is the real problem," she added.

The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, in which Facebook users' data was collected without their consent for political advertising, once again set alarm bells ringing about the misuse of such mass-surveillance.

Both the Snowden and Cambridge Analytica scandals also undoubtedly raised awareness, helping citizens to understand the concept behind the 'DATA IS THE NEW OIL' mantra.

But research shows that many European citizens still do not understand how online companies use their data.

That is why former commissioner Reding hopes for yet another wake-up call "that can help citizens at large understand that their data is something very personal and something that needs to be protected".



Ukraine: 'He told me he loved me then said goodbye'

the
year
2014

20 February 2014, and snipers had just opened fire on protesters in Maidan square in Kiev, in the final act of a revolution which led, one day later, to the fall of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich and to Russia's invasion.

By Andrew Rettman

"He told me he was on the Maidan, that he loved me, and then he said: 'Goodbye'."

Oleksandra Matviychuk cried as she recalled the phone call, from her husband Oleksandr, six years ago.

"It was the most horrible moment in my life", she said.

His call came on the morning of 20 February 2014 and snipers had just opened fire on protesters in the Maidan square in central Kiev, in the final act of a revolution which led, one day later, to the fall of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich and to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, shattering the post-Soviet order in Europe.

Matviychuk, a then 31-year old lawyer and rights activist, spoke with her husband from the office of Euromaidan SOS, an initiative she had created to give legal aid to victims.

By February 2014, they were so busy she was sleeping just two-to-three hours a day.

And Kiev was so dangerous she was living in hiding, after regime thugs tried to raid her flat.

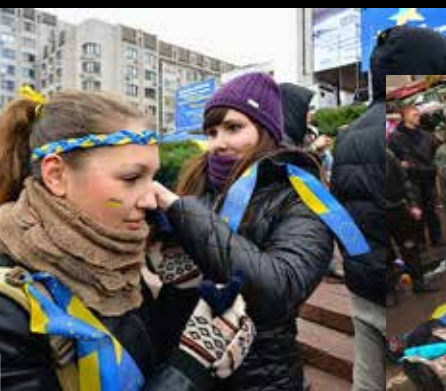
Her husband was not hurt in the end.

But dozens of other people were gunned down in cold blood, surrounded by EU flags - the symbol of the opposition movement - on the uprising's most deadly single day.

"I'm lucky, because many others never saw their loved ones again," Matviychuk said.

"The shooting went on for hours and we received thousands of calls for help. Our volunteers rushed to the morgues, to Hotel Ukrayina, to hospitals, and other places where the bodies were being taken, to photograph them and their IDs," she recalled.

"Being a lawyer in such a situation, you feel absurd, but we had to document the truth," she said.



The Maidan protests began peacefully on 21 November 2013
Photo: mac_ivan



Dozens of people were gunned down by snipers on 20 February 2014
Photo: Jeroen Akkermans RTL News Berlin

Russian soldiers occupied Crimea the same day Ukrainian president Vladimir Yanukovich fell

Photo: Elizabeth Arrott/VOA



To this day, no one knows who ordered the killings

Photo: Christiaan Triebert

The 'Revolution of Dignity' had begun three months earlier, at about 8PM on 21 November 2013, with a Facebook post by Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayyem.

"Let's get serious ... Who's ready to come to Maidan before midnight? 'Likes' don't count", Nayyem wrote, after Yanukovych, earlier the same day, had halted preparations to sign an EU accord and opted to stay, instead, in what Matviychuk called "the Russian world".

Matviychuk and about 1,000 others heeded Nayyem's call.

"Everyone was smiling that night, even though it was freezing ... but, inside, I was concentrated, because I knew 1,000 people were not enough to stop the ruin of our country," Matviychuk said.

As days and weeks went by, to her "huge surprise", the crowds kept growing, at points numbering over 500,000, despite increasing police brutality, including the first lethal shootings of protesters - Serhiy Nigoyan, Roman Senyk, and Mikhail Zhynzhenko - on 22 January 2014.

Some were also happily surprised when top EU and US diplomats visited the Maidan.

But for Matviychuk, what counted was "support from ordinary people, not just the political elite".

"When violence broke out on 11 December, we were scared because our relatives were on the Maidan and we didn't know what would come next," she said.

"It was deep into the night, but, suddenly, our Facebook page was flooded with messages: 'Spain is with you. Italy is with you. France is with you ...'", she said.

"These gestures were so important, because we knew we weren't the only ones who weren't sleeping, that we were not alone", she said.

Nayyem's Facebook post has gone down in history, but for Matviychuk, the revolt had deeper roots - and its first casualties were women.

When 29-year old Iryna Krashkova was raped and beaten half-to-death by two policemen in the village of Vradiivka in June 2013, one of whom went free because of relatives in high places, it prompted protests against regime lawlessness from Lviv in western Ukraine to Donetsk in the east.

And when 18-year old Oksana Makar was raped and murdered in March 2012 in Mykolaiv, on Ukraine's Black

Sea coast, by three men, two of whom also went free, it also sparked a wave of disgust on social media and street protests against Yanukovych's "world".

Fast forward to 2020, and two new presidents later - Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelensky - and, for Matviychuk, the fight for "dignity" goes on.

Her NGO - the Centre for Civil Liberties - is still fighting in the courts for justice for the 83 protesters killed on the Maidan.

They are also seeking justice for the 18 policemen who died. "These men were also tools used by the regime", Matviychuk said.

"Nobody believes they [the Maidan snipers] were Georgian or Italian mercenaries, or any other Russian propaganda stories, but what we need are court verdicts, not popular knowledge," Matviychuk said.

Her struggle was made harder when Zelensky, last year,



Oleksandra Matviychuk: 'There's still a lot of work to do'

Photo: Oleksandra Matviychuk

let five key suspects - officers from Ukraine's 'Berkut' special police - flee to Russia in exchange for Ukrainian soldiers and civilians taken hostage in the war in east Ukraine.

And her fight is being obstructed by Yanukovych-era officials, who never left their posts, and some of whom have crimes to hide.

"It's not just about top officials who ordered attacks, or Berkut officers who killed people - you must consider the whole chain-of-command, the responsibility of the middle ranks, and these people are not so interested in our investigations," she said.

"We still have to build the institutions our country needs, and we have to protect Ukraine from Russian aggression, so there's a lot of work."

REFUGEE CRISIS - THE MALIAN POET WHO GOT ASYLUM

the
year
2015

Over one million people seeking refuge arrived in the European Union in 2015 - among them a Malian political activist and poet, who has since been granted asylum in Italy.

By Nikolaj Nielsen

Soumaila Diawara was the leader of a far-left wing youth movement in Mali in 2012.

Three years later he was granted asylum in Italy, where he now works as an interpreter for a prefecture in Rome.

He also teaches school kids about migration and has published two books of poetry in Italian.

"Europeans need to know that the problems of Europe are not due to Africa, or that the problems in Africa are not due to Europe," says Diawara.

"The problem is due to a system that exploits," he says, noting both Africans and Europeans have been victims.

Born in 1988 in Mali's capital city of Bamako, Diawara's story is one of political persecution in a country wrecked by poverty and violence.

Mali's military coup in early 2012 forced him to flee, after authorities started arresting political activists, sentencing some to death.

Diawara had been in Burkina Faso at the time of the arrests in Mali. His home was ransacked. Unable to return, he went to Algeria and then eventually to Libya.

Arrested in Libya, he spent ten days in a notorious detention centre in Tripoli before paying some €800 for his freedom.

He then packed onto a boat on Christmas eve 2014 along with others and arrived in Sicily.

"We were saved by a Maltese boat and transferred to an Italian one," he said.

Eight months later, in 2015, he was granted asylum in a country, Italy, that broadly viewed migration with suspicion.

Rallies were held in Rome against immigrants, as the far-right Northern League party was growing in popularity.

The year, 2015, is also seen as a pivotal turning point for the politics surrounding migration and asylum in Europe.

Some one million people, many of them refugees from the civil war in Syria, had sought sanctuary in a Europe that promised open arms.

Most arrived from Turkey before heading up through the Western Balkans and then towards Austria, Germany, Sweden and elsewhere.

Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel called it a "historic test" for Europe.

An EU plan to disperse some 160,000 arrivals throughout member states ended up generating tensions on quotas that still reverberates and divides some capitals today.

"Those who are proposing it, know full well it won't work," said Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban at the time.

It is a familiar refrain that has since scuppered many attempts to reform EU-wide asylum laws.

Today, the European Commission's 2020 proposal is more fixated on returns, and keeping people from leaving their countries in the first place.

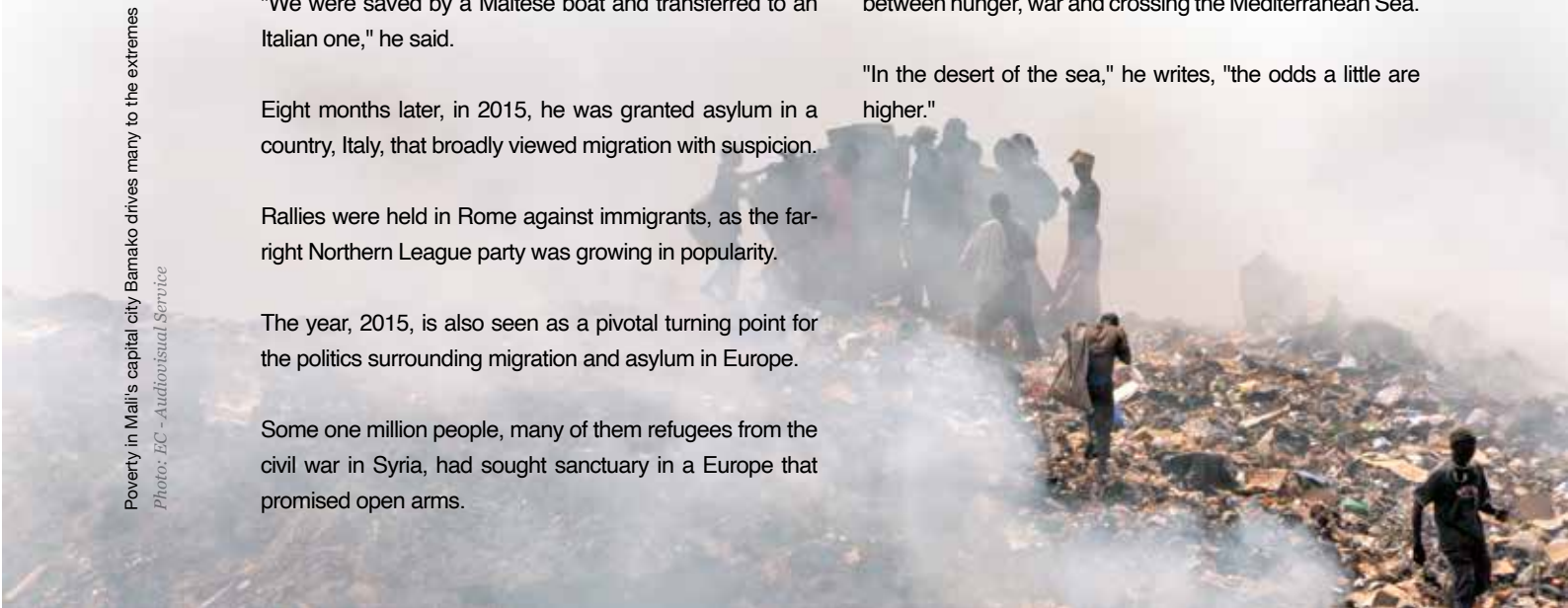
Other efforts were made in Malta at a summit on migration in late 2015.

That meeting was followed up with a political declaration to set up a new EU Emergency Trust Fund, which now co-finances, among other things, the Libyan Coast Guard.

That coast guard returns to Libya anyone who attempts to leave the country by boat. Many are sent to detention centres, often run by rogue militia outfits where people are sometimes sold off into human slavery.

In one of his poems, Diawara weighs survival chances between hunger, war and crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

"In the desert of the sea," he writes, "the odds a little are higher."



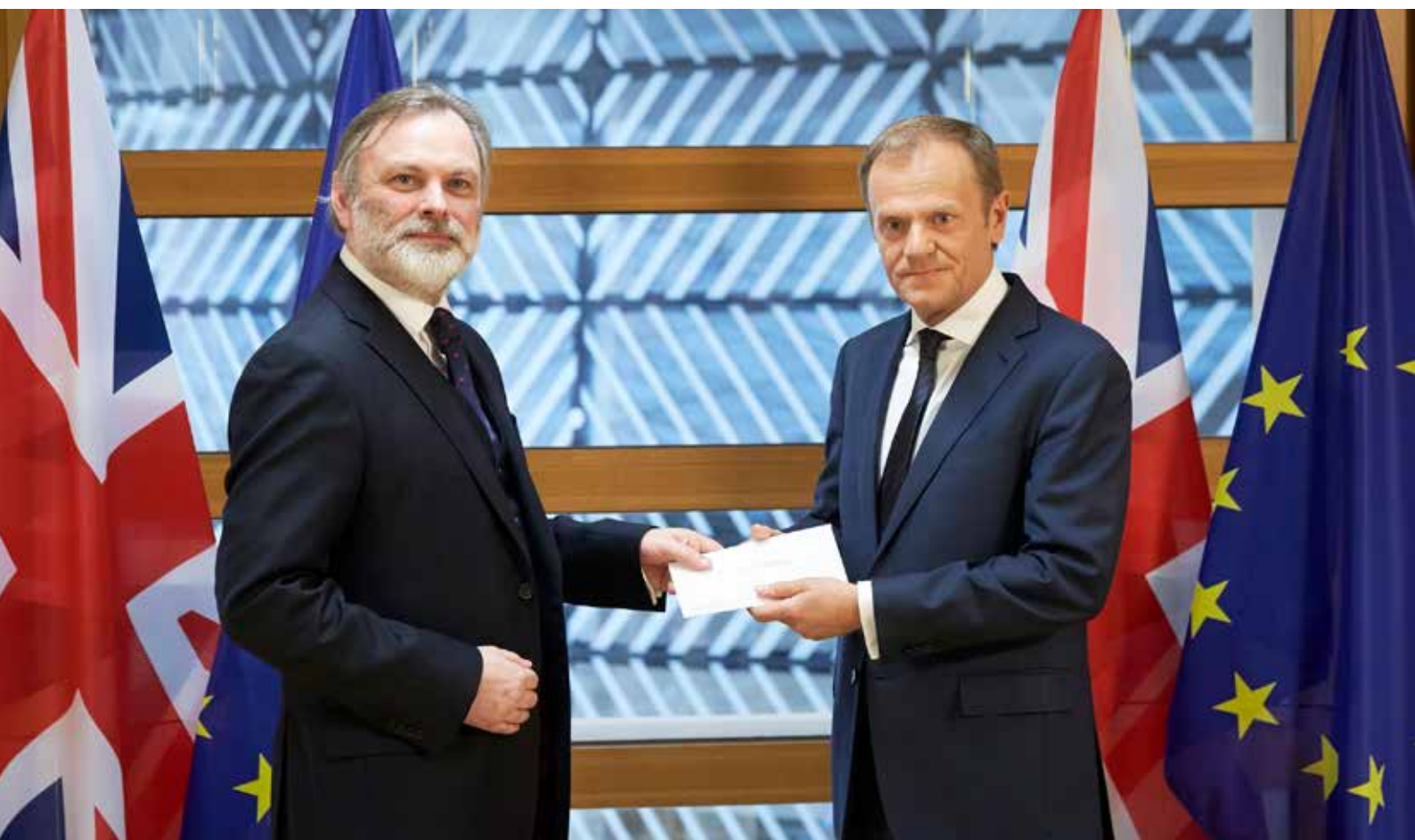
Brexit

– A shock to the system

the
year
2016

In 2016, Britain became the first member state to decide to leave the EU. The referendum sent shockwaves through Europe and changed UK politics. As the first casualties, EU and British citizens have been caught in limbo.

By Eszter Zalan



Britain's EU ambassador, Tim Barrow, hands the written notification on the UK's wish to leave to EU to then European Council president Donald Tusk, in 2017

Photo: European Council

The evening of 23 June 2016, the day British voters decided whether to leave to European Union, had an unnerving feel to it in Brussels.

An unrelenting summer storm painted the sky with double rainbows and lightening, creating an eerie, out-of-place, out-of-time overture to the vote.

The next morning's shock of the UK deciding to leave the bloc it had joined in 1973, by 52 percent to 48 percent, left everyone scrambling for answers: is this

real, what does this mean, how will it be done?

British prime minister David Cameron, who opened the door for a referendum but campaigned for Remain, quit the day after the plebiscite, leaving his successor, Theresa May, to figure out what kind of Brexit the UK really wanted.

The EU moved relatively quickly, amid fears others might follow Britain's example.

In July, the EU Commission appointed French politician, Michel Barnier as the bloc's chief Brexit negotiator, and set out the choreography of two-phased negotiations based on the succinct (in fact, just five sentences) Article 50 of the EU treaty.

May, having lost her majority in the British parliament after a snap election, bowed to pressure from hardline Brexiteers in her own party, and pushed for a hard exit, aiming to untangle the complicated economic and trade ties with the EU.

The referendum was one of several elections around the world that exposed a deep division in different societies, seemingly fuelled by fears around migration, a decade of austerity slashing public services, and frustration with an ever-more globalised elite.

It also put the spotlight on how social media platforms were used, willingly and unwillingly, for political campaigning, and how Russia interfered with the vote.

Brexit shook UK politics to its core, re-emboldened Scottish independence calls, and even led to discussions on the possibility of Irish unification.

It also ultimately resulted in the premiership of Boris Johnson, one of the biggest faces of the Leave campaign, and pushed the ruling Conservative party further to the right.

In October 2019 after much - mostly British - political drama, a divorce deal was reached. The UK officially left the EU on 31 January 2020, with its transition period concluding at the end of 2020, when all ties will break.

The EU and UK are still negotiating on what shape the future relationship should take as this magazine went to press.

One of the key demands of the EU in the divorce talks was to secure the rights of 4.5 million British and EU citizens who settled in the EU and Britain respectively, believing the EU's free movement principle would protect them for life.

They were the first casualties of Brexit.

Elena Remigi, an Italian-born interpreter who had lived in the UK for over a decade, is one of them.

"I remember the shock, the disbelief," she told EUobserver of the day after the referendum, adding

that the "othering", particularly of immigrants, had an impact in the vote.

"It felt like the carpet has been pulled from under us," she said.

Remigi founded the In Limbo Project to compile, in two books, personal accounts of EU and British citizens whose futures are now in doubt.

It shed a light on the solidarity among EU citizens who helped each other when many felt the certainty of the life they had built for themselves was gone.

To retain their existing rights, EU citizens had to apply for a so-called "settled status" - it was not an automatic right.

Now EU citizens fight for a physical proof of the settled status - crucial for the elderly, for instance, in case of hospital care - not only digital, which the government has so far denied.

There is a fear people might be wrongly deported, as in the case of the 'Windrush' scandal of long-standing Caribbean immigrants in 2018.

Remigi said she had seen the rhetoric against immigrants changing people's minds heading into the election. She has now acquired citizenship.

Remigi, who describes herself as an Anglophile in love with the language and literature, says Brexit changed her relationship with the country.

"It is like falling out of love with someone, and there is a sense of betrayal," she said.

Liberal, vibrant, diverse, open, a brand in itself, one of two European nuclear powers, and trade-friendly but regulation-averse, the UK will be sorely missed from the EU.

The power balance inevitably shifts in the bloc after Brexit, with the Netherlands stepping up to fill London's 'liberal' shoes on the EU budget, trade and rule of law. Meanwhile France, as the sole nuclear power, wants a more assertive global Europe.

When asked if he had any regrets, former EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker said the EU should have taken a role in the Brexit referendum.

"I was wrong to be silent at an important moment," he rued.

'WE'RE LUCKY TRUMP DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE WAS DOING'

Donald Trump picked fights with everybody - except Russia and North Korea - in the past four years. But he lost, including in his fight with the truth, US journalist and historian Anne Applebaum said.

By Andrew Rettman

"Are you crying, Anne Applebaum?", the British radio host asked.

It was off-the-mike and early in the morning, London time, on 9 November 2016, in the studio of BBC Radio Four's flagship Today programme and Applebaum, a US journalist and historian, was holding her head in her hands, while listening to a live-feed of Donald Trump's presidential victory speech in Washington.

"Of course, I wasn't [crying], but it must have looked that way," Applebaum said, recalling the moment four years later.

It was "still shocking and upsetting," she said.

"I said, at the time, this is potentially the end of the Western alliance ... the end of an era," she added.

And for the next four years, following his inauguration in January 2017, Trump did what he could to prove her right.

He made up foreign policy as he went along.

His only idea was to pick fights and his only motive was personal gain.

"The problem with him [Trump] isn't that he's stupid. [It's that] he's very uneducated. He knows very little

about the world," Applebaum said.

And the other problem was that "he is amoral," she added.

"One of the reasons why he was always so hard for people to understand was that his only interest - I mean, his only interest - was himself," she said.

"All his policies were designed to benefit him personally or psychologically," she added.

"That's why he's such a confusing political figure," she said.

Trump was "rude to the [former] British leader ... Theresa May. He was rude to [German chancellor] Angela Merkel. He was rude to [French president Emmanuel] Macron," Applebaum said.

"He acted as if it [Nato] was some kind of mafia, in which people had to pay up to be part of it," she added.

He picked a trade fight with China, but he lost, because he had torn up US trade pacts with the EU and Asian democracies, which had been designed to contain Chinese power.

He picked a fight with Iran on nuclear arms-funding, but he also lost, because he destroyed Western unity on sanctions.



Trump (l) with Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg
Photo: nato.int



Anne Applebaum (l) is a US historian and journalist
Photo: msz.gov.pl



US president routinely insulted EU leaders
Photo: consilium.europa.eu

"Now, the US doesn't trade with Iran, but other people quietly do ... It's a mess," Applebaum said.

One of Trump's most amoral moments came in 2019, when he tried to force Ukraine's president to fabricate dirt on his US election rival, Joe Biden, by threatening to cut off military aid to Ukraine.

It saw Trump impeached and almost lose office, but there were similar moments on the domestic front.

"We've never had an American president before who said to the state of California: 'I won't help you with your fires because you don't vote for me'. Unthinkable, in the past, but that's what he [Trump] did," Applebaum said.

Other leaders had also harmed US interests and values in the past.

But for Applebaum, Trump was "a real low in American history".

"I don't know the first half of the 19th century so well, but he was the first American president in at least a century to behave like that," she said.

Meanwhile, Trump's needs came out in other ways.

He cosied up to autocratic Russian president Vladimir Putin, for instance.

In one "odd and creepy" incident after a summit in Helsinki in 2018, Applebaum recalled, Trump sided with Putin against US intelligence services in saying Russia had not interfered in the 2016 US election.

But the psychology of Trump's relations with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un was even stranger, Applebaum said.

"I think we'll look back at that with just wonder and amazement that that really happened - the [Trump and Jong-un] meetings and the exchange of love letters [in 2018]. That was really bizarre," she said.

For their part, EU leaders began to stop meeting Trump, as time went by.

When he invited Merkel to a summit in the US in May as an election campaign stunt, for instance, "she [Merkel] didn't want to get involved and just said: 'No'," Applebaum noted.

"People came to understand that ... if you went to see him [Trump], you'd just be humiliated. He'd say something stupid in a press conference and you'd be embarrassed," Applebaum said.

Some of the harm Trump did cannot be undone.

But looking back on events - one day after Trump's mini-era ended, as he lost his re-election bid on 7 November 2020 - Applebaum said the West had also been "lucky".

"We're lucky we got that kind of autocrat, who didn't know how government works," she said.

"He [Trump] could have done a lot more damage, if he understood what he was doing," she added.

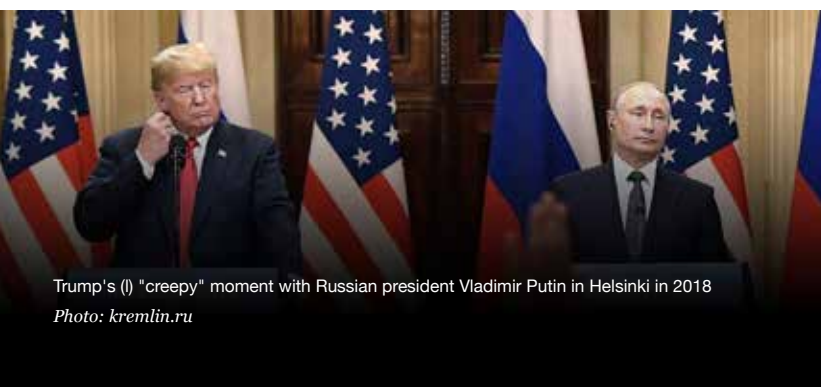
Trump, falsely, claimed Biden rigged the 2020 election because that was his one idea for how stay alive in US politics, Applebaum said.

"I don't think he [Trump] is ever going to really concede ... he's going to use that [conspiracy theory] to galvanise his political base, to make people angry," she said.

But if Trump also picked a fight with reality, by screaming about "fake news" on Twitter, then, in some quarters, the truth was winning, Applebaum indicated.

"It turned out to be good for some journalism because, when people understood they needed reliable information ... there was a huge wave of subscriptions to [US publications] the New York Times, the Washington Post, and even my magazine, The Atlantic," she said.

"The Atlantic has hundreds of thousands of new subscribers," she said.



Trump's (!) "creepy" moment with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Helsinki in 2018
Photo: kremlin.ru



Trump with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un in 2019
Photo: whitehouse.gov

Juncker: Far-right 'never had a chance' against the EU

The far-right rose in power over the span of 2017 and 2018. But for former EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, they never posed a real threat. "They are not right because their basic societal analysis is wrong," he said.

By Nikolaj Nielsen



Italy's Matteo Salvini (l) with Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban

Photo: Balazs Szecsodi/Hungary's Press Office of the Prime Minister

Jean-Claude Juncker leaned into his chair at his spacious office at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels.

The former European Commission president had arrived from his home in Luxembourg earlier that morning along with his bodyguard.

On his desk is an empty but used ashtray, scattered documents, a light blue tie, and a bottle of water. Behind him, shelves stacked with books.

Juncker had set aside some time to discuss with EUobserver the rise and fall of the far-right over the past few years.

He once famously slapped Hungary's prime minister Viktor Orban (in jest) on camera, and then called him a dictator.

"I was always calling him privately 'dictator' and so when he came in the room I said 'dictator' and he was used to that," Juncker said.

"He is not a dictator in the real sense of the word, of course. But he is far-right."

During his tenure as commission head, the far-right populist political parties gained in power.

Donald Trump entered office as US president in January 2017, invigorating movements in Europe.

That same month leaders from Austria's Freedom Party, Belgium's Vlaams Belang, the Czech Republic's Dawn of Direct Democracy, and Italy's Northern League, among others, pledged an alliance. It quickly unravelled.

But Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Austria's Freedom Party soon rose to heights of public support seldom previously seen.

France's far-right Marine Le Pen then faced off with Emmanuel Macron in a bid to become president that same year. She lost.

Yet 2018 still managed to consolidate the far-right in ways that could no longer be ignored.

In June, the Northern League's Matteo Salvini was sworn in as Italy's deputy prime minister and minister of the interior.

He had entered into a shaky coalition government with the populist Five Star Movement, on the back of demonising migrants and immigration.

"The day he [Salvini] became a coalition partner in Italy, it took away from his erotic influence on others," said Juncker.

For Juncker, the far-right was a short-lived threat despite the large number of MEPs of similar political stripes elected to the European Parliament.

"They never had a chance to change European policies," he said of Salvini and others like him.

Juncker extends that assessment to Nigel Farage, the then-MEP who had helped usher the UK out of the European Union.

"I had fights with Farage, I liked him as a person," he said.

But he notes Farage's movement was limited to Britain, and that he had little, if any support, inside the European Parliament.

The AfD has since imploded and Austria's Freedom Party's stint in government collapsed in the wake of political scandals.

Salvini, as well as the Dutch firebrand nationalist Geert Wilders, have since turned into historical footnotes.

Out of the bunch, Le Pen remains an outlier, still eyeing the French presidency.

For Juncker, the real threat to the European Union never came from the far-right. Instead, it is rooted in the rule of law.

Much like with Farage, Juncker got along with people politically opposed to him, in countries where the rule of law was being undermined.

He held meetings with leaders of the 'Visegrad Four' countries, composed of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

"I had huge debates with them, bringing them together and often at the eve of the European Council," Juncker said.

"There was not war - but no common ground," he said.

Poland and Hungary would accuse the Juncker commission of unfairly signalling them out for political reasons.

"I have introduced more infringement procedures against Germany than any other member state and they are a Christian Democratic ruled country," countered Juncker.

The animosity against the commission spread onto the streets of Hungary.

The Orban government had plastered images of Juncker and US billionaire philanthropist George Soros all over the country.

Orban sought to depict the two men as behind a mass migration plot aimed at destroying the 'white Christian' European identity.

"I was not really happy about these posters, but I didn't take this too seriously," said Juncker.

When he was Luxembourg's prime minister, he added, he had even met with Soros on Orban's recommendation.

"He [Orban] doesn't remember that he was the one asking me to have a meeting with Soros back in my prime minister's time. So he has changed. I didn't," Juncker concluded.

Juncker (c) with the Visegrad 4 leaders

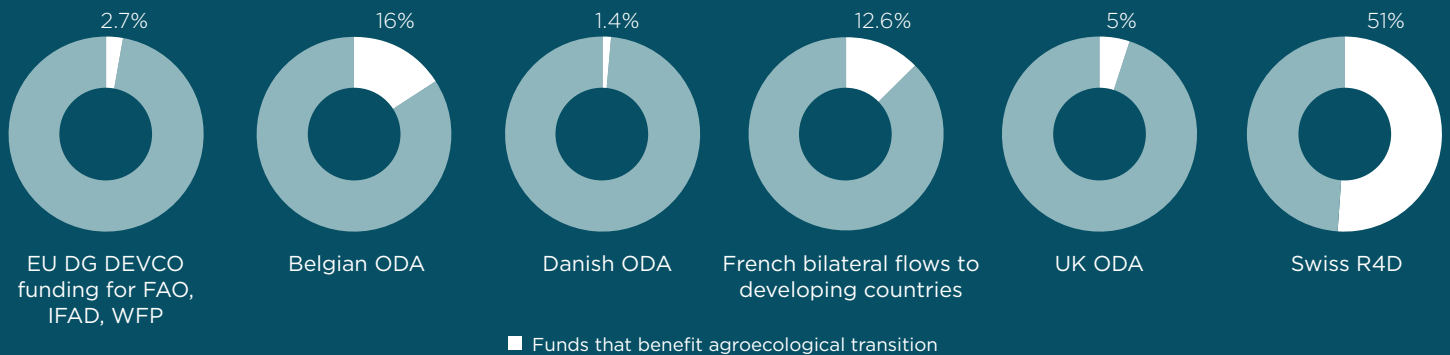
Photo: European Commission



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EU's Green Deal

– a global 'gold standard'?

the
year
2019

All EU action on the climate stands at the crossroads between domestic ambition and international cooperation - especially with the G20 countries, who are responsible for about 80 percent of all global emissions.

By Elena Sánchez Nicolás

European Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans: 'Because of the need for recovery from the Covid crisis, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest. We better do it in the right way'

Photo: European Commission

For decades there has been extensive scientific consensus that the climate is changing - but only during the past few years experts have been able to link that change to particular weather events.

In Europe, the increase in heatwaves, floods, droughts, landslides plus other noticeable effects have changed citizens' perceptions and their expectations of environmental protection.

A wave of climate strikes across the bloc, and the outcome of the 2019 European elections, where Green parties did well, were a powerful reminder of this new reality, especially for those responsible for finding an effective response to what is widely seen as the biggest challenge of the 21st century.

The long-anticipated "European Green Deal" was launched in December 2019 by European

Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans, who was given the responsibility of overseeing the bloc's climate policy after leading a passionate campaign to become the president of the EU executive.

This so-called "new growth strategy" is designed to make Europe the first continent to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050 - an idea that marries up the EU's legally-binding commitment (made under the international Paris Agreement in 2015), where the average global temperature rise is to be limited to well below 2°C.

The Green Deal's flagship initiative will soon take the form of a "European Climate Law," transforming these political promises into binding obligations, while providing predictability and legal certainty to guide investors - and hopefully

setting an example for other international partners to follow.

As climate change does not affect everyone equally, neither does the green transition. The move towards a low-carbon society is expected to increase the burden on those regions or countries reliant on extractive industries and related energy production, as well as carbon-intensive industries.

That is why for Timmermans, who comes himself from a coal region in the Netherlands, "leaving no one behind" is essential for the success of the Green Deal.

"Whenever there is a challenge, the people who are the most vulnerable pay the highest price. We need to make sure that those who are most vulnerable are also best protected," he told EUobserver, adding there needs to be a "just transition or there will be just no transition" at all.

With the announcement of the Green Deal, the commission pledged to raise its 2030 ambition on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to at least 55 percent (below 1990 levels). But the specific target is yet to be decided.

"It will be bloody difficult for everyone," Timmermans warned, pointing out that the commission's ambition for 2030 will be especially challenging for households, and the transport and agriculture sectors.

Asked whether he expected the necessary investment for the bloc's green transition, Timmermans said that "member states understand that we need an agreement on the updated 2030 climate target soon. It is the signal that financial markets are waiting for".

"Right now, the markets want to be part of this [transition in Europe]. But if we start showing weaknesses again, they may turn against us," he added.

"Because of the need for recovery from the Covid crisis, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest. We better do it in the right way," Timmermans pointed out.

Some critics, meanwhile, have argued the pandemic and related economic downturn might overshadow the Green Deal as one of the bloc's top priorities.

However, in a more optimistic view, Timmermans said that the coronavirus pandemic, the environmental and biodiversity crisis as well as the industrial revolution bring the potential "for a comprehensive solution, where Europe rises to the occasion".

However, all EU climate action stands at the crossroads between domestic ambition and international cooperation, especially with the G20 countries, which are responsible for about 80 percent of all global emissions.

The bloc's new goal for 2030 has also been a key element in its global climate diplomacy, as it shaped the debate about the EU's official contribution to the Paris Agreement ahead of the deal's fifth anniversary this year - when countries are expected to present tougher climate goals.

"The issue of where our target for 2030 should be is very much linked to the question: to what extent Europe should take responsibility for global emissions reductions," said Timmermans, who thinks that the objectives of the Paris Agreement can be achieved "if other industrialised countries also take their share of responsibility".

With its upcoming 'carbon border tax', expected for early 2021, the EU aims to protect European companies being forced to comply with stricter environmental rules at home, while pushing international partners to uphold the bloc's standards when trading in the single market.

"We need to play this very cleverly and carefully. Be the most ambitious in the world, become the first climate-neutral continent, but at the same time allow other international partners to go in the same direction, because if we lead and nobody follows, we will not reach the goals of the Paris Agreement," Timmermans concluded.

EU solidarity tested in face of Covid-19 pandemic

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2020

When decisive, coordinated action from EU institutions and member states was most needed to respond to the first coronavirus outbreaks, the bloc struggled to find a common and timely response. What lessons have been learned?

By Elena Sánchez Nicolás

Photo: CDC

Since Covid-19 was first recorded late in 2019 in China, the virus has quickly spread around the world - upending everyday life and testing the world's response in a global crisis.

The pandemic rapidly revealed that the EU and its member states were not prepared for a medical and humanitarian crisis of such dimensions.

When decisive and coordinated action from EU institutions and member states was most needed to respond to the first outbreaks, particularly the one in Italy, the bloc struggled to create a common and timely response to the pandemic.

This is partly explained by the fact that, under its treaties, the EU still has no direct or shared competencies in the area of health.

As a result, some member states introduced unilateral measures, such as export bans on some medical supplies or the closure of borders - revealing a glaring lack of European solidarity during the first months of the pandemic.

"EU leaders took some decisions that were not really in line with the European perspective," the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, told EUobserver, referring to the export bans of certain medical gear seen in Germany, France, and the Czech Republic back in March.

"At the beginning, some countries thought that it was possible to win the battle against the virus at the national level. But in only a few days, they all understood that this was not the right approach and more cooperation was needed," Michel added.

In a quick U-turn after these dark early days, EU countries started sharing medical equipment and doctors with other member states, jointly repatriating EU citizens from third countries and assisting neighbouring countries financially.

Without (yet) a safe and efficient Covid-19 vaccine, member states have been following two main strategies to fight the virus: imposing very restrictive measures (with massive socio-economic effects), such as lockdowns, and trying to keep the virus under control by testing, tracing and isolating.

"This is a permanent battle," Michel said, adding that the pandemic has revealed a need to increase the responsibilities of the EU in the healthcare sector.

'This is a permanent battle,' warned Charles Michel, president of the European Council - adding the pandemic has revealed the need to increase the role of the EU in healthcare

Photo: European Commission



"Now, there is more political will to work towards the European level [in the healthcare sector] - but aiming to have one European model for health systems is not realistic," he added.

While the global understanding about this new respiratory disease has steadily increased since the first outbreaks, how effectively Europe is responding to the current much-feared second wave of Covid-19 remains unclear - especially amid fears over 'vaccine nationalism', or the seizing of the first batches of doses by richer states that can pay the most or the quickest.

Meanwhile, the burden on healthcare systems all across the bloc, as a result of the surge in coronavirus infections, has triggered new nationwide lockdowns and restrictive measures in nearly all EU member states.

However, the second wave has also brought fresh hopes for an effective vaccine.

"Next year, we will probably have a vaccine, or several vaccines, for Covid-19, but it is quite certain that vaccination will take time, so now the priority is to make more progress in testing, tracing, and isolation while improving cross-border cooperation," said Michel.

The European Commission, on behalf of member states, has signed deals with companies such as Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK and Johnson & Johnson for their potential Covid-19 vaccines, while also negotiating with other pharmaceutical firms.

But EU leaders still have to agree on common criteria for the deployment of the vaccines (when a safe and effective shot is available), to ensure a fair distribution of vaccines both within the EU and beyond.

"This is an issue of concern. We need to work on this strategy in order to avoid a political battle in the next months that will make Europe look ridiculous," Michel warned.

There is an opportunity to make Europe stronger, "if we find the way to tackle the question of vaccines together," the Belgian politician added.

"Nevertheless, it is clear that even if we solve the problem of Covid-19 in some countries in the world, it will never be solved until we make sure that all over the world we can keep the virus under control," he made clear.

The pandemic, meanwhile, has also increased ongoing tensions between China and the US, resulting in a new geopolitical environment in which the role of the EU is still to be finally determined.

However, for the European Council president, the EU now has the opportunity to develop a so-called "strategic autonomy," transforming the bloc's economic and social model to make Europe "less dependent [on third countries] and more influential" in the global context.

"We want an open economy with international exchanges, but we need to rebalance the international relationships taking into consideration more fairness, and [a] level playing field," he added.

In its history, the EU has survived many crises and, undoubtedly, it will also survive the negative socio-economic consequences of Covid-19.

However, a key question remains: will the EU be able to establish timely 'solidarity' responses to future crises, in the face of such large-scale disruptions to life and economies?



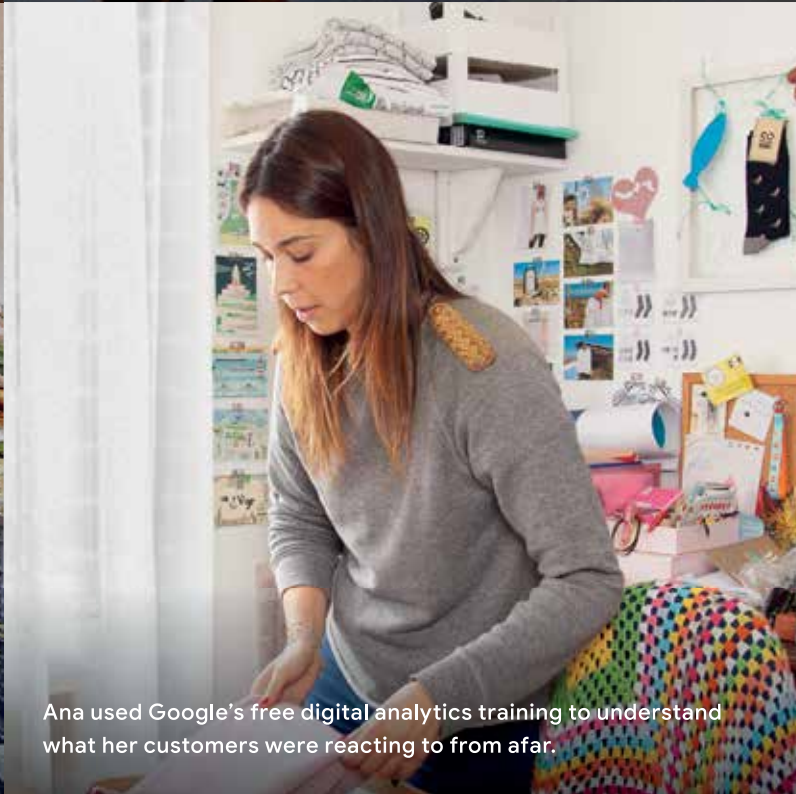
Korina and Kyriakos used Google's free digital training to launch a jobseekers' platform matching farmers with workers.



When Janine's dog school closed during lockdown, she used Google's free website evaluation tool to shift sales online.



Ingo used Google My Business posts to let customers know he was delivering during lockdown.



Ana used Google's free digital analytics training to understand what her customers were reacting to from afar.

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