



WHAT IF ...?

14 futures for 2024

Edited by
Florence Gaub



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The editor

Florence Gaub is the Deputy Director of the EUISS. She specialises in strategic foresight, as well as security and conflict in the Middle East and North Africa.

The EUISS Chaillot Paper series

The *Chaillot Paper* series, launched in 1991, takes its name from the Chaillot hill in the Trocadéro area of Paris, where the Institute's first premises were located in the building occupied by the Western European Union (WEU). The hill is particularly known for the Palais de Chaillot which was the site of the signing of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and housed NATO's provisional headquarters from 1952 until 1959.

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INTRODUCTION

Any science fiction aficionado will know that the genre seems to be surprisingly good at predicting the future: satellites, the moon landing, the mobile phone, 3D printing and even antidepressants all featured in novels, films and TV series often long before they actually materialised.¹ Does this mean science fiction authors are better at foresight than others? Of course not.

A different mechanism is at play here: when humans are shown the possibility of innovation, they will inadvertently be inspired by it. (For a yet unknown reason, this is even more so the case today than in the past).² Science fiction is therefore not an extraordinarily accurate foresight mechanism, but instead acts as a feedback loop: because people watch science fiction films, they get ideas about how they could shape the future.

This loop does not just apply to fiction, but to all types of forward-looking domains. Take science, for instance: in the seventeenth century, scientist Robert Boyle wrote a list of 24 innovations that he hoped would solve a number of human problems, including the ‘prolongation of life, the art of flying, the art of continuing long under water, the cure of wounds and diseases by transplantation, the acceleration of production of things out of seed and drugs to appease pain’.³ More than 300 years later, the vast majority of the items on Boyle’s list have become reality – not because he had a crystal ball, but because he and his wishlist influenced how the Royal Society, and a host of other scientists

after him, concentrated their research efforts. In that sense, visions and utopias are not naïve: they can serve as an inspiration for science, but also policymaking.

Scenarios, too, can have that effect: popular tools which bring to life a distant future, scenarios are essentially stories for adults, which help to suspend disbelief and orientate our decision-makers. But they can tell different types of stories: in our two previous ‘What if’ *Chaillot Papers* (2017 and 2019), our scenarios were warnings of possible futures, inspiring action to avoid them.

In this *Chaillot Paper* – as always a true EUISS team effort – we have changed the direction, following the lead of science fiction, as we propose *desirable* scenarios in 2024. However, in contrast to Star Trek et al., we do not simply display possible futures but also include the paths that could lead us there.

This type of methodology is called *backcasting*. Where foresight looks towards the future from the present, backcasting looks towards the present *from* the future. It chooses a preferred future and outlines the paths, and milestones, that can lead to it.⁴ Due to its problem-solving nature, backcasting is a tool particularly suited to policymaking. (Perhaps because of that, it appeared first in the energy sector with pioneer studies and the codification of the method in the late 1970s and early 1980s.)⁵

1 Peter Kotecki, “Here are 15 wild sci-fi predictions about future technology that actually came true,” *Business Insider*, January 12, 2019.

2 “When science fiction inspires real technology,” *MIT Technology Review*, April 5, 2018.

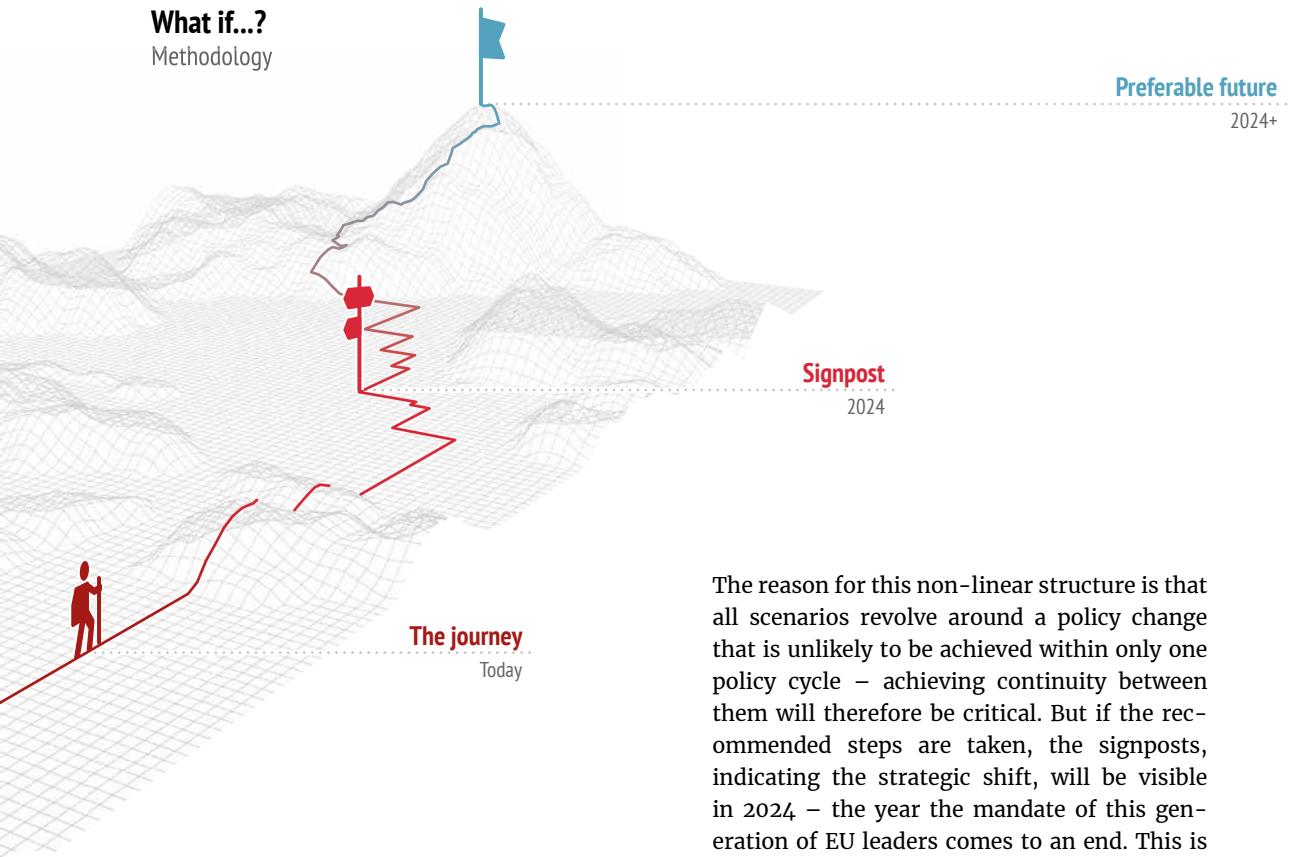
3 Ian Sample, “Robert Boyle: wishlist of a Restoration visionary,” *The Guardian*, June 3, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/jun/03/robert-boyle-royal-society-wishlist>.

4 Karl Dreborg, “Essence of backcasting,” *Futures*, vol. 28, 1996, pp. 813–28.

5 Amory B. Lovins, *Soft Energy Paths: Towards a Durable Peace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); John Robinson, “Energy backcasting: a proposed method of policy analysis,” *Energy Policy*, vol. 10, 1982, pp. 337–44.

What if...?

Methodology



Just like its cousin, foresight, backcasting is more of an art than a science: there is no rigid methodology on how to design the pathway backwards from the future. Of course, to be more than a pie-in-the-sky fantasy, it has to include obstacles and opportunities; it ideally also defines interim objectives and what some call ‘signposts’, designating a recognisable potential future event that signals a significant change on the way to the desired future.⁶

The 14 scenarios in this *Chaillot Paper* all follow the same structure, taking us not only on a journey to the future but also backwards to the present: they start out with the signpost set in 2024, describe the desirable future in the years beyond that date, and lay out the pathway that connects this situation to today.

The reason for this non-linear structure is that all scenarios revolve around a policy change that is unlikely to be achieved within only one policy cycle – achieving continuity between them will therefore be critical. But if the recommended steps are taken, the signposts, indicating the strategic shift, will be visible in 2024 – the year the mandate of this generation of EU leaders comes to an end. This is not to distract from the many other tasks they will have to tackle during their tenure, but it is a contribution to dealing with the profound shifts that are occurring.

In that sense, these scenarios can be read as policy recommendations in disguise since they bring to life a situation in 2024 that could be the positive result of this generation’s work. But backcasting scenarios are not just recommendations; since they revolve around a clear – and even normative – idea of a certain future, they require a strong understanding of what type of future is actually desirable in a given context. If there is uncertainty about the preferred future, backcasting can therefore serve as a blueprint for forming public opinion *before* it actually serves as a roadmap for policymaking.

⁶ Ray Strong et al., “A new way to plan for the future,” Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS’07) 2007, IEEE Computer Society, <https://www.computer.org/csdl/proceedings-article/hicss/2007/27550230b/12OmNvmXJ67>.

Lastly, scenarios, shared visions for the future and agreed telescoped steps are all useful in the journey that will take us from a Newtonian world view (where the world is essentially mechanistic, understandable and therefore manageable) to a Quantum world view (where everything is connected, complex and requires more than just knowledge to solve a problem). In this world, we will have to slow down, adopt longer perspectives and seek more creative solutions in policymaking. Electoral cycles, modern technology and lifestyles are pushing us towards taking faster and faster decisions, and not just in policymaking – business executives and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are forced to think in quarterly terms too. Studies show that pace of life has increased by 10% worldwide since the mid-1990s – even by 30% in Asia. Historical studies, too, suffer from this time compression: over the last two

decades, research has shrunk to examining time spans of a maximum of 50 years, down from more than 75 in the early twentieth century. The art of adopting a long-term view, *la longue durée*, is disappearing at the same pace as problems become more complex – to the detriment of visionary policymaking.⁷

Foresight and its cousins can help with this: by design it is orientated towards a future further away (as an art, it is notoriously myopic; the closer the future, the less visible it becomes). It can warn, but also propose positive futures we want to work towards. Just as the *New Scientist* called for a new wishlist akin to Robert Boyle's to achieve positive innovation, this publication offers a number of desirable futures worth striving for.⁸ In the absence of exercises such as this, science fiction and doomsayers will maintain the monopoly on views of the future.

⁷ Fernand Braudel, "La longue durée," *Réseaux*, vol. 5, no. 27, 1987, pp.7-37; Jo Guldi & David Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸ David Cannadine, "Longer life, flying, mind-bending drugs: Dreams that science made real," *New Scientist*, October 9, 2019, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24432512-800-longer-life-flying-mind-bending-drugs-dreams-that-science-made-real/#ixzz66T7QOdVa>.





The background is a vibrant blue gradient, transitioning from a lighter teal at the top to a deeper blue at the bottom. It is filled with numerous glowing, semi-transparent blue spheres of varying sizes, some of which have a bright white center. Thin, light blue lines crisscross the background, creating a sense of depth and movement, reminiscent of a network or a futuristic cityscape.

INNOVATE

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IF ... WE AVOIDED WORDPLAY WITH CHINA?

ALICE EKMAN

On 10 December 2023, on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 43 countries gathered in Brussels to launch the ‘Universal Glossary’, also known as the ‘Glossary for effective multilateralism’. Although by 2023 many countries were employing the same diplomatic vernacular, they attached quite different meanings to certain words and it was time for a major clarification. For instance, since Xi Jinping became president in 2013, China had increasingly positioned itself as the supporter of free trade and globalisation,¹ multilateralism and the rules-based system,² human rights³ and the rule of law.⁴ But a large number of countries were using the same terms with totally different meanings in mind. The Universal Glossary defined these terms and others commonly used in key multilateral fora – from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to the United Nations (UN).

The launch of the glossary aimed at putting an end to the ambivalence and confusion which had obstructed bilateral and multilateral

negotiations for more than a decade. An online version was also launched on this occasion, designed to be updated with new terminology, based on the evolution of the global agenda, and with each definition being endorsed by the 43 countries, and others who would join the group later on. ‘Words have meaning, they create the basis for relationships between humans, but also between states!’, underlined one of the 43 state representatives at the December 2023 gathering in Brussels. Another quoted the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: ‘Language disguises thought’⁵ – adding, ‘our thoughts are clear, so is our language, and so should be our conversations with each other now, at bilateral or multilateral levels.’

In concrete terms, this dynamic led throughout 2024 to tougher negotiations of joint statements and communiqués, and in some instances to the refusal to sign joint statements which included words that were – or could be – misused or misinterpreted by other signatories. It also led some countries to pull out of

The author wishes to thank Cristina de Esperanza Picardo for the valuable brainstorming session on this topic and for her input to this chapter.

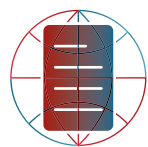
- 1 This trend had become noticeable since the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, where President Xi Jinping declared: ‘We must remain committed to developing global free trade and investment, promote trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation through opening-up and say no to protectionism.’
- 2 In particular since 2015, marked by Xi’s speech at the UN (‘We should be committed to multilateralism and reject unilateralism’) and more actively since the beginning of the Trump presidency in 2017.
- 3 Notably since China’s activism at the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2017–2018.
- 4 Particularly since October 2014, marked by the Fourth Plenum of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party, whose main topic was the ‘Rule of Law’.
- 5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung), 1921.

Lost in translation

Examples of competing definitions between China and the EU

Competing definitions based on analysis of **European Union** and **Chinese** official sources.

Although both sides are increasingly using the same words in bilateral and multilateral settings, they actually attach very different meanings to them.



human rights

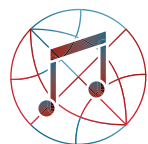
n. pl. ['hyu-mən 'rɪt]

1. Human rights are universally applicable legal norms.

Council of the EU, *EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy*, June 2012

2. There is no universal road for the development of human rights in the world. As an important element in the economic and social development of each country, the cause of human rights must be promoted on the basis of the national conditions and the needs of the people of that country, and cannot be defined on the basis of a single authority.

China's National report for the Universal Periodic Review to the UN Human Rights Council, November 2018



art

n. ['ɑːt / 'kəl-çər]

1. Freedom of expression, including artistic expression, is essential for the development and manifestation of individuals' identities in society.

EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline, January 2014

2. Writers and artists should take a people-centered approach and draw inspiration from everyday life and the experiences of the people to produce works that do justice to our times. We encourage them [writers and artists] to create fine works (...) that reflect real life, and that extol our Party, our country, our people, and our heroes.

Xi Jinping, 19th Party Congress speech, October 2017



internet

n. ['ɪn-tər-,net]

1. The borderless and multi-layered internet has become one of the most powerful instruments for global progress without governmental oversight or regulation.

Cybersecurity Strategy of the European Union, February 2013

2. Within Chinese territory the internet is under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty. The internet sovereignty of China should be respected and protected; China must uphold a clean and righteous internet space.

White paper on the Internet in China, June 2010; Xi Jinping, speech at national conference on publicity and ideological work, August 2018



journalism

n. ['jər-nə-,li-zəm]

1. Investigative journalism fulfils a necessary watchdog role that assists the public in holding governments and institutions, at all level, accountable for their actions and obligations.

EU High Representative Federica Mogherini on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day, May 2019

2. Journalists should maintain close connections with the people, record the events of the great times, tell China's stories well and spread China's voice.

Xi Jinping, congratulatory letter to the All-China journalists' association, November 2017



rule of law

n. ['rɪl əv 'lɔ]

1. Rule of law guarantees fundamental rights and values, allows the application of EU law, and supports an investment-friendly business environment. It is one of the fundamental values upon which the EU is based.

European Commission website, 2019

2. The Party's leadership is the most essential feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the most fundamental guarantee for socialist rule of law in China.

Communiqué of the 4th Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of CPC, December 2014

potentially misleading joint agreements previously signed, and propose ones whose terms were more clearly and explicitly defined. This was the case of the 'Belt & Road' Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) signed with China: several international organisations and countries decided to pull out of these MoUs, or to amend them in clearer terms. 'We have realised that this is not what we meant,' explained a diplomat from an EU member state at the fourth Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in May 2023 in Beijing.

Lexical clarification led to a more efficient and precise reform of the global governance system. Throughout the 2010s and 2020s, calls for 'like-minded' countries to preserve the rules-based order became increasingly numerous, with many diplomatic corps (from Japan, the United States, South Korea, India, Australia or European countries) encouraging dialogues and exchanges in this vein. But what exactly bound the 'like-minded' countries together was often subject to debate. With this endeavour at joint clarification, like-mindedness was described in clearer terms: countries who shared similar conceptions and definitions of domains they aim at governing together – from the internet to the global economy. Throughout the 2020s, several countries had reaffirmed their support for multilateralism, but this time they emphasised the need to promote a content-based multilateralism, gathering countries around a common understanding of issues addressed.

In particular, signatories of the Universal Glossary adopted a converging approach in several multilateral organisations such as the G20, the UN – including the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva – but also the WTO, where the definition of 'free trade', 'economic

liberalisation' and 'developing country' had become increasingly ambiguous and subject to debate. The signatories also made strenuous efforts to safeguard existing definitions at the International Criminal Court of Justice in The Hague.⁶ In broader terms, the Universal Glossary incorporated various existing glossaries drafted previously by several international organisations,⁷ but which had not often been referred to or utilised.

Clarification was not an easy task, because misunderstandings have always existed in the history of diplomacy, but also because a group of countries had actively, and rather efficiently, promoted their own, alternative definitions in many multilateral fora. As the leader of this group, China had played a particularly active role in redefining the terms of the multilateral discussions since 2014,⁸ and had managed to convince a diverse but significant set of countries – including Ethiopia, Belarus, North Korea and Qatar – to endorse its definitions of key concepts. For instance, Russia had been particularly keen to support China's definition of terrorism in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Alternative concepts and definitions had gained ground in the SCO, the BRICS but also at the G20, the UN and the WTO.

Among the various words that had led to confusion, the term 'human rights' was certainly the most high-profile example. During the 2000s-2010s, Chinese diplomacy had deployed an ambitious set of initiatives aiming at redefining human rights in terms of access to economic prosperity first and foremost. It did this through activism at the Human Rights Council of the UN in Geneva, the organisation of a 'Beijing Forum on Human Rights' held every year since 2008, and of a 'South-South

6 Existing definitions include that of the term 'genocide'.

7 Such as the Glossary of Migration-related Terms by UNESCO (including definitions of slavery and racism, among other words), or the OCHA Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

8 Xi Jinping then declared that it was time for China to reinforce its 'speaking power' in the world (*huayu quan*), and the general perception within the Party leadership is that it is time for China to counter 'Western' concepts and words at home and abroad. Interviews and informal exchanges with Chinese think tanks, 2013-2019.

Human Rights Forum' held in 2017, among other events.⁹ During the years 2020–2025, China promoted a set of additional initiatives that positioned the country as the ultimate arbiter and reference point in this matter. The various annual and multilateral human rights fora organised by China gained international influence and recognition, in part due to the Chinese government's creation of a 'human rights award', based on a ranking it had established in 2021 and whose main criterion for selection concerns the ability of a state to provide prosperity to its citizens: Saudi Arabia was granted the award in 2022.

Although these initiatives were initially greeted with cynicism and laughter in Europe, they were applauded by many other governments outside the region, and revealed a broader, deeper trend: the progressive marginalisation of the original definition of human rights in bilateral and multilateral settings. Already in 2018, Beijing had estimated that 'more than 120 countries expressed their support for and appreciation of China's human rights progress-es'.¹⁰ Having for over two decades issued an annual report on 'The Human Rights Record of the United States'¹¹ in response to the 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices' issued annually by the US State Department, the Chinese government decided in 2022 to issue a new annual report on 'The Human Rights Record of the European Union' to counter statements Brussels had issued regarding Xinjiang and Hong Kong, among other issues.

In this context, the issuance in 2023 of the glossary for effective multilateralism was not supported by the majority of countries represented at the UN. China, but also Russia, completely ignored the initiative. Still, these actions drew attention to the 'definition gap',¹² which had remained unnoticed by several countries, and induced a reversal of this trend, both at official and civil society level.

Lexical and conceptual convergence also led to a more effective deployment of professional training programmes delivered by 'like-minded countries' to developing and emerging countries in areas in which definitions are contested (journalism and media, research, civil society, law), after having noted the influence of similar programmes launched by other countries with the aim to promote alternative definitions and conceptions in the world.¹³

On social media, several NGOs highlighted the misuse of words for political and ideological purposes, echoing a debate about 'fake words' that had emerged in the early 2020s, after the debate about 'fake news' in the previous decade. The hash tag *#fakeword* became popular, tagging misuse of words in official speeches at key multilateral events. The hash tag *#universal* also gained popular appeal in an attempt to promote 'universal values', at a time when an increasing number of governments were rejecting the existence of such values – some going so far as to censure this expression on social networks.¹⁴

9 "Writing a New Chapter of International Human Rights Exchanges and Cooperation," speech by Li Baodong, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the South-South Human Rights Forum in Beijing, December 10, 2017, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1518308.shtml.

10 See for instance "China's perspective on human rights widely understood, recognized, supported: diplomat," *Xinhua News Agency*, November 7, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-11/07/c_137590004.htm.

11 The last report was issued in March 2018. See "China issues report on U.S. human rights situation", *Xinhua News Agency*, March 14, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/14/c_137894687.htm.

12 Alice Ekman, "China and the 'Definition Gap': Shaping Global Governance in Words," *The Asan Forum*, November, 2017.

13 For instance, China has been actively promoting its vision of 'positive' journalism, urging journalists to produce upbeat 'happy' news stories and features, through the organisation of various multilateral fora and training programmes for professionals in developing countries in recent years, such as the '2019 Belt and Road Journalists' Forum', held in September 2019 in Beijing or the 'Seminar on New Media Business' offered to officials and media professionals of countries that are members of the Belt & Road Initiative in Autumn 2019, among other examples.

14 For example, since the beginning of his presidency (2013), Xi Jinping has perceived the idea of universal values as illegitimate and as a 'Western plot' to undermine Communist Party rule.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

The EU was the pioneer of the lexical clarification endeavour, which later became global, in a step-by-step process that took about four years (2020–2024). The Union’s readjustment of the terms of engagement with China in 2020 was the starting point of this process.

After years of EU–China dialogues with limited results, based on diverging use of the same words, the EU considered that there was an urgent need for clarification and took the initiative in this regard. Lexical clarification was helpful in reinforcing the efficiency of EU–China dialogues. Joint definition of the topic of the dialogue became the precondition for starting the dialogue. When no consensus could be found on the definition, the annual dialogue was put on hold. This avoided a situation where the EU lost time engaging in dialogues conducted at cross-purposes, which did not mean that the EU ceased to address the issue at hand in other ways.

Several EU member states managed to decipher China’s discourse more efficiently, and to approach the negotiation of the Belt & Road Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) proposed in 2017–2019 by Beijing from a perspective that was in line with their interests. Having identified key expressions (such as ‘Community of Shared Future’ or ‘new type of international relations’, etc.) used by Chinese leaders and officials in 2017–2018, European diplomats also pinpointed words that were apparently neutral but which became sources of misunderstanding with China. This led to the drafting in 2020 of a detailed EU glossary of terms – including terms such as ‘internet’/‘cyberspace’, ‘human rights’, ‘free trade’, ‘journalism’, among others – which later influenced the drafting of the 2024 Universal Glossary.

Informal coordination and co-preparation among several EU member states before their participation in fora and summits proposed by China – such as the Belt & Road forum 2017 and 2019 – included the elaboration of a largely consensual definition of words used at these events, which supported the shaping of an EU

Timeline

Signpost

2024

The Universal Glossary launched
Underlines ongoing confusion in bilateral/multilateral fora
Starts clarification process



Preferable future

2024+

Renegotiation or withdrawal of documents previously signed through misunderstandings
Strengthening of a group of ‘like-minded’ countries based on common understandings
Global governance restructuring based on these common understandings



The journey

Today

EU and several member states start to decipher China’s discourse more efficiently
EU glossary of terms issued
EU clarifies terms of engagement and dialogue with China



common communication strategy. This was facilitated by the emergence of different formats of engagement with China, with several EU member states frequently inviting representatives from the EU and other member states to join their bilateral meetings with China since 2019. This framework of engagement with China was enlarged in 2020, on the occasion of the German presidency of the Council of the EU. It also built on previous initiatives to support multilateralism – such as the ‘alliance for multilateralism’ launched in 2019 by several EU member states and supported by the EU.

The EU became a tough negotiator, adopting a more transactional approach, in the process. By clarifying the definition of key terms it has deemed of importance since 2020, the EU not only adjusted its method of engagement and dialogue with China, but also its diplomatic methodology and participation in multilateral fora

– taking an uncompromising stand *vis-à-vis* the meaning of words and expressions used in joint declarations and agreements. In particular, it was categorical that it would not tolerate misunderstandings or engage in wordplay over terms and values it considers universal.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT IF ... THE EU DEVELOPED A MORE STRATEGIC CSDP?

DANIEL FIOTT

As the journalist from Euronews asked what it was like to be held hostage by jihadists for four months since June 2024, the three student backpackers could not hold back the tears. Europeans Paulus Klimitz and Katriona Wicedz and the American John O'Connor were visibly emotional as the EU Ambassador to Burkina Faso thanked EU forces for rescuing the tourists. Flanked by the Force Commander of the 1,500-strong EUFOR Sahel, the Ambassador told the assembled press that EU special forces had broken into Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) compounds under cover of darkness to free the youngsters. Present in the country since June 2024, EU forces had not only stopped JNIM and AQIM from seizing territory in Burkina Faso's Banfora, Sindou, Bobo-Dioulasso and Orodara regions, but they had also led to an overall reduction in kidnappings and sporadic killings – in May 2024 there were fifteen hostage takings per month and by September only three. Indeed, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the Union's military presence had contributed to an 80% reduction in hostage takings.

At a joint press conference in Washington in July 2024, the US Secretary of State and the EU's High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) praised the resolve and skill of the EUFOR personnel. "The people of the United States pass on their deepest gratitude to the EU for rescuing an American citizen and sticking it to radical Islamic terror groups in Africa", stated the Secretary. Rather

modestly, the HR/VP remarked how the EU's work to defeat JNIM and AQIM was not yet over. Yet the Union had nevertheless made a substantial difference to security in the region. For example, EUFOR Sahel's presence had led to a 70% reduction in airborne incendiary strikes on civilian populations, which terror groups were perpetrating by using commercially available drones.

Later that week, during a speech on the EU as a military actor at a leading US university, the HR/VP gave further details about the crucial role of the EU's military action in the Sahel and Gulf of Guinea regions. "Did you know", the HR/VP explained to the assembled academics and students, "that EU land and naval forces are leading efforts to break up the jihadist business model?". In fact, an August 2024 feature report published across Europe's leading media outlets showed that in addition to keeping the peace in Burkina Faso, EU naval forces had foiled an attack on a European-flagged oil transport vessel called *Die Anmut* in the Gulf of Guinea. Jihadist groups wanted to attack the vessel in order to create an oil spill near the Bight of Bonny and cause significant environmental damage in time for the 2024 Abuja Climate Summit. Yet EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* put a stop to their malicious plans.

Launched in late 2024, EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* halted and seized 40 boats suspected of being owned by JNIM and AQIM in the first three months of deployment. As the year progressed, an average of five piracy attacks occurred each month compared to a high of 16 attacks per

month before EU vessels had arrived in the region. EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* even seized a vessel that was carrying hundreds of stolen Global Positioning System (GPS) devices and radar scanners that were reportedly destined for distribution among pirates and terrorists. In addition to eventually securing the safe passage of ships like *Die Anmut*, EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* also helped to buoy commercial shipping in the region, which had previously decreased by 45% since the spike in piracy attacks that began in 2021. As the HR/VP went on to remark during his July 2024 speech, “the EU has finally emerged as a military power based on action rather than just rhetoric.”

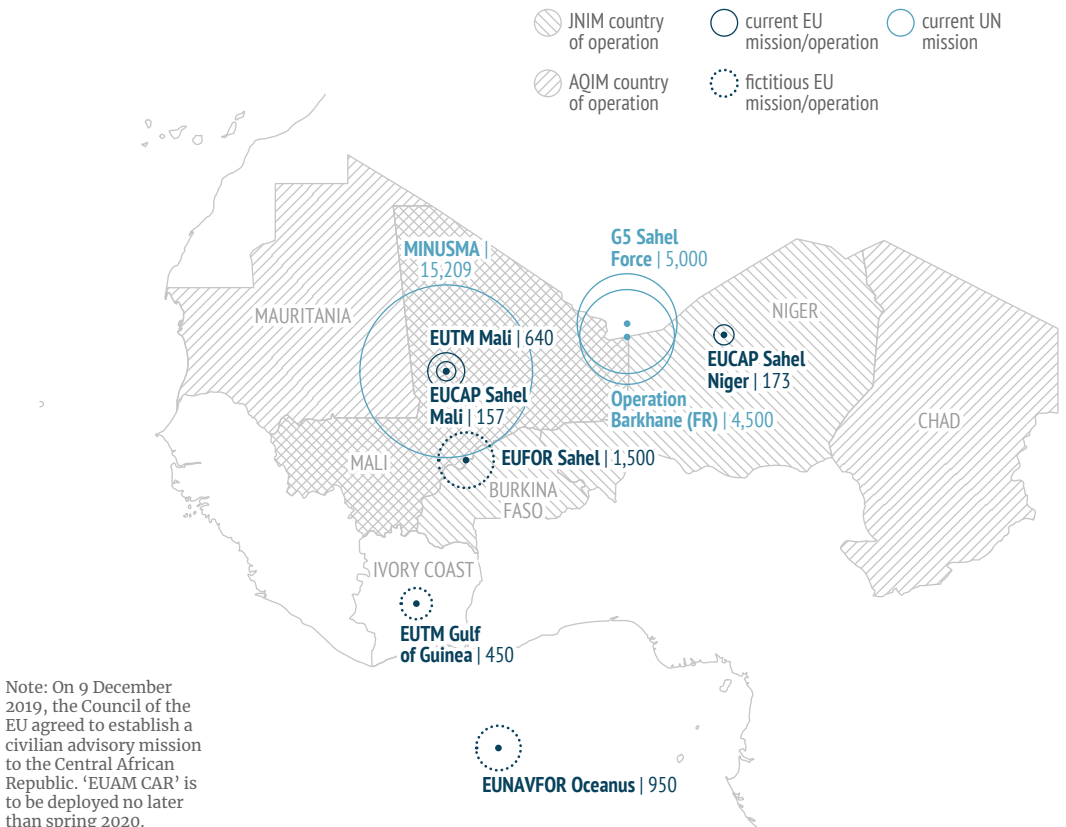
Following the successful deployment of EUFOR Sahel, the Union sought to bring together its civil, diplomatic and economic tools to ensure

longer-term stability in the Sahel. What was apparent was that the Union’s decision to review the EU’s Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell (RACC) and develop a more joined-up strategy for the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea had demonstrably succeeded. However, the EU’s long-term engagement in the region needed to blend stabilisation efforts and economic development. In fact, at the 2025 EU-Africa Summit the newly appointed HR/VP stated that a reduction in insecurity should undergird a long-term plan for economic integration in the region.

Following an invitation from the government in Ouagadougou, the EU decided to work on a concept for a 35-strong stabilisation team deployed to the country in January 2026. This stabilisation action was supported by a €6.5 million financial envelope to bolster local law

Multilateral peace operations in the Sahel

Real and fictitious deployments from 2024 onwards



Data: Natural Earth, 2019; Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018; European External Action Service, 2019; EU Institute for Security Studies, 2019; French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019; French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2019; Stanford University, 2018; United Nations, 2019

enforcement bodies and security forces at Ouagadougou airport under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). Attacks on civilians were at an all-time low: only 25 attacks per year were registered in 2026 compared to 250 attacks back in 2023.

What is more, at the invitation of governments in the region the EU launched a naval training mission – EUTM Gulf of Guinea – to build capacity among coastal states following the success of EUNAVFOR *Oceanus*. From 2021 to 2023, there were over 200 piracy attacks per year in the Gulf but thanks to EU efforts this was consistently reduced to approximately 30 non-violent piracy events each year. JNIM and AQIM were all but eradicated in the Gulf of Guinea and pushed out of Burkina Faso – and only small, ineffectual terrorist cells remained in Mali. It was clear that JNIM and AQIM could not make a comeback while the Union was on the ground.

This was an important development because it allowed the Union to roll out a much broader strategy for the region. For example, the EU adopted a ‘Connectivity Strategy for the Sahel’ (CSS) in mid-2026 which was backed up by investments in infrastructure: €30 million was dedicated to modernising the Dakar-Ndjamena-Djibouti train line and a further €50 million was invested in upgrading electrical infrastructure for the West African Power Pool. Such steps were seen as vital in order to allow Burkina Faso to maximise the benefits of being part of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Tangible results quickly followed: EU-funded infrastructure had already led to an encouraging 0.4% increase in Burkina Faso’s GDP in 2027.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

HR/VP Josep Borrell began his time in office by getting to work on President Von der Leyen’s call for a ‘geopolitical Commission’ and a Union that more autonomously asserts itself around the world. One of the aspects of his portfolio to which he dedicated time was the deployability and effectiveness of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. In particular, in his address to the EUISS Annual Conference in 2020 he invited the audience to reflect on how the CSDP could be further regionalised to address the cross-border aspects of instability in the Union’s near and wider neighbourhoods. As he remarked during his keynote speech, “there is a huge potential to build on the positive experiences of CSDP in the Sahel, especially as this region is vital to European security and prosperity.”

There was a wider context to HR/VP Borrell’s point. In June 2018, the Council had stressed the need to better interconnect EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger so as to enhance the EU’s response to terrorism and people, narcotics and weapons trafficking and smuggling, as well as the need to support the G5 Sahel countries¹ and regional partners such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In particular, the HR/VP used his speech to point to the importance of the February 2019 decision by the Council to expand the expert pool present in the region and to enhance the RACC based in Nouakchott, Mauritania. He also stressed that on 21 February 2019, the Council had approved a new joint civil-military concept of operations for the regionalisation of CSDP in the Sahel and had extended EUCAP Sahel Mali until 2021. Furthermore, on 9 December 2019 the Council established a civilian advisory mission to the Central African Republic (CAR), which was deployed no later than spring 2020 (EUAM RCA).

During the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, one of the first actions undertaken

1 Council of the EU, “Council Conclusions on the Sahel/Mali,” 10026/18, Luxembourg, June 25, 2018.

by the Council in September 2020 was the extension of EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUTM Mali to 2022. Following on from these decisions, in October 2020 the European External Action Service (EEAS) began drafting a new strategy for the region that would bring together and update the 2011 EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and the 2014 EU Strategy for the Gulf of Guinea. In particular, there was a call for concrete interlinkages between civil and military command and control: the Civilian and Military Planning and Conduct Capabilities (CPCC and MPCC), the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept, the European Peace Facility (EPF) and hybrid threats.

Consequently, from September to December 2020 the EEAS started work on a concept for potential joined-up military operations in the region. Even though the Union had deployed several CSDP missions to the region since 2012,² and dedicated over €200 million in security assistance and €8 billion in development assistance since 2014,³ plans for a military operation to the Sahel would be the first real test for the MPCC – in line with the Council Conclusions of November 2018.⁴ To this end, it was fortunate that agreement in the Council for the launching of the €10.5 billion EPF was secured in spring 2020 – the peace facility would see the financing of assistance measures in the military and defence domain (e.g. infrastructure, logistics, advice and equipment).

Finally, the EEAS also sought to vastly improve the Union's operational and situational coherence in the region by developing plans for an enhanced RACC. The Coordination Cell would continue to coordinate civil and military efforts in the region, but the review led to greater coordination between the Cell and the CPCC/MPCC, plus with other tools such as the South StratCom Taskforce. Not only did the enhanced RACC focus greater efforts on how the EU could

Timeline

Signpost

2024

EUFOR Sahel rescues tourists from JNIM and AQIM

The 1,500-strong force reduces attacks on civilians in the Sahel

EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* foils attempt to attack oil transporter in the Gulf of Guinea

Preferable future

2024+

EUNAVFOR *Oceanus* delivers training to Gulf of Guinea states

EU adopts Connectivity Strategy for the Sahel

The journey

Today

Extension of EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUTM Mali to 2022

New strategy for the regionalisation of CSDP

Enhanced concept for the Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell

bolster counter-terrorism and defence expertise in the Delegations, but it also tied together the Union's efforts on cyber defence, hybrid threats, infrastructure investment and protection and counter-terrorism.

² These include: EUCAP Sahel Niger since 2012, EUTM Mali since 2013, EUCAP Sahel Mali since 2014 and EUTM RCA since 2016.

³ European External Action Service, "The European Union's Partnership with the G5 Sahel Countries," July 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/factsheet_eu_g5_sahel_july-2019.pdf.

⁴ Council of the EU, "Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy," 13978/18, Brussels, November 19, 2018.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IF ... THE EU LAUNCHED ITS FIRST CIVILIAN CYBER MISSION?

PATRYK PAWLAK

The Global Forum on Digital Security for Prosperity organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in June 2024 was like no other previous edition. For the first time, the conference attracted leaders from the all over the world. The European Union was represented by the Commissioner for Internal Market and the Special Representative for International Cyberspace Policy.

The statement by the Special Representative was clear in its message: “With the launch of the civilian cyber units (CCUs) under the CSDP in January 2024, the EU has proven once again its role as a forward-looking security provider globally.” The CCUs, she stressed, were the first step in the effort to adapt the EU’s concepts, tools and instruments to new challenges posed by conflict and crisis management in cyberspace.

Indeed, in line with the earlier Foreign Affairs Council conclusions, the EU was gearing up to launch its first civilian cyber missions (EU CCMs) in October 2024. Aimed at strengthening the state and societal resilience, EU CCM Vietnam and EU CCM Indonesia intended to send a clear signal to all malicious actors: the EU will not tolerate violations of international norms and will use all the instruments at its disposal to support partner countries where malicious cyber operations cause disruption and instability and increase the risk of conflict.

In November 2023, the EU for the first time activated the Mutual Defence Clause (Art. 42.7 TEU) following a request from France who suffered a significant ransomware attack that paralysed the operations of several contractors responsible for the preparation of the Olympic Games in 2024, the aviation control systems at Orly and Charles de Gaulle airports as well as the traffic control systems of the Paris metro network. The scale of the attack against the contractors raised significant concerns about France’s capacity to host the Games and resulted in the Olympic Committee’s decision to allow the event to take place in multiple locations across France, including Bordeaux and Nice. An investigation into these cyberattacks showed that they were mounted from several countries in the Global South. With a view to strengthening the capacity of other countries to prevent or stop cyberattacks, the input of the EU member states was instrumental in the OECD’s decision to update the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Casebook on Conflict, Peace and Security Activities to officially recognise expenditure on cyber capacity building as official development assistance.

The concept of the CCUs built on the EU’s experience with cyber-related capacity building. CCMs in Vietnam and Indonesia provided evidence that the idea of CCUs as a concrete means of bridging development and foreign and security policy instruments did work. By the end

of 2025, EU experts from computer emergency response teams (CERTs), crisis response centres, crime units and judges had delivered over 8 training sessions to a broad range of security sector reform (SSR) actors in those countries and assisted with institutional and legislative reforms in nine other countries.

While the decisions taken by the EU to strengthen the protection of the Union's interests through building the resilience of partner countries had a positive impact on the perception of the EU as a truly global cyber actor, they did not stop or significantly reduce malicious cyber activities targeting the EU and its member states. Quite on the contrary in fact: the number of cyberattacks multiplied, with several attacks carried out against EU and member states' agencies implementing EU projects in partner countries or officials with access to sensitive information (e.g. several EU projects funded through the Digital4Development programme). The highest number of incidents reported by the computer emergency response team for the European institutions, bodies and agencies (CERT-EU) included cyber-espionage campaigns.

At the same time, the EU's experience in fending off sophisticated attacks – mostly due to the implementation of the second-generation Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive in 2025 – and the capacity to impose consequences on malicious actors by applying targeted and sectoral sanctions, was increasingly appreciated by partner countries, especially in Africa. With the increase of the online population from 19 million in 2005 to nearly 400 million in 2025, the African continent became one of the biggest markets for digital platforms but also the testing ground¹ for malicious cyber activities. Given the potential use of online disinformation campaigns to fuel conflict and

undermine fragile peace settlements in certain parts of the continent, requests for comprehensive EU assistance, including through development projects and Civilian CSDP Cyber Missions, increased.

The EU's contribution to conflict prevention was recognised in the Joint Declaration on EU-UN Cooperation in Cyber Conflict Management that was signed in the margins of the second UN Summit on Digital Cooperation in 2026. The same year elements of cyber resilience were mainstreamed into CSDP and all other relevant Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) tools as well as into development cooperation and freedom, security and justice (FSJ) instruments with the adoption of a Joint Communication 'Elements for an EU-wide strategic framework for supporting Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the digital age'.

Contrary to the initial scepticism about new initiatives undertaken within the CSDP framework, by 2029 the EU had completed four civilian cyber missions with a further three in the planning (EU CCMs Algeria, Tunisia and Cameroon). In addition, all 12 ongoing CSDP operations included a civilian cyber dimension, with particular focus on developing the competence of the security sector.² These developments were possible thanks to the strong commitment of the member states to establishing CCUs. By 2029, the EU had 20 such units, each counting 15 experts from different disciplines and nationalities and established through contributions from the member states and countries such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Singapore, Jordan, Japan and South Korea, with whom the EU signed a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA). In line with the EU-UN declaration on cyber conflict management, the CCMs also increasingly played a complementary role *vis-à-vis* the UN missions.

1 Council on Foreign Relations, "Disinformation, Colonialism and African Internet Policy", *Blog Post*, November 21, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/disinformation-colonialism-and-african-internet-policy>.

2 European External Action Service (EEAS), "Rule of Law also in the Cyber Environment: EUPOL trains Palestinian judges," September 3, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/66921/rule-law-also-cyber-environment-eupol-trains-palestinian-judges_en.

Selected EU-funded cyber capacity building projects

Projects and countries concerned

Through its various financial instruments, the EU already supports cyber capacity building efforts in numerous partner countries. Their focus ranges from promoting legislative reforms to reforming national regulatory, law enforcement and judicial bodies.



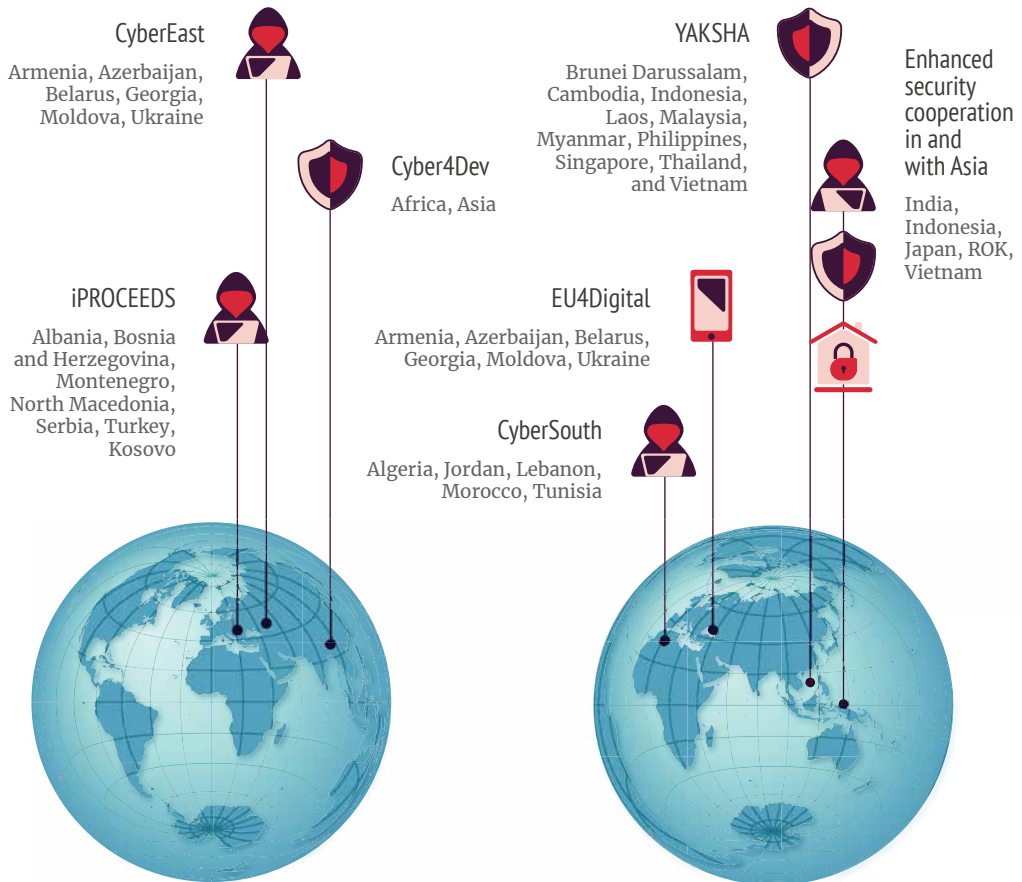
Crime

The EU supports states in strengthening their legal and institutional capacities to fight cybercrime, including by enhancing their abilities to engage in effective international cooperation.



Peace and stability

The EU engages with stakeholders around the world to provide policy support and promote better understanding of EU policies.





Security

The EU works with partner countries to increase the resilience of their critical information infrastructure and networks through comprehensive policies, organisations and technical measures.



Rights

The EU works to build awareness about the importance of the right to privacy and promotes greater regulatory convergence on data protection.



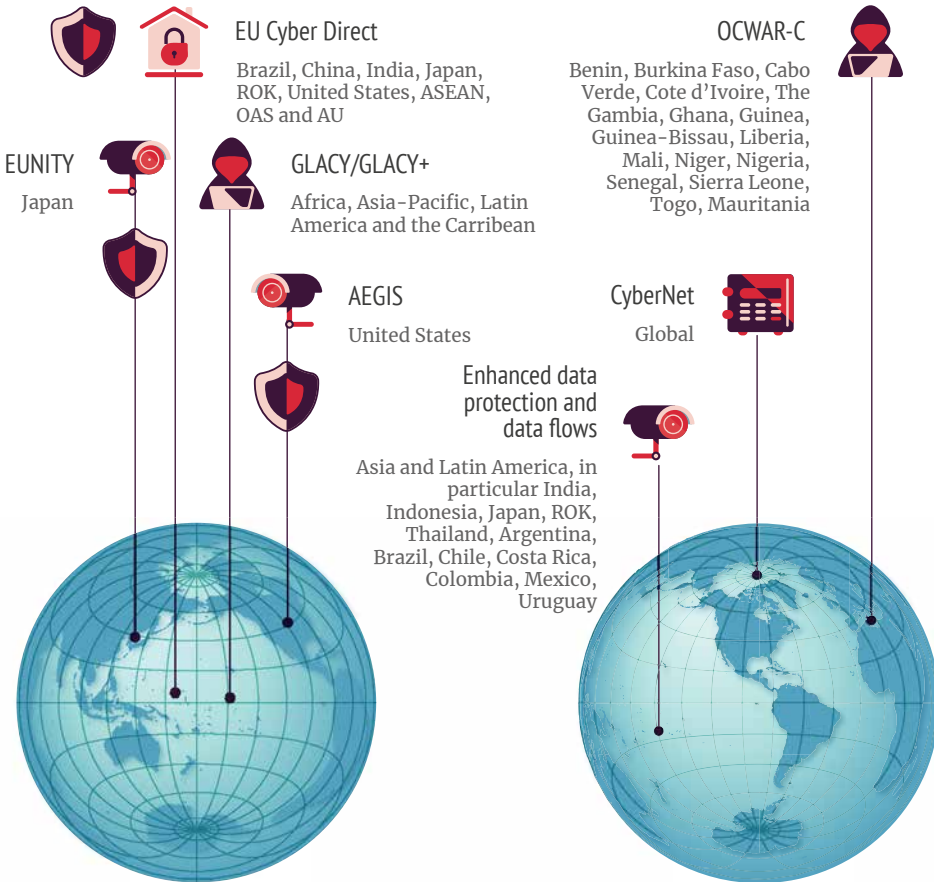
Digital

The EU strengthens cooperation on digital policies, including telecom rules, trust and security of e-government, eTrade, eHealth, ICT innovation and digital skills.



Human Capacities

The EU takes steps to strengthen global delivery, coordination and coherence of the EU's external cyber projects.



WHAT WENT RIGHT?

For a long time, the EU's cyber diplomacy lacked a strategic vision. This changed with the adoption of the EU Strategy for International Cyber Policy during the German Presidency in December 2020. The document recognised the urgency to define how cyber diplomacy contributes towards the achievement of the EU's broader foreign and security policy objectives. The Action Plan attached to the Strategy indicated the need for a single point of contact for international partners on all 'cyber' issues and proposed the appointment of a Special Representative for International Cyberspace Policy. In addition, building on the earlier documents,³ the Strategy stressed the critical role of cyber capacity building in partner countries and regions for the promotion and protection of the EU's values and interests as laid down in the EU Treaties.

Faced with an increasingly hostile and competitive international environment, the Civilian CSDP Compact,⁴ adopted in 2018, delivered on most of its commitments before the summer 2023 deadline. The 2022 Civilian Annual Report on Capabilities by the European External Action Service (EEAS) identified cyber capabilities as one of the key gaps in the EU's existing panoply of civilian capabilities and proposed the establishment of the CCUs. The first such unit was in place in 2024 as part of the new Civilian Compact.

Many obstacles⁵ that had jeopardised previous efforts at improving cooperation at the EU level were successfully avoided. For instance, the challenge of standardisation of training and curricula was overcome thanks to the efforts undertaken by the cyber platform for education, training, evaluation and exercise (ETEE) coordinated by the European Security and Defence College, the European Defence Agency's Cyber Ranges Federation project⁶ that helped improve cyber defence training capabilities, and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects such as the EU Cyber Academia and Innovation Hub (EU CAIH).⁷

Regarding the setting up of the CCUs, two specific projects proved to be particularly relevant for overcoming the shortcomings that hindered past attempts to create a permanent pool of experts in the cyber domain at the EU level. By the end of 2022, the EU CyberNet had established a well-functioning network of experts that could assist and provide expertise to countries both inside and outside of Europe. In addition, lessons learned from the deployment of Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRTs)⁸ to deal with cyberattacks by the United Cyber Caliphate that paralysed the communications of the EU CSDP missions and operations in Iraq, Mali, Niger, Somalia and the Mediterranean in December 2020, helped to identify tools and methods to detect, recognise and mitigate cyber threats.

The humiliating effect of these coordinated cyberattacks – launched by a multinational coalition of hackers in response to new listings under the EU cyber sanctions regime in 2021

3 Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on EU external capacity building guidelines," 10496/18, Brussels, June 26, 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10496-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

4 Council of the European Union, "Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact," 14305/18, Brussels, November 19, 2018, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14305-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

5 Nicoletta Pirozzi, "The Civilian CSDP Compact: A success story for the EU's crisis management Cinderella?," *EUISS Brief* no. 9, October, 2018, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%209___Civilian%20CSDP.pdf.

6 European Defence Agency, "Cyber Ranges: EDA's first ever cyber defence pooling & sharing project launched by 11 member states," Brussels, May 12, 2017, <https://www.eda.europa.eu/info-hub/press-centre/latest-news/2017/05/12/cyber-ranges-eda-s-first-ever-cyber-defence-pooling-sharing-project-launched-by-11-member-states>.

7 PESCO projects, "EU Cyber Academia and Innovation Hub (EU CAIH)," <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/eu-cyber-academia-and-innovation-hub-eu-caih/>.

8 CRRT is a PESCO project launched in 2018 to support member states, EU Institutions, CSDP operations as well as partners to ensure a higher level of cyber resilience and collectively respond to cyber incidents. For additional information, see: <https://pesco.europa.eu/project/cyber-rapid-response-teams-and-mutual-assistance-in-cyber-security/>.

targeting offshoots of the North Korean Lazarus Group and entities associated with the United Cyber Caliphate – mobilised political attention. The need to address the lack of adequate national, institutional and organisational capacities that helped to establish those countries as safe havens from which criminal and terrorist groups could operate freely became a priority of the Special Representative for International Cyberspace Policy – a position created in February 2021.

By June in the same year, as a sign of support for the UN Group of Governmental Experts, all EU member states had published their interpretation of international law in cyberspace, which contributed to strengthening a joint approach to responding to malicious cyber activities. Europe’s ‘Secret Cyber Santa’ – as the 2020 attack against the EU missions was dubbed by the media – also accelerated the revision of the EU regulations concerning classification of documents,⁹ which subsequently led to new cooperation arrangements between the EU and NATO in 2023, including closer cooperation between EU INTCEN and NATO’s Cyberspace Operations Centre (CYOC).¹⁰

By the end of 2024, the EU had made significant progress towards becoming a truly ‘forward-looking cyber player’ as envisaged by the 2016 EU Global Strategy. Unfortunately, it was not a clear political vision but rather the pressure of external events that once again pushed European leaders to act.

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Creation of Civilian Cyber Units
Launch of Cyber Civilian Missions in Indonesia and Vietnam
Expenditure on cyber capacity building recognised as ODA



Preferable future

2024+

Review of Civilian Compact suitable for the digital age
Creation of 20 CCUs
Four CCMs completed and three CCMs in the planning



The journey

Today

EU Strategy for International Cyber Engagement and Special Representative for International Cyberspace Policy
Implementation of the Civilian CSDP Compact and Civilian Annual Report on Capabilities
Implementation of cyber-related PESCO projects: Cyber Rapid Response Teams and Cyber Academia and Innovation Hub



⁹ Council of the European Union, “Council Decision on the security rules for protecting EU classified information,” September 23, 2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D0488&from=EN>.

¹⁰ Alexandra Brozowski, “NATO sees new cyber command centre by 2023 as Europe readies for cyber threats,” *Euractiv*, October 19, 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/nato-sees-new-cyber-command-centre-by-2023-as-europe-readies-for-cyber-threats/>.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT IF ... EUROPE CREATED AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL/NEWS PLATFORM?

NATHALIE VAN RAEMDONCK

It was Monday afternoon on 12 December 2024. The EU's newly-appointed HR/VP, Eva Gizvel, had just finished her *Discutons* session on NovaWeb where she answered questions from European citizens. The Strategic Communications Division had convinced the Spokesperson service of the tech-savvy HR/VP to try out an online Q&A session on NovaWeb, the new European social/news platform, and she was curious to participate after her nomination was approved by the European Parliament. The HR/VP's communications team had been preparing for this for weeks and seemed satisfied with the results; with 70,000 comments it was the highest recorded interaction in the history of any online Q&A. It even surpassed the historic 'Ask Me Anything' with President Barack Obama in 2014 on Reddit, the first ever done by a world leader.¹ The HR/VP's team managed to reply to the 587 comments that had been most upvoted by the participants in the 8 hours that the session was open and made about 15 video responses. Questions ranged from very technical questions on budget reforms and CSDP missions to philosophical questions on the future of the EU and even questions about how the HR/VP felt about living in Brussels. For the first time in the history of NovaWeb, there was also a high

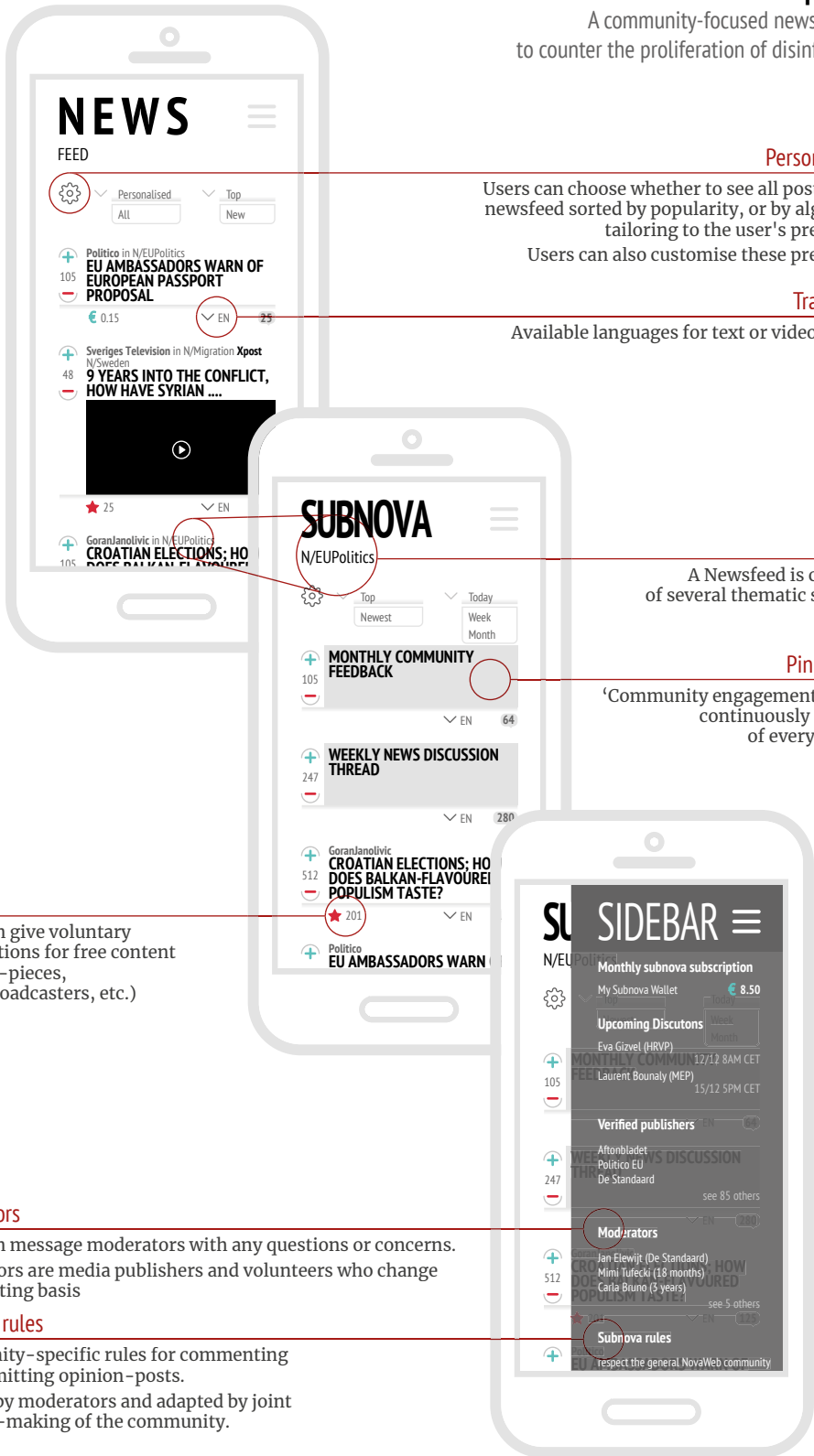
level of interaction from non-Europeans, making up one-fifth of the traffic.

Moderators from dozens of subnovas – interest-based communities on NovaWeb – volunteered to help the European subnova to moderate the enormous flow of comments. They deleted about 1% of the comments that were flagged by other users, banned 325 users and gave warnings and time-outs to about 5,000 users. The interventions were based on site-wide community guidelines, where criminal behaviour, hate speech and deliberate disinformation was systematically deleted. Comments that were critical of European policy were not deleted, however, in accordance with site-wide regulations regarding coverage of political topics. Those who were not constructive in their comments naturally gained less visibility as they were downvoted by other users. Some particularly critical but relevant comments received much visibility in the *Discutons* session, urging the incumbent HR/VP to respond. Her skilful replies to the hard-hitting questions marked her out as one of the new breed of European decision-makers who would not evade criticism of EU policies and institutions.

1 "I am Barack Obama, President of the United States," *Reddit*, August 29, 2012, https://www.reddit.com/r/IAMA/comments/z1c9z/i_am_barack_obama_president_of_the_united_states/

Social news platform

A community-focused news platform to counter the proliferation of disinformation



Personalisation

Users can choose whether to see all posts in their newsfeed sorted by popularity, or by algorithmic tailoring to the user's preferences. Users can also customise these preferences.

Translations

Available languages for text or video subtitles

Subnova

A Newsfeed is composed of several thematic subnovas.

Pinned posts

'Community engagement' appears continuously at the top of every subnova.

Coins

Users can give voluntary contributions for free content (opinion-pieces, public broadcasters, etc.)

Moderators

Users can message moderators with any questions or concerns. Moderators are media publishers and volunteers who change on a rotating basis

Subnova rules

Community-specific rules for commenting and submitting opinion-posts. Created by moderators and adapted by joint decision-making of the community.

As NovaWeb was initially created with the main purpose of active news distribution and engagement, it established a community that valued a high quality of interaction. This became evident during the Q&A session in which a number of probing and informed questions were asked. It also validated the rising success of the hybrid social/news platform. Moderators of the bigger subnovas had seen the platform and its community grow over the years into an informative channel characterised by healthy debate and interaction. The expansion of NovaWeb into an increasingly large constellation of subnovas drew new users from all types of backgrounds and was diversifying the online ecosystem.

The HR/VP's online Q&A session had a far-reaching impact. Not only did it receive considerable attention in news outlets around the world, but the HR/VP's replies were also widely discussed in NovaWeb's relevant subnovas. Journalists factchecked and investigated the pertinence of certain answers and European opinion-makers and academics analysed the policy plans. Some subnovas were slightly disappointed with the level of knowledge about specific issues, especially on technology. Tech-specific subnovas invited the relevant EU policymakers to appear in scheduled *Discutons* chat sessions, suggestions which were also well-received by the politicians themselves. When the HR/VP unveiled a new Global Strategy a few months later, participants in several subnovas dedicated to foreign policy and world politics drafted a recommendations report based on the highest voted comments made by verified subnova participants. Overall, this added a layer of citizen participation that the EU had been striving towards for years through the European Commission's public consultations. NovaWeb also had a positive effect on reducing disinformation and online radicalisation. Parallel information societies had started appearing in the era that NovaWeb first saw

light. NovaWeb's ingenious yet simple system of verified news publishers, and bottom-up and top-down community moderation, proved to be a powerful antidote against this degradation of the information space.

The model started drawing the attention of other countries outside Europe. Societies all over the world had been struggling with the unintended harmful side-effects of Silicon Valley platforms. Publishers and civil society in Latin America and Africa ventured into NovaWeb, and a vibrant ecosystem of subnovas with a South American and African focus found its place in the network. Their policymakers also took note, and welcomed the platform's positive influence on their countries. Other countries saw NovaWeb as a threat and blocked access. Rigorous content control was however a very costly affair for most states with limited resources.² The lack of openness stunted their development and caused them to lag behind in digitisation and innovation. A few regimes in Arab countries were violently overthrown at the end of 2025 after increasingly draconian policies and deteriorating economic conditions caused widespread social unrest. The European development programme Cyber4Dev was invited to countries likely to undergo the same fate, and shared the experience of NovaWeb. Some governments gradually allowed their population more freedom of information and created a decentralised version of NovaWeb. Over time, most of those governments allowed all of NovaWeb to be accessible in their country, and an accession policy was created for local platforms to join the global NovaWeb network.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

When a 2020 poll showed that 18% of the European population believed there was some truth

² In 2016 Internet shutdowns and content restrictions cost countries globally \$2.4 billion according to Brookings Institution. See: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/internet-shutdowns-v-3.pdf>

to the ‘Kalergi plan’ conspiracy,³ also known as the ‘white genocide’ conspiracy, policymakers realised something had to be done. 65% of the believers indicated seeing a viral meme on the Kalergi plan that picked up speed on their social media pages in early 2020. Fingers were pointed at Silicon Valley’s social media platforms, who were grappling with the spread of disinformation on their services. While four of them had already agreed to comply with the European Code of Practice against Disinformation in 2017,⁴ this had not prevented something like the Kalergi conspiracy from spreading. Enforcing rules, however, received little support in a Europe that valued a free and open internet. Some intensive fact-checking was carried out by news organisations, yet the results appeared to have only a limited effect on those who believed the conspiracy theory. A Council of Europe report had previously concluded that simply pumping more ‘factual information’ into the media ecosystem would not stop the information disorder. ‘The emotional and ritualistic elements of communication have to be taken into account.’⁵

A new initiative was thus launched in late 2020. The pilot version of the NovaWeb platform was created by nine European government-funded public media agencies.⁶ After years of effort at getting a European broadcasting channel off the ground, in an increasingly digital society a different approach was tried to launch an online platform. Collaboration between the public broadcasters was facilitated by the European Digital Single Market and the EEAS’s Strategic Communications Division, which also provided partial funding for the platform. Commercial media partners joined a few months later, and a system was set up to verify participating

Timeline

Signpost

2024

First EU HR/VP Q&A on NovaWeb
Biggest recorded online interaction
International attention drawn to EU digital conversation



Preferable future

2024+

Online EU citizen participation becomes established
Non-European NovaWeb ecosystem blooms
NovaWeb Digital Development programme



The journey

Today

Tackling increased information disorder
NovaWeb, a public and private media platform, created
Community moderating course created



publishers through the European Federation of Journalists. A pay-per-view model would facilitate revenue for funding the journalistic work and avoid the need for advertising algorithms that had plagued the Silicon Valley platforms.

³ Richard Von Coudenhove-Kalergi was a twentieth-century Austro-Japanese politician, diplomat and philosopher who played a central role in European integration. The conspiracy theory purports that his plans to bring the continent together masked his intention to encourage a process of enforced racial intermixing. See: Sophia Gaston (with Joseph E. Uscinski), “Out of the Shadows: Conspiracy Thinking on Immigration,” Henry Jackson Society, Centre for Social and Political Risk, November, 2018, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Out-of-the-Shadows-Conspiracy-thinking-on-immigration.pdf>.

⁴ European Commission, “Code of Practice against Disinformation”, Brussels, January 29, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/code-practice-against-disinformation-2019-jan-29_en.

⁵ Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, “Information Disorder: Towards an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking,” Council of Europe Report DGI(2017)09, September, <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>.

⁶ Hossein Derakhshan, ““Why Europe should build its own social platform for news”, *The Guardian*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/02/europe-band-together-rival-facebook>.

Users could create a NovaWeb wallet and easily make micro-payments per article read. Meanwhile the public broadcaster content remained free, as such material was taxpayer-funded. As NovaWeb was structured in subcommunities called subnovas, users would find their interests bundled in specific communities, and intensive users and experts would pay a monthly subscription for all the paid content provided on a subnova.

Apart from the revenue model, what was novel about NovaWeb was that it valued healthy community interaction as much as quality content. The purpose of NovaWeb was to engage users beyond passive news consumption and take into account the influence of emotions and tribalistic feelings in the way in which people process news.⁷ For this purpose, the subcommunities were designed to be their own self-governed space under general NovaWeb-wide community guidelines, and thus allowed to create their

own identity and highlight news items they found interesting and important, or uninteresting or unwelcome, through a voting system. The fact that moderators were actual members of the news-communities was also essential to the attraction of NovaWeb. Moderation rules were clearly outlined, created as part of a joint decision-making process in the community and flexible to change. Novaweb media publishers would be required to designate full-time community moderators to the platform depending on the revenue they gained from NovaWeb. Community participants could also volunteer as moderators on a rotating basis, but no subnova could be created without two certified moderators. By mid-2021, a training course was created to assist NovaWeb moderators in this task of managing an online community. As NovaWeb ushered in a new and innovative social environment for news consumption, a novel online political structure was in the making.

⁷ Op.Cit., “Information Disorder: Towards an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking”.







REFORM

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IF ... THE MENA SWITCHED TO SOLAR POWER?

FLORENCE GAUB

It was a Monday morning in April 2024, just after Ramadan had ended, and the EU's ambassador to Libya had a rather pleasant task ahead of her: cutting the ribbon to open a solar power station on the outskirts of Benghazi. The country had finally stabilised enough to justify the investment of European funds into what appeared to be, to some at least, a rather unimportant small-scale innovation project. What the naysayers did not realise was that the wartime destruction had become a driver for innovation in Libya: the country's civil war had damaged electrical grids and put oil production and export on hold, providing an impetus for modernisation and diversification. "Transforming a painful past into a bright future is the Libyan way forward", the ambassador said in her opening speech. Indeed, solar energy was the answer to the population's electricity needs: Benghazi's street lights and hospitals were already powered by solar and the new power station would extend power provision to private households.¹ Now drawing 20% of its energy from the sun, Libya had surpassed its own 2015 goals of renewable energy twofold.

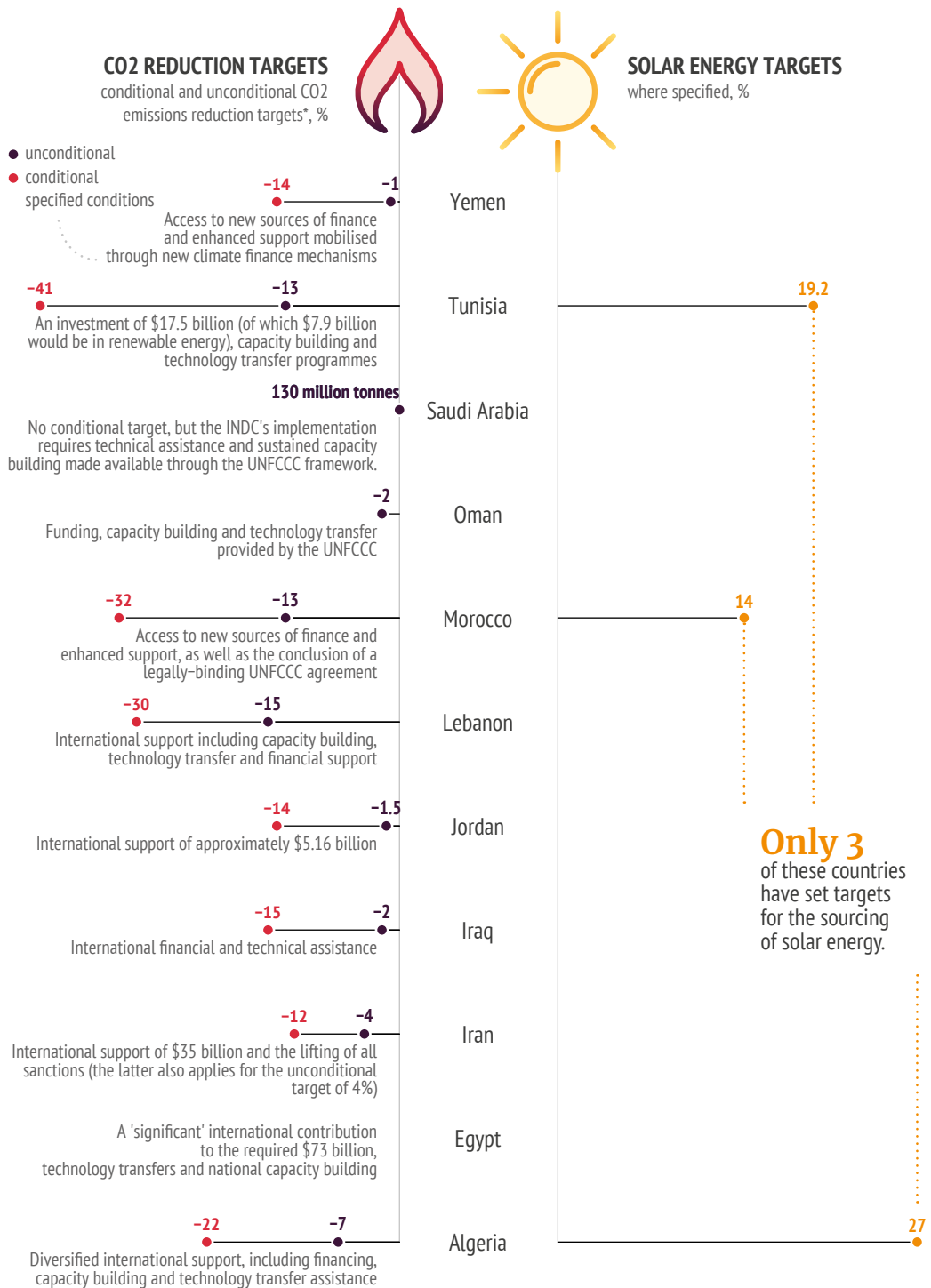
More importantly, this was part of a regional trend which was beginning to gain traction. Solar power, which had provided on average just 0.4% of energy in 2018, now stood at nearly 30%; in Morocco, the region's solar leader, it was even approaching 40%. This was a rapid turnaround after decades of neglecting the geographic advantages of the region's open deserts and ample sunshine. Egypt, for instance, had seen a nearly revolutionary jump in its solar-derived energy from 3.1% in 2019 to 27% today. It is therefore well on track to draw 53% of its electricity from renewable energy in 2030, most of which will be thanks to the sun.² The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which had originally planned to reach 30% in 2030, had met its target earlier than expected, in 2024. The regional trend brought others on board, too: Saudi Arabia, which originally intended to rely mainly on nuclear power to reduce fossil fuel dependency, had changed course in 2021 by focusing almost exclusively on solar energy projects – particularly for water desalination.³ Even Algeria, which made a very slow start despite its vast potential, rapidly caught up with

The author would like to thank Lotje Boswinkel for her assistance in preparing this chapter.

- 1 UNDP Libya, "Boosting Benghazi's Health Sector: Solar Energy for Al-Kwayfia Hospital," <http://www.ly.undp.org/content/libya/en/home/stories/Boosting-Benghazi-Health-Sector-Solar-Energy-for-Al-Kwayfia-Hospital.html>; Sami Zaptia, "UNDP helps install solar street lights as part of sustainable development through harnessing clean energy," *Libya Herald*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2019/05/08/undp-helps-install-solar-street-lights-as-part-of-sustainable-development-through-harnessing-clean-energy/>.
- 2 The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), "Renewable Energy Outlook Egypt," 2018, https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2018/Oct/IRENA_Outlook_Egypt_2018_En.pdf. IRENA, "Pan-Arab Renewable Energy Strategy 2030: Roadmap of Actions for Implementation," June, 2014, <https://www.irena.org/publications/2014/Jun/Pan-Arab-Renewable-Energy-Strategy-2030-Roadmap-of-Actions-for-Implementation>.
- 3 Isabel Togoh, "Saudi Arabia Plans To Enrich Uranium For Its Nuclear Power Reactors," *Forbes*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/isabeltogoh/2019/09/09/saudi-arabia-plans-to-enrich-uranium-for-its-nuclear-power-reactors/#23f2c5465e2f>.

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions

INDCs under the Paris Agreement



* Tunisia's reduction targets are relative to 2010 emissions levels, while all other countries' reduction targets are relative to the business-as-usual (BAU) scenario.

The BAU projection assumes that there are no changes in people's attitudes and priorities, that no major changes in technology and economics occur and that no further action is taken beyond what had been done or planned by the submission of the INDC.

The date for these targets to be achieved is 2030 for all countries except Iraq, for which it is 2035.

Data: UNFCCC, 2019

its neighbours and was now on track to reach its target of 27% renewable energy in 2030 – more than half of which will be solar.⁴ Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), various ‘amateur’ solar projects had been emerging, including in many schools.⁵ In environmental, economic and even strategic terms, these developments heralded a true Copernican Revolution for the region, as well as for Europe. It had not happened a day too soon: temperatures and sea levels were already climbing markedly every year and emission cuts were becoming a matter of survival.

Although signs of the Middle Eastern energy transition towards solar power began to be visible in 2024, its true effects unfolded in the decade thereafter. The obvious switch occurred, of course, in the energy sector, as it helped the region meet its skyrocketing energy demands, which are projected to reach European levels by 2050.⁶ Iraq, for instance, which experienced electricity shortages on a yearly basis until 2024, now finally guarantees regular supply thanks to solar power.⁷

Yet it was not just the region but the whole world which was rapidly moving away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy much faster than originally thought. The region’s head start meant it was ready to absorb the loss of \$7 trillion (between 25–40% in revenue) from a decline in fossil fuel use by 2040 – this was

an almost existential move for hitherto unprepared states such as Libya, Yemen, Iraq or Algeria. This change also had a positive effect on Europe’s renewable energy sector: though it had suffered from congestion due to capacity constraints in the early 2020s, exchanging wind for solar energy between north and south of the Mediterranean was now a real possibility.⁸ This did not just help the environment, it boosted state coffers too: solar energy from North Africa was cheaper than European energy production, making the energy transition painless for European societies.⁹ It was, of course, this energy transition that helped the MENA (by now at European emission levels) and Europe to cut emissions so as to even surpass the latter’s own goals of 32% renewable energy in the mix by 2030.

The region’s solar switch had other, less obvious positive side effects that paved the way not just for a better energy or environmental future, but an economic and political one, too. For instance, it allowed for the removal of subsidies that had been an important obstacle to economic growth and diversification. Gone were the days of subsidies consuming 4% (Algeria), 7% (Egypt), 11% (Saudi Arabia) or even 17% (Iran) of national GDPs.¹⁰ Jobs were being created in the solar energy sector (28,000 by 2035 in Egypt and more than 200,000 in the Gulf states), but this was not all: thanks to the move away from fossil fuel, new sectors began

4 Hamid Ould Ahmed, “Algeria plans solar energy tenders to tackle rising electricity needs,” *Reuters*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-algeria-energy/algeria-plans-solar-energy-tenders-to-tackle-rising-electricity-needs-idUSKCN1PM1GO>.

5 Nabil Mansouri, “Algérie : des projets d’énergie solaire prise en charge par des ‘amateurs’,” *Maghreb emergent*, February 12, 2019, <https://maghrebemergent.info/algerie-des-projets-denergie-solaire-prise-en-charge-par-des-amateurs/>.

6 US Energy Administration, “International Energy Outlook 2019 with projections to 2050,” September, 2019, <https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/ieo/pdf/ieo2019.pdf>.

7 Abass Z. Ahmad and DA Pavlyuchenko, “Turning Iraq into a country of energy exporter through the exploitation of solar energy and vast desert land,” *Energy Systems Research*, 2019, https://www.e3s-conferences.org/articles/e3sconf/pdf/2019/40/e3sconf_esr2019_05009.pdf.

8 Carlo Brancucci Martínez-Anido, “Effects of North–African electricity import on the European and the Italian power systems: a techno-economic analysis,” *Electric Power Systems Research*, vol. 96, March, 2013, pp. 119–132; “Elmed interconnector aims to bring solar power from the Sahara to Europe,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 24, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/elmed-interconnector-aims-to-bring-solar-power-from-the-sahara-to-europe/a-48843725>.

9 Mokhtar Benasla, “The transition towards a sustainable energy system in Europe: What role can North Africa’s solar resources play?,” *Energy Strategy Reviews*, vol. 24, 2019, pp. 1–13.

10 International Energy Agency (IEA), “Fossil-fuel subsidies,” 2018, <https://www.iea.org/weo/energysubsidies/>.

to grow.¹¹ As investments in the energy sector were more secure, others soon followed, which helped to further modernise domestic economies. For Europe, this proved to be an attractive opportunity to export its own renewable energy technologies to the region, thereby outflanking China.

More political consequences were to be expected: as central governments in the previously oil-exporting states no longer held the monopoly on income, participation and demands for accountability were expected to grow; regional cooperation was set to deepen thanks to cross-border renewable energy grids; and lastly, the Middle East and North Africa's geostrategic importance decreased somewhat in the eyes of the United States and China, thereby liberating the Strait of Hormuz from its status as a global neuralgic spot for energy trade. Ultimately, this allowed for the emergence of a *détente* between Iran and Saudi Arabia.¹²

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

For a long time, the MENA did not feel any pressure to diversify its energy sector – a posture that stood in stark contrast to the fact that it was liable to suffer worse than any other region in terms of climate change fallout. Already one of the hottest regions globally, temperatures were projected to rise twice as fast as elsewhere in the world: by 2050, it will see a 4 degree increase in temperature and entire cities, such as Alexandria and Basra, are projected to be engulfed by rising sea levels.¹³ But in

2020, not even one quarter of Arab countries had established agencies dedicated specifically to promoting renewable energy, nor had most states enacted fiscal measures to reduce the costs of renewable energy projects – indeed, only Jordan had reliable and well-established regulatory frameworks. Although the region's CO2 output was nearing Europe's, its commitments to the Paris Agreement goals were mostly tied to the provision of outside assistance. At the time, the World Bank estimated that Egypt, Jordan and Morocco alone would need \$100 billion in investment in renewable energy generation between 2016 and 2030 – sums that were difficult to generate nationally.

But matters began to change in the years following 2020. As global awareness of climate change grew, regional developments, such as tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, created a new sense of urgency in Europe. Matters were further helped by the fact that renewable energy technology, particularly solar energy, was rapidly dropping in price and technological breakthroughs in energy storage allowed the region to integrate solar energy into the grid.¹⁴

As a result, climate diplomacy became a cornerstone of European engagement with the MENA – while the EU took the lead on this, it encouraged member states to streamline their efforts, too, so as to achieve maximum effect. This initially included a campaign to raise awareness concerning the urgency of the issue all over the region, both among decision-makers and the general public.¹⁵ Recognising that eastern Arab countries had generally less ambitious targets (in the range of 5–10%) than western Arab countries (between 27% and 52%), these

11 IRENA, "IRENA Market Analysis GCC 2019," 2019, https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2019/Jan/IRENA_Market_Analysis_GCC_2019.pdf; "Egypt's growing green energy sector likely to boost jobs," *Ahram Online*, March 14, 2018, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/292765/Business/Economy/Egypt's-growing-green-energy-sector-likely-to-boost.aspx>.

12 Andreas Goldthau et al., "How the energy transition will reshape geopolitics," *Nature*, vol. 569, May 2, 2019.

13 World Economic Forum, "How the Middle East is suffering on the front lines of climate change," April 5, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/middle-east-front-lines-climate-change-mena/>.

14 Jean-François Seznec, "Renewable Energy in the Middle East," *Atlantic Council*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/renewable-energy-in-the-middle-east/>.

15 Kate Dourian, "Challenges to the Energy Transition in the Gulf Countries," The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, October 2, 2019, <https://agsiow.org/challenges-to-the-energy-transition-in-the-gulf-countries/>.

efforts focused particularly on Iraq and the Gulf states.¹⁶

Second, Europe developed country-specific energy transition plans rather than regional super-solutions such as Desertec. In those plans, it pivoted away from its traditional focus on energy market liberalisation, instead zeroing in on pragmatic solutions that would facilitate investments in solar energy projects. By linking climate financing to energy sector reform, the EU facilitated not only the access to funds, but improved the legal and regulatory conditions for investments in renewable energy, and contributed to the phasing out of subsidies and the reform of national banking sectors. In particular, it supported smaller-scale installations, thereby contributing further to the decentralisation of energy production.

In 2024, the region was therefore much better positioned to face the future thanks in large part to European efforts – not just with regard to energy, but also in economic, environmental, and even socio-political terms. The power station opened by the EU ambassador in Libya was but one symbol of this monumental development.

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Solar power accounts for nearly 30% of MENA's energy mix
 Number of countries, including Libya, surpass renewable energy goals
 Region-wide environmental and energy 'Copernican Revolution'



Preferable future

2024+

Skyrocketing energy demands are met
 Rapid modernisation of MENA economies
Détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran



The journey

Today

Technological breakthroughs and lower prices
 Climate diplomacy cornerstone of European engagement
 Climate financing linked to energy sector reform



¹⁶ IRENA, "Renewable Energy in the Arab Region: Overview of developments", 2016.

CHAPTER 6

WHAT IF ... A REVOLUTION LED TO DEMOCRATISATION?

KATARIINA MUSTASILTA

The election Sunday kicked off peacefully across Batna, a southern Mediterranean country of 12 million inhabitants. The polling stations opened at 9am on 3 March 2024, almost four years since the 'People's Revolt' had sparked the transition. High levels of voter registration meant that a drastically higher turnout was anticipated than when the first interim government had called elections in late 2020. International observers, such as the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM), were present and cooperated with local observers who had been monitoring the situation throughout the transitional period. Amid fears of violent clashes between supporters of rival political groups, voting took place without major disruptions. Batna's Independent National Electoral Commission (BINEC) reacted swiftly to any reported problems throughout the day and advised voters in real time through social media and local radio channels.

These were Batna's first multiparty elections in 25 years and the stakes were high. The last opinion polls had shown a shrinking lead for the Reconciliation and Democracy Front (RDF) party and their presidential candidate Melis Beaku. Beaku had risen to the centre of the political stage through her prominent role as the chair of the National Educational Union (NEU) in the largely non-violent People's Revolt that had ousted the country's long-standing president Mbeki Kobola in the spring of 2020. In a country where ethnic identities were often politicised, Beaku had managed to garner

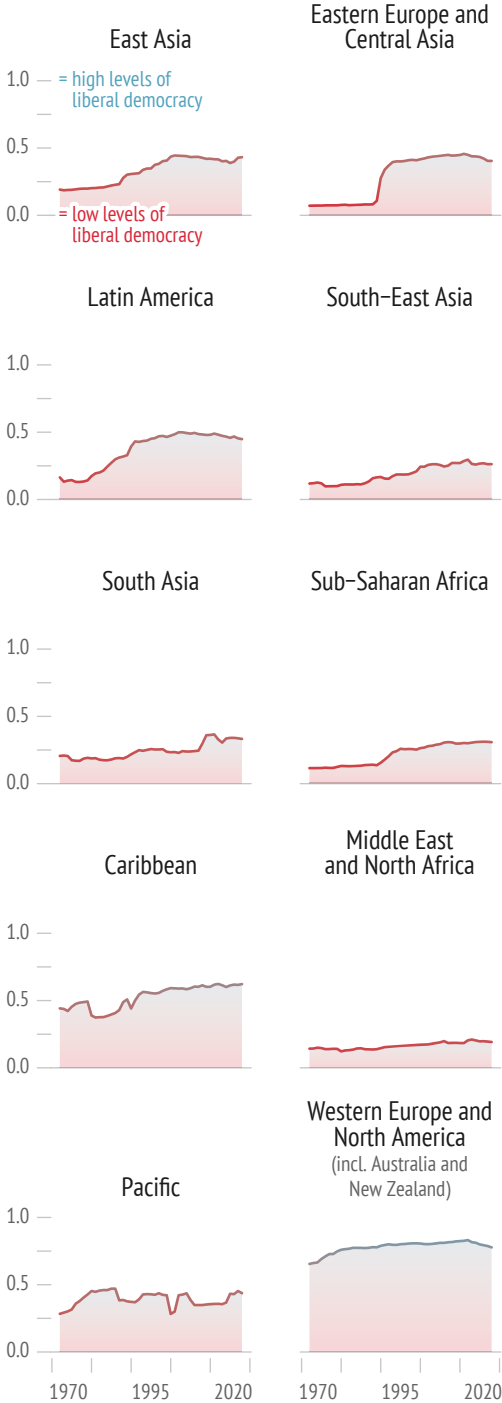
support across ethnic groups and was particularly popular among the urban populace.

Just behind in the polls came Henry Kabore, an old ally of the ousted president who had quickly changed his allegiance when the mass protests erupted. Kabore was seen as a reformist in the Batna National Coalition (BNC) party that had ruled the country for decades. While momentarily allied in ousting Kobola, Beaku and Kabore had emerged as political rivals in the weeks that followed, with a subsequent increase in violence threatening the country's internal peace.

Contrary to the predictions of the pre-election polls, Kabore emerged victorious in the presidential elections, the results showing 52% of the votes cast for him against Beaku's 44%. Even though the RDF did better in the National Assembly elections, the results were a huge disappointment for Beaku's excited constituents. However, while the results led to a short increase in tensions (#WedontwantKabore and #NotoanotherKobola were trending on Twitter by noon on Monday), there was no lethal escalation of violence and the situation calmed down quickly. Beaku congratulated Kabore in a press conference after the results were clear, acknowledging her defeat and thanking her voters and those who supported reform in the country. The BINEC published the complete election results on Monday afternoon and the EOM held its own press conference later that evening. Supporting its campaign period assessments, the EOM stated that no systematic fraud attempts or intimidation of voters had

Democratisation facing headwinds across the world

Liberal democracy index over time and across regions, 1970-2018



Data: V-Dem V9, 2019

taken place and judged the elections to have been competitive and well organised overall. A survey conducted shortly after the elections showed that a majority of both Kabore’s and Beiku’s supporters had a positive view of the BINEC and trusted it to have conducted its work independently of the political parties.

The 2024 general elections had considerable positive implications for peace and development in Batna and the wider region. The orderly handover of power from the transitional government to the democratically elected bodies enabled the new regime to swiftly take on its responsibilities and continue the reforms launched during the transitional period. Two years after the elections, Batna’s GDP per capita was growing at a rate of 2.9%, marking a drastic improvement from the years leading to Kobola’s fall and its immediate aftermath. Foreign investments had doubled since the beginning of the transition period and youth unemployment – a chronic problem in the region which increased instability risks – showed signs of alleviation.

Notably, citizens’ trust in their governance institutions also improved. A national survey conducted one year after the elections showed that while RDF supporters still opposed the BNC government, trust towards democratic institutions had increased across societal groups while support for violent mobilisation had decreased. This contributed to two important outcomes. First, the number of Batnan irregular migrants arriving in neighbouring countries declined and approximately 20% of the internally displaced people (IDPs) and 10% of the refugees and asylum-seekers that had fled due to violence were able to return home within the first post-election years.

Second, improved state legitimacy helped to avoid the feared spread of violent extremist movements in and outside Batna and counter a regional democratic backslide. By October 2026, when the EU deployed an Election Follow-up Mission (EFM) in Batna, analysts estimated the number of active terrorist cells with links to Batna to have decreased by two-thirds compared to 2019. Across Batna’s neighbourhood, public support for democratic

coalition-building was increasing and pluralistic civil society networks were becoming more organised.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

Batna's political transition commenced in an increasingly familiar way: mass non-violent resistance fuelled by political and socio-economic grievances was sparked by a sudden event (in this case the decision by President Kobola to reduce energy subsidies).¹ While the unpopularity of the president helped to initiate regime change, it was the organised nature of the pro-democratic campaign and significant support to conflict resolution and institutional reforms that enabled a gradual democratic transition.² The EU, for its part, responded to – and indeed pre-empted – the transition by combining its conflict prevention efforts with committed support to non-violent pro-democratic action under its renewed strategic framework for Human Rights and Democracy.³ In practice, this meant diplomatic services aimed at conflict resolution, a long-term commitment to strengthening genuine democratic institutions and active support to non-violent and conflict preventive capacities.

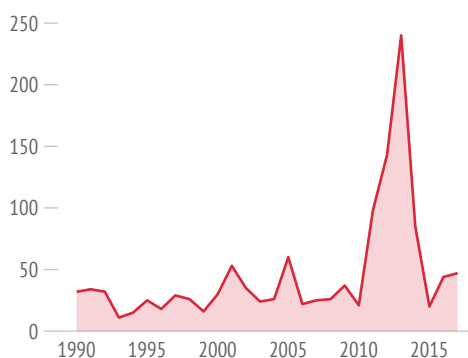
First, diplomatic efforts were resolute during the turbulent beginning of the transitional period. While the NEU had coordinated the network of resistance groups, Kabore had formed an interim government and announced plans to hold elections in six months' time. This polarised the country, as the civil resisters saw the elections as hasty and as a means to legitimise Kabore's undemocratic rule, and led to continued protests and boycotting of the planned

elections. Acknowledging that Kabore's plans to hold elections were premature and counterproductive to peace and democracy, the EU declined the interim regime's invitation to observe the elections and instead emphasised the need to first reform the electoral institutions and build a level political playing field.⁴ The HR/VP released a statement offering support to any transitional regime in carrying out the institutional reforms, given inclusive negotiations over the structure of the transitional government.

Under mounting domestic opposition and external pressures, Kabore agreed to negotiations mediated by a UN special envoy and co-facilitated by the EU. In December 2020, the newly formed RDF with Beaku as its leader, Kabore's BNC and various civic groups signed a power-sharing framework outlining a 40-month transition period leading to

Pro-democracy protest waves growing in Africa?

Spontaneous and organised non-violent protests concerning human rights and democracy in Africa with >100 participants, 1992-2017



Data: SCAD, 2019

- 1 Erica Chenoweth, "Trends in Nonviolent Resistance and State Response: Is Violence Towards Civilian-based Movements on the Rise?," *Global Responsibility to Protect*, vol. 9, 2017, pp. 86-100.
- 2 Jonathan Sutton, Charles Butcher, and Isak Svensson, "Explaining Political Jiu-jitsu: Institution-building and the Outcomes of Regime Violence against Unarmed Protests," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2014, pp. 559-73.
- 3 Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Democracy," 12699/19, 2019; Véronique Dudouet and Howard Clark, "Nonviolent Civic Action in Support of Human Rights and Democracy," Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, European Parliament, 2009; Ken Godfrey and Richard Youngs, "Toward a New EU Democracy Strategy," *Carnegie Europe*, September, 2019.
- 4 As the Council Conclusions 12699/19 recognise, elections can serve to legitimise undemocratic rule.

elections. The EU and the UN provided third party guarantees to the agreement, including a continued commitment to mediation services.⁵ Once the transitional government was in place, the EU announced a multi-year democracy support programme coordinated with other international donors. Major support went to the comprehensive reform of the BINEC and bolstering civil society actors engaged in voter education and elections observation.

Second, support to societal non-violent and conflict prevention capacities helped to mitigate violence during the upheaval. The EU had identified that Batna posed a growing conflict risk already in 2018, due to its high levels of corruption, the weakening of the central government and armed violence that had broken out in its neighbourhood.⁶ Of particular concern was the spread of violent extremists across the border to the northwest, which had a history of inter-communal violence. In order to undermine the potential of violent mobilisation and encourage non-violent civic activity, the EU supported the organisation of a network of local human rights activists engaged in non-violent action advocacy and training. Moreover, the EU used its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) to fund inter-communal dialogues, particularly focused on facilitating communication between youth leaders and developing early warning systems.⁷ These systems were instrumental in cutting short the cycle of revenge attacks in areas that experienced violence during the political upheaval in 2020 and in preventing escalatory rumours during the electoral process in 2024.

Third, in early 2023 and at the invitation of the transitional regime, the HR/VP announced that an EOM was to be deployed in the 2024 general elections. Considering the transitional context, a core group of long-term observers were deployed already in September 2023 to carry out

Timeline



Signpost

2024

First multiparty elections in 25 years
EUEOM monitors the elections, cooperating with local observers.
The elections are conducted peacefully



Preferable future

2024+

Improved economic development and political stabilisation
Return of IDPs and refugees
Democratic backslide countered regionally



The journey

Today

Support to non-violent capacities and early warning mitigates violence
Diplomacy and mediation contribute to a negotiated transitional regime
Comprehensive support for the electoral process

a pre-assessment of the electoral system, releasing their statement with short-term recommendations in October 2023. Thereafter, the chief observer published several statements on the engagements of the EOM with Batnan institutions and parties in the lead-up to the elections, as part of a new communication strategy to manage the public's expectations and build

5 Alexandre Raffoul, "Making Power-Sharing Work: The Role of Mediation," *PeaceLab*, May 2019.

6 See: the Global Conflict Risk Index (GCRI).

7 Conciliation Resources and Saferworld, "Effective local action: From early warning to peacebuilding," 2016, <https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Effective%20local%20action%20pages.pdf>.

confidence.⁸ The EOM worked closely with local monitors, particularly on issues concerning electoral manipulation through online misinformation and disinformation. The long-term presence and visibility of the EOM contributed

to the informed public's confidence in the authenticity of the elections, which served to preserve societal peace during and after the electoral process.

⁸ Inken Von Borzyskowski, "The Risks of Election Observation: International Condemnation and Post-Election Violence," *International Studies Quarterly*, 2019.

CHAPTER 7

WHAT IF ... RUSSIAN CITIZENS COULD TRAVEL VISA-FREE IN EUROPE?

SINIKUKKA SAARI

Europe, here we come – from Russia with love! #novisa #visafree #eu #вотумы #безвизы #евросоюз – @Ksenia04. At 00:07 on 8 May 2024, a group of five young Russian women drove through the Grzechotki-Mamonovo crossing point from Kaliningrad to Poland without any kind of visa. They posted status updates on different social media platforms accompanied by photos of them posing next to a small Subaru and waving their Russian passports in the air. ‘A smiling group of students become the first Russian citizens to cross the border without a visa’, reported a Polish online magazine a few hours later.

The day before, the President of the European Commission had issued a statement: “Tomorrow we will be celebrating the important day of peace in Europe – which also reminds us of our ability to overcome destructive historic legacies and work together for a better future. This year, we greet the day with a significant accomplishment: from tomorrow, 8 May, Russian citizens will not need a visa to enter the Schengen Area for a maximum of seven days of travel – under the condition that they have a biometric passport and that their application has been authorised by the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) before the start of the trip. The aim of this unilateral policy is to reach out to Russians, our close neighbours and fellow Europeans.”

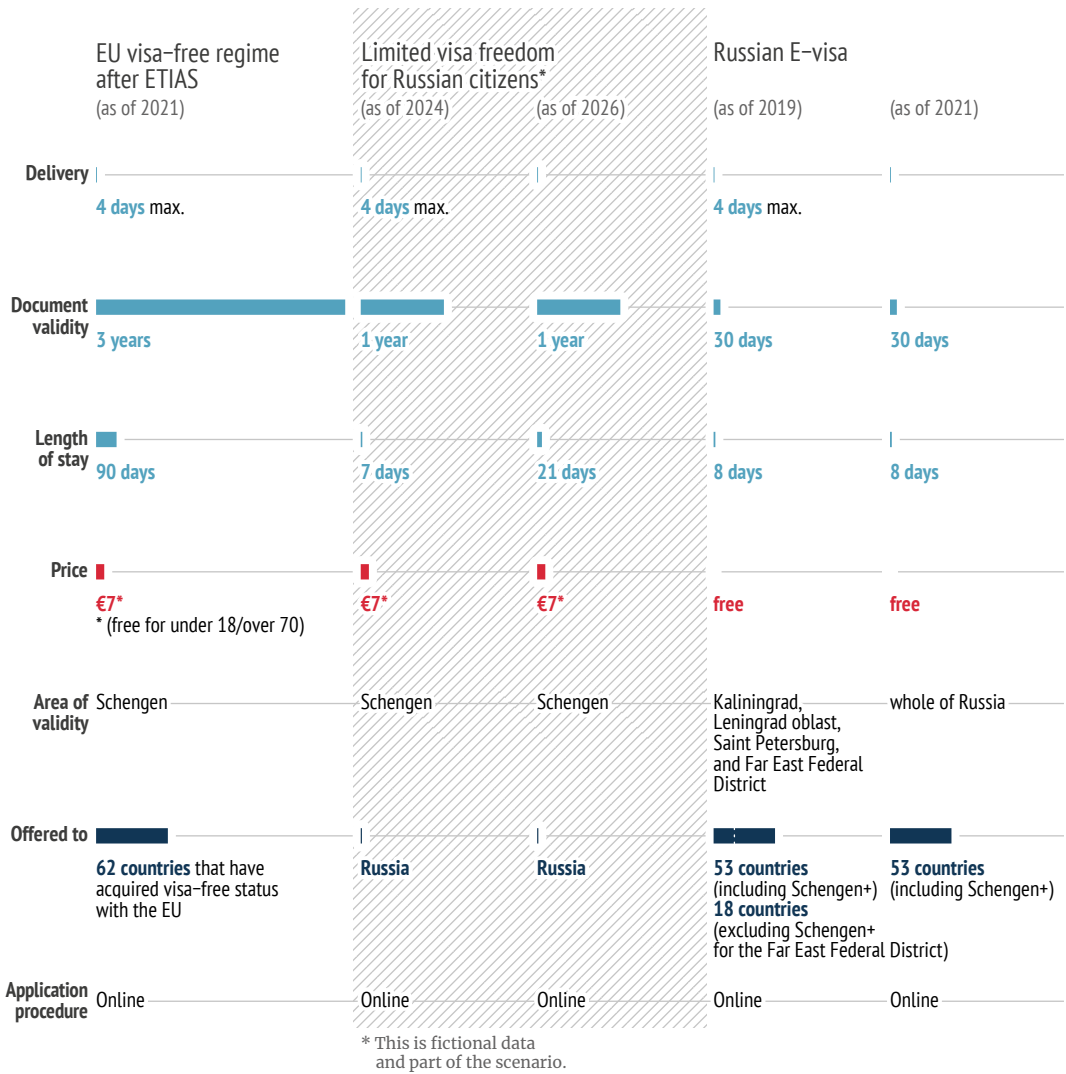
She went on: “At the same time, the EU stands firm in its commitment to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Reflecting this, the EU member states took a decision earlier this week to add three persons who held key roles in organising Russia’s presidential elections in Crimea in March to the sanctions list. We further condemn Russia’s violent repression of large-scale protests in Moscow the day after the elections and to this end, we have added two interior ministry officials who directed these brutal actions to the travel ban list and seized their assets in EU countries. The latter decision is based on the EU human rights sanction regime established in 2020.”

The decision regarding visa freedom for Russian citizens in 2024 was applied conditionally for two years. The ‘testing phase’ was justified by the risk of growing levels of organised crime and immigration – despite the fact that Russia was not considered a migratory risk and a re-admission agreement between the EU and Russia had been signed already in 2007.

Moreover, the decision did not change the EU’s non-recognition policies in the eastern neighbourhood: Russian passports issued in regions with a non-recognised status – such as Crimea, Donbas, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria – were not valid for travel in the EU.

Comparison of visa freedom after ETIAS, Russian E-visa and limited visa freedom

(as imagined in this scenario)



Data: Consular Department of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Russia, 2019; EU/Schengen Visa Info, 2019

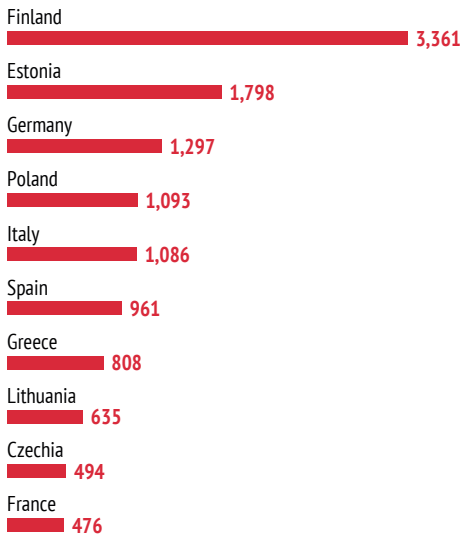
The visa procedure had been one of the biggest obstacles to independent and spontaneous travel to Europe for Russians.¹ When a visa was no longer required, the number of Russian visitors to Europe grew rapidly: in 2026, 62 million arrivals in Europe from Russia were recorded (compared to some 32 million in 2013). This remarkable increase brought about new business

opportunities for Russian and European businesses alike. New small and medium-sized enterprises first began to mushroom in the transport and tourism sectors. Increased competition among service providers, combined with an increasing number of travellers, led to significant cuts in air and bus fares. That meant that more Russians could afford to

1 “Understanding Russian outbound tourism: What the Russian blogosphere is saying about Europe?”, UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2015, <https://mtu.gov.hu/documents/prod/9789284416714.pdf>.

Russian tourists' favourite EU destinations

Top ten EU countries, number of tourist trips in 2018, thousands



Data: Russian Federal State Statistics Service, 2019

travel abroad, something which again fed into the positive cycle of decreasing prices and expanding markets. A positive spill-over was later observed in other European service sectors such as restaurant and retail industries.

A survey conducted among Russian tourists by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in August 2026 showed that fears over hostility and anti-Russian sentiment in Europe – one of the reasons that resulted in a strong decrease in Russian international tourism after 2014² – had become significantly less common after the visa-free travel decision made by the EU in 2024. Moreover, the Levada Centre – an independent Russian polling agency – recorded a remarkable improvement in general positive attitudes towards the EU by Russians. In May 2019, only 37% of Russians had either a very positive (4%) or somewhat positive (33%) attitude towards the EU, whereas in May 2026,

59% of Russians had either very positive (19%) or positive (40%) attitude towards the EU.³ Growing interaction and first-hand encounters with EU citizens, combined with a growing distrust of national broadcast media, increased Russians' awareness of the gap between negative Russian news coverage and the reality in Europe.

After the initial decision to lift the visa requirement for Russian citizens, the downward trend of acquiring an international passport⁴ in Russia was reversed: in 2018, 24% of Russians had an international passport; in 2026, a record-breaking 40% of Russians (and 68% of Muscovites) – altogether around 55 million people – had an international passport. Gradually, the majority of these became biometric passports. These were signs that the hitherto often isolationist Russian mindset was starting to fade away – in particular among younger Russians.

Contrary to initial fears, the new system also increased border security. A biometric passport entered into the ETIAS system was a more secure way of controlling the movement of people across borders than a traditional passport entered into a Schengen or national visa system. Based on this positive evaluation, the visa-free travel regime for Russian citizens continued and the maximum length of stay in the Schengen Area was extended from 7 days to 21 days on 1 May 2026.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

In 2019, Russia announced that citizens of Schengen countries, as well as citizens of Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Cyprus were allowed to apply for a free-of-charge e-visa to the Leningrad oblast and Saint Petersburg (in

² Ibid.

³ "Rossiya i mir" [Russia and the world], Levada Centre, June 26, 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/2019/06/26/rossiya-i-mir-4/>.

⁴ In Russia, citizens can possess both an internal passport (not valid for foreign travel) and an international passport. International passports can be either non-biometric (valid for five years) or biometric (valid for ten years).

addition to the Kaliningrad region, where this policy had been applied since June 2019) for trips of up to eight days beginning in October 2019.⁵ It took a maximum of four days to obtain the visa online and no visits to a consulate or tourist agency were required, nor was it necessary to register once in Russia.

This e-visa system was then extended to include the entire territory of Russia in 2021. The changes in Russian visa policy in 2019 and 2021 encouraged many Europeans to take short weekend trips, mostly to Russia's main cities. It was at this point that EU leaders seriously considered reopening a visa dialogue with Russia as a possible way to 'jumpstart' the relationship.

These considerations were shelved due to negative developments in Donbas and the brutal treatment of protesters and activists in Russia after the 2021 parliamentary elections. These negative events led to the insight that engagement with Russian civil society needed to be radically rethought. Due to the increasingly repressive policies of the Russian authorities, stigmatised Russian activists were ambivalent about Western support as it often made them targets of state oppression. The EU decided to step up its engagement with Russian society at large rather than with select groups, while maintaining political pressure on the Russian leadership and keeping restrictive measures in place.

The fresh thinking on visas was further facilitated by new technology which was already shifting approaches to visa issues. Technology was enabling more careful and individualised scrutiny of travellers and the boundaries between various types of e-visas and travel authorisation systems for visa-free travel were becoming increasingly blurred. The old system suffered from the ease with which fake

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Unilateral visa waiver for Russian citizens for 7 days

EU reaffirms commitment to territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova
EU human rights sanctions regime applied to Russia



Preferable future

2024+

Number of Russian visitors to Europe increases significantly, with positive economic repercussions

As engagement increases, the EU's image in Russia improves

Increasing mobility and enhanced border security



The journey

Today

EU reaches out to Russian society at large
New technology enables lighter travel authorisation procedures and more targeted border control measures

EU policy is based on its own long-term interests (rather than seeing the visa issue as a 'reward' to the Russian government)



identities could be created and visas obtained through standard procedures; this had been the case with the suspects of the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in the UK in 2018, as well as the assassination of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Germany in 2019, for

⁵ "Ukaz prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii o poryadke vezda v RF i vyezda iz RF inostrannykh grazhdan" [Ukaz of the President of the Russian Federation on entry to RF and exit from RF of foreign citizens], July 18, 2019, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/File/GetFile/0001201907190031?type=pdf>.

instance.⁶ Entering biometric passports into the ETIAS system was quicker, cheaper (both for the EU countries and for the travellers) and more secure. The resources saved by the faster, up-to-date procedures could be reallocated to ensure more targeted border security measures.

In 2022, the European Commission conducted a study on the technical and security aspects of a potential limited extension of the ETIAS system to countries that do not enjoy visa freedom with the EU. It proposed that a unilateral, limited visa waiver could be granted to countries that did not pose a migratory risk; they could be offered a shorter period of authorisation and a shorter maximum length of stay than those states with official agreements on visa freedom.⁷

In early 2023, the Commission came up with a proposal which would grant a unilateral visa waiver to Russian citizens. Instead of insisting on a negotiated process with the Russian authorities, whose behaviour the EU condemned, the Union decided to engage with Russian society on its own terms. In the run-up to the Russian presidential elections in March 2024 – which did not result in any real change of leadership – the room for manoeuvre for civil society shrank even further. A key argument supporting EU policy was that Russian citizens should not be held hostage by the actions of an undemocratic and increasingly repressive Russian government.

⁶ For the UK case, see: “Skripal Poisoning Suspect’s Passport Data Shows Link to Security Services,” *Bellingcat*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/14/skripal-poisoning-suspects-passport-data-shows-link-security-services/>; “Russian Hitmen Posed Businessmen to gain entry in to the UK,” *The Telegraph*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/09/06/russian-hitmen-posed-businessmen-gain-entry-uk/>; for the German case, see: “Suspected Assassin In The Berlin Killing Used Fake Identity Documents,” *Bellingcat*, August 30, 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/08/30/suspected-assassin-in-the-berlin-killing-used-fake-identity-documents/>.

⁷ In fact, something along these lines was envisaged already in one of the first studies of a potential ‘EU ESTA’ back in 2011, see: “Policy study on an EU Electronic System for travel Authorization (EU ESTA),” PWC, February, 2011, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/docs/pdf/esta_main_en.pdf.

CHAPTER 8

WHAT IF ... THE EASTERN PARTNERS JOINED 'MONEY SCHENGEN'?

STANISLAV SECRIERU

On 27 June 2024, a group of tourists from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine was surrounded by reporters gathered at an ATM on Schuman Roundabout in Brussels. The EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations accompanied them. A lawyer from the Moldovan city of Bălți, Vasily Cebanu, said: "Until recently my bank in Moldova would grant two cash withdrawals in the EU free of charge, but from the third one onwards the bank charged commission. I arrived yesterday from Amsterdam with my wife and tomorrow we are heading to Paris by train. This morning, I withdrew cash in the EU for the third time and now it is free of charge." Olena Andriyenko from Kharkiv, who stood nearby, chipped in: "Vasily was pretty lucky. My bank did not grant even two withdrawals without commission. In general, it's good that now we are part of the European payment system. Europe required Ukraine to complete reforms of the banking sector and because of these reforms I now have more trust in our banks." A Georgian owner of a small business in Batumi, Vano Kavkasidze, continued: "I know that today you can do many payments by card. But I am kind of old fashioned. I prefer to have some money in my pocket and pay by cash. I am glad there will be no charges for cash withdrawals while I am

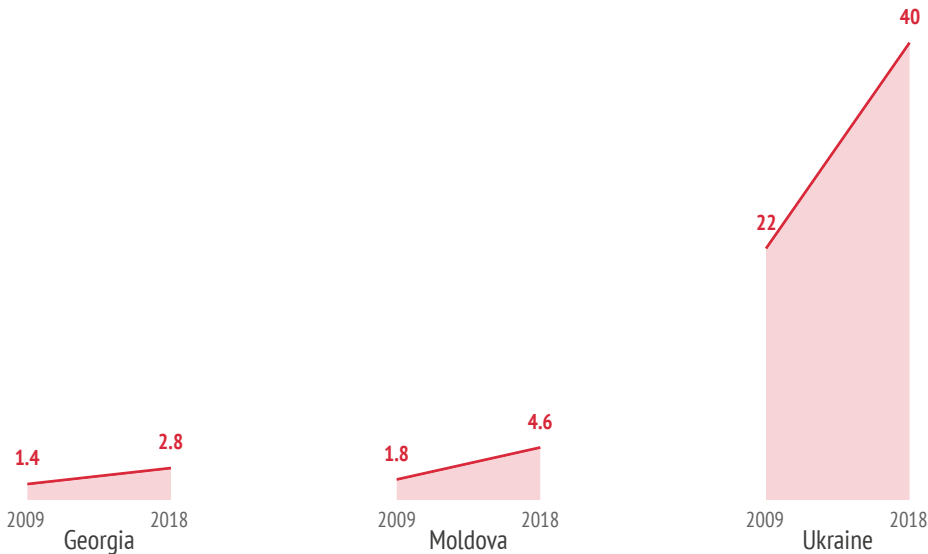
in the EU. Overall, the fact that Georgia joined this system means that I will be able to make faster payments for import/export-related operations with business partners in Europe."

The Commissioner explained: "On this very day ten years ago, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine signed respective Association Agreements with the EU. Today we made another important step towards closer, deeper and mutually beneficial relations. These three countries have fully joined the Single European Payment Area (SEPA). I must admit that from the outset few believed that it would be possible. But, again and again, the EU and its partners in the eastern neighbourhood demonstrated that political determination and hard work can deliver on what previously looked impossible. The extension of SEPA to three associated countries is further proof of the EU's strong commitment to stability and prosperity in the eastern neighbourhood. Finally, SEPA also benefits EU-based firms doing business in the region."

Since its creation, SEPA had brought a number of significant benefits to EU citizens and businesses which are largely taken for granted today: a single bank account and card to make payments across Europe; quicker, safer and

Trade dynamics after the launch of the Eastern Partnership

Trade turnover with the EU, € billions



Data: European Commission, 2019

simpler bank transfers and retail payments; lower fees for bank transfers; transparency regarding currency conversion costs; free cash withdrawals from ATMs on the territory covered by SEPA; enhanced security of bank cards; and new electronic services (such as e-invoicing).¹ According to estimates by PwC, for its members SEPA could annually lead to ‘€21.9 billion [of] quantifiable savings [...]; €227 billion credit and liquidity unlocked [...]; and a total of up to 973,000 man-years [...] unlocked from mundane payment processing and refocused on higher value added activities.’²

From 2024, onwards, SEPA extended these considerable benefits to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Accordingly, their economic relations with the EU kept expanding quickly, consolidating the status of the euro as the principal currency for foreign trade transactions in the eastern neighbourhood. Three factors drove the ‘Euro-isation’ of local economies and made

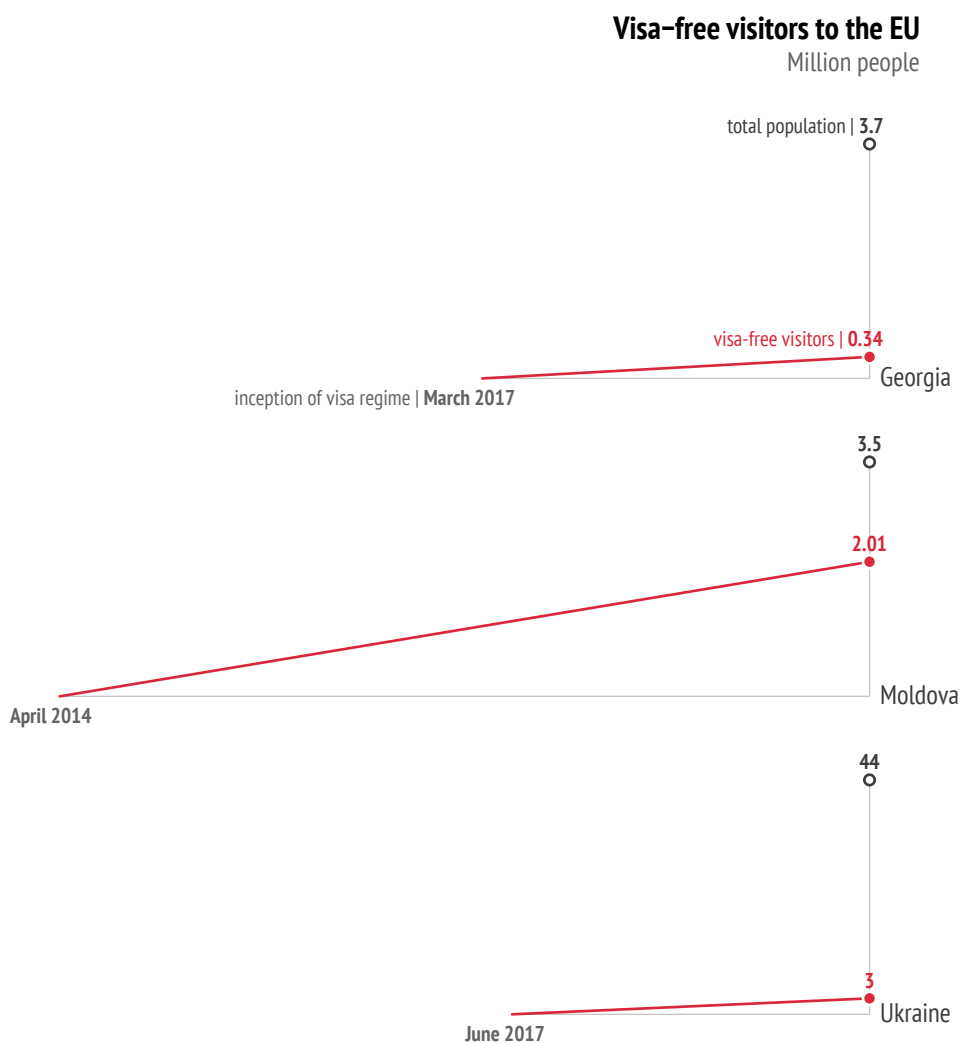
SEPA more advantageous: trade, mobility and remittances.

Facilitated by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs), the value of the EU’s bilateral trade exchanges with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in 2026 surpassed €3.5 billion, €5.3 billion and €50 billion, respectively. Rapidly expanding trade pushed up the volume of import/export transactions conducted in euro between the EU and three eastern partners. As trade grew, SEPA facilitated commercial operations by cutting the costs and time related to moving increased amounts of money across borders. This benefited companies from the EU and eastern Europe alike.

By 2026, 1.8 million Georgians, 2.6 million Moldovans and 12 million Ukrainians had visited the EU visa-free. In addition, since 2014 almost 16,000 students and academics from these countries had come to the EU for

1 European Central Bank, “The Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA),” 2013, https://www.ecb.europa.eu/paym/retpaym/shared/pdf/SEPA_e-brochure_2013.pdf.

2 “Economic Analysis of SEPA. Benefits and Opportunities Ready to Be Unlocked by Stakeholders”, PwC, January 16, 2014, <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/audit-services/corporate-treasury-solutions/assets/pwc-sepa-benefits-and-opportunities-ready-to-be-unlocked-by-stakeholders.pdf>.



Data: Moldova MFA (2019), Telegraf.com.ua (2019), Agenda.ge (2018), World Bank (2018)

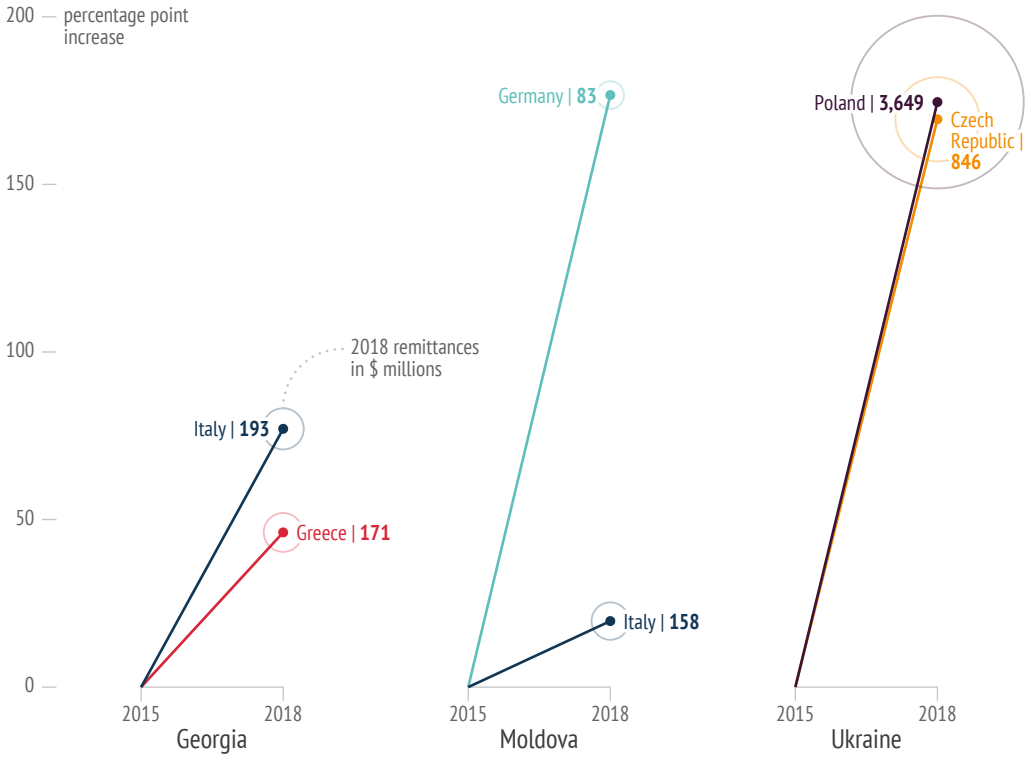
education and research exchanges within the Erasmus+ framework. As a result, the extension of SEPA in 2024 made travel and relocation easier and less expensive. It eliminated fees for cash withdrawals at ATMs and made it unnecessary to open a bank account (and sustain the related costs) in the EU for those residing in Europe temporarily (longer than three months).

In 2026, the EU was by far the largest source of remittances for these three states: Georgians working in Italy and Greece sent over €440 million, Moldovans employed in Germany and Italy combined channelled home almost €320 million, while Ukrainian workers in

Poland and the Czech Republic transferred over €5 billion. Although not all transfers from the EU were made in euro, the role of the currency grew rapidly: the share of euro remittances sent to Moldova reached 70% in 2026, for instance. The extension of SEPA had cut the costs of money transfers and thus encouraged more workers to wire money via banks instead of using costly payment systems or relying on unsafe cash transfer schemes. In this way, SEPA spread its benefits not only to well-to-do urban elites residing in Tbilisi, Chisinau and Kyiv, but also to ordinary people who travelled legally to the EU to earn money in order to improve the financial circumstances of their families back home.

Main sources of remittances from the EU

To Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 2015–2018



Data: National Banks of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 2018

Last but not least, the extension of SEPA to the three associated states required legal and regulatory alignment in the banking sector. By 2024, this, in turn, helped to make the sector in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine more robust and improved interoperability with the banking systems in the EU. SEPA-related reforms introduced greater transparency and enhanced the supervision of money flows in and from the EU. Thus, the SEPA enlargement process helped the EU to more comprehensively address money laundering threats originating from or passing through third parties.

that ten years after the EaP had been launched, its members had followed distinct paths in their relations with the EU: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine had signed the Association Agreements, Armenia and Belarus had joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), whereas Azerbaijan had opted to balance both Russia and Europe. These very different trajectories required readjustments and clear differentiation if the EaP was to remain a relevant transformational tool in the eastern neighbourhood. The EU reached the conclusion that while the framework incorporating the six states from eastern Europe needed to be preserved and further institutionalised, the three associated members should receive an upgraded offer.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

In 2019, the EU started the reflection process on the future of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). In the early stages, consultations highlighted

In early 2020, the EU came up with a list of possible incentives for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, among which was the extension of SEPA. The EU included SEPA in the offer for several reasons. First, all three satisfied the

basic preliminary eligibility requirements, namely 'strong economic ties ... [and] a strong legal relationship with the EU.'³ Second, the extension of SEPA was a logical continuation of the three other freedoms the EU had already granted, albeit in a limited form: freedom of travel to Europe (for short-term visits) via visa-free regimes and privileged trade in goods and services via the DCFTAs. Third, in the 2010s the banking sectors in all three states (though to a lesser degree in Georgia) experienced systemic problems that had also had negative spillover effects for several banking institutions in the EU.⁴ And while reforms had been carried out and the situation had improved, the banking sectors in these countries still required greater transformation and consolidation; SEPA provided the EU with a powerful conditionality tool to support this positive change. Finally, yet importantly, the reforms required in order to accede to SEPA helped to mitigate the phenomenon of money laundering in the neighbourhood.

In early 2020, after having consulted the European Central Bank (ECB) and the European Payment Council (EPC), the latter being the body which decides on admission to SEPA, the EU Commission ordered an impact assessment. Equipped with a positive evaluation, the Commission sought the political blessing of EU member states. The EaP Summit Final Declaration in June 2020 subsequently recommended: 'to extend SEPA to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine when all the criteria set by EPC are fully met by the applicants.'

The declaration put the process in motion: the EU dispatched a combined team of experts from the EU Commission, ECB and EPC to conduct screening, assess the needs for technical and financial assistance and draft 'SEPA action plans' containing a detailed to-do list before accession. To avoid overlaps and ensure complementarity, the teams liaised with the Council of Europe's Moneyval Committee (responsible for

Timeline

Signpost

2024

SEPA extended to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine
Continued growth of EU trade with the three countries
SEPA-related reforms contribute to combating money-laundering



Preferable future

2024+

SEPA enables faster payments for growing number of import-export operations
Association Agreement (AA) states effectively integrated into European economic zone
The status and popularity of the euro as an international currency improves



The journey

Today

EaP summit identifies 'fourth freedom' of capital movement as the next step in the association process
Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine receive 'SEPA action plans'
Financial reforms in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine implemented with European expertise



the evaluation of compliance with anti-money laundering procedures) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which also uses conditionality to reform financial sectors in these three states. In November 2020, the associated members of the EaP received action plans, which once fulfilled, would extend the advantages of SEPA to the territories controlled by the

³ European Payment Council, "Criteria for Participation in SEPA Schemes," <https://www.europeanpaymentscouncil.eu/document-library/other/criteria-participation-sepa-schemes>.

⁴ "European banks named in Moldova-Russia money laundering and tax evasion scandal", Oxfam International, March 20, 2017, <https://www.oxfam.org/es/node/8404>.

central authorities in Tbilisi, Chisinau and Kyiv. The incorporation of these three neighbours into SEPA completed the virtuous circle by adding (although in a restricted form) a 'fourth freedom' to the relations between the EU and

EaP states: movement of capital. Therefore, by making money circulate faster, SEPA came to support the greater mobility of citizens and a growth in trade of services and goods.

CHAPTER 9

WHAT IF ... THE EU AND THE US LAUNCHED A PARTNERSHIP TO DEFEND DEMOCRACY?

SIMONA R. SOARE

The president of the European Council and the president of the United States held a joint press conference on the occasion of the EU-US Summit in March 2024. Standing side by side in front of a crowd of journalists and cameras flashing in the room, the two sent a strong message about a rejuvenated transatlantic partnership and a renewed commitment to common liberal values. Taking the floor, the president of the European Council said: “The Partnership to Defend Democracy launched three years ago with the United States is already delivering. Over a thousand partners from like-minded countries, private industry, cities, universities and civil society answered our call and joined the Partnership. In 2019, we stood on the precipice of democracy failing in the transatlantic area. Due to our inclusive approach, together, we have turned the tide on the democratic dip of the 2010s. Over the last two years, we have reversed the rollback of democracy in Europe. Nevertheless, much work remains to be done. The European Union and its member states are fully committed to sharing the burden of defending democracy and to building the future of democracy together with our transatlantic and global partners. Later this year, we will celebrate 35 years since the fall of communism across Europe. I can think of no better way of celebrating this achievement than by putting our common transatlantic project for a Europe that is whole, free and at peace

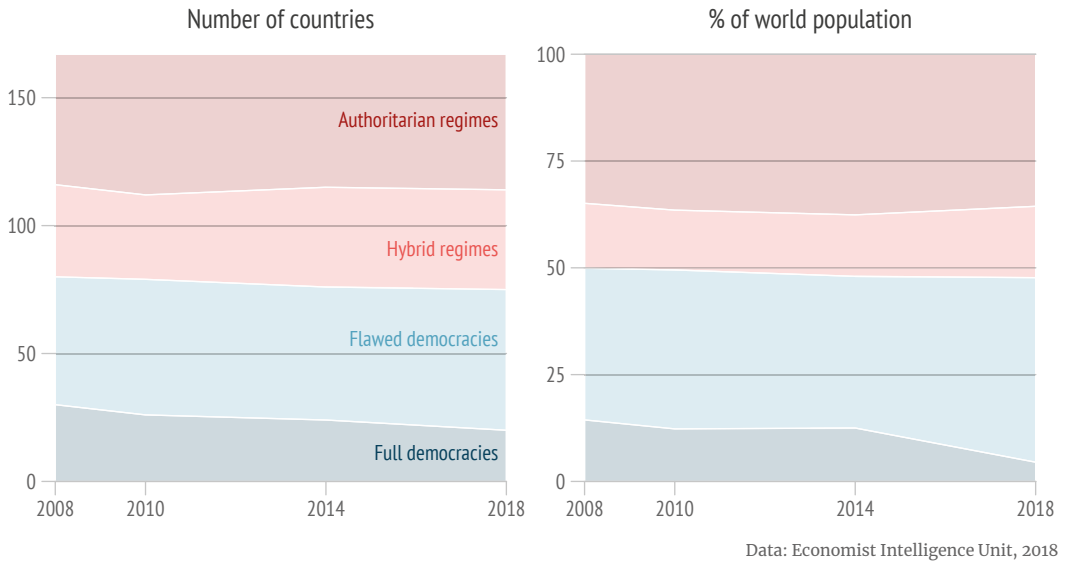
firmly back on its democratic path, safe from hostile interference.”

In her opening statement, US President Jess Ketterer, a decorated veteran who had served in Afghanistan and was a former Massachusetts senator, said: “We are resolute in our efforts and will defend our democratic societies against foreign interference as vigorously as we defend our borders. We are equally determined to take greater responsibility globally to assist and support like-minded countries affected by hostile foreign interference in their democratic processes and institutions. The United States and our European allies have always been iron-clad defenders of freedom in the world. As we are faced with increasing great power competition from authoritarian regimes, our common values bind us together as strongly as ever. We will not falter in defending our free way of life and the rules-based international order.”

The Partnership to Defend Democracy (PDD) was an effort to revive the values-based roots of the transatlantic partnership by galvanising transatlantic approaches to safeguarding the future of democracy. The multi-stakeholder initiative, launched in 2022, focused on defending democracy from hostile foreign interference and building democratic resilience. It included states in the transatlantic area (members of both the EU and NATO, as well as EU associated and candidate states), like-minded

Democracy in the world

2008-2018



nations such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India and Mexico, sub-state actors (cities, counties and local councils), private industry (including big tech companies and social media), academia and civil society. Over one thousand stakeholders joined the PDD in its first year.

The framework convened five strategic working groups to develop common action plans on how to tackle transnational challenges to democracy, including vectors for hostile foreign interference such as disinformation, foreign political funding, foreign direct investment, emerging technologies and new digital strategic infrastructure under foreign control. The strategic working groups met regularly to build common situational awareness, coordinate action plans and information sharing and monitor implementation of agreed measures.

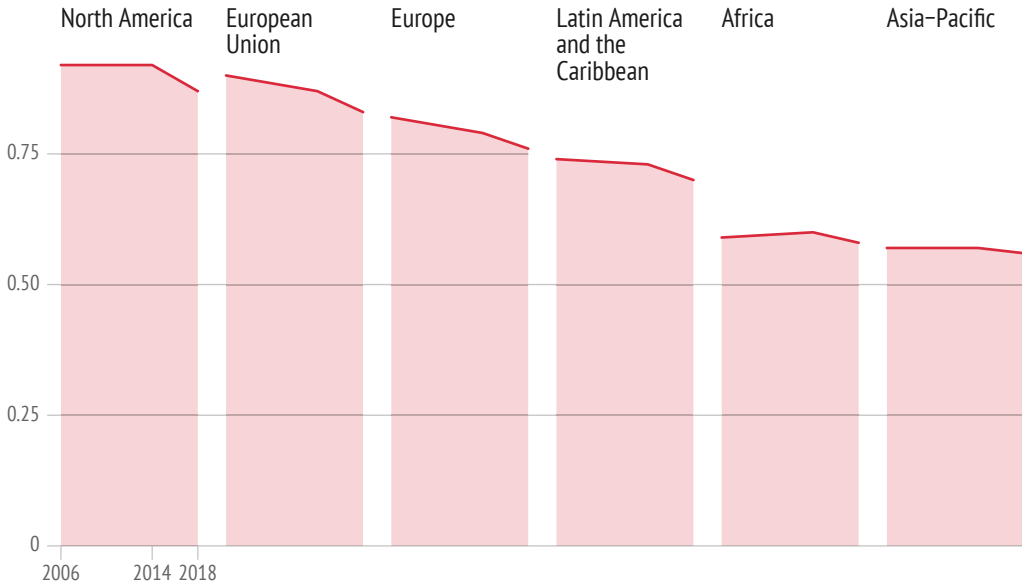
The PDD helped reverse the trend of democratic backsliding: by 2024, the number of people living in democratic, free regimes had exceeded the number of people living in hybrid or authoritarian regimes. As part of the PDD's measures, stakeholders strategically focused their collective action and coordinated their respective support on two key elements of democratic governance which had seen the biggest decline

since the mid-2000s – the rule of law and civil liberties. The G7 Rapid Reaction Mechanism, a 2018 initiative to strengthen coordination in identifying, preventing and responding to threats to G7 democracies, was used to bolster democratic resilience against hostile foreign interference. This involved strengthening information sharing and building a common threat analysis of the subversion activities used by Russia and China to undermine democracy in G7 countries.

In Latin America, the transatlantic stakeholders coordinated democracy and human rights support, trade instruments and development aid based on flexible but clear conditionality connected to improvements in the areas of the rule of law and civil liberties. Focusing on clear outcomes, the EU gave targeted support to a wide range of societal and economic actors in the region which were committed to democratic reforms, civil liberties and respect for human rights. These efforts leveraged the EU aid awarded mainly to flawed democracies and hybrid regimes across the region through strategic bilateral or multilateral engagement. Supported by the newly-established Fund to Defend Democracy, this policy resulted in an improvement in democracy in a majority of countries on the continent, helping Mexico,

Developments in civil liberties across the world

Civil Liberties Score, 2006–2018



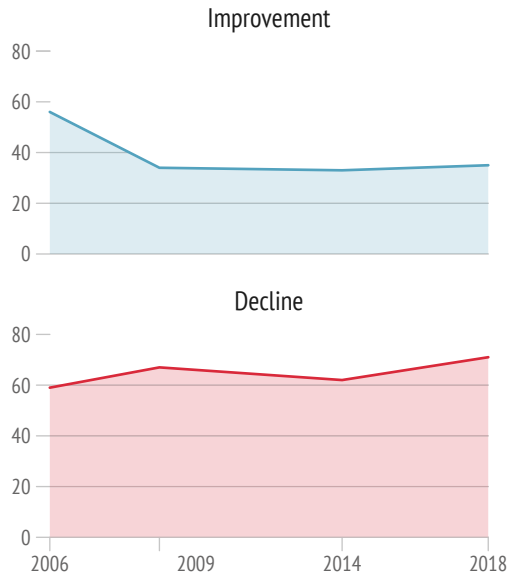
Data: IDEA, 2018

Argentina, Colombia and Brazil transition from flawed to full democracies.

By the mid-2020s, the functions of democratic governance had improved in more states than it had declined. Aligned with the EU’s own European Democracy Action Plan, this helped enhance democratic resilience and made those countries less vulnerable to hostile foreign interference. The PDD strategic working group invited civil society, academia and big tech industry to join a new effort to understand political behaviour in democracies. The result was a Roadmap on the Future of Democracy, which identified the drivers of positive and negative transformations in democratic societies around the globe. These included inequalities, social and political exclusion, corruption, urbanisation, migration and demographic pressures, climate change, the role of new technologies,¹ digital platforms, new political parties and forms of political activism beyond civil society.

Net improvement and decline in quality of democracy

Number of countries, 2006–2018

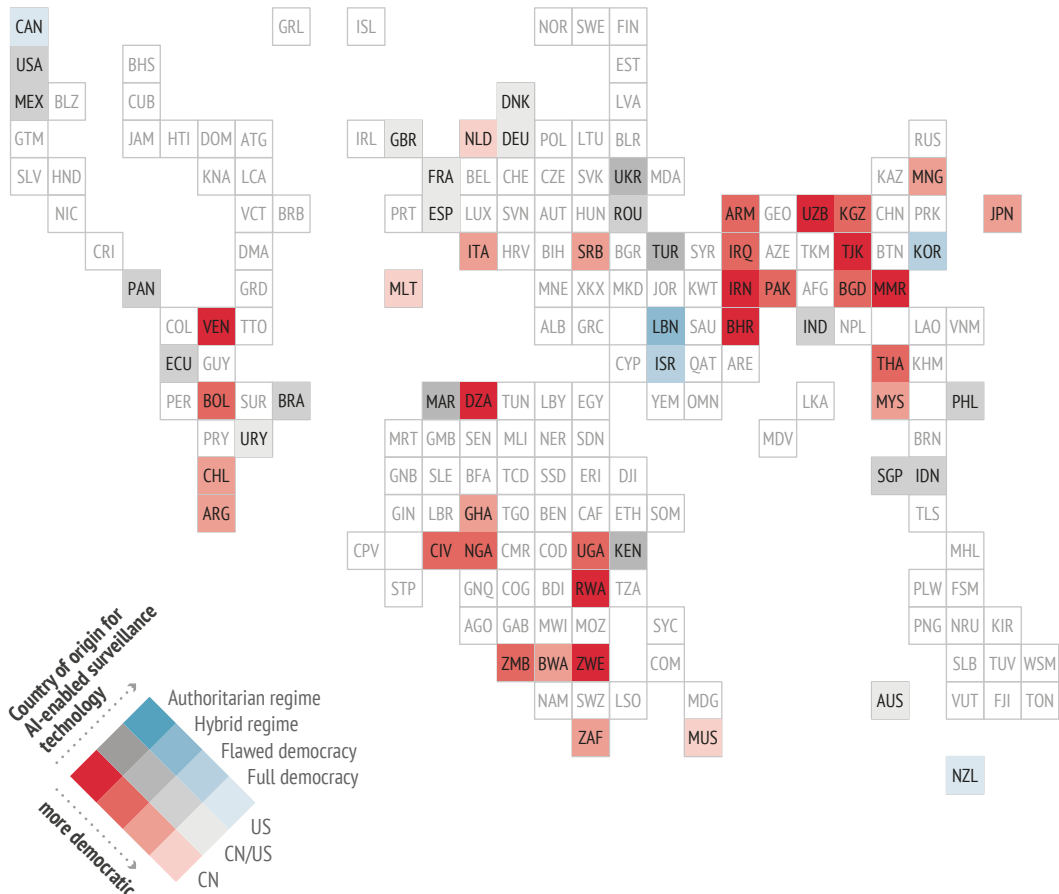


Data: Freedom House, 2019

1 “World Leadership Alliance and Club de Madrid, Next Generation Democracy 2014–2018: Final Insights,” Club de Madrid, 2019, <http://www.clubmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NGD-Final-Insights-web.pdf>.

AI surveillance technology diffusion

By political regime type and country of origin



Data: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018

The PDD Roadmap on the Future of Democracy drove a common approach among stakeholders to deploying democracy, development and other types of aid in a concerted fashion to strengthen democratic resilience and security. In doing so, PDD actions improved popular perceptions of the effectiveness of democratic governments and the representative function of democracy. These were the areas which had seen the steepest decline in the West during the populist wave of the 2010s.² The interplay of values, social status, income, rationality and emotions in democratic political participation

was recognised and the PDD helped to develop a deeper understanding of transnational, local and national political trends and their influence on democratic processes.

Lastly, the PDD contributed to strengthening civil liberties across democratic regimes. This helped disrupt the efforts of authoritarian regimes to leverage modern technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance political control and undermine democratic societies. By 2025, the PDD and the International Panel on AI had undertaken joint projects to counter

² Florence Gaub, “Global Trends to 2030: Challenges and Choices for Europe,” European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, April, 2019, p.37, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/global-trends-2030---challenges-and-choices-europe>.

malicious uses of AI-enabled mass surveillance, disinformation and deep fakes, which helped to disrupt the connection between the accelerating decline in civil liberties across the world and the geographical expansion of Chinese mass surveillance technologies. Building on the Code of Practice on Disinformation, big tech companies and online and social media platforms agreed to a set of rules of democratic behaviour that enabled them to become vehicles for democratic resilience. In 2019, 64 countries, mainly across Africa and Latin America, used Chinese digitally-enabled mass surveillance systems, despite mixed governmental readiness for the introduction of AI-enabled technologies.³ Chinese AI-enabled mass surveillance technologies were proliferating fastest among hybrid regimes and, worryingly, among flawed democracies. By 2025, the number of countries relying on technologies originating from PDD countries overtook those countries depending on China for technological transfers.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

In 2020, the protection of European values and democracy against foreign interference and domestic subversion became a strategic priority for the EU. In March 2020, the European Council Conclusions highlighted the urgent need to strengthen democratic resilience in Europe as it was essential to the security of the Union. Emphasis was placed on the EU's role as a responsible global security actor working towards principled democracy rather than principled realism.

The Council commissioned the HR/VP to produce a report on how to strengthen the role of the EU in defending democracy by building synergy between internal policies – such as the European Democracy Action Plan – and external ones.

In October 2020, the HR/VP presented the report, outlining challenges to European interests and security caused by foreign interference in democratic processes in the neighbourhood. The report proposed two key actions in the areas of democracy and human rights in support of EU strategic interests – multilateralism, the preservation of the international rules-based order and maintaining a free and open trade system. The first was a new EU Democracy and Human Rights Strategy, which defined democratic advancements as a security interest for the Union. The strategy was based on a broader, more inclusive approach to stakeholders of democratic ecosystems in partner countries (governments, local/regional institutions, civil society, but also *ad hoc* forms of political activism, academia and private industry). This included a more strategic deployment of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The €3 billion that the NDICI allocated for democracy and human rights (4.4% of overall available funds) was deployed in synergy with other development and trade instruments to maximise flexible, tailored conditionality towards deeper democratic reforms, specifically in Africa and Latin America.

The second action was an EU-US multilateral, multi-stakeholder forum to defend democracy, the PDD. The PDD provided the EU with the opportunity to engage and act together with international partners to strengthen the global democracy agenda. Supporting democracy and human rights became key aspects for ensuring European security and prosperity. Acting through the EU Delegation in Washington, based on the recommendations of the HR/VP report and member state input, in early 2021 the EU launched this two-stage initiative. In the first stage, the EU developed a track 1.5 transatlantic agenda consisting of regular meetings facilitated by the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki to develop a coordinated concept on vectors of foreign interference in, and the subversion of,

3 “Government Artificial Intelligence Readiness Index 2019,” Oxford Insights and the International Development Research Centre, 2019, <https://www.oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness2019>.

democratic societies. In a consequent step, in spring 2021 in Prague, the EU convened a transatlantic parliamentary conference on the future of and challenges faced by democracy. This was followed by a mid-2021 transatlantic commission on the future of democracy, which negotiated the charter for the PDD. The PDD was formally agreed in the framework of the Working Group on Transatlantic Relations and endorsed by the European Council and the US. The EU and the US then jointly launched the PDD at the EU-US Summit in January 2022.

Timeline

Signpost



2024

Pressure grows to defend democracy against hostile foreign interference
Renewed transatlantic commitment to liberal values, multiple stakeholders involved
Transatlantic partnership delivers on defending democracy

Preferable future



2024+

Reverse in democratic backsliding
Improvement of quality of democracy
Disruption to authoritarian efforts to use new technologies to undermine democracies

The journey



Today

European Council strengthens EU's role in defending democracy alongside partners
EU-convened transatlantic parliamentary conference on future of democracy
EU-US Summit launches Partnership to Defend Democracy (PDD)





A dramatic, stormy sea with a white rectangular box containing the word 'PROTECT'. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, and the water is turbulent with white foam from breaking waves. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues and greys, with a bright white highlight in the center of the clouds. The word 'PROTECT' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, centered within a white rectangular box that stands out against the dark background.

PROTECT

CHAPTER 10

WHAT IF ... BURKINA FASO DEFEATED VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

GIOVANNI FALEG

After nearly a decade of instability and conflict, in 2024 Burkina Faso became the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to defeat violent extremism. Unlike conventional wars, which typically end with a landmark event (such as an armistice), the triumph over violent extremism happened quietly. Burkina Faso did not mark the occasion, one that could have become a national day of celebration in the years to come; violent extremism disappeared as it had started, gradually and steadily, but not without leaving scars on the local communities who had been victims of the attacks.

On 1 September 2024, a renovated public school in Kourfayel, a village close to Djibo, the capital of Soum, was inaugurated by the local authorities. “Children going back to school safely, this is our biggest victory against terror”, said the president during his ceremonial speech, right before opening the main door to officially mark the beginning of the school year. Almost eight years earlier, in March 2017, a school in that village had been one of the first targets of extremist attacks, as a teacher and another civilian were murdered by members of the group ‘Ansaroul Islam’. By 2020, more than

5,000 schools in the country had closed due to attacks, ambushes, threats to teachers and the use of facilities to host military personnel or displaced persons, leaving almost 650,000 children deprived of education.¹

But it was not just in schools that extremism was defeated. The new mosque in Salmossi, 20 km from Gorom-Gorom in the north of Burkina Faso, was inaugurated on 8 December 2024 together with a statue of three women holding hands directly in front of the mosque’s entrance. The latter had been financed by an association of Burkinabe diaspora as a symbol of both dialogue between the country’s three main religions (Christian, Muslim and Animist) and the role of Burkinabe women in strengthening resilience. Traditionally a stable country with peaceful relations between its religious groups, violent extremism had turned Burkina Faso into a hotspot of instability, exacerbating inter-communal tensions and religious fanaticism: in October 2019, 16 people were killed while praying in the Salmossi mosque, for instance. The event pushed many residents of Salmossi to leave the village, adding to some 486,000 people displaced at that time.²

1 UNICEF, “Education in peril in West and Central Africa,” August 23, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/stories/education-peril-west-and-central-africa>.

2 UN OCHA, “Burkina Faso: Insecurity continues to drive displacement,” October 15, 2019, <https://www.unocha.org/story/burkina-faso-insecurity-continues-drive-displacement>.

“Violent extremism left our society with many scars, fears and unresolved issues. Hundreds of thousands of people are still displaced, lack jobs or don’t have access to food. The country’s health service faces severe limitations, decimated by years of internal violence. But the gunfire has stopped. Villages are no longer threatened by attacks. Our children can go to school, safely. Our people can pray, safely. Our resilience and our integrity have defeated extremism and will help us exit from this humanitarian emergency”, said President Kabore in his speech at the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2024, emphasising the need to maintain high levels of

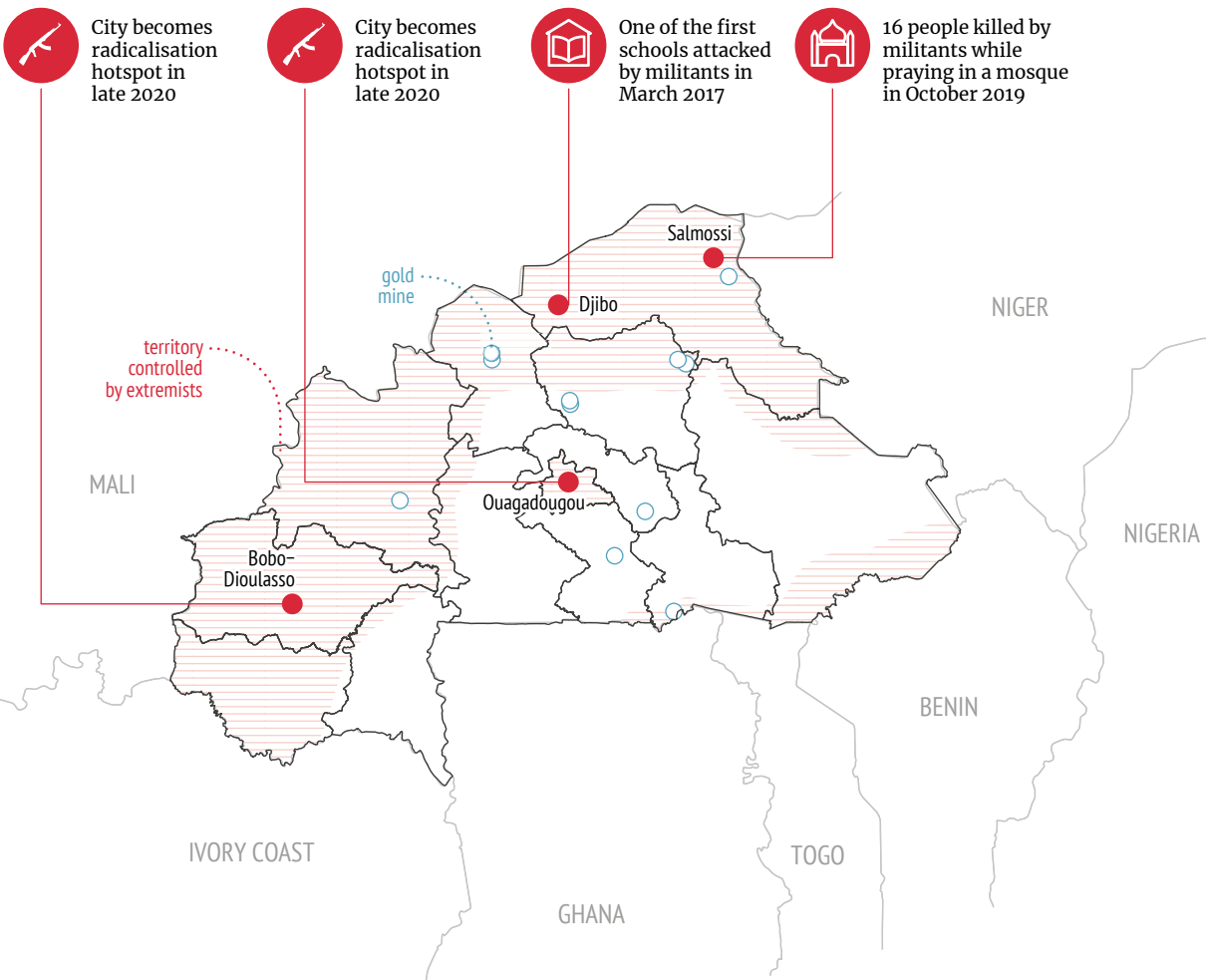
foreign assistance in order to support resilience and sustain stabilisation.

After years of trial and error in foreign interventions in the Sahel, Burkina Faso provided a remarkable and unique success story. The implications in the following years were twofold.

First, regional security and stability in West Africa improved as a result of violence reduction in the country. Trans-border areas between Burkina Faso and West African coastal states (Benin, Ghana, Togo) witnessed a decline in organised crime and illicit trafficking. The reduction of violence in Burkina Faso weakened

Expansion of violent extremism in Burkina Faso

Areas where extremist groups installed bases and controlled parts of the territory by 2021



Data: Natural Earth, 2019; GADM, 2019; MECV/IPE, 2010

Islamist factions across the whole region, something which not only cut down the number of attacks and fatalities per year but boosted economic activity too: by 2026, socio-economic indicators released by the OECD's Sahel and West Africa Club, as well as the World Bank's ease of doing business index, increased in most West African countries. EU member states and the US Department of State lifted the 'advice against travel' to Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin in June 2025, allowing tourist flows to resume.

Second, Burkina Faso avoided a dangerous slide towards state failure. By 2026, the gradual re-establishment of education and health services helped address societal needs and, as a result, rebuild trust between the population and the state. Albeit imperfect, governance was restored in peripheral areas of the country. As public infrastructure was rebuilt, local administrators and public officials returned to their posts and municipalities and provinces started delivering basic services. This in itself was a mini revolution: at the peak of the crisis, back in 2021, high levels of insecurity and forced displacement led to the eruption of mass protests in major cities, and leaders in the security apparatus began to prepare to launch a military coup in the belief that only a military junta would have sufficient authority to restore order. Instead, the defeat of violent extremism eventually ushered Burkina Faso into a period of economic growth that eased social and political tensions, with GDP growth increasing from 2.9% in 2022 to 7.1% in 2026.

Because of the positive implications for regional and internal stability, Burkina Faso eventually became a champion of free trade and economic integration in West Africa, with the government announcing plans to boost foreign investments and significantly reduce poverty and inequality in the country by 2035. At the 2026 African Union(AU)-EU Summit that took place in Ouagadougou in 2026, Burkina Faso showcased the huge steps taken towards resilience, announcing the extension of visa-free programme to all member states of the AU

as a sign of its commitment to a prosperous, peaceful and integrated Africa.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

Between 2019 and 2021, Burkina Faso had witnessed a constant escalation of terrorist attacks, caused by a proliferation of violent extremist groups such as AQIM, JNIM, Ansar-al-Islam lil-Ichad wal Jihad (IRSAD) and the Movement for Unity and the Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Violent extremist groups initially penetrated into Burkina Faso through its northern borders with Mali and Niger, but then established a presence in the country and spread further south by exploiting intercommunal, religious and social grievances and generating sustainable income by controlling the informal gold market.³ This led to the creation of radicalisation hot spots in Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Soum province and the border areas between Burkina Faso and Benin.

By mid-2024, groups had lost control of much of their territory, denying them areas of operation, as well as sources of recruitment and revenue. Data diffused by the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) showed a sharp decline in deaths caused by terrorist attacks in the country between 2022 and 2024; a 65% reduction from an average of 3,100 casualties per year. When Burkina Faso emerged as a terror hotspot in 2020, it ranked 18th in the GTI global ranking, with the impact of terrorism classified as 'high'; the 2024 GTI report placed Burkina Faso at 45th place, with a 'low' impact. The country also ranked 6th in the largest decreases in deaths from terrorism.

Burkina Faso's success story in defeating violent extremism was the result of a combination of two main factors: endogenous changes in the country and stronger commitment by the international community, known as the 'Dakar process'. The EU also played a role as a third

³ See: International Crisis Group, "Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush," *Africa Report*, no. 282, November 13, 2019.

factor, by contributing with civilian crisis management instruments and expertise.

1. **The government strikes back.** The game changer was endogenous – a change in the government’s Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy. In October 2021, the prime minister of Burkina Faso launched a dialogue with the more moderate wings of some rebel groups in order to address social and communal grievances in exchange for greater security, following a model previously seen in other contexts, such as the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon in 2019. Given the limited impact of previous (military) efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism, the government devised a new stabilisation strategy that consisted of a dialogue for national unity and reconciliation and called for the Burkinabe people to defend their motherland. The government asked international actors to support the process with civilian expertise in order to assist with security sector reform (SSR), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and police reform. The government also sought to address the porosity of the border between Burkina Faso and Benin and strengthen control mechanisms for the artisanal gold sector to restore regulation of gold mining, thereby depriving extremist groups of a key source of income.

2. **Coordinated support by the international community: the ‘Dakar process’.** Endogenous change would not have had the desired impact had it not been adequately supported by international actors. Previous efforts to address insecurity in Burkina Faso were based on overlapping multilateral initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel, the Alliance for the Sahel, and the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (PS3), which were yielding little in the way of results. As soon as Burkina Faso’s government released the new stabilisation strategy, the Dakar High-Level Coordination Meeting was launched under the PS3 framework in December 2021. International actors endorsed the new strategy and agreed on ‘niche’ roles for foreign interventions in Burkina Faso so as to avoid duplications and maximise synergies. This

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Burkina Faso succeeds in defeating violent extremism
Schools, hospitals and places of worship are rebuilt
Villages are no longer threatened by attacks

Preferable future

2024+

Burkina Faso avoids state failure
Regional security in West Africa improves
Burkina Faso becomes a CVE success story

The journey

Today

Burkina Faso devised a new stabilisation strategy
International community launched the ‘Dakar Process’
EU deployed a Civilian CSDP mission

also paved the way for the unanimous adoption of UN Resolution 2345 in February 2022, which defined modes of support to stabilisation and CVE in Burkina Faso.

3. **The EU deploys a civilian CSDP mission to support stabilisation in Burkina Faso.** Under the ‘Dakar process’ and UN Resolution 2345 (2022), the EU launched a civilian CSDP stabilisation mission ‘EUSTA Burkina Faso’ in late May 2022 to assist in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism by reinforcing the capacities of the Burkinabe authorities through the provision of training, strategic advice and equipment. The mission was the first of its kind because, in addition



to cooperation with other agencies and organisations, and engagements in areas such as border control management, justice, human rights and technical training courses for security forces, it relied on specialised teams providing *ad hoc*, short-term support to specific tasks as requested by Burkina Faso's government, particularly in the fields of mediation and counter-terrorism. This

provided the EU with the capacity to deploy civilian expertise with greater rapidity, flexibility and impact, in line with the policy priorities set in the Civilian CSDP Compact. The Union was therefore able to assist the reconciliation programme, as well as carry out traditional security tasks within the same mandate.

CHAPTER 11

WHAT IF ... A COUNTRY RESTRICTED ACCESS TO RARE EARTH ELEMENTS?

GUSTAV LINDSTROM

On 15 April 2024, a flare-up between two countries caught most policymakers off-guard, even if tensions had been visible over several weeks. That Monday morning, a Ministry of Commerce spokesperson in one of the two countries announced a halt of its exports of rare earth elements (REE) to its neighbour. The move was both unexpected and surprising.

After some brief reflection, however, its ramifications became increasingly clear. Dependence on this group of 17 metals – 15 lanthanides, as well as scandium and yttrium – had steadily increased over the past decade.¹ Products such as smartphones, turbines, medical devices and advanced military weapons systems all included some form of REE. These rare earth metals also served as process enablers, as catalysts or polishing powders in the glass, optics and electronics industries, for example. The country imposing the ban had mined, separated, refined, formed and manufactured anywhere between 70–90% of the world's rare earth ore, rare earth oxides and rare earth alloys for decades. It still held a dominant market position.

The announcement outraged the affected neighbour, which decided to rally international

support. The resultant expressions of support – in the form of public statements and declarations of solidarity – started trickling in within 72 hours, including from the EU. At this point, events took another unexpected turn: rather than ease tensions, the external pressure hardened the position of the country instituting the REE ban. On 19 April, the same ministry spokesperson announced an extension of the ban. The ban was to be enforced with immediate effect, and all countries that had expressed solidarity, or made specific statements in support of the affected country, would also face REE restrictions. Should other countries follow suit, the list would incorporate them on a rolling basis. Although this move would certainly affect the country instituting the ban, it did not seem to mind.

As a result, from one week to the next, approximately 40 countries (including all EU member states), found themselves facing REE import restrictions. The affected countries could, of course, support each other with current stocks of REEs. Still, for entities reliant on REEs and unprepared for the consequences, the ban spelled trouble. A tumultuous time would follow – affecting public and private sectors

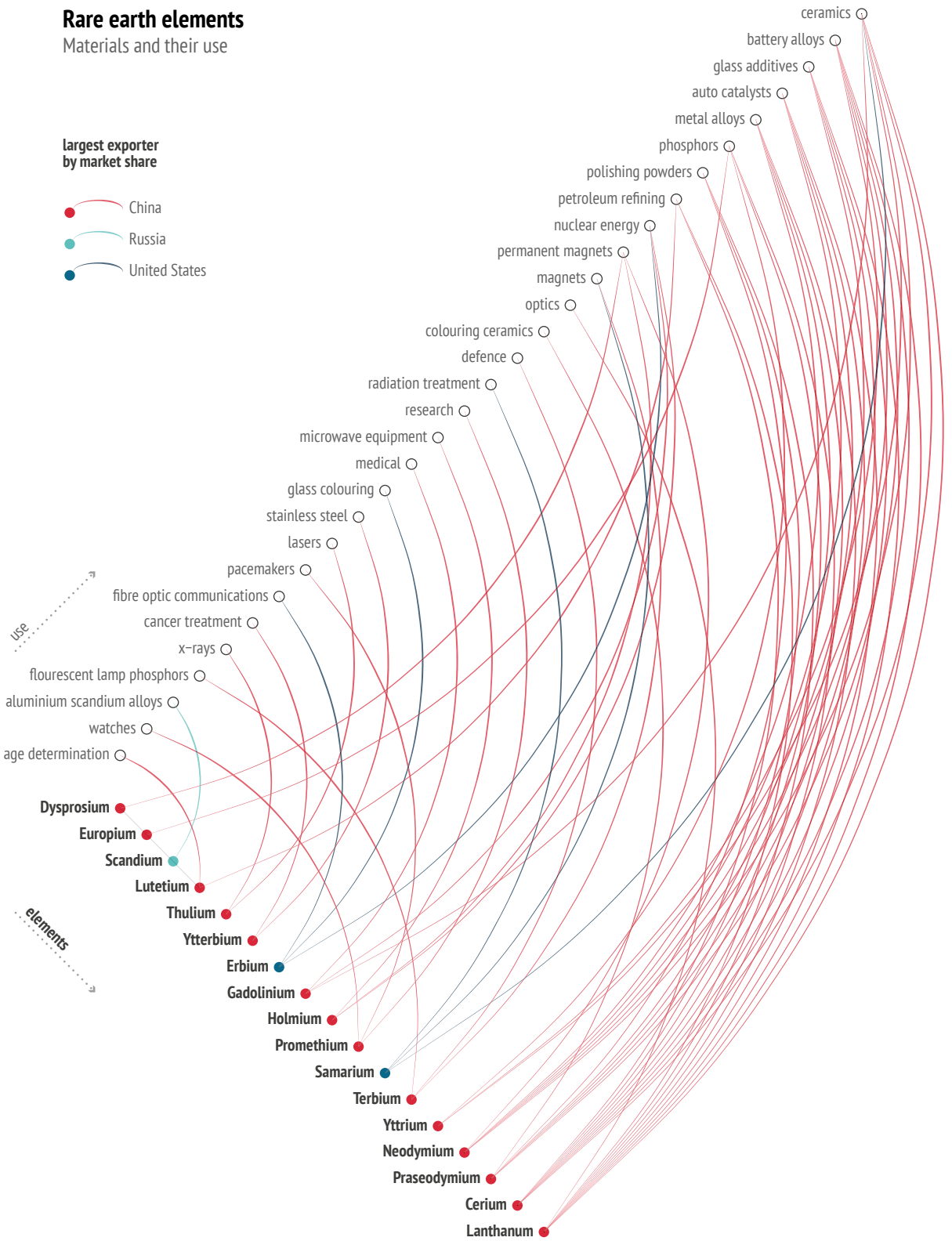
¹ For more information on REEs, see: US Geological Survey, “Critical Mineral Resources of the United States—Economic and Environmental Geology and Prospects for Future Supply,” *Professional Paper*, no. 1802-0, 2017, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/1802/0/pp18020.pdf>.

Rare earth elements

Materials and their use

largest exporter by market share

- China
- Russia
- United States



across several countries. The EU and its member states, nonetheless, were able to navigate the situation better than others were. Many years earlier, the Union had taken proactive measures to alleviate the impact of such a situation. The EU's preparedness would eventually help mitigate the impact of this challenge beyond Europe.

Several consequences materialised in the aftermath of the REE restriction. First, an immediate effect was a massive price hike for several REEs. This hike commenced before the actual ban came into effect, as suppliers and users went on a buying spree – driving up prices. The price increase caught many companies off-guard. Their only reference to inform decision-making was a similar – but short-lived – situation in late 2010. That year, the price of the REEs neodymium and praseodymium, commonly used in magnets, rose to \$225/kilo, respectively (in the two years preceding this event, their average price had been around \$60/kilo). Dysprosium, also used in (neodymium-iron-boron) permanent magnets, experienced an even more pronounced hike: the average price went from \$310/kilo in 2010 to \$1,600/kilo in 2011.²

At this stage, several countries jointly filed a complaint with the WTO regarding the export restrictions. But it soon became clear that this avenue would not yield rapid results. The WTO was still undergoing internal reform, following a long standoff concerning its Appellate Body. As the case opened, a string of appeals eventually confirmed that this would be a multi-year process.

Second, several goods and services relying on REEs rose in price. The electric and hybrid car industry was among the most severely affected: over 90% of hybrid and electric cars still

employed REE-based magnets in their engines, a dependency rate that was no different than it had been five years before.³ Besides putting a lot of financial pressure on specific car manufacturers, the resulting price hikes yielded lower demand over a sustained time period.

Third, senior military leaders in several countries raised concerns over the matter. Their principal worry was that the security of REE supply might lead to procurement disruptions. In particular, they underlined the link between REEs and multiple military systems. These included, among others, fin actuators in missile guidance and control systems, disk drive motors installed in aircraft, tanks, missile systems and command and control centres, optical equipment, satellite communications, as well as lasers.⁴ Although the ban would not have implications in the short to medium term, they signalled a need to lower dependency rates on REEs, in particular for 'critical' systems.

Lastly, restrictions on REE availability spurred renewed efforts to diminish REE reliance. These efforts took on different forms across stakeholders. Among them were options to explore alternative production materials, even if substitutes tended to be less effective.⁵ Another avenue considered was efficiency gains or the recycling of REE processing wastes, with magnet swarfs and polishing powders holding particular promise in this regard.

In countries with proven REE reserves – such as the United States, Australia and Brazil – several entities explored options to expand REE mining operations. Many such initiatives did not make much progress, as efforts were stymied by the significant hazardous and environmental tolls associated with such operations.

2 John Seaman, "Rare Earths and China – A Review of Changing Criticality in the New Economy," *Notes de l'Ifrri*, January 2019.

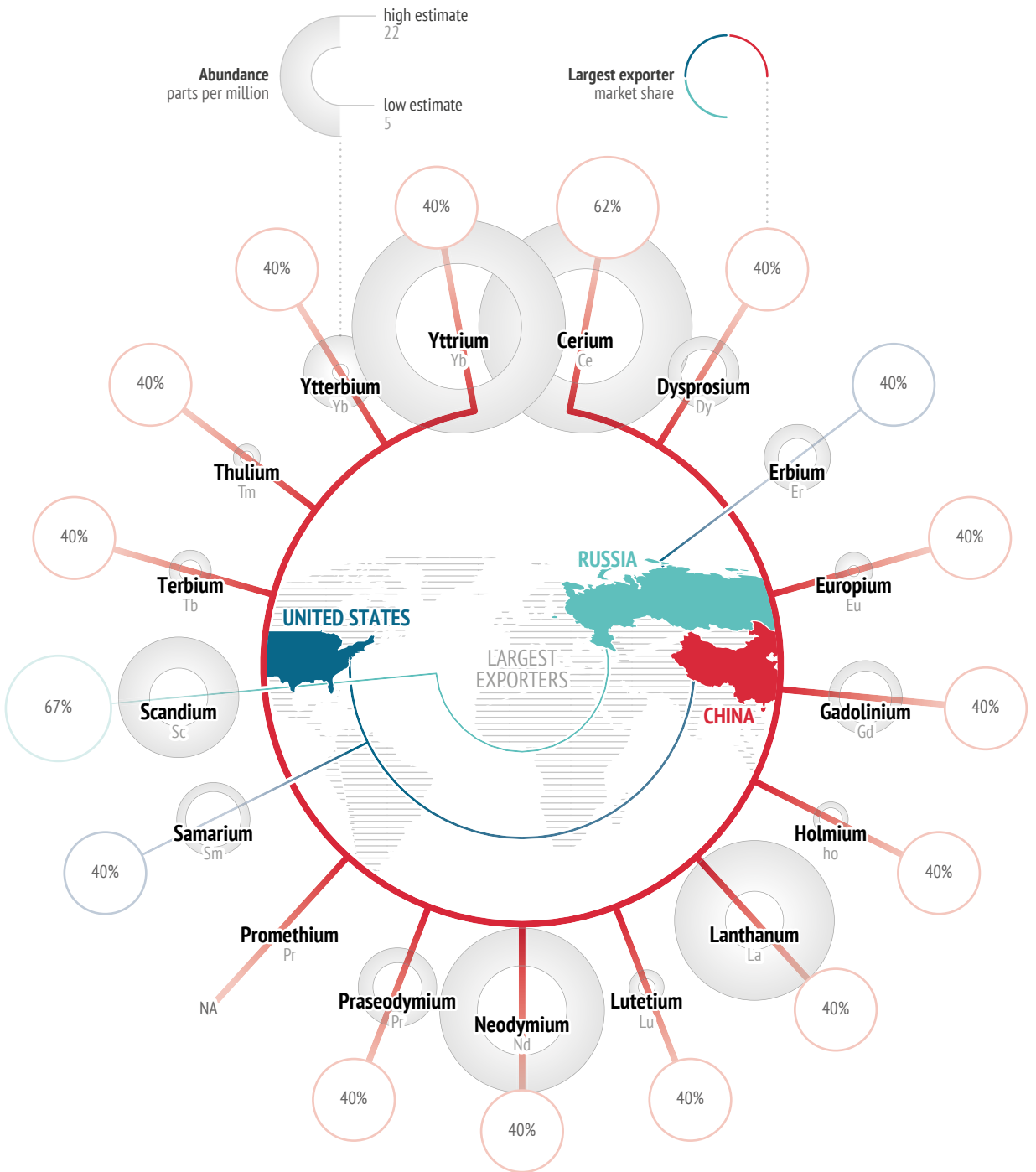
3 Lucy Hornby and Henry Sanderson, "FT Big Read. US-China," *The Financial Times*, June 5, 2019.

4 Valerie Bailey Grasso, "Rare Earth Elements in National Defense: Background, Oversight Issues, and Options for Congress," *Congressional Research Service Report*, December 23, 2013.

5 US Geological Survey, "Mineral Commodity Summaries," February 2019.

Rare earth elements

Classifications, applications, and source countries



Data: IFRI, 2019; European Commission, 2017

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

When the REE crisis materialised, the EU was prepared. Already in 2008, it had instituted a Raw Materials Initiative to examine REE access, which underlined that substituting REEs was a difficult task. The European Commission confirmed this in 2017, when it gave heavy rare earths a score of 0.96 on a 0–1 scale (where ‘1’ symbolised the lowest levels of substitutability), with light rare earths scoring a 0.90.⁶ Given that the EU’s import reliance level was 90%, proactive measures were in order.

The EU was also aware of its recycling potential. A 2015 study identified Europe as one of the world’s largest producers of REE-containing wastes, with less than 1 percent recycled. It also provided guidance on which products offered the best recycling opportunities with respect to REE, highlighting hard disk drives, automotive applications and motors in industrial applications.⁷ Together, these and other findings served as an impetus for greater REE-related efforts.

In late 2020, the EU unveiled a four-pronged approach to reduce its dependence on external REEs from any third country. It focused on:

- > **Strengthening raw materials dialogues** – Building on previous raw materials dialogues with the United States and Japan, the EU promoted such dialogues with other countries with known REE reserves. As a result, in 2020 and 2021 the EU engaged in in-depth discussions with Afghanistan, Brazil, Australia and Mongolia to explore opportunities to diversify its REE supply chain.
- > **Exploring European REE mining** – Under this heading, policymakers further explored the REE mining potential in Sweden and Greenland. The focus was on the areas which had previously benefited from

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Major REE producer restricts supply to neighbour
Several countries rally in support of affected country
The EU and other countries are included in the REE ban



Preferable future

2024+

EU mitigates effects of impact
Diminished REE reliance through use of alternative materials, recycling of REE processing waters



The journey

Today

EU extends its REE dialogues
European countries explore REE mining options
Europe engages more on REE efficiency, recycling and substitution



projects examining geological, hydrometallurgical and environmental research and development (R&D) dimensions. Accordingly, environmentally safe REE mining – addressing e.g. the treatment of off-gas, dust emissions, waste management, etc. – commenced in Kvanefjeld, Greenland, in late 2025. Its output included a mineral

⁶ European Commission, “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the 2017 list of Critical Raw Materials for the EU,” September 13, 2017.

⁷ Jakko Kooroshy, Guenter Tiess, Arnold Tukker and Allan Walton (eds.), “Strengthening the European rare earths supply chain: Challenges and policy options,” ERECON, *ARES(2015)2544417*, June 17, 2015.

concentrate containing 20–25% rare earth oxide, a zinc concentrate and fluorspar.⁸ The Kringlerne project (also located in Greenland and planned for several years), became operational in 2026 following fast-tracked governmental efforts and one-off investments. In addition, some policymakers further examined the viability of exploration and use of space resources, following legislation enacted to that effect by Luxembourg already in 2017.⁹

- > **Boosting European networks engaged on REE work** – Efforts in particular promoted multi-disciplinary networks engaging experts from the academic, think tank and policymaking world – such as the European Rare Earths Competency Network (ERECON). Through European funding and support, these groups and networks were able to reflect critically on several topical issues prior to the 2024 ban crisis, ranging from access to the ‘critical REEs’ (yttrium, dysprosium, europium, terbium and neodymium) to the merits of establishing a small-sized EU buffer stockpile.¹⁰
- > **Enabling funding opportunities for technological research on REE efficiency,**

recycling, and substitution – Under this heading, efforts examined REE funding opportunities under the European Commission’s 2021–2027 Horizon Europe programme – in particular under the second pillar on ‘Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness’. Shortly after the initiation of the Horizon Europe programme in 2021, several consortia projects commenced analysing REE substitution and recycling opportunities for electric motors, permanent magnets, luminescent materials and turbines. Furthermore, recognising the potential consequences for military applications, the European Defence Fund (EDF) was deemed eligible to fund REE research. In 2022, for instance, it funded a multi-national project to examine substitution options for neodymium-iron-boron magnets and high purity beryllium.¹¹

In the end, these and follow-on efforts provided the EU and its member states with a head start when the REE crisis emerged in the spring of 2024. Through proactive planning, its impacts were successfully limited to the greatest extent possible.

⁸ For more, see the Kvanefjeld project: <http://www.ggg.gl/project/>.

⁹ For more, see the Official Journal of the Duchy of Luxembourg: <http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2017/07/20/a674/jo>.

¹⁰ David L. An, “Critical Rare Earths, National Security, and U.S.–China Interactions,” RAND Corporation, 2015.

¹¹ Op.Cit., “Rare Earth Elements in National Defense: Background, Oversight Issues, and Options for Congress.”

CHAPTER 12

WHAT IF ... CITIES BECAME DIPLOMATS?

RODERICK PARKES

2025 was the quietest year on record for the European Union. Peace had reigned across its neighbourhood ever since European cities had got involved in defusing diplomatic crises. EU diplomats, sitting in their glass towers high above the rooftops of Brussels, now spent their time grumbling about ‘beginner’s luck’. The recent incident in the city of Grodno, Belarus, was just the latest ‘one that got away’ – an international crisis scotched by city officials before it even began.

Just a few hundred metres across the city, and a few floors lower, sat one of the ‘beginners’ in question. An advisor to the Brussels mayor, he was quartered in a small office in the cellar of Brussels City Hall. He had heard the ‘beginner’ tag, and rejected it: he liked to point out that city diplomacy is as old as Europe itself; still, he did admit to some bemusement at its role in preventing a full-scale conflagration on Europe’s eastern flank.

It had all started some weeks earlier at an EU ‘twinning and training hub’, a kind of ‘speed-dating’ for mayoral officials from eastern and western Europe working on security issues. That was where he had met her – the deputy mayor of Grodno. She had been giving

a presentation about her city’s mix of ethnic Poles and Russian migrants, and warned that overzealous public information campaigns about trolls, terrorists and fifth columnists were eroding social trust.¹ She wanted a method to ensure her local community could act in the case of a real security threat – but above all could combat unfounded suspicions. They came up with ‘COMMINT’, a ‘community intelligence’ approach to hybrid threats.

After their initial discussion came a crisis-scenario exercise. This marked a change of tone, more top-heavy. The trainer was from a foreign policy think tank, and it showed: he clearly enjoyed geopolitical clichés.² He described to the participants the fictional country of *Barbinsk*. Barbinsk (read: Belarus) is squeezed into the ‘fault-line’ between Russia and the EU, he said, and it remains stable only because it has never tried ‘pivoting’ to the West. But should this ever change, Barbinsk could fall prey to Russian covert activities, suffering the same fate as the rest of the Eurasian ‘crush zone’ – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

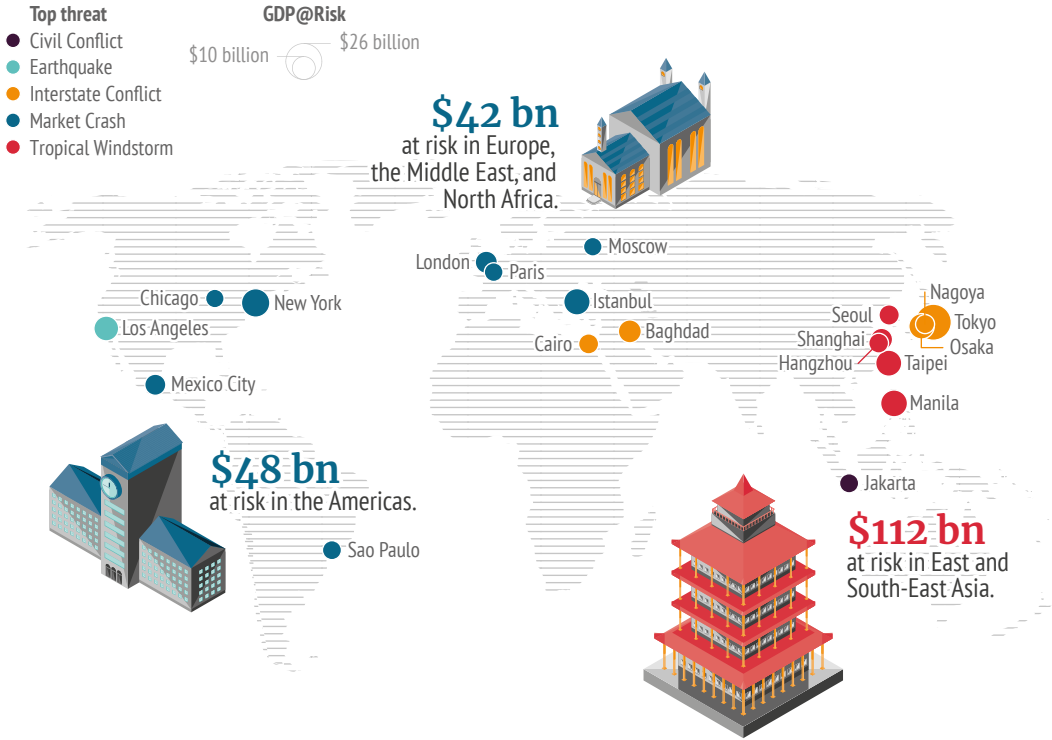
The trainer then asked them to imagine the following crisis: the Barbinsk president reaches out to the West, angering Moscow which fears

1 Eugénie Coche, “Fake news and online disinformation: Case study – Belgium 2018,” Report of the Institute for Information Law (iVir), (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Law School, 2018), pp. 10–11, <https://www.ivir.nl/publicaties/download/Case-study-Fake-News-Belgium.pdf>.

2 Agnia Grigas, “Putin’s next land grab: the Suwalki Gap,” February 14, 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/putin-russia-suwalki-gap-426155>.

Vulnerable cities: the economic hit

Urban economies are particularly vulnerable to catastrophe, with the top 20 exposing a cumulative \$200 billion of national GDP to risk.



Data: Natural Earth, 2019; Cambridge Global Risk Index, 2019

losing control of this ‘land bridge’ to her Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad and her European export markets. Immediately, Russian-language videos start appearing on social media. These videos are clearly deep fakes. They fuel fears that the *Baltak* minority (read: ethnic Poles) are about to attempt a coup or secession in West Barbinsk by reviving a historical Grand Duchy. As tensions grow, mysterious unmarked soldiers (read: Russian ‘little green men’) are spotted in Barbinsk.

It was obvious where the trainer was steering them: he wanted the eastern participants to be on their guard against Russian hybrid warfare tactics and to feel confident about calling in EU crisis managers at the first whiff of trouble.

“But hang on”, the deputy mayor interjected, “next year, we in Grodno will celebrate our history as capital of a long-dead Polish Commonwealth. It’s a cultural project – no secessionist ambitions involved. We’ll even produce some Russian language videos. It would be a disaster if European diplomats took these videos as a sign of ‘covert Russian activities’: the EU itself is funding them.”

The participants instead agreed that if they ever saw unmarked troops on the streets of Grodno (or Brussels), they would put the word out to local citizens on social media and use ‘community intelligence’ to identify them. “I’ll bet we discover those unmarked soldiers are actually our own local troops – probably preparing for

a military simulation involving ... unmarked soldiers.”³ They had been half joking. But a couple of months later - when the Belarusian president unleashed geopolitical shockwaves by seeking *rapprochement* with the West, and mutual suspicions between Russia and the EU reached a crescendo – that is precisely what the deputy mayor did.

Five years later, Belarus was now advertising its own successful model of governance and international cooperation. Belarus’s cities had been central to this revival, developing their own ideas in a bottom-up fashion. Such was the sense of self-confidence, indeed, that nobody was surprised when the new Belarusian president formulated a bold recommendation. Speaking at that year’s Grodno Forum on the ‘New Eurasian Security Order’, she said “Europe should really Belarusify itself”. Her suggestion was received with polite respect.

This was her pitch: the EU is really just a super-sized version of Belarus, at least in geopolitical terms. Belarus, like the EU, is a collection of cities which sprouted up at a confluence of rivers and trade routes.⁴ Having first made Belarusians wealthy, this geographic situation left them vulnerable, as with the EU. This boundless connectivity makes it difficult for citizens to know where borders lie, let alone define their common political identity. Soon, Belarus’s trading routes were being squeezed by towns further to the east and west, just as the EU’s trading routes were now being held to ransom by Washington and Beijing. But whereas Belarus had mastered its tricky geopolitics by empowering its cities, the EU still appeared cautious about city diplomacy.

She said cities can flatten international hierarchies and open up new ways to solve geopolitical problems. She cited Minsk as proof:

Minsk began hosting diplomatic talks after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and now runs confidence-building exercises with border towns in Ukraine, Georgia and Russia. Or Polatsk. Polatsk helped defuse big geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America by focusing on democratically-elected mayors. As for the Grodno Forum, it gave city representatives from antagonistic countries space to sit down together in ways impossible at state level. In short, it was cities which defused Belarus’s geopolitical dilemmas and cities which made Belarus an international presence which larger powers found useful.

Yet the truth was that *Belarus* was the one following the EU’s lead – the EU had embraced city diplomacy some time before. The new Belarusian president – the former deputy mayor of Grodno – was proof of this. She had made her name with her ‘COMMINT’ approach to policing, first dreamed up at a ‘twinning and training hub’ run by the EU. Moreover, the Brussels city official who collaborated with her on ‘COMMINT’ was now representing the EU at the Grodno Forum: in line with current EU practice, he and other city officials were empowered to speak on behalf of the whole European Union at inter-city events.

He claimed no credit for Belarus’s success: the whole rationale of EU city diplomacy was precisely to give other countries ownership for solving their problems. So, instead, he suggested that the EU might equally usefully *Balkanise* itself: major cities in the Balkans recently agreed joint rules on inward investment, and now are successfully linked up by Chinese infrastructure, with the EU keen to enlarge into the region. It was just one of many current examples of successful city cooperation (and another one spurred by EU engagement).

3 “Little Green Men” in Belarus? What we actually know about unmarked soldiers in Belarus,” *medium.com* (online), February 4, 2017, <https://medium.com/dfriab/little-green-men-in-belarus-9b696478bab4>.

4 Andrew Wilson, *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011).

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

Back in 2020, city summitry was widespread, but it had a rather exclusive feel. It was led by self-appointed ‘smart cities’ across the Americas and Asia and by mayors from Shenzhen or San Francisco who claimed to have mastered the future. Their glitzy summits excluded the thousands of cities worldwide which foresaw a future only of crisis and collapse. The EU was slow to get involved. The reason lay largely with ‘subsidiarity’ – the constitutional principle which kept EU diplomats out of local European affairs, and European localities out of international affairs. Thus EU development aid was available to some ‘global’ African cities, but rarely to crisis-hit cities; and EU Neighbourhood Policy still focused on foreign governments and civil society.

In hindsight, the EU’s early reluctance turned out well. It meant the EU did not get swept up in the glitzy hype. When the EU did finally embrace city diplomacy it turned the usual triumphalist narrative on its head. In contrast to those jet-setting global mayors, EU policy was driven by a sense of just how fragile cities are, how *unnatural* even. And it was the EU’s own cities which promoted this new understanding: they had begun *ad hoc* cooperation with crisis-hit mayoralties from Ukraine to Libya. The first step to formalising this cooperation came from the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the EU institution which hitherto most embodied the principle of subsidiarity. The CoR established a hub where it matched European urban expertise to international problems, with topics ranging from waste management to urban planning.

Responding to this shift of position on the part of the CoR, the EEAS stepped in. The EEAS was still trying to find a response to the onslaught of international terrorism, migration and crime from cities across the Middle East and eastern Europe. The EEAS – recognising these as signs of urban strain – linked the CoR hub to its own work on crisis prevention and early warning. And, together, the two bodies pressed the Commission to embrace city diplomacy in its neighbourhood and development policies. In 2020,

Timeline

Signpost

2024

International crises around the EU are being resolved better and earlier
European cities are involved in crisis response abroad
New methods of crisis management emerge from cooperation between mayors



Preferable future

2024+

Cities are given a formal role in EU foreign policy
The EEAS and the Committee of the Regions are the core of this cooperation
Other parts of the world adopt EU model of city diplomacy



The journey

Today

EU city diplomacy focuses not on glitzy projects but rather on crises
Cities and mayors can cooperate even when their respective states are at war or diplomatic relations broken off
EU cities prove readier to learn from third countries than do EU diplomats



the EU agreed its new multi-annual budgetary settlement, creating three funding lines for city diplomacy – ‘cities as places’, ‘cities as spaces’ and ‘cities as players’.

The first prong, ‘cities as places’, recognises that people are by instinct highly mobile; mobility is our path to physical security, food and resources. When people settle down in cities, they thus lose their prime survival strategy. That means that cities must work frantically

to guarantee citizens' security. If the EU wants to prevent a resurgence in mass irregular migration, it needed to bolster cities in vulnerable littoral zones or drought-ravaged desert areas.

Behind the second prong, 'cities as spaces', lurked the spectre of organised crime: when people settle down in cities, they create complicated new social hierarchies. For citizens stuck at the bottom of the hierarchy, crime provides a legitimate ladder. The groups of smugglers and housebreakers operating across the EU came from cities like Tbilisi or Kyiv. The EU's response focused on helping those cities

become spaces of social mobility, where people could rise up the hierarchy by legitimate means.

'Cities as players' was initiated due to concerns about violent extremism. Terrorism tends to emerge where people feel the lack of *both* physical and social mobility. European cities had largely mastered these pressures and become incubators of civil, economic and social rights. The EU thus gave a platform to European mayors to work internationally and open up new vistas in gridlocked hotspots. It is this final strand, above all, which catalysed the new global wave of inter-city cooperation.

CHAPTER 13

WHAT IF ... THE EU MADE SANCTIONS COMPATIBLE WITH HUMANITARIAN AID?

CLARA PORTELA

It was a chilly morning in early 2024 when Lasse jumped into his truck with a serene smile on his face, ready to leave the remote Syrian village where he had spent the last couple of days installing much-needed water pipes. He could not help but remember how a similar mission conducted in the village only five years earlier, when he first started his field posting with an international humanitarian agency, had proved unusually challenging. Water had been contaminated after purifiers were destroyed by warring forces and it had proved impossible to procure new water pumps. These had to be purchased from Western countries, which had placed them under sanctions when hostilities started. The pipes were not considered problematic in themselves, but they typically contained metal elements that were forbidden. This meant that procuring them from EU countries required the prior granting of a licence. However, since such licences were approved on a case-by-case basis, humanitarian actors were never certain that they would eventually receive one.¹ If water could not be purified by filtration, chlorination was an easy alternative. However, no exemptions were granted for chlorine as it could have been used to manufacture chemical weapons. In the absence of water purification,

the village quickly fell victim to a severe cholera outbreak, just a few weeks into Lasse's Syrian posting. As a result, the spread of cholera reached epidemic proportions, while Lasse and his team had to sit and watch the emergency unfold, waiting for the licence to purchase the water pipes.

Before his deployment to Syria seven years before, Lasse had been an advocate of the international sanctions imposed against the ruling regime. However, as a humanitarian worker, he was dismayed to discover that the sanctions made his work more difficult. "How can bans deployed to restrain military actions against civilians obstruct humanitarian action?" he wondered. Brussels carefully designed its sanctions to affect the Assad regime, targeting government members, army officers and firms providing funding essential for the continuation of military operations against civilians.² However, due to the regime's omnipresence in the private sector, Lasse's team had a hard time renting trucks and even procuring mobile phones for the office from entities unconnected to the government. As humanitarian workers active in the field, his colleagues Zacharie, Malgorzata and Anselm were anxious that their

1 Council of the EU, "Guidelines on implementation and evaluation of restrictive measures (sanctions) in the framework of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy," 5664/18, 2018.

2 Clara Portela, "The EU Sanctions against Syria: Conflict Management by other Means?," *Egmont Policy Brief*, Egmont, 2012.

Some humanitarian aid recipients under EU autonomous sanctions

Countries targeted by EU restrictive measures and receiving EU humanitarian assistance at the same time



Data: Natural Earth, 2019; www.sanctionsmap.eu, 2019; European Commission, 2019

compliance with foreign sanctions might affect their neutrality and independence in the eyes of locals, putting them at risk.³ In addition, they worried about failing to meet the goals agreed with the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) and other donors on account of the obstacles they encountered. As EU citizens, they feared penalties for sanctions violations as soon as they returned home. Anselm, for instance, was shocked to learn that his country penalised sanctions evasion with up to ten years in prison!

By contrast, during the mission he had just concluded, Lasse had been able to install brand new water pipes with high quality filters. He had also been able to deliver a stock of medicines in case of an epidemic. No waterborne diseases had been recorded in the past five years, and he was confident that no outbreak would occur anytime soon thanks to the new pipes he had just installed. Memories of the mess he had witnessed five years back vanished in the morning haze. He started his truck,

satisfied that his organisation had not failed the donors or the villagers. Looking back, he was now so glad he had once asked his boss to send that letter to Brussels.

Lasse, now the director of the agency where he had started as a junior officer some 20 years back, was organising his speaking points in the antechamber of the UN meeting room where he was set to shortly deliver his statement. He had been invited to give a presentation about the experience of humanitarian agencies operating in areas under sanctions. In preparation for his intervention before the UN audience, he had retrieved the documents prepared by Malgorzata, the agency's former financial officer. From them, he could clearly identify a turning point back in 2020. Malgorzata's duties had evolved from preparing onerous applications for licences to producing financial reports accounting for expenditure. Notably, financial planning became more efficient as it became easier to foresee what items could be procured and when they would arrive. Instead of struggling with the complexities of bans, after 2020

3 Alice Debarre, "Safeguarding Humanitarian Action in Sanctions Regimes," International Peace Institute, 2019.

the office devoted efforts, personnel and resources to reach needy civilians in every corner of the country. Having been the most inefficient office, spending a larger budget than their counterparts while taking more time to reach less people with less aid than similar agencies in countries not subject to sanctions, the Syria office had transitioned to one of the most efficient offices in the region.

Many years after leaving Damascus, Lasse reported on the transformation he had witnessed. His agency had strengthened his partnership with European donors. These could now demonstrate to taxpayers that the generous funds devoted to humanitarian assistance were reaching distressed populations while minimising the risk of diversion of aid towards irresponsible rulers. Instead of blaming European governments for humanitarian hardship in conflict zones because of their sanctions, public opinion, civil society organisations and third countries acknowledged their role as responsible donors assisting populations in areas of unrest. Indeed, Lasse has been invited at the request of South Korea and Japan to present on ‘The EU’s humanitarian channel as a model for East Asian donors: A view from the field’.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

Heidrun, Pekka and Constantin had gathered for a consultation between their respective units in ECHO, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission. They convened at the request of ECHO in order to review the implementation of the package of measures they had adopted to avert unintended impacts of sanctions on humanitarian assistance. The EU recently granted a general exemption to a number of international humanitarian agencies active in areas under sanctions. Following a thorough investigation of their internal

structures, funding and activities, applicant agencies were included in a ‘white list’ of humanitarian actors benefiting from an exemption applicable to almost 90% of items under sanctions, reserving the derogation procedure for highly sensitive (mostly dual-use) items. For the rest, only reporting requirements existed.

Pekka, ECHO’s representative, reported the contents of a letter received from a humanitarian organisation in Syria, a long-term partner already included on the ‘white list’. While acknowledging that the general exemption had considerably relieved the administrative burden on the agency, and most importantly, eliminated the protracted waiting times that had been delaying deliveries, it complained that it had not solved all their problems. A computer shipment had not reached their office because the bank had refused to process the payment as part of its ‘de-risking’ policy, despite the fact that it was fully compliant with the law.⁴ They had experienced the same problem with various transactions involving the procurement of medicines and emergency relief equipment, as well as staff salary payments, with banks in different countries. Nobody in Pekka’s unit knew how to respond to that – “You cannot oblige a private company to accept a customer’s request, even if it is perfectly legal”. Nobody knew what to do.

Heidrun, who had worked on the field in Senegal prior to joining the EU, unexpectedly raised her hand. “Since we already have an instrument in place to keep transactions off the radar of the US Treasury Department, could we make it available for humanitarian actors operating in countries under sanctions?”, she asked. Constantin objected: The ‘Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges’ (INSTEX) was created in 2019 to facilitate transactions between European and Iranian firms.⁵ After Washington abandoned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), INSTEX was established as a Special

⁴ Clara Portela “How the EU learned to love sanctions,” in Mark Leonard (ed), *Connectivity Wars*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 2016, pp. 41–42.

⁵ Ellie Geranmayeh and Manuel Lafont, “Meeting the challenge of secondary sanctions,” in Mark Leonard and Jeremy Shapiro (eds) *Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act*, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 2019, pp. 68, 73.

Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to circumvent the traditional financial networks the US uses to extend its jurisdiction for enforcing sanctions.⁶ It was meant to reassure Tehran that it would still benefit economically from the JCPOA despite Washington’s withdrawal and not just serve humanitarian purposes. But Heidrun insisted that, unlike commercial banks, INSTEX keeps its operations outside the reach of the US Treasury, protecting them from the threat of US secondary sanctions – therefore, a similar SPV could be employed for the conduct of transactions to and from humanitarian agencies featured on the EU’s ‘white list’. Her peers around the table gradually came to agree with Heidrun’s proposal. For ECHO, it meant that aid would be delivered effectively. Because of the secrecy of the transactions, the neutrality of humanitarian agencies would not be compromised. The Commission and the EEAS could scrutinise the transactions made, retaining the ability to check suspicious-looking payments to ensure that no blacklisted recipients were involved. By the end of the session, the EU had given the green light to the establishment of the humanitarian SPV.

Timeline

Signpost



2024

Humanitarian agencies no longer have to contend with delays and obstacles in delivering aid
Humanitarian agencies regain ability to stop epidemics and famines

Preferable future



2024+

EU regarded as a model for funding of humanitarian missions
Humanitarian agencies can increase the proportion of funds allocated to operations

The journey



Today

EU launches package in support of humanitarian agencies operating under sanctions:
Creating a white list of trustworthy agencies
Granting an almost global licence for humanitarian actors
Extension of the SVP for humanitarian payments outside Iran

⁶ Sascha Lohmann, “Extraterritorial US sanctions,” *SWP Comment*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2019.

CHAPTER 14

WHAT IF ... PAKISTAN BECAME RESISTANT TO INSTABILITY IN AFGHANISTAN?

JOHN-JOSEPH WILKINS

“*Pakistan zindabad! Pakistan zindabad!*”. The chanting crowds that greeted Prime Minister Imran Kahn on Pakistani Independence Day celebrations on 14 August 2024 had more than the usual patriotic reason to be jubilant: only eight months prior, Pakistan had come close to being dragged into the quagmire of its collapsing neighbour Afghanistan. Yet today, TV images of food supplies and shelter being delivered on Pakistani aid trucks rumbling along the Karakorum Highway through narrow mountain paths beamed into tens of millions of households as the population rallied in support of its elected officials.

Things could have been quite different. Back in January 2024, following the repatriation of most of the 14,000 US troops stationed in Afghanistan, the uneasy truce between the Afghan government and the Taliban subsequently collapsed. The combination of Afghan national forces melting away in the face of insurgents and continued meddling by foreign powers sparked outright conflict. As competing factions seized (or retook) more and more Afghan settlements, increasing numbers of people were displaced. The sudden mass of (mostly Pashtun) refugees heading into Pakistan as a consequence began to worry segments of the Pakistani establishment, especially as most were arriving in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – now including the region formerly known as the Federally Administered Tribal

Areas (FATA) – and Balochistan border provinces. Although the Pakistani army eventually closed official border crossings on security grounds, fearing infiltration, an unknown but significant number of Afghans had nevertheless made their way across the border. Notions of the emergence of a separatist ‘Pashtunistan’ straddling the border, as well as the prospect of exacerbating already simmering communal tensions outside of Pashtun-dominated areas, loomed large in the minds of some.

But despite the influx of refugees and the near cessation of legitimate cross-border trade, which put serious strains on the Pakistani state and host communities, the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan successfully withstood the shock, having been buttressed by its international partners, including the EU. Crucially, despite the risk of severe regional destabilisation, the Pakistani army refrained from interfering in domestic politics. Rather than launch what would be (yet another) ruinous coup, the military brass allowed the government to continue to fulfil its duties and kept the soldiers in the barracks.

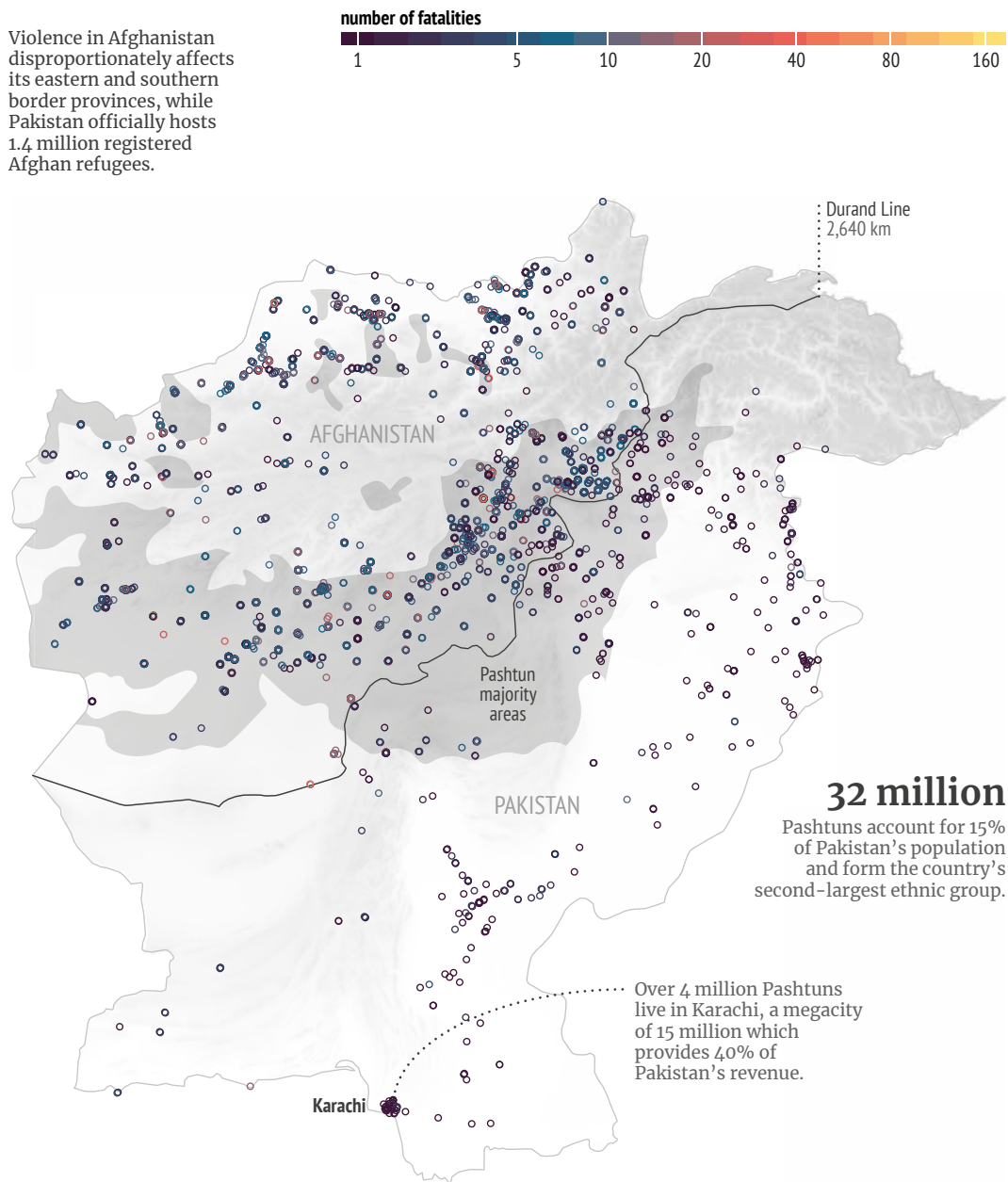
Due to the persistently dire security situation in Afghanistan, international crisis management responses remained focused on preventing ‘spillover’ in neighbouring states in the following years. Indeed, at a conference in Brussels in August 2026, the EU Special Envoy for

A dangerous walk in the Hindu Kush

Violence across Afghanistan and Pakistan

This map shows violent events with at least one fatality in 2019. A total of 6,000 events led to 37,600 casualties in Afghanistan and 1,000 in Pakistan.

Violence in Afghanistan disproportionately affects its eastern and southern border provinces, while Pakistan officially hosts 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees.



Afghanistan noted his regret that more could not be done at this stage in Afghanistan itself, but also that “sustained EU action in Pakistan was vital to help both the Afghan diaspora, as well as to preserve region-wide stability.”

The influx of Afghans, combined with Pakistan’s rapid urbanisation,¹ led to the proliferation of the number of *katchi abadi* (temporary settlements) in numerous cities.² Urban slums had, however, remained the targets of numerous EU-funded projects, with a focus on health drives and ensuring access to safe, drinkable water: up until recently, Pakistan had still lacked the vaccines, diagnostics, healthcare systems and infrastructure in place to prevent diseases from spreading. Yet the transmission of communicable and waterborne diseases was largely prevented and there were no reported epidemics thanks to campaigns to immunise as many as possible on Pakistani soil.

There were still incidents of localised unrest, particularly in Karachi, where a new wave of Pashtun migrants threatened to seriously upset the delicate social and political balance of Pakistan’s largest city. The port metropolis of some 15 million inhabitants,³ which had seen clashes between Afghans and local political groups dominated by the Muhajirs in the past, also saw disinformation campaigns spread via WhatsApp targeting ethnic Pashtuns centred on the theme “The Afghans of the Frontier are never at peace except when they are at war.”⁴ But the prime minister and the government of Pakistan successfully took to social media (particularly Instagram) – with the message amplified by the EU, its member states and other international and civil society organisations

– to counter the spread of misinformation designed to provoke social discord.⁵

More importantly, civilian rule was preserved in a country with a long history of military intervention. As a result, there was no further escalation with neighbouring hegemon India. In fact, due to greater stability and the solidifying of civilian rule in Pakistan, an unexpected *détente* between New Delhi and Islamabad occurred the same year. And while the EU had no direct role as a mediator, its increased efforts had *de facto* helped facilitate the beginnings of a dialogue on the still unresolved Kashmir issue.

WHAT WENT RIGHT?

In recognition of the increasingly ‘nodal’ nature of the global system, the EU’s foreign policy apparatus had evolved its approach of establishing ‘Strategic Partnerships’. There had been significant increases in resources allocated to countries identified as critical ‘nodes’, as well as a clear recognition that Europe can be an actor in its own right in Asia rather than an appendage of Eurasia. To this end, the number of personnel was boosted in EU Delegations in South Asia and public diplomacy initiatives were launched and sustained – a South Asia StratCom Task Force was established in recognition of the need to boost the online presence of the EU in the sub-continent and tackle disinformation, for instance.

There was also a broader realignment towards prioritising countries that neighboured failed or failing states rather than these states

1 UN-Habitat, “World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development,” 2016, https://www.un-ilibrary.org/human-settlements-and-urban-issues/world-cities-report-2016_d201a997-en.

2 Madeeha Ansari, “In the slums around Islamabad, children need more support from their schools,” *The Guardian*, May 8, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/may/08/pakistan-katchi-schools-ngo-islamabad>.

3 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), “Provisional Province Wise Population By Sex And Rural/Urban, Census – 2017,” August, 2017, http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/DISTRICT_WISE_CENSUS_RESULTS_CENSUS_2017.pdf.

4 Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (London: Penguin, 2011), p.377.

5 Imran Kahn was the second most active world leader on Instagram in 2018 with more than ten posts a day, while the account of the government of Pakistan is in fourth place with six posts a day. The Pakistani prime minister is also the fourth most ‘interactive’ world leader on Facebook. For more see: <https://twiplomacy.com/blog/world-leaders-instagram-2018/>.

themselves, with the focus on preventing contagion: Pakistan was identified as one of the potentially most dangerous countries on that list, mainly due to its nuclear capabilities, weak governance institutions, huge population (the 5th largest on earth),⁶ insufficient economic growth/job creation and the potential of escalation with New Delhi over the disputed territory of Kashmir. The renewal of the EU-Pakistan Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) in 2020 provided an opportunity for the EU to position itself as one of Islamabad's partners of choice, particularly given the US troop withdrawals from the region and Washington's re-focusing on the Indo-Pacific theatre. In addition to increasing the overall budget of the MIP from the previously allocated €653 million, its Sector 3 'Good Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law' was augmented from 15% of the total to approximately 30%.

Momentously, in October 2023 Pakistan went on to oversee the fourth peaceful democratic election since its creation in 1947, when the EU again deployed an expanded EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). Despite the usual administrative hurdles, the majority of the recommendations previously made by the EOM had been acted upon and the country's fragile democracy remained intact with the re-election of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party.⁷ The EU was thus justified in focusing on strengthening governance legitimacy by supporting the functioning of public institutions and tackling corruption, thereby bolstering public trust.

With escalating instability in Afghanistan, it was finally accepted that the 2-3 million Afghans already in Pakistan could no longer be forced (or volunteer) to return home.⁸ One of the world's largest refugee populations began to be gradually integrated into the population,

Timeline

Signpost

2024

Following Afghan's descent into civil war, waves of refugees arrive in Pakistan but situation remains stable

Military does not intervene in politics and civilian rule survives

Preferable future

2024+

Localised unrest handled successfully

Disease outbreaks prevented

Continued consolidation of civilian rule

The journey

Today

Foreign policy realignment from 'Strategic Partnerships' to 'nodal' powers

Pakistan identified as priority due to weak institutions, regional tensions and nuclear threat

Health drives target urban slums and democratic institutions bolstered

despite continued objections by the military on security grounds, thereby easing pressure on the Pakistani state in the long run. Beyond improving the lives of ordinary people, it was acknowledged that the control of disease outbreaks in particular helped reduce tensions

6 Pakistan will overtake Brazil in 2020. See: Alexandre Tanzi, "China's Reign as the World's Most Populous Country Could End Soon," *Bloomberg*, June 17, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-17/china-s-reign-as-world-s-most-populous-country-could-end-soon>.

7 European External Action Service, "EU EOM presents final report on the general elections, with recommendations for reform," June 7, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/election-observation-missions/eom-pakistan-2018/63785/eu-eom-presents-final-report-general-elections-recommendations-reform_en.

8 Zuha Siddiqui, "For Afghan Refugees, Pakistan Is a Nightmare – but Also Home", *Foreign Policy*, May 6, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/09/for-afghan-refugees-pakistan-is-a-nightmare-but-also-home/>.

between refugees and host communities. Accordingly, health concerns were high on the agenda: Pakistan and Afghanistan had stubbornly remained the only countries on earth (along with Nigeria) unable to stop the transmission of polio., Here, the EU was able to put into practice the vital lessons learned over the past number of years in health interventions in fragile environments, particularly from Ebola outbreaks: vaccination drives conducted in conjunction with the World Health Organisation (WHO) were also part of a concerted effort to stamp out the spread of ‘extensively drug resistant’ (XDR) forms of typhoid fever, which until that point had been rising at an alarming rate in Pakistan’s southern province of Sindh⁹ – but had also begun to appear abroad.¹⁰ EU advocacy also facilitated the expansion of NGO operations in Pakistan’s northwest provinces.

Finally, the EU was able to engage with China so as to avoid overlap or competition over projects which were part of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – concrete tripartite cooperation remained a subject of discussion only.

Beijing welcomed the opportunity to ensure the stability and the viability of its investments and alleviate some of the Pakistani population’s deep scepticism towards Chinese projects. Pakistan’s hitherto sluggish economy also began to accelerate to meet the regional average of around 7%, thereby again removing a source of potential unrest and denying the military an excuse to intervene.¹¹

Of course, upping activity in Pakistan was not without serious hurdles and threats (including militantism and violent extremism). Moreover, it was true that certain elements in Islamabad had long been a destabilising factor in Afghanistan, seeking to bring about regime change so as to ensure a Pakistan-friendly government in Kabul, thereby avoiding ‘encirclement’ by regional rival India.¹² But the risks posed by a Pakistan abandoned to its own devices were correctly considered to be far greater than increased engagement. Though jeopardised by the fallout from an imploding neighbour, civilian rule in Pakistan had been successfully ‘inoculated’ by the Union and its partners.

9 “A strain of typhoid could become virtually untreatable,” *The Economist*, April 28, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/science-and-technology/2018/04/28/a-strain-of-typhoid-could-become-virtually-untreatable>.

10 World Health Organisation (WHO), “Typhoid fever – Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” September 27, 2018, <https://www.who.int/csr/don/27-december-2018-typhoid-pakistan/en/>.

11 While the South Asia region experienced an average of 6.9% in GDP growth in 2019, the Pakistani average was an underwhelming 2.7%. See: Amin Ahmed, “Pakistan’s fiscal consolidation measures to revive economic growth: World Bank,” *Dawn*, June 8, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1486775>.

12 Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 29.

ABBREVIATIONS

AI Artificial Intelligence	CSS Connectivity Strategy for the Sahel	EPC European Payment Council
AfCFTA African Continental Free Trade Area	CVE Countering Violent Extremism	EPF European Peace Facility
AQIM Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	CYOC Cyberspace Operations Centre	ERECON European Rare Earths Competency Network
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations	DCFTA Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area	ETEE Education, Training, Evaluation and Exercise
AU African Union	DDR Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration	ETIAS European Travel Information and Authorisation System
CAR Central African Republic	EAEU Eurasian Economic Union	FATA Federally Administered Tribal Areas
CCM Civilian Cyber Mission	EaP Eastern Partnership	FPA Framework Participation Agreement
CCU Civilian Cyber Unit	ECB European Central Bank	FSJ Freedom, Security and Justice
CERT Computer Emergency Response Team	ECHO Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations	GDP Gross Domestic Product
CPCC Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability	ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States	GTI Global Terrorism Index
CPEC China Pakistan Economic Corridor	EDF European Defence Fund	HR/VP High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the Commission
CoR Committee of the Regions	EEAS European External Action Service	IcSP Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
CRRT Cyber Rapid Response Teams	EFM Election Follow-up Mission	IDP Internally Displaced Person
CSDP Common Security and Defence Policy	EOM Election Observation Mission	

IMF

International Monetary Fund

INSTEX

Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges

IRSAD

Ansar-al-Islam lil-Ichad wal Jihad

JCPOA

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

JNIM

Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin

MENA

Middle East and North Africa

MIP

Multi-Annual Indicative Programme

MoU

Memorandum of Understanding

MPCC

Military Planning and Conduct Capability

NDICI

Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

NGO

Non-governmental organisation

NIS

Network and Information Security

ODA

Official Development Assistance

OECD

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PTI

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

PDD

Partnership to Defend Democracy

PESCO

Permanent Structured Cooperation

R&D

Research and Development

RACC

Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell

REE

Rare Earth Elements

ROK

Republic of Korea

SCO

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SEPA

Single European Payment Area

SPV

Special Purpose Vehicle

SSR

Security Sector Reform

UAE

United Arab Emirates

UN

United Nations

UNFCCC

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNHCR

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

WHO

World Health Organisation

WTO

World Trade Organisation

According to a famous science fiction film, the future is what you make of it. This *Chaillot Paper* takes this quote from *Back to the Future* to heart, proposing 14 different portraits of the future for the year 2024. These are not ‘Grey Swans’ we want to avoid – on the contrary, they are ‘White Reindeers’, positive developments we can make come true. The scenarios do not just depict a desirable future, but include pathways and concrete recommendations on how to get there.

The scenarios outlined here therefore amount to more than strategic foresight since they are highly operational; in addition, they describe futures that are just beginning in 2024, but which will have wide-ranging positive repercussions in the decades beyond that date.