



EU Update

I N T H I S E D I T I O N

August saw a wide array of events rock the European Union, from the resignation of the Trade Commissioner to the challenges surfaced from the election results in Belarus.

In **EU Foreign Affairs and Security** tensions continued heightening between Turkey and Greece and the European Council declared that it did not recognise the results of the Belarusian election.

The **Finance, Trade and (Digital) Internal Market** section provides an overview of the EU's investigation of COVID-19 vaccinations and its first agreement on a potential vaccine, as well as the resignation of the Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan

In terms of **Migration**, August was again marked by the large number of immigrants who are stuck in the Greek Islands, barred from the Italian and Maltese coasts and crossing the Channel into England.

Finally, the **Environment** section discusses revisions to two of cornerstone climate and energy legislative packages including proposals to raise the EU's climate target for 2030 and consultation on the Renewable Energy Directive (REDII)

While September brings the Union closer to the beginning of the finalisation of Brexit negotiations and near to the mid-point of the German Presidency of the European Council, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and inter-country relations continue to keep the Union on its toes.

September 2020

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On August 19th the European Council declared that they do not recognize the results of the August 9th elections in Belarus, citing that they “[were neither free nor fair](#)”. The European Council is moving to sanction those responsible for falsifying election results and for inciting violence and repression. [EUR 53 million](#), originally intended for the Belarusian government, has been reallocated for Belarusian civil society; EUR 2 million for individuals affected by state sponsored violence and repression; EUR 1 million for civil society and media; EUR 50 million, will be distributed as coronavirus emergency support (health care facilities, medical equipment and social services for vulnerable groups).

The deadly explosion in [Lebanon](#) strengthen the EU's solidarity with its people, recognizing the importance of support not only today, but also in the future. A military coup in [Mali](#) on August 18th saw both the President and Prime Minister deposed, suspending current EU training missions mandated to train Malian army and police.

On the Eastern Mediterranean front, tensions between Turkey and Greece have only worsened over the last month as Turkey continues their push into gas exploration, with their research vessels heavily guarded by Turkish Navy warships. Following the ‘Gymnich’ meeting between EU Foreign Ministers on

August 28th EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Josep Borrell, called for Turkey to abstain from its current illegal activities, and to work towards de-escalating the situation. Borrell also cited “[a growing frustration in the face of Turkish behavior](#)”, saying that the lack of progress from Turkey could call for more restrictive measures by the European Council following their next meeting at the end of September.

The ‘Gymnich’ meeting also allowed for the foreign ministers to reflect on the EU's overall approach to world conflicts and crises, especially given how busy the first half of 2020 has been in regard to foreign policy citing; “[We cannot change big global trends, but we can change how we respond to them.](#)”



Environment

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While many policies have been derailed in the past months by the COVID-19 public health crisis, it now seems like the European Union is back on track, pursuing the revision of some of its cornerstone climate and energy legislative packages.

The EU and [the Sustainable Development Report 2020](#)

During the last month, the United Nations (UN) released [the Sustainable Development Report 2020](#), focusing especially on the 13th Sustainable Development Goal— climate action. The report shows that no Member State of the European Union (EU) has managed to reach this goal, with the majority of the countries still having major challenges to face in the coming years. This report comes at a time in which the European Commission [prepares to table proposals](#) that would raise the EU's climate target for 2030. The central point of the upcoming discussion is whether to propose an emissions reduction target of 50 or 55% by 2030, up from 40% currently. Updating the emissions reduction target would provide a crucial step for achieving the 13th Sustainable Development Goal through a strategy that is considered both [feasible and effective](#) by scientists.

Revision of the Renewable Energy Directive (REDII)

The European Commission (EC) has also recently launched a [public consultation](#) on the potential revision of the Renewable Energy Directive (REDII) that entered into force in 2018, in order to properly align this piece of legislation with the EU's flagship Green Deal and with its goal of making the entire Union climate-neutral by 2050. The Renewable Energy Directive (REDII) set an overall binding renewable energy target for the EU of 32% of total energy consumption by 2030, but now policymakers are looking towards a more ambitious objective. This optimistic revision is in line with recent studies showing REDII to be one of the EU's [most popular legislative packages](#) within the industries affected.



August was marked by the [resignation of EU trade commissioner](#) Phil Hogan following criticism of his attendance at a controversial golf society dinner on August 19 in Ireland. The dinner was attended by several high-profile Irish political figures, in a scandal now informally dubbed “Golfgate.” With over 80 people in attendance, the dinner [violated new restrictions](#) imposed by the Irish government on August 18 which limit [indoor gatherings](#) to six people. Hogan was also censured for not complying with Irish quarantine rules following his arrival in the country from Brussels.

Specifically, Hogan did not restrict his movements for 14 days as required, arguing that a negative COVID-19 test [meant he didn't need to](#). Ireland's Department of Health, however, [has emphasized](#) that a negative test does not shorten the mandated duration. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen released a [statement](#) on Hogan's resignation on August 27, 2020 in which she said she was grateful for his “tireless work” and thanked him for his “valuable contribution to the work of the Commission.” In accordance with [Article 246 of the Treaty](#), the Irish government must now tender another candidate for a Trade Commissioner of Irish nationality. In the meantime, Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis will assume responsibilities for trade matters.

In other coronavirus-related news, the Commission has reached its first agreement on a potential vaccine with the pharmaceutical company [AstraZeneca](#) on August 14. The [Advance Purchase Agreement provides](#) the contractual framework to purchase 300 million doses with the option to purchase 100 million more on behalf of EU Member States—including to be donated to lower- and middle-income countries

or re-directed to other European nations. Using a non-replicative recombinant chimpanzee adenovirus-based vaccine ChAdOx1, [AstraZeneca's candidate](#) is currently in large-scale Phase II/III Clinical Trials after promising results in Phase I/II trials. The agreement will be financed with the [Emergency Support Instrument](#). Similar agreements with other vaccine manufacturers have been discussed via exploratory talks with [Sanofi-GSK](#) on July 31, [Johnson & Johnson](#) on August 13, [CureVac](#) on August 18, and [Moderna](#) on August 24. Overall, these conversations are a [critical step](#) towards the [European Vaccines Strategy](#), which was adopted by the Commission on June 17.

Another key component of the Union's [coronavirus strategy](#) is [SURE](#), which aims to mitigate the pandemic's socio-economic impact. Under this instrument, the Commission has [presented proposals](#) to provide €81.4 billion in financial support to 15 Member States. It is now up to the Council to approve these proposals.

Additional developments from the last month span a Tariff Agreement between the United States and the Union, and Cambodia losing duty-free access to the EU market. The [tariff reductions](#) will not only increase market access for hundreds of millions of dollars in US and EU exports, but are the first reductions in duties to be negotiated between the two entities in more than two decades. The Union's [decision](#) to partially withdraw Cambodia's duty-free, quota-free access to the market affects approximately 20% of exports to the EU, including products such as garments, footwear, and travel goods. Cambodia's preferential access—which it enjoyed under the “[Everything But Arms](#)” (EBA) agreement—was withdrawn due to [serious concerns](#) about the deterioration of political, human, land and labor rights in the country.



The European Union is facing new challenges on migration matters as the number of people arriving to its border continues to rise in the middle of the pandemic.

As of August 5th, around [29,000 migrants](#) remain stranded on Greek Islands. A [voluntary migrant repatriation action plan](#) has been launched to send home 5000 migrants. The project is being carried out jointly by the European Commission, the Greek authorities and the UN's International Organization for Migration. Recipients are paid 2000 EUR to leave the country.

Greece, however, has been under international scrutiny after the [New York Times published an article on August 14](#) documenting illegal pushbacks. This has been denied by prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, saying that they have "[been victims of a significant misinformation campaign](#)".

Italy and Malta, serving as controlling borders for illegal migrants coming from the central Mediterranean route, [closed their ports to rescue ships](#) claiming that they were no longer safe havens due to the pandemic. This has led to a decrease of European state-led efforts to save lives at sea. On August 17th, [at least 45 migrants and refugees died](#) in this year's largest recorded shipwreck off the Libyan coast.

A rise in migration can also be seen in the UK, as the number of people trying to cross the Channel has increased. The British government has called for the [use of defense forces](#) to stop them and the [Home Office is removing asylum seekers](#) to other EU member states.

On this matter, the [European Union has rejected a British request for a migration pact](#) that would allow the return of asylum seekers to other European countries. Once the Brexit transition period expires on December 31st, the European Union will lose the right under the Dublin regulation to transfer refugees and migrants to the UK, and vice versa.

