



EU Update

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

Through the month of November, COVID-19 cases have surged across Europe, prompting a new wave of lockdowns. This hasn't slowed the pace of EU affairs, which have been marked by the ongoing Brexit negotiations and the US Election.

EU Foreign Affairs and Security has been dominated by the US election and tensions to the east of the Union, with sanctions raised against Belarus and issues across Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia

For **Finance, Trade and (Digital) Internal Market**, the last month has seen changes to export controls on "sensitive dual-use goods", including surveillance technologies, sanctions on US exports as a result of the Boeing—WTO case and a variety of actions taken to protect the EU's trade interests in the uncertainty at the end of 2020

The **Migration** section covers reactions to the New Pact on Migration, as well as a surge of migrants arriving in the Canary Islands.

Finally, the **Environment** section covers the fifth edition of the Circular Economy Stakeholders Conference, as well as renewed commitments to reduce air pollution

In December the UK's leave date from the Union looms large on the horizon, with many still unsure of where negotiations will land.

December 2020

Andreas Björklund—Permanent Author

In November, the EU's first **annual defence review** was published, confirming that the EU is still far from its stated aim of achieving 'strategic autonomy'. "European defence suffers from fragmentation, duplication and insufficient operational engagement," HR/VP Borrell said about the findings of the report.

The Member States have also rejected a small move towards using **QMV instead of unanimity in foreign policy**. HR/VP Borrell proposed QMV when implementing details of a new action plan on human rights, but the proposal was rejected.

During the month of November, EU external relations have of course been heavily marked by the drawn-out **U.S elections**. Joe Biden's hard-fought victory has inspired hope among EU leaders for a restored transatlantic partnership on security and a multilateralist world order.

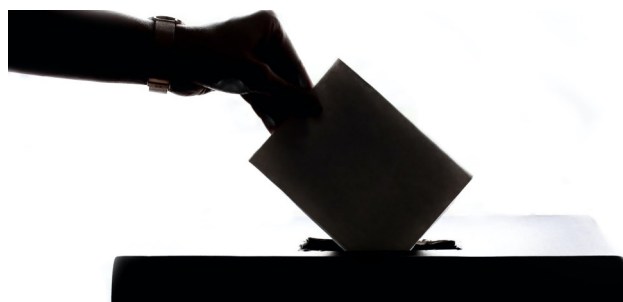
Apart from that, focus has been on the EU's eastern neighbourhood. After months of internal disagreement, the EU broke the deadlock and imposed sanctions on **Belarus** President Alexandr Lukashenko.

In **Moldova**, the pro-EU opposition candidate Maia Sandu won the presidency. This will open for deepened cooperation between the EU and Moldova, but also increases tensions with Russia which will be unwilling to lose influence in the region.

In the Nagorno-Karabakh region, **Russia** has deployed peacekeeping troops and brokered a cease-fire agreement between belligerents **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan**. By granting military support to the Azeris, **Turkey** has also managed to assert influence. The EU's role has thus been marginalised in the conflict, as the Union did not take any decisive action.

Last year, **North Macedonia** changed its name to appease Greek objections to its prospects for accession to the EU and NATO. However, it encountered another hurdle on its way towards EU membership when Bulgaria vetoed the opening of negotiations.

Lastly, in **Georgia**, the ruling party has proclaimed victory in the parliamentary elections. However, the results have been disputed by the opposition, sparking large-scale protests and police crackdowns. The deal that the EU and the U.S. brokered in March for a reformed electoral system has not yet been able to create political stability in the country.



Environment

Margherita Trombetti—Permanent Author

November began with the fifth edition of the [Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference](#), a platform where private and public stakeholders gathered to discuss how to further the Union's efforts towards implementing the circular economy paradigm on the Continent and beyond. This year's edition was characterised by the presentation of the [new Circular Economy Action Plan](#), one of the principal pillars of the European Green Deal, and featuring the promotion of consumers' role, the focus on valuing waste, and the importance of investing in research and innovation. In the words of Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans, '*Covid-19 has underlined the urgency of stopping the destruction of our natural environment and exposed the fragility of the current economic model hence making 'circular economy...the model of the future'.*

Covid-19 also highlighted the necessity to strengthen health protection at the EU level. In an attempt to solve discrepancies between EU and global standards, and to further reduce mortality, the European Green Deal is pushing to better align EU air quality

rules with WHO guidelines. With this in mind, the [European Environment Agency's 2020 report on the improvement of air quality](#) in Europe presented this month must be welcome: it shows a decrease in deaths linked to air pollution in the Member States over the past decade.

However, the numbers remain alarmingly high: 'about 400.000 premature deaths across the Continent' occurred in the same timeframe, convincing the European Commission to [weigh in on the issue](#) with a revision of EU rules. The first step in this direction was the launch of [an open consultation](#) on an EU Action Plan 'Towards a Zero Pollution ambition for air, water and soil' earlier this month.

Lastly, the trilogue between the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission on the [Common Agricultural Policy reform](#) have begun, but divergences between their positions require further discussions. For the moment, an [agreement on the application of transitional rules](#) has been reached, with a view to offering regulatory certainty for the farmers and businesses concerned.



On 9 November 2020, the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement regarding the European Commission's proposal for the modernization of EU export controls on [sensitive dual-use technologies and goods](#). While such tools have many civilian uses, they can also have [far-reaching implications](#) and be utilized for defense, intelligence, and law enforcement purposes. Cyber-surveillance technologies in particular were highlighted by the Commission as posing a significant risk to not only human rights, but national and international security. The legislative proposal was first adopted by the Commission in September 2016 and offers a "[comprehensive 'systems upgrade'](#) [that] will make the existing EU Export control system more effective."

This will be accomplished through a [number of changes](#), including the introduction of a novel "human security" dimension, updating key notions and definitions, simplifying and harmonizing licensing procedures (which amongst other functions allows the Commission to amend the list of items or destinations subject to specific forms of control), and developing an EU capacity-building and training program for Member States' licensing and enforcement authorities. Overall, the proposal promises to make the system more agile and transparent, and is a crucial step towards ensuring the EU is capable of properly responding to the risks posed by emerging technologies and evolving circumstances.

In other news, November also marked the continuation of the Boeing - World Trade Organization (WTO) case as the Commission implemented new regulations increasing tariffs on US exports. The [WTO authorized the EU](#) to take such countermeasures in October 2020 in response to unlawful US subsidies to aircraft maker Boeing, which have been to the detriment of Airbus and the European aerospace industry. Having taken effect 10 November 2020, the regu-

lations were [agreed to by EU Member States](#) after the US failed to provide the basis for a negotiated settlement. The US exports impacted are estimated to be worth [\\$4 billion](#).

The measures were part of a series of actions taken this month to protect EU trade interests as the Commission also [launched a new complaints system](#) for reporting market access barriers and violations of Trade and Sustainable Development commitments. An important reflection of the Commission's [increased commitment](#) to ensuring the enforcement and implementation of trade agreements, the system comes on the heels of the July 2020 appointment of its first [Chief Trade Enforcement Officer](#) (CTEO). The complaint forms are available online on the [Access2Markets](#) portal and open for EU-based stakeholders, including Member States, individual companies, businesses/trade associations, civil society organization, and EU citizens. Other actions include the [suspension of the EU's participation](#) in technical negotiations in the International Working Group on Export Credits (along with 10 other members). [Call for more transparency](#) in the terms offered in export finance transactions, the temporary suspension demonstrates the EU's dedication to fostering a level playing field between exporters.

Want to Read More?

As COVID-19 cases in Europe soared over the last month, leading to a number of new lockdown measures, the debate around Coronabonds has gained renewed attention. More information in: [Italy, Coronabonds and a dilemma that wasn't](#)

The Canary Islands have seen an increase in migrants arriving to its territory. On the first weekend of November alone, around [2,200 migrants crossed the dangerous Atlantic route from Africa to Europe](#) and arrived to Gran Canaria, where they were being housed in improvised camps on the docks at Arguineguí. The president of the Canary Islands, Ángel Víctor Torres, said that the [“existing infrastructure could not cope with the number of people arriving”](#).

Spain, along with other “front-line” Member States, Greece, Italy and Malta, are [demanding clearer rules on migration](#) within the EU and the solidarity of other Member States to relocate people arriving at their territory. In a joint document, these four countries criticized the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and asked for the imbalances on solidarity and responsibility between Member States to be addressed.

This issue was also addressed on November 19, 2020, by President Von der Leyen at the High-Level Conference on Migration and Asylum in Europe, where she stated that [“those countries that fulfill their legal and moral duties or those which are more exposed than others must be able to rely on the European Union to share responsibility in case of need”](#), adding that it is an obligation of each Member State to support other Member States under pressure to manage migration.

This month, violence against migrants and violation to fundamental rights have attracted the attention of the media to France and Croatia. [Police officers are being investigated for violent actions against migrants](#) while carrying out an operation to break up a protest migrant camp in Paris; and the EU ombudsman started a formal investigation regarding allegations of [aggressive pushbacks of migrants and refugees by the Croatian police](#), which its government had previously denied.

An extraordinary meeting with the Management Board of Frontex was carried out November 11, 2020, at the Commission’s request, to discuss allegations of fundamental rights violations and pushbacks of migrants in the Aegean Sea. At this meeting, the board concluded that urgent action is needed in order to investigate all fundamental rights allegations and instructed Frontex’s Executive Director to [“suspend or terminate any activity, in whole or in part, if he considers that there are violations of fundamental rights or international protection obligations that are of a serious nature or are likely to persist”](#), including those regarding allegations against staff of the Agency.

On November 24, 2020, the European Commission presented the [“Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027”](#), which builds on the achievements of the previous plan from 2016. The new plan aims to support Member States, through funding and guidance, on the following actions: (i) inclusive education and training, (ii) employment opportunities and skills recognition, (iii) access to health services and (iv) access to adequate and affordable housing. To ensure full transparency of the implementation of this plan, the Commission will develop an interactive platform to monitor its progress.

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Check out these related articles:

[The New Pact on Migration: a real change or a hidden preservation of the past approach?](#)

[How have some European Member States reacted to the New Pact on Migration and](#)

