

IN THIS EDITION

As the year progresses, it is becoming clear that the areas of democratic law in neighbouring and some EU member states, the continuing struggle against COVID-19 and migrant rights require considerable sustained effort from the EU. This edition also covers advancements in the fields of climate law and trade, both aligned with global initiatives and developments in the respective fields.

Democracy and Governance covers increasing tensions between the European Commission and Eastern European member states on topics like gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights.

In **Environment**, read about the ongoing discussion around EU climate law, including pressure to get a draft of the legislation prepared in time for Joe Biden's Leaders' Climate Summit.

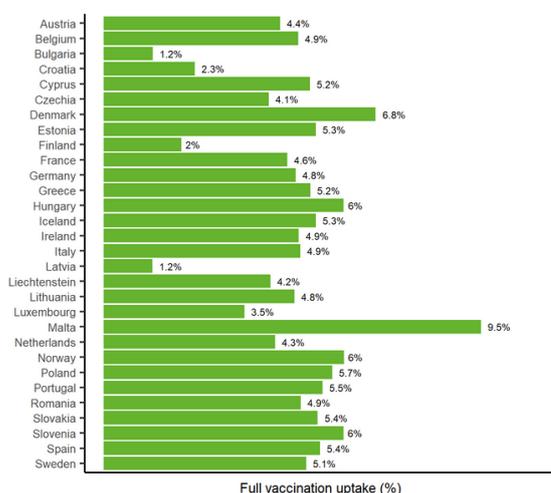
Updates in **Finance, Trade and Digital (Internal) Market** include further developments on the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, changes in the energy sector and information on the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



On the topic of **Migration**, we discuss the need for nations across the EU to ensure migrants have access to COVID-19 vaccines and the construction of additional refugee camps in the Greek islands.

Developments in **Foreign Affairs and Security** include responses to human rights issues in Turkey, the EU's first sanctions against Chinese officials in almost a decade and a new approach to European cybersecurity.

KEY FIGURE



The speed of delivery and implications for a 'COVID-19 free world' are a theme across the policy areas in this edition. This figure demonstrates the cumulative number of full vaccinations delivered as at 21 March 2021 as a percentage of the country's population aged 18 years and above. Source: [EU COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Overview](#)

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Katrin Hermann—Permanent Author

Right from the beginning of this month there have been significant developments, including increased tensions between the EU and Eastern European states concerning the rule of law and fundamental EU values. The European Commission also published its 2021 report on gender equality, highlighting the struggles women have faced during the pandemic and what needs to be done to tackle this issue. On a more positive note, concrete actions have been taken towards building a stronger Social Europe through the new European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

After years of clashes with the EU over judicial reform, the rule of law and freedom of the press, the Hungarian right-wing Fidesz party has [decided to leave](#) the European People's Party of the European Parliament. Since Viktor Orbán became Prime Minister, there have been frequent disagreements between Hungary's stance on several essential EU values (mainly the rule of law mechanism) and things came to a head when new internal rules allowing for the suspension of political parties, rather than just individual MEPs, were approved. Though not particularly surprising, this move makes any attempts to build bridges between the EU and the government of Hungary even more difficult.

On March 5th, ahead of International Women's Day, the European Commission published its [official 2021 report on gender equality](#). The report highlights the significant challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed when it comes to protecting women. This report is the first published under the official Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which seeks to build a more equal Union that includes gender in all policy areas of the EU. In line with this strategy, the Commission is also launching the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal, which will compile data from all 27 Member States in order to easily identify strengths and weaknesses.

Unfortunately, despite these promising developments, the fight for women's freedoms continues to be a [struggle in Poland](#), where abortions in cases of congenital defects are now illegal, banning the procedure almost entirely. This has caused an uproar amongst Polish women and EU officials, with UN and Council of Europe human rights bodies declaring the ban to be in opposition to



Poland's human rights obligations. Its increasingly problematic track record on both women's and LGBTQI+ rights has caused MEPs to officially adopt a resolution declaring the EU an [LGBTQ 'Freedom Zone'](#), a clear reaction to the wave of Polish cities that have decided to become 'LGBT ideology-free-zones'.

The [stealthy withdrawal of Turkey](#) from the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, a key international accord designed to implement laws protecting women from violence and prosecuting offenders, does not bode well for women living in Turkey. Turkish conservatives justified its withdrawal by continuing to promote the false narrative that the Convention will undermine traditional family values and promote homosexuality. This narrative has also been used in countries within the EU; Poland [seeks to withdraw](#) from the Convention and has proposed a disturbing alternative which bans abortion and homosexual marriage, supported by conservative Christian organizations.

Despite the aforementioned setbacks, the EU has made significant progress on other fronts, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which seeks to implement measures structured around fair access and opportunities in the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. Future proposals that have been announced include a [Directive on pay transparency](#), enforcing equal pay for equal work, as well as a [new Strategy](#) for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

WANT TO READ MORE?

Check out Katrin Hermann's article:

[The Istanbul Convention and the Rejection of European Values](#)

ENVIRONMENT

Vlad Surdea-Hernea—Permanent Author

Through the voice of the European Commissioner for European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans, the EU Commission [has urged negotiators](#) from the Parliament and Council to finish drafting the EU climate law by the end of April, in due time for [the Leaders' Climate Summit](#) organized on the 22nd of April by the USA. This development is symbolically relevant, as the Biden administration will most likely also [announce their national targets](#) for CO² reductions at the Summit. While the negotiations have advanced in the previous months, there are still debates on the short-term 2030 objectives. The Summit will be the [first major Transatlantic meeting](#) discussing climate ambitions since the Biden administration took office.

Additionally, meeting the April deadline remains essential given the other internal targets of the EU, especially the climate policy package [due by the end of June 2021](#). These goals include reforming the EU ETS, a new set of emissions standards for the European vehicle fleet, and more stringent renewable energy targets for member states. These developments will be based on the pan-European objectives set by the EU Climate Law.

The European Commissioner for Environment, Virginijus Sinkevičius, [has confirmed that](#) the last meeting of the Ministers of Environment across the EU member states has been fruitful, advancing the agenda on multiple areas, such as greening the European Semester, developing a battery strategy, Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the EU Forest Strategy and the 8th Environment Action Programme. However, while multiple areas of interest have seen significant advancement during the recent talks, there is still much to do regarding the unanimous acceptance of a final draft of the EU Climate Law.

WANT TO READ MORE?

Try this article by Ulises Bobadilla y Jiménez:

[Extractive Diplomacy? EU Development Cooperation for the Green Deal](#)



FINANCE, TRADE AND DIGITAL (INTERNAL) MARKET

Niamh Saunders—Intern

This month saw further developments in the [EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment \(CAI\)](#), with the market access offers published on 12 March. As China is a key trading partner for the EU, the CAI aims to provide increased legal certainty, improve market access and fairer rules of engagement for European companies, investors and service providers. Improved commitments in market access are seen across a variety of sectors, prominently manufacturing (automotive and basic materials making up a significant proportion), and the services sector. The complex arrangement between the two parties should be closely monitored to ensure a commitment to sustainability and human rights provisions.

Within the energy sector, the European Commission and EU Member States took part in the fourth negotiation of the [Energy Charter Treaty \(ECT\)](#) earlier this month. In line with the [Paris Agreement](#) and its long-term decarbonisation and energy transition policies, the EU is bound to discourage all further investments into fossil fuel-based energy infrastructure projects, unless they are fully consistent with an ambitious, clearly defined pathway towards climate neutrality. The EU has stressed the need for progress in the negotiations for the modernization of the ECT, with the aim of working towards an inclusive global energy transition in alignment with Paris Agreement objectives. This round saw the EU present its proposal to phase out the investment protection of fossil fuels from the Treaty, as well as provisions related to investment protection. Looking forward, the next negotiation round in June 2021 will be set to discuss further improvements in economic sectors.

Released at the end of February, the Commission's [Quarterly Report on the Euro Area](#) outlines the structural economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadly the report summarises the most significant macroeconomic challenges that will be faced in the coming years, namely, economic stability, the well-functioning of product, labour and financial markets as well as international trade. Key areas identified for growth were, not surprisingly, the expansion of digital workplaces, e-commerce and FinTech services.

The Commission has made moves towards

strengthening the transparency and authorisation mechanism for vaccine exports by introducing the principles of reciprocity and proportionality. What does this actually mean? Essentially, the new criteria aims at avoiding countries who restrict their own export of vaccines or raw materials and, importantly, focus on those countries who have the greatest need. Member States and the Commission must assess whether requested exports pose a threat to the security of supply of vaccines and their components in the EU. Although this is a crucial step in improving the transparency of the vaccine distribution, the objective of 'timely distribution' to European citizens is currently not being met.

Further in trade, the [EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement \(CETA\)](#) has been highlighted as a significant actor in minimising the economic impact of the pandemic. The partnership between the EU and Canada emphasises the fundamental importance of values-based trade as a platform for cooperatively facing global challenges.



MIGRATION

Michela Pellegatta—Research Associate

On March 19th, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions launched a [new partnership](#) to increase cooperation and support to EU cities, regions and rural areas for their work to help integrate new arrivals. This partnership is a follow-up to the [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#) and is based on three main goals. Firstly, it aims to build an open and regular dialogue between the Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and local and regional authorities on integration. Secondly, it seeks to build capacity and promote exchange of experiences for local and regional authorities on different aspects of integration and community sponsorship. Lastly, it aims to improve evidence and data on integration at the local level. This partnership could potentially represent a great channel to foster migrants' integration among the countries, especially in rural areas where migrants encounter greater challenges in their integration path and have fewer tools and facilities at their disposal.

In European countries, many migrants are [excluded from COVID-19 national vaccination programs](#) and the European Union is remaining [alarmingly silent](#) about this. This could prove highly problematic—for example, undocumented persons, excluded from many of these plans, represent [one percent of the EU's population](#) and are mostly occupied in frontline

jobs, especially in the [care service, domestic work, and hospitality sectors](#). Thus, they are among those most exposed to and likely to transmit COVID-19. Similar challenges extend to individuals without residence or secure legal status, such as asylum seekers. It is fundamental that European countries include migrants in their vaccination plans, to effectively prevent the virus from spreading among the population. Leaving these persons unvaccinated will pose a serious obstacle to [herd immunity](#).

On March 29th, Ylva Johansson, the EU home affairs commissioner, visited Lesbos and Samos. During her visit, she announced that the EU will provide [€250m of funding](#) (£213m) to build five new refugee camps on the islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Kos and Leros. This seems to be great news, as Europe is finally taking action after the dramatic events that occurred in the [Moria camp](#) in September 2020. However, we have to ask ourselves if this is the right approach and, especially, a long-term solution to the current issue. And this does not seem the case. As [Stephan Oberreit](#), Médecins Sans Frontières' head of mission in Greece said, "continuing to clone and repackage the containment model is the best recipe for a catastrophe". There is an urgent need to find dignified alternatives to camps and to provide access to a fair asylum procedure.



FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

Letitia Roman —Permanent Author

Starting on the [22nd of March](#), the Foreign Affairs Council is being held in Brussels with the physical presence of all the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell. The agenda mostly focuses on the recent human-rights developments in Turkey, which will also be addressed later this month by the European Union Council. A significant number of Ministers from EU Member States have condemned [Turkey's exit from the Istanbul Convention](#), but other topics such as the status of the Kurdish minority and the future of migration in the Mediterranean region remain relevant.

Additionally, [the Council has agreed upon imposing the first set of economic sanctions targeting Chinese officials in almost three decades](#). The set of measures comes as a response to the alleged human rights violations of the Uyghur minority, and is bound to affect four Chinese official and one other local organization. In retaliation, Chinese authorities have already imposed counter-measured sanctioning European official that have been involved with designing and condoning the EU sanctions. It is, however, very important to note that the sanctions approved by the EU have been adopted with the unanimous support of all the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Member States. The decision is part of a broad set of measures adopted by the EU Council, which also include sanctions against Russia, China, North Ko-



rea, Sudan, Eritrea and Myanmar. This course of actions has become possible due to the recently adopted [EU Magnitsky Act](#), which has been adopted in December 2020.

Lastly, the Council [has adopted preliminary conclusions](#) on the European Cybersecurity Strategy. The unanimously adopted conclusions state that cybersecurity is crucial for building a resilient, green and digital European Union. To ensure the development, implementation and monitoring of the cybersecurity strategy, the EU Council recommended that the Commission and the High Representative should establish a detailed implementation plan. This is a significant step towards enabling cohesion in the national cybersecurity strategies of EU member states, which in the past have had to deal with local issues in a local manner. This has often led to a [lack of coordination](#), which has had a damaging effect on the cybersecurity infrastructure of multiple states.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Our Coffee Conversations are back!

Each month, we will cover new exciting topics spanning across our five policy areas. The first session is hosted by the environment team where our very own [Vlad Surdea-Hernea](#) will talk about the Distributional Impacts of Carbon Pricing with [Declan Ingham](#). Stay tuned for more details in the coming days!

You can already register for the event [here](#).

