

IN THIS EDITION

While April saw significant groundswell behind EU priority areas such as climate commitments, a number of notable isolated events also occurred. The 'sofagate' incident highlighted gender politics that are still at play (especially within the constraints of diplomacy), rioting in Northern Ireland demonstrated the fragility of the Brexit agreement and the Suez Canal blockage demonstrated the interlinked nature of our modern economic eco-system. Incidents like these highlight the importance of EU policy in setting strategic approaches to overcome the social and economic challenges of our times.

This month, the Environment section primarily covers the central provisions of the new European Climate Law.

In Foreign Affairs and Security notable developments included Germany passing one of the world's toughest laws regarding the security of 5G communications.

The Democracy and Governance section covers the EU's referral of Poland to the Court of Justice of the European Union for its controversial law regarding the judiciary.



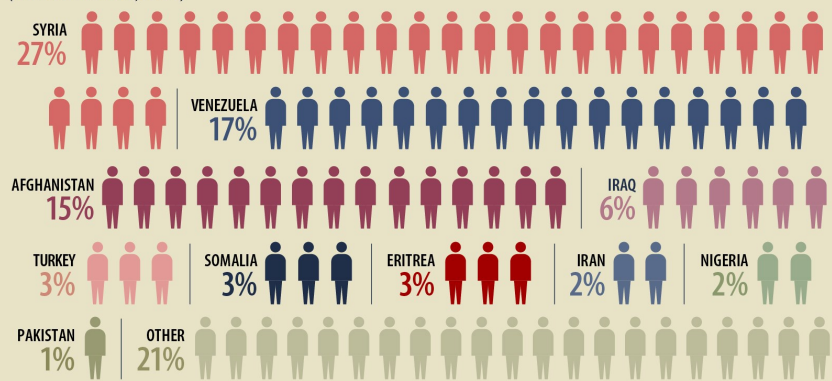
The Migration section covers the most recent (and unacceptable) tragedy in the Mediterranean.

Finally, the Finance and Trade section covers a number of notable trade deals that are current in progress, or have been finalised, with key strategic partners.

KEY FIGURE

Asylum applicants granted protection status in the EU by citizenship

(share in EU total, 2020)



'Other' refers to other citizenships not presented in the graph.

ec.europa.eu/eurostat

Last year, the EU granted protection status to 281 000 asylum seekers, 5% down compared to 2019. Syrians and Venezuelans make up the two largest groups of beneficiaries, with 60% of Syrians who were granted protection status receiving it in Germany and 96% of Venezuelans receiving it in Spain.

This month we hosted a Coffee Conversation on the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, addressing the issue of responsibility-sharing in Europe. Watch the talk on our YouTube channel @pathforeurope

ENVIRONMENT

Vlad Surdea-Hernea —Permanent Author

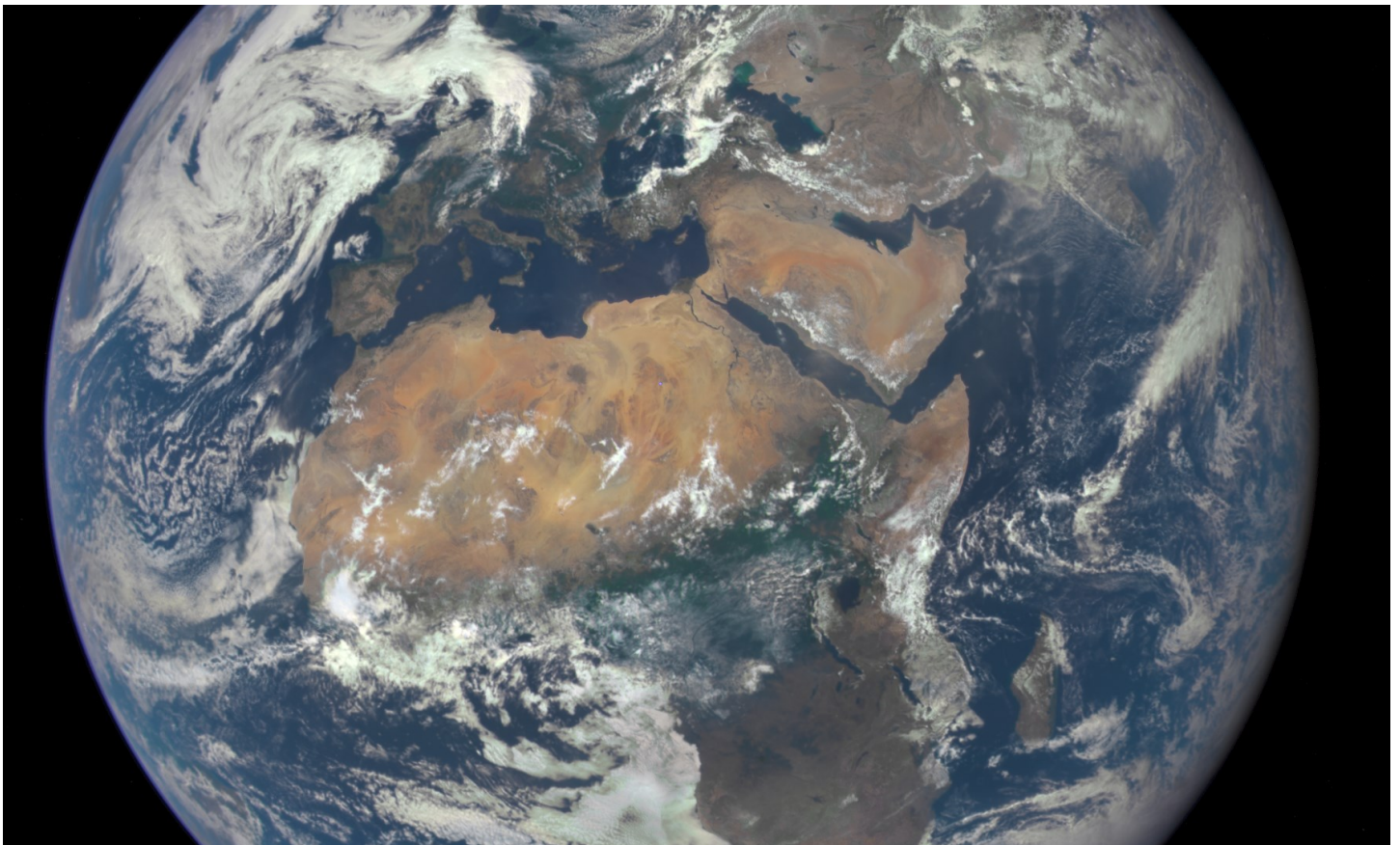
On the 21st of April, European Union negotiators [reached an agreement](#) on the central provisions of the European Climate Law. The Climate Law, expected to be published by June 2021, is set to enshrine into law the strong climate objectives assumed by the EU Commission at the beginning of its mandate. The [key provision](#) that has been approved by the negotiators was the emission reduction target for 2030—a 55% reduction level has been approved. While this is significantly lower than what the EU Parliament supported, specifically a 60% emissions reduction target, it still represents a more ambitious objective compared to existing standards. One interesting legal tweak introduced by the EU Commission was increasing the role that is to be played by carbon sinks, which effectively raises the ambition for 2030 to a 57% reduction. A direct consequence of the last round of negotiations was the establishment of the European Scientific Advisory Board, an independent board with the task of supporting local, national and regional stakeholders meeting the climate objectives enforced by the Climate Law. The upcoming months will be centered around designing the clear trajectory of moving from the 2030 objectives to net-neutrality by 2050. This trajectory is set to include precise roadmaps for different industrial sectors, especially important for the so-called hard-to-abate sectors.

Another significant development regards the future of the carbon border-adjustment mechanism (CBAM). EU Commission Executive Vice President Frans Timmermans [announced](#) that carbon leakage remains a significant threat for global fight against climate change, and the EU will not hesitate to protect its green industry, even if these protections will be opposed by its strategic partners. This announcement preceded the large Leader's summit organised by US President Joe Biden, where the American administration [announced its own ambitious climate objectives](#). Corroborating these pieces of information, we can infer that a potential CBAM could be embraced by the US, and would therefore target other global players, such as China and India.

WANT TO READ MORE?

Read Vlad Surdea-Hernea's recent article:

[Hydrogen is what states make out of it](#)



FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

Letitia Roman—Permanent Author

On Monday, 26th of April, the European Union announced the final version of its new [Indo-Pacific strategy](#), in a move set to further establish bilateral relations between the EU and countries in the region. The move comes as no surprise, given that the EU is the most important investor and development assistance provider, and among the biggest traders, in the Indo-Pacific region. The development of this strategy accounted for the previously released [2019 Strategic Outlook on China](#) thus advancing the role of the EU in relation to countries in Asia. While both strategies are centered around cooperation and finding common ground, they also indicate that the EU's values and interests remain crucial, even if this results in a less preeminent role.

Regarding the cybersecurity of the European Union, on the 23rd of April, Germany [passed](#) what is considered to be one of the toughest laws regarding the security of 5G communications. The [IT Security Law 2.0](#) restricts the role of untrustworthy

suppliers of 5G services and requires communication operators in Germany to notify the federal government if they sign contracts for critical components of 5G technology. This law also gives the local and federal government powers to block these transactions. For the last two years, the rest of the EU countries have waited for Germany to decide whether or not they will take a tough stance on Chinese giants like Huawei. This decision might affect the common cybersecurity framework of the EU.

Finally, throughout the month, the EU has had to deal with [an expansion of Russian presence](#) in the Black Sea region. While for the moment, Russia activities seem to have been put on hold, policy-makers in Brussels expect new developments, especially given that legislative elections in Russia are approaching. Many analysts suspect that further interference in regions where EU countries maintain strategic interests are soon to come.

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Katrin Hermann—Permanent Author

At the end of the previous month, the European Commission announced it would refer Poland to the Court of Justice of the European Union in the matter of Poland's [controversial law](#) on the judiciary. This law was deemed to be incompatible with the primacy of EU law and violates one of its most fundamental values, the rule of law. The Commission has previously filed four infringement procedures on the independence of the judiciary in Poland, which has continued to pass laws that undermine the EU's values. By referring to the Court of Justice, the Commission seeks [interim measures](#) to prevent "the aggravation of serious and irreparable harm inflicted to judicial independence and the EU legal order".

In lieu of Roma Day on the 8th of April, several EU Commissioners [announced](#) the adoption of the EU Roma Strategic Framework, a ten year plan that aims to provide equality for the Roma community within and outside the EU. Due to the stigma and discrimination that many Roma communities still face, this framework seeks to address their contin-

ued marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion. This new framework ties in with several other Strategies presented by the Commission (such as the [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#)) but specifically targets Roma equality. Though many policies must be tackled on a national level, the EU will support this process through monitoring, advice and funding.

April also included the launch of the [citizen's platform](#) for the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe on Europe Day (May 9th). This multilingual platform allows for "citizens from across Europe will have the possibility to provide their views on any topic that they consider important for the future of the EU". This space allows for a more inclusive space for democratic debate and the opportunity to brainstorm and put forward ideas. This new digital space is intended to engage EU citizens to contribute to the future of the EU, tying in with the Conference's [official slogan](#): "The future is in your hands".

MIGRATION

Michela Pellegatta —Research Associate

The past month has been characterized by the following two important policy developments:

On April 9th, the European Commission adopted [new rules](#) to upgrade the European Border Surveillance System (ERCOSUR). ERCOSUR is a cooperation mechanism, established in 2013, for exchanging information among authorities responsible for managing the EU's external borders. It aimed at facilitating the coordination within and across Member States to prevent and tackle serious crime by introducing several important novelties. Firstly, it made it easier, more secure and reliable to exchange information among Member States, by standardizing the information that needs to be included in situational pictures and various reports. Secondly, it made reporting more effective, as Member States are required to disclose any situation impacting the EU's external borders through both monthly reports and case-by-case alerts, which will be used to prepare accurate risk analyses. Thirdly, Member States are now also required to report incidents and operations related to Search and Rescue, leading to better detection of migrants in danger. Lastly, the Regulation contains rules for establishing and sharing specific situational pictures with non-EU countries and third parties.

On April 14th, the Commission presented a [new Strategy](#) on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025), focusing on preventing this crime, bringing traffickers to justice and protecting and empowering victims. The strategy builds on the EU's comprehensive legal and policy framework in place to address trafficking in human beings, rooted in the Anti-trafficking Directive, and focuses on four main pillars. Firstly, it aims to reduce the demand that fosters trafficking through the implementation of several measures, such as the organization of a prevention campaign targeting high-risk sectors. Secondly, the Commission attempts to break the business model of traffickers, both online and offline. Thirdly, the strategy seeks to protect, support and empower victims, with a specific focus on women and children, by, for example, strengthening victim empowerment programs. Lastly, it aims to promote international cooperation as a key aspect of addressing and combating trafficking.

Beside these important positive policy developments, an unfortunate event is also worth mentioning. On April 21, a tragic incident occurred in the Mediterranean Sea. A boat full of migrants capsized due to bad weather and stormy seas,



leading to the death of up to [130 people](#) and no survivors. This represents the largest loss of life recorded in the Central Mediterranean since the beginning of the year. So far in 2021 alone, [at least 300 other people](#) have drowned or gone missing in the Central Mediterranean. The international community should undertake urgent steps to end avoidable loss of lives at sea, by reactivating Search and Rescue operations in the Mediterranean and enhancing coordination with all rescue actors. Hopefully, the new policy developments outlined above could contribute, at least a little, to the resolution of this problem.

WANT TO READ MORE?

Check out Anita Calchi Novati's recent article:

[The COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to improve the EU's approach to migrants](#)

FINANCE, TRADE AND (DIGITAL) INTERNAL MARKET

Niamh Saunders—Intern

Conclusions to the ratification process of the [EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#) came together, finally, at the end of this month with the European Parliament overwhelmingly voting in consent of the agreement. Fundamental to the agreement is the protection of European interests and maintaining the integrity of the Single Market through a robust level playing field and the protection of environmental, social, and labour rights. Looking forward, both parties must continue to commit to joint solutions to the Withdrawal Agreement, specifically the [Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland](#).

This month saw the European Commission hold its 2021 [Trade Policy Day](#) to discuss its new trade strategy focussed on promoting an open, sustainable, and assertive trade policy for the EU. The virtual event included panel discussions on the three core objectives of the new EU Trade Strategy: supporting recovery and transformation of the economy with its green and digital aims, shaping global rules, and increasing the EU's capacity to pursue its interests and enforce its rights. The Day provided useful insights into multilateral solutions to current global challenges faced by the EU and WTO. Continued assessment of EU trade negotiations is necessary to ensure the maximisation of benefits of international trade to Europe's companies, while also moving towards more sustainable and fairer globalisation.

Further in trade, negotiations continued this month with five Eastern and Southern African countries (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe). The Commission reported that this negotiation round allowed for continued progress on most issues, including mutual administrative assistance, food safety, plant and

animal health standards and trade and sustainable development. The next round will be held in July 2021 and will continue deepening the existing Economic Partnership Agreement.

On the 21st of April, the Commission introduced new measures to improve sustainable finance and EU taxonomy, channelling money towards green activities. The goal is to give investors the tools to re-orient themselves towards more sustainable technologies and business – a key step in working towards climate neutrality in Europe by 2050. The Commissioner responsible for financial services, financial stability, and the Capital Markets Union, Mairead McGuinness, highlighted that [“the financial system plays a crucial role in the delivery of the EU Green Deal, and significant investments are required to green our economy”](#). Within the new package is the EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act, Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and an additional six amending Delegated Acts on fiduciary duties. The proposals attempt to develop comprehensive sustainability and transparency frameworks for companies, ensuring that the European financial sector is a central actor in the European Green Deal's growth strategy and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several countries, including Germany, Greece, and France, submitted their Recovery and Resilience Plans this April. The Recovery and Resilience Facility, as mentioned in last month's update, is central to the [NextGenerationEU](#) recovery plan, offering 672.5 billion euros in funds to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The plans submitted by Member States should address the challenges indicated by the European Semester, in addition to measures that seek to reap the benefits of digital and green transitions.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

In April PfEU hosted two Coffee Conversations:

- An event by the Migration team focussed on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum
- An event by the Environment team which discussed the distributional impacts of carbon pricing.

Both discussions were insightful and engaging—you can catch them on PfEU's [YouTube Channel](#)!

