

IN THIS EDITION

August has seen a departure from the key issues such as COVID-19 and 'Brexit' that have dominated the European Union discourse and policy agenda for the past six months.

In a devastating month, the EU's attention has been focused on the situation in Afghanistan and ongoing challenges arising from Poland's push against rule-of-law and Lukashenko's regime.

With September set to be dominated with the upcoming German federal election, it does not look like there will be stability for the EU any time soon.

The Migration section covers the situation at the Lithuanian and Belarussian border and the placement of Afghani refugees.

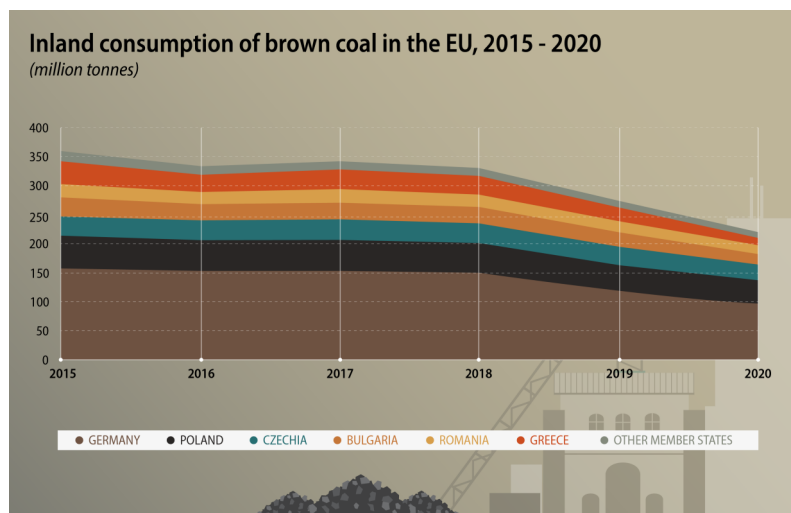
The Environment section covers the challenges outlined in the [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report](#) and the potential impact of the upcoming German election on the green agenda.

The Democracy and Governance section covers the clash between the EU and Poland over rule-of-law and the EU's escalations against Poland in an attempt to manage the situation.



The Foreign Affairs and Security section covers key comments from Vice President Josep Borrell regarding Afghanistan, the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny and the situation in Belarus.

KEY FIGURE



Consumption of brown coal in EU countries is down by almost a third compared to 1990 levels. An especially steep drop-off has been observed in the usage of brown coal for energy production, mostly due to the bloc's focus on shifting towards natural gas and renewables for this purpose. 95% of the EU's brown coal consumption is by SIX countries: Germany (44%), Poland (19%), Czechia (12%), Bulgaria, Romania and Greece.

MIGRATION

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[On August 1st](#), the European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson met the President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda to discuss the situation at the Belarussian border. The Lithuanian border guard personnel, with Frontex support, are undertaking a sophisticated operation to combat the flow of illegal migrants created by Belarus's regime and to defend the Schengen area. Since the beginning of 2021, [almost 4 thousand](#) illegal migrants have crossed the border between Lithuania and Belarus, most of them Iraqi citizens. As stated by [Johansson](#), this is primarily an act of aggression from the Lukashenko regime and not a migration crisis. Indeed, by smuggling migrants into the EU, Lukashenko is primarily attempting to destabilise the bloc and get revenge for the sanctions that Europe has imposed against his country.

On August 11th, to help improve the reception capacity in Lithuania following the exceptional number of people irregularly crossing the Lithuania-Belarus border, the European Commission made [€36.7 million](#) available to Lithuania as emergency assistance under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. These resources are aimed at supporting the reception facilities and services, with first aid, medical care, COVID-19 isolation facilities, shelter, food, clothing, and hygiene kits. Furthermore, the funding will also reinforce the response teams for detecting potential victims of human trafficking and for assisting persons in need of international protection. These resources will provide real support to the Lithuanian government,

but they may not be sufficient to solve the situation. It is necessary to eradicate the issue at its origin by opening, if possible, a dialogue with the Lukashenko regime, as well as by increasing cooperation with the Iraqi government.

Following the Taliban takeover, some European countries are following with great concern the developments in Afghanistan and the severe consequences for its population, thus are offering their availability to host Afghani refugees fleeing from the country. For instance, [Luxembourg's](#) foreign minister, Jean Asselborn, has called on EU countries to agree as soon as possible on a quota arrangement to take in refugees from Afghanistan. [Germany](#) declared its willingness to take in numerous refugees, further it announced that it will to provide [€100 million](#) in aid for Afghans displaced inside Afghanistan as well as refugees in Afghanistan's neighboring countries. Various [Italian municipalities](#) have shown their willingness to welcome Afghani refugees as well.

Unfortunately, this attitude of solidarity is not shared by all European countries. Some of them, including [Austria](#), are against offering protection in Europe to Afghans fleeing the Taliban takeover. Furthermore, the [Greek government](#), fearing a repeat of the 2015 refugee crisis, put in place several measures to stop possible Afghani asylum seekers from trying to reach Europe: it completed a 40-km fence on its border with Turkey and implemented a new surveillance system to reinforce control.



ENVIRONMENT

Vlad Surdea-Hernea—Permanent Author

August started under the auspices of the newly published [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report](#), focusing on the physical science basis of climate change. This report has shown that the world is not on track toward keeping climate change under control, with the average global warming en route to average temperatures more than 2 degrees higher than pre-industrial levels. At this stage, European policymakers are tasked with aligning the Fit for 55 policies launched last month by the European Commission with scientific realities. However, [these negotiations](#) between the European Parliament and the Council might take up to two years.

In the short-term, EU climate policy making has been marked by the upcoming elections in Germany. [The scope and pace of the green transition](#), especially in sensitive industry sectors such as automotive, has been [thoroughly debated](#) by candidates of all the parties across the political spectrum. With Angela Merkel set to depart office after the end of this electoral cycle, uncertainty regarding the future government and Chancellor has led to numerous positions regarding climate. While left-wing parties such as SPD and the Greens have remained staunch supporters of a rapid transition, both the CDU-CSU leader Armin Laschet and representatives of smaller parties such as FDP have warned against a transition that could “kill jobs”. This debate is fundamental for the entire EU, as Germany has been a driver of the European Green Deal and remains the largest economic

power in the bloc.

On a different note, the EU has had [trouble preparing for a difficult winter](#), accumulating historically low natural gas reserves. Current storage facilities in the EU member states are at around 60% capacity at the end of August, far from the potential maximum of 117 billion cubic meters. While there are many supply-side reasons behind this lack of preparations for winter, such as the aversion of states to pay the [current high prices for natural gas](#), natural disasters in different parts of the world (such as Russia or Brazil) have augmented this crisis. This situation points to the need for the EU to develop a more robust energy security framework, especially given the pivotal role that is to be played by natural gas during the energy transition.

The current situation regarding gas storage has also had geopolitical implications, [amplifying the discourse surrounding the NordStream 2 pipeline](#) between Russia and Germany. German Chancellor Angela Merkel met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 20 to discuss this matter, but the comments resulting from their negotiations have been described by critics as too general. While Germany principally supports the finalisation of the deal with Russia, many Central and Eastern European countries have constantly criticised this large infrastructure project as increasing [dependency on Russian energy carriers](#).



DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Katrin Hermann—Permanent Author

This month, the European Commission has rejected a call for action by the European Parliament under a new rule-of-law conditionality mechanism. Poland continues on a collision course with the Commission by upholding their vote to remain an “LGBT-free zone”. In the critical ruling which may decide Poland’s relationship with the European Union, a group of activists entered the court to protest the ruling party’s planned changes to the judiciary.

Despite the threats made regarding the withdrawal of EU funding, the regional parliament (Małopolska) in Poland [has refused to drop](#) its anti-LGBT resolution, creating the so-called “LGBT-free zones”. These zones prompted the European Commission to begin [a legal inquiry](#) as to why Poland has failed to adequately investigate and address these situations. Małopolska would lose significant amounts of funding, and the European Commission [sees little incentive](#) for continued investment. [The Catholic Church](#), a power ally of the ruling conservative PiS party, has supported the decision to continue these zones. On the other hand, Poland has agreed to an order by the Court of Justice of the European Union to dismantle a judge’s chamber which was accused of [“undermining the independence of the judicial system”](#). Warsaw’s response is still being analyzed by the Commission, due to the number of caveats in their response and continued references to Poland’s constitution being “the highest law”. The conflict between the Commission and Poland and

the primacy of EU law continues to persist.

The decision on whether the Polish constitution will have primacy over EU law was met with [pro-democracy protests](#) in the court chambers. This seminal ruling will in no small way affect the future relationship between Warsaw and Brussels and the protestors feel that this ruling could potentially further isolate them from Western Europe and Polish citizens’ freedom from an increasingly authoritarian government. This [isolation](#) has not only manifested itself in its LGBT rulings and restriction of women’s reproductive rights, but in increased media control as well.

The rule-of-law conditionality mechanism adopted by the European Commission is of utmost importance for rulings on breaching EU law, like in Poland and Hungary. [This mechanism entered into force](#) in January and links funds to the respect of legal norms. EU leaders have attached certain conditions to its application, “such as a requirement for the commission to set up guidelines on the use of the mechanism and to wait for a European Court of Justice ruling on it.” MEPs have become upset that this would result in delays in applications of the legislation, which is seen as a powerful way to handle rule of law violations. Commission President Von der Leyen replied in a letter that there were no constraints on the application of the legislation, stating that the Parliament’s [“request to act is not sufficiently clear”](#), causing backlash from MEPs and disarray over the mechanism.



FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY

Nicola Farina—Permanent Author

In recent weeks, EU Vice President Josep Borrell has expressed great concern over the recent developments in Afghanistan. Earlier in August, after the Taliban's first military offensives, Borrell declared that their actions were in clear contradiction with their stated commitment to a negotiated conflict settlement and the Doha peace process. Following the fall of Kabul, he called for an extraordinary videoconference of the EU Foreign Ministers to react immediately. On behalf of the European Union, Borrell pushed urgently for the immediate cessation of all violence, the restoration of security and civil order, and the protection of girls and women.

In a press release on August 17, the EU declared its continued support to the Afghan people and democracy, good governance, human rights and social and economic development in the country. In this context, EU engagement with its partners in Central Asia will be increasingly important to prevent the use of Afghan territory by international terrorist groups. To address the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, the EU claimed that it will continue to provide needs-based assistance to the Afghan people, and it calls on the Taliban to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

In a talk with Antony Blinken, the United States Secretary of State, and with the NATO Secretary-

General, Borrell tried to ensure international cooperation on the evacuation of EU and foreign nationals and EU local staff through temporary access to Kabul airport. On August 19, he participated in a video call with the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers to discuss Afghanistan's situation, including evacuations, humanitarian, human rights and migration issues, regional stability, and counterterrorism. The objective was to tackle this foreign policy crisis and challenges jointly.

Concerning two other situations unfolding respectively in Russia and Belarus, the Vice President advocated, firstly, to the Russian Federation for the immediate and unconditional release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and for a quick and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt made on him last year. Secondly, one year after the elections in Belarus, Borrell strongly criticized the Lukashenko regime's brutal repression and requested the opening of an investigation over the mysterious death of Belarussian activist Vital Shyshou, who has been found hanged in a Kyiv park.

Finally, the EU called again this month for a stop to the violence in Myanmar and the release of all those detained following the coup. Borrell campaigned for the quick establishment of both humanitarian access and a political democratic dialogue process.

