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COVER NOTE

From:	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, signed by Mr Stefano SANNINO, Secretary-General
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
Subject:	Report of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "Common Foreign and Security Policy Report - Our priorities in 2024"

Delegations will find attached document HR(2024) 158.

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EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



**Report of the High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

of 20/06/2024

Common Foreign and Security Policy Report – Our Priorities in 2024

**Report of the High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

"Common Foreign and Security Policy Report - Our priorities in 2024"

This report covers events up to 31 May 2024.

The European Union is now faced with two wars raging in its neighbourhood. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its continuing war of aggression (following the aggression which started already in 2014 with the illegal annexation of Crimea) is creating a major threat to European security. This war, by now the biggest in Europe since the Second World War, is existential for European security.

In the Middle East, Hamas brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks across Israel on 7 October 2023 triggered a conflict in Gaza that has disproportionate effect on civilians and caused a catastrophic humanitarian situation. It still risks spreading to the West Bank and throughout the entire region. It is the EU's vital interest, and it also reflects our core values, to help Ukraine prevail and to work towards a lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East, avoid a wider regional conflict and mitigate the consequences.

This illustrates how much the geopolitical context in which the EU is operating remains marked by radical uncertainty, and the major underlying dynamic of a shift from cooperation to competition. The proliferation of conflicts and the normalisation of the use of force are normalising violence as a mean to pursue political objectives by both states and non-state actors. From Ukraine to the Caucasus, from the Middle East to the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and beyond, an arc of instability is settling in around Europe and connects to other regions, such as the Indo-Pacific. Increasing tensions in the South and East China Seas, as well as China's broader external power projection, in particular its ever closer ties with Russia, pose risks to the EU's interests.

Power politics is back. The world is becoming more multipolar and less multilateral. From trade to investment, from information to migration, all types of interaction are being weaponised and global competition could escalate into confrontation. Europe's security needs to be understood in a broader sense.

Such trends towards fragmentation impair international cooperation, at a time when the acceleration of global transitions is needed to effectively address global challenges which are more pressing and more difficult, including in areas critical to human security like climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, and the management of global commons and migration.

For the EU, these major strategic shifts pose a double challenge, and require a paradigm shift: First, about the need to defend itself better, and second about the need to actively defend the rules-based multilateral order and its achievements. It is about strengthening European sovereignty and building capabilities and resilience at home, from defence to economic security. While security is more than defence, there is no doubt that defence remains and will remain at the core of any security strategy. Strengthening European Defence, has emerged as a generational challenge for Europe. It is also about strengthening the EU's ability to promote its interests and values, including through stronger partnerships. The EU cannot afford to turn inwards and must remain open and engaged in the world.

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It is about strengthening our capacity as the EU to act together, with others when we can and alone when we must.

(1) GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES**Europe**

The **non-EU Western European partners**¹ are the EU's closest partners, committed to the rules-based multilateral order; we are working together to advance the EU values in bilateral context as well as in multilateral fora. Together with the EU against the Russian unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway continued aligning with EU statements and restrictive measures; Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Faroe Islands continued implementing equivalent restrictive measures. We launched a security and defence dialogue with Iceland and concluded a Security and Defence Partnership with Norway.

2024 marked the 30th anniversary of the entry into force of the **European Economic Area** (EEA) agreement, celebrated also through an EEA summit in March. We continued holding bi-annual ministerial political dialogues with Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Consultations and dialogue with Switzerland continued on a vast array of topics, including security and defence. We achieved a Memorandum of Understanding on Enhanced Cooperation between the EU and the Government of the Faroe Islands.

Geopolitical developments increasingly affect the **Arctic** regions, as Russia's attacks on democracies continue. Military and dual-use assets as well as hybrid and cyber-attacks are being deployed across their Arctic zones. In reply, NATO and allies are deploying more assets and conducting more exercises. This has effects on the daily life of Arctic inhabitants including indigenous peoples. Climate change remains the most comprehensive threat. The EU upholds its Arctic engagement in key civilian sectors ranging from regional policy and cooperation, over science and research to Earth observation capacities.

In the current geopolitical context it remains key to keep the **Western Balkans** firmly on their path towards the European Union. The EU's intensified political engagement continued, including the historic decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Western Balkan partners continued to align with the vast majority of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions condemning Russia's invasion and its humanitarian impact. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia aligned fully with EU foreign policy, including sanctions on Russia. Kosovo voluntarily aligned with those measures. Tangible progress in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue was achieved, in particular in the areas of freedom of movement and energy, while no progress was made in the implementation of the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation. The **Foreign Affairs Council** (FAC) held two discussions about the region and held an informal exchange of views with Western Balkans foreign ministers on 22 May 2023. The Western Balkans partners continued to provide inputs to FAC discussions and were debriefed after FAC meetings. The bi-annual informal Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Dialogue at **Political Directors'** level between the EU and the Western Balkan partners resumed, with the latest session held on 6-7 February in Sarajevo.

¹ Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, Holy See, Faroe Islands (as self-governing country within the Kingdom of Denmark)

The EU's rule of law mission in Kosovo (**EULEX**) continued to provide a valuable contribution in support to security, stability and the rule of law in Kosovo in line with its mandate. In the aftermath of the attack on KFOR on 29 May 2023 and of the armed attack in Banjska/Banjskë on 24 September 2023, the Mission helped manage the ensuing crises, drawing on its available resources and on reserve forces provided by Member States. The Mission also knew how to maintain its position of strict impartiality – something that was recognized and appreciated across Kosovo society by all communities. It enhanced its visibility and stepped up foot patrols aimed at fostering a sense of security among the population in the north of Kosovo. While the events in the north drew the most attention, EULEX continued its more regular tasks in line with its mandate, providing a valuable contribution in support to security, stability and the rule of law. Operation **EUFOR Althea** continued supporting the authorities to maintain a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, its core mandate. EUFOR's presence remained crucial and all tasks it implements remained fully relevant.

The focus in **EU-Türkiye** relations continued to be shifted to concrete steps towards re-engagement, including strong EU support in the aftermath of the 2023 devastating earthquakes, which created a momentum for an improvement of the relations. Following the tasking by the June 2023 **European Council**, the High Representative and the Commission issued a Joint Communication on EU-Türkiye relations in November 2023. In April 2024, the work into this direction has started and several rounds of High Level Dialogues on different sectoral issues were held. Türkiye continued to refrain from flights over Greek inhabited areas and from exploration and drilling activities in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Greece and Cyprus. The Cyprus settlement process remained at a standstill, while in January 2024 the UN Secretary-General appointed María Angela Holguín Cuéllar as his Personal Envoy on Cyprus, a development that was welcomed by the **European Council**. With regard to the domestic situation, the serious backsliding continued in the area of respect for human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms, including the non-implementation of the judgements by the European Court of Human Rights. Local elections were held on 31 March. The main opposition party won the mayoral elections in 14 regions including Istanbul and Ankara. EU-Türkiye exchanges on regional and foreign policy issues continued. Türkiye remained a significant and assertive foreign policy actor. In the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Türkiye continued efforts to address sanctions circumvention. Türkiye's views on and support to Hamas are at odds with EU positions. In light of its candidate status, Türkiye's CFSP alignment remained extremely low.

The start of the implementation of the **Windsor Framework** in spring 2023 paved the way for a progressive normalisation of bilateral relations with the **United Kingdom** through informal consultations and pragmatic cooperation between the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in areas of common interest in foreign, security and defence policy including on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Middle East, China, as well as sanctions elaborating and countering circumvention. Co-ordination continues on outreach to Global South countries (so-called "Middle ground" countries for the UK) on multilateral initiatives including the Summit on Peace in Ukraine and the UN Summit for the Future. In the Trade and Cooperation Agreement context, it allowed for the organisation of the first structured dialogues between the EU and the United Kingdom on Cyber in November 2023, and on Counterterrorism in February 2024. Besides significant EU-UK coordination on military support to Ukraine (EU Military

Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine and the UK's Operation Interflex), coordination between the Operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES and Operation Prosperity Guardian (to which the UK contributes) supports the success of the EU operation in the Red Sea.

Eastern Neighbourhood and Central Asia

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has challenged the European security order and changed the overall geopolitical context in the Eastern neighbourhood. In this context resilience and stability have become the guiding principles of the **Eastern Partnership** (EaP) policy framework, as confirmed by EU Member States and EaP partners in the December 2023 EaP Foreign Affairs Ministerial meeting. In this more flexible and streamlined approach, focus has been on strengthening cooperation in the key areas of security cooperation, broader resilience-building and connectivity.

In 2023, cooperation on security was stepped up including through new Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, the **European Peace Facility** (EPF) and security dialogues. The **Eastern Partnership** was also confirmed as a successful tool to bring partner countries closer to the EU, while tailoring cooperation to increasingly differentiated needs.

In 2023, the **EU enlargement process gained new historic momentum** with the decision to **open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova** and **to grant candidate status to Georgia**. In March 2024, the EaP Senior Officials Meeting adopted an Annual EaP Work Plan for 2024, which focuses work on strengthening the rule of law and better public administration, defending against cyber, hybrid and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) threats, building economic resilience, connectivity and trade and economic integration, environmental and climate resilience (including green transition and growth) to resilient digital economy, including through the European Investment Plan.

The EU continued to contribute to the cooperation in the **Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and in the Northern Dimension**. After Russia's suspensions or voluntary departure, the state parties and the EU organized the work of these formats in line with the new geopolitical situation. All three continue to provide political coordination and project support in politically sensitive regions. The Council of the Baltic Sea States is focusing on discussing security political issues that are specific to the Baltic region. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council has established and maintains a wide network of thematic working groups, cooperation among regional authorities and a Youth Council all of which have a direct impact on the lives in the regions adjacent to the Baltics. The Northern Dimension is phasing out some of its sectoral work, which is no longer viable after Russia's departure, and is focusing on sectors where cooperation in this format provides added value in the new political environment.

Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** has increasingly been hampered in fulfilling its mandate and these problems continued throughout 2023. This makes it even more important that the EU and its Member States continue their political support, its cooperation with the OSCE on project work and is actively engaged in the efforts to solve the OSCE's budgetary and administrative problems. The OSCE has always been a meeting place for countries that do not share similar views. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine this has made political dialogue in the OSCE very difficult, but it

also underlines its importance as one of the few organizations where countries with very different views can present their positions and listen to the position of others.

Regarding **bilateral relations with EaP countries**, the European Union continued providing **Ukraine** and its people very significant political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support. The EU response follows three main tracks:

- (i) wide-range support to Ukraine (the overall EU assistance to Ukraine and its people by the EU and its Member States amounts to almost EUR 100 billion);
- (ii) keeping pressure on Russia (isolating and holding Russia to account for its crimes, also at the multilateral level, as well as putting in motion different restrictive measures, specially to undermine its war military machinery); and
- (iii) global outreach to address the consequences of Russia's aggression (including on food and energy security).

The relations between the EU and Ukraine continue to be guided by the Association Agreement and its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. In December 2023, the EU decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, thereby paving the way for closer collaboration in all areas, including CFSP. The EU adopted in February 2024 the **Ukraine Facility** (EUR 50 billion for the years 2024-2027) to provide stable and sustainable financing to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction, and modernisation, including key reforms necessary on its EU accession track. EU support to Ukraine also includes around **EUR 35 billion of military support** (covering Member States' bilateral donations and through the European Peace Facility), humanitarian assistance (more than EUR 3 billion mobilised so far), and support made available to Member States for refugees. The decision was taken in March 2024 to establish the **Ukraine Assistance Fund** with a EUR 5 billion dedicated envelope in the European Peace Facility. At the end of May 2024, more than 50,000 Ukrainian soldiers have completed training under the umbrella of the **EU Military Assistance Mission** (EUMAM), with a target of reaching 60,000 by the summer.

The civilian **EU Advisory Mission** (EUAM) continues to implement its mandate for civilian security sector reform. The Mission advises Ukraine in accelerating civilian security sector reforms in preparation for EU accession, most notably through the Action Plan for the Overarching Strategy Plan for the Reform of the Entire Law Enforcement Sector 2023-2027. At the same time, the Mission supports Ukraine in meeting urgent wartime challenges such as the investigation and prosecution of international crimes and building policing capacities of law enforcement agencies in preparation for their deployment to liberated territories. The Mission also extensively supports government-led efforts by engaging with women's civil society and organising training for the office of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Customs Service and law enforcement agencies, the Security Service of Ukraine and the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine. Furthermore, EUAM has supported the National Academy of the National Guard of Ukraine, and the National Academy of State Border Guard.

Throughout the year, the EU and Ukraine increased its cooperation in the field of CFSP through intensive contacts at all levels and regular meetings at top level. On 20 March 2024, the EU-Ukraine Association Council took place in Brussels.

In December 2023, the **European Council** decided to open accession negotiations with the **Republic of Moldova**. The **European Council** also invited the Council to adopt the respective negotiating frameworks once the relevant steps set out in the Commission recommendations of 8 November 2023 are taken: on 1) justice reform, 2) anti-corruption and 3) de-oligarchisation. In the **European Council** Conclusions of 21-22 March 2024, EU leaders welcomed the progress made by Moldova on its path to EU membership and invited the Council to adopt the draft negotiating frameworks.

Despite intensifying pressure from Russia and its proxies that continued hybrid actions seeking to destabilise the country, Moldova remained committed to pursuing the necessary reforms and advancing on its EU path. Moldova also continued to show strong solidarity with Ukraine, notably by hosting people fleeing the war and playing a vital role in the Solidarity Lanes. The country also continued to support the EU's efforts in international fora, including by aligning for the first time in November 2023 with individual sanctions on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, listing numerous Russian individuals and entities. Overall, Moldova has substantially increased its **CFSP alignment** from 54% in 2022 to 80% in 2023. The alignment rate **in May 2024 reached 86%**.

The EU and Moldova continued enhancing their **cooperation on security and defence**, with the objective to strengthen Moldova's overall resilience. This cooperation was elevated to a new strategic level, with the conclusion of a **Security and Defence Partnership**, encompassing the existing areas of cooperation and dialogue, as well as identifying new opportunities for joint actions, signed on the margins of EU-Moldova Association Council on 21 May 2024. The third meeting of the High Level Political and Security Dialogue took place in April 2024. The **EU Partnership Mission to Moldova (EUPM)**, inaugurated by the High Representative on 1 June 2023 in Chisinau, continued providing valuable assistance to Moldovan institutions in developing crisis management structures and enhancing their capacity to counter hybrid threats and foreign information manipulation and interference. During its first year, the Mission helped set up the National Cyber Security Agency and the National Centre for Strategic Communications and Countering Disinformation. Moreover, EUPM Moldova supports the Prime Minister's Office in coordinating the country's crisis management structures in order to pool existing state resources and to streamline the government response to crises.

The EU continued providing support to the modernisation of Moldova's defence capabilities through the European Peace Facility (EUR 137 million for 2021-2024), placing Moldova among the main beneficiaries of this kind of assistance. Two packages of listings under the framework for restrictive measures against individuals and entities who seek to destabilize Moldova were adopted in May 2023 and February 2024 respectively, and the restrictive measures were prolonged in April 2025 for another year. The measures currently apply to 11 individuals and 1 entity.

The EU remained firm in its commitment to a comprehensive, peaceful and sustainable settlement of the **Transnistrian conflict** and supported continued dialogue between the sides, in view of further confidence-building and to avoid destabilisation. The implementation of the Association Agreement continued and political dialogue advanced with the EU-Republic of Moldova Association Council held on 21 May 2024.

In December 2023, the **European Council** granted the status of candidate country to **Georgia**, on the understanding that the relevant nine steps set out in the Commission recommendation of 8 November 2023 are taken. In spite of Georgia's stated objective of joining the EU, Georgia backtracked on its

commitments, putting forward controversial legislative initiatives. Despite repeated and unequivocal calls by the EU and international community to not go forward, on **28 May 2024**, the Georgian Parliament decided to override the President's veto and to definitely adopt a **law on “transparency of foreign influence”**, incompatible with EU values and standards. The Venice Commission submitted an urgent opinion strongly calling the authorities to repeal the law. The reintroduction of this law prompted large protests by Georgian citizens, while intimidations, threats and physical assaults of protesters, civil society activists, politicians and journalists increased. The adoption of the law was accompanied by hostile anti-Western and anti-EU rhetoric by the Georgian officials culminating with claims that, by funding civil society and opposition, Western donors attempted to start a revolution “at least twice in the last three years”. In a statement issued with the Commission, the High Representative warned on 28 May that enactment of the law leads to backsliding on at least three out of the nine steps set out in the Commission's recommendation for candidate status endorsed by EU leaders and will negatively impact Georgia's EU path.

Georgia's security situation remained calm and stable despite the tense regional situation. In 2023, the EU supported Georgia's defence forces with EUR 30 million through the European Peace Facility. The measure for 2024 will be assessed depending on political developments in the country. The sixth round of the regular EU-Georgia Strategic Security Dialogue took place in January 2024. The EU continued its engagement in line with its Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy towards the occupied breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and continued to be involved in conflict resolution efforts, including through the work of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia and the EU Monitoring Mission (**EUMM Georgia**). The Mission continued its daily patrolling activities along Administrative Boundary Lines between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Through its confidence building activities, in particular the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism and the Hotline, the Mission contributed to de-escalation of potential volatile situations and facilitated constructive dialogue. Georgia aligned with the EU in all international initiatives supporting Ukraine at the United Nations and has provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine. However, it has not aligned with sanction regimes on Russia and Belarus and resumed direct flights with Russia in May 2023. Since then, the number of direct flights has been increasing. Overall, Georgia's record of alignment with the EU CFSP positions and decisions remains low (50% in 2023 and 49% so far in 2024).

The EU continued to support efforts towards lasting peace **between Azerbaijan and Armenia**, demonstrating its commitment to a peaceful and prosperous South Caucasus. The EU condemned Azerbaijan's 19-20 September 2023 military operation, resulting in a mass exodus of over 100 000 Karabakh Armenians, and swiftly provided humanitarian assistance. With more than 2000 patrols conducted since its launch in February 2023, the **EU Mission to Armenia (EUMA)** continued to be an important component of the EU's efforts in supporting peace and stability in the region. The Mission observes and reports on the situation on the ground, and contributes to EU-supported normalisation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenian counterparts expressed strong support for EUMA, highlighting a significant decrease in border incidents and increase of public opinion about the European Union since the Mission's deployment. In 2023, the EU also continued to support the mine clearance action activities in both Armenia and Azerbaijan and continued

providing the much needed support to help conflict-affected populations and improve livelihoods of vulnerable people in both countries.

The EU worked on strengthening bilateral relations and supporting the reform agenda with **Armenia** while supporting its democratic path through the implementation of the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Armenian authorities expressed the wish to give a positive impetus to EU-Armenia relations – as conveyed also by Prime Minister Pashinyan in his address to the European Parliament in October 2023. The heads of state and government at the **European Council** of 26-27 October 2023 invited the High Representative and the Commission to present options on how to best strengthen EU-Armenia relations “in all their dimensions”. The EU-Armenia Partnership Council, the second one since the entry into force of the CEPA, took place in February 2024, agreeing to launch work for an ambitious new EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda. An EU-US-Armenia high-level meeting in support of Armenia’s resilience took place on 5 April 2024 in Brussels, where the EU announced a EUR 270 million Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia for the period 2024-2027. The EU and Armenia have worked to deepen cooperation in security and defence. The second EU-Armenia Political and Security Dialogue took place in November 2023. After the successful launch of the EU Mission in Armenia in February 2023, the EU decided to strengthen the mission in December 2023 by increasing its staff from 138 to 209. In addition, the Council in April 2024 authorised the High Representative to launch negotiations with Armenia on the Framework Participation Agreement, paving way for Armenia to participate in the future EU CSDP missions and operations.

Azerbaijan remained a strategic energy partner as parts of the efforts to diversify energy sources. The EU continued cooperation with Azerbaijan to help diversify its economy, including through the EU’s Economic Investment Plan (EIP). The COP29, which Azerbaijan will host in the second half of 2024, is an opportunity for direct investments in renewable energy capacities and a decarbonised industry. At the same time, the EU underscored the importance of the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as the basis for the bilateral relationship.

In **Belarus**, human rights violations and repressions against all segments of the Belarusian society continued and worsened. The EU responded to this repression in a united way through its policy of Support, Solidarity, and Sanctions, which is outlined in Council conclusions adopted on 19 February 2024. Since the fraudulent 2020 presidential election, the EU has committed EUR 140 million in assistance to the Belarusian people. The EU has also progressively expanded its restrictive measures in light of the situation in Belarus and the regime’s support to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU has now adopted 7 packages of sanctions on Belarus. The EU continues to raise the human rights violations in international fora, to contribute to the international efforts to holding the perpetrators accountable and to assisting civil society and the democratic forces. The EU remains ready to invest up to EUR 3 billion in Belarus after a future democratic transition.

Following the unprovoked full-scale military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, **Russia** continued to escalate its war of aggression, which followed its aggression that started in 2014 with the illegal annexation of Crimea. The **European Council** continued its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

Along with like-minded partners, the EU successfully coordinated Russia's international condemnation and isolation. This has prevented Russia from being elected or re-elected to several bodies. For example, Russia failed to win back a seat in the Human Rights Council, the International Maritime Organisation's Council, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization Council. The EU continued to adopt unprecedented and hard-hitting sanctions packages. It imposed sectoral measures in several fields, constraining Russia's economic activities, as well as individual measures against a large number of individuals and entities, continuous human rights violations in the occupied Ukrainian territories, including the deportation of children. It adopted measures to tackle sanction circumvention, an increasing concern. The EU's sanctions have and will continue to have a significant effect on Russia's economy. They increased the cost of and curtailed the ability for Russia to carry out the war and showed the EU's determination and unity. The EU decided to use extraordinary profits generated by the immobilization of assets of the Russian Central Bank to support Ukraine, namely for further military support, as well as defence industry capacities and reconstruction of Ukraine. Moreover, the EU continued to support Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media inside and outside Russia.

Central Asia

The EU pursued its high-level political engagement with the countries of Central Asia as they continued to be confronted with the repercussions of regional instability and pressure from their neighbours.

The situation in Afghanistan and the continued Russian military aggression against Ukraine have generated security, political and economic challenges for the Central Asian region. **High-level visits** from the EU to the region included the second meeting between President of the European Council Charles Michel and the Heads of States of the five Central Asian countries in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, in June 2023, demonstrating the EU's keen geopolitical interest to strengthen relations with the region. The **19th EU-Central Asia Ministerial meeting**, chaired by the High Representative on 23 October 2023 in Luxembourg, for the first time in the presence of the 27 EU Member States foreign ministers, adopted a **Joint Roadmap for Strengthening Relations between the EU and Central Asia**. It includes 79 action points, focusing on regional stability and resilience, including water management, counterterrorism, border security and support for civil society and democracy.

Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreements are either in force (**Kazakhstan**), about to be signed (the **Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan**) or being negotiated (**Tajikistan**). The EU's engagement with Central Asia was also illustrated by the conclusion of the agreement of an EU-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership on Sustainable Raw Materials, Batteries and Renewable Hydrogen Value Chains in April 2024. The EU continues to be closely engaged with the five Central Asian countries on compliance with international sanctions against Russia and Belarus, including through the EU's Special Envoy on Sanctions, Mr David O'Sullivan.

Middle East and North Africa

The situation in the Middle East and especially the **Middle East Peace Process** became of even greater importance for the EU in 2023 following the Hamas terrorist attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza that has ensued from Israel's military operation in

Gaza. The situation has been discussed regularly at the **Foreign Affairs Council**, as well as the **European Council**, including in extraordinary meetings, with a focus on protecting all civilians in line with international law and international humanitarian law, the unconditional release of all of the hostages and provision of humanitarian aid, preventing regional spill-over, and reviving a political process leading to the two-state solution. In November 2023, the High Representative visited Israel, the occupied Palestinian territory, Bahrain, Qatar, and Jordan to pass these messages. Messages to Iran for de-escalation have also been conveyed by the High Representative on several occasions.

Prior to the terrorist attacks of 7 October, the EU was working on restoring the Middle East peace efforts by convening the Peace Day Effort on 18 September 2023 at the UN, New York. The Ministerial event was co-chaired by the High Representative and the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States. Earlier in the year, the EU/High Representative co-hosted together with Norway the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) in Brussels on 3 May and in New York in September 2023. The EU continued to work to enhance bilateral relations with Israel and Palestine, building on the bilateral activities in 2022. The EU and its Member States remained among the largest supporters of the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The two CSDP missions in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to play an important role in the institutional capacity building of the Palestinian Authority. **EUPOL COPPS**, which currently operates only in the West Bank, has contributed to the establishment of more effective and sustainable policing and a wider criminal justice arrangements under Palestinian ownership, as well as to the reform of the security and justice sector. **EUBAM Rafah** continues to support and assist the Palestinian Authority and its General Administration for Borders and Crossings in Jericho in their capacity for Integrated Border Management. The 27 May FAC brought about a political agreement for the EEAS to explore the redeployment of the mission, in coordination with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and the UN.

In 2023, the EEAS continued implementing the Partnership Priorities adopted in 2022 with **Jordan and Egypt**, notably through the regular cycle of institutional meetings, paving the way for both Association Councils in 2024. With Egypt, relations intensified across policy areas, with steps ranging from the signing of a Joint Declaration on a Water Partnership to the first Counter-terrorism dialogue, as well as with the signing of the EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership on 17 March 2024 and the Association Council in January 2024. The EU continued to support Jordan's triple modernisation process (political/economic/administrative) during the visit of King Abdullah II on 7 November to Brussels, including through a substantial support package of EUR 902 million in grants and loans. The EU is considering the deployment of an EU Election Observation Mission to accompany the 2024 parliamentary elections in Jordan.

In **Syria**, the EEAS has continued to support the Syrian-led, UN-facilitated political process for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and to be the first donor in support of the Syrian people. Through the Brussels Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the Region (8th edition held in April-May 2024) the EU has continued to mobilise international efforts both on advancing the political solution and raising pledges for assistance in Syria and in neighbouring countries, raising EUR 7.5 billion for 2024 and beyond.

In **Lebanon**, the EEAS has been urging Lebanese leaders to decisively address the institutional vacuum, with no President in office, a care-taker government, and the growing socio-economic crisis, through meaningful reforms, also with a view to responding to the regional challenges.

From October 2023, **Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria** have all been seriously affected – in political, security, and/or socio-economic terms – by the war in Gaza and its consequences. Following the gradual aggravation of the situation around the Lebanon-Israel border, the EEAS urged all parties to de-escalate and engage in diplomatic efforts towards the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The EEAS and the High Representative have deployed intense diplomatic efforts, and mobilized EU institutions including via high-level visits, to urge regional de-escalation, respond to humanitarian needs, assist states and societies weather increased challenges and support regional peace efforts.

The EEAS continued to actively implement the Joint Communication on A **Strategic Partnership with the Gulf** (2022), strengthening and deepening relations with the Gulf partners, with a strong focus on cooperation with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and United Arab Emirates on Middle East peace efforts and also on the continuing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, (e.g. preparation for a Summit/high-level meeting on Peace in Ukraine) and prevention of the circumvention of sanctions against Russia. The EU continued the institutional engagement with the **Gulf Cooperation Council** (GCC) based on the agreed strategy for the Gulf. The EU-GCC Joint Council (October 2023, Muscat) included the launch of an EU-GCC Security Dialogue (January 2024, Riyadh), aiming to establish a close cooperation on key areas of common interests such as maritime security, all the more important in light of the current situation in the Red Sea, cyber and hybrid threat, disaster preparedness and response, non-proliferation and counter-terrorism.

After the formation of new government in **Iraq** in autumn 2022, the EU revamped its institutional engagement with Iraq, holding after a 7-year hiatus the third **EU-Iraq Cooperation Council** (ministerial level) in Brussels in March 2023. Concrete deliverables of the **EU-Iraq Cooperation Council** were the agreement on a Joint Declaration on sustainable development, green transition, governance, regional connectivity and sustainable finance, and the establishment of the new Development Cooperation Subcommittee. **The European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Iraq** continues to contribute to the civilian aspects of Iraqi Security Sector Reform, including the Iraqi National Security Strategy and helps to ensure coherence of European Union action in this area, together with the EU Delegation in Iraq. Despite a challenging political and security situation on the ground, EUAM Iraq has progressed steadily with the implementation of its mandate and is seen as a trusted and reliable partner by its Iraqi counterparts.

The EU continued to support the UN-led peace efforts in **Yemen**, as well as regional initiatives and welcomed the 23 December announcement by UN Special Envoy Grundberg on a Roadmap agreed among the parties on the main principles of an UN-led peace process towards a final comprehensive and inclusive peace in the country. Following the continuous Houthi attacks against European commercial vessels, the EU launched the maritime **Operation ASPIDES** on 19 February in order to protect maritime shipping, safeguard maritime security and ensure freedom of navigation from the Red Sea to the Gulf, including also a large part of the North-West Indian Ocean. The operation protected over 140 vessels and repelled more than a dozen of Houthi attacks.

Building on its multi-dimensional Partnership, the EU continued shaping its dialogue and cooperation with **Morocco**, with various exchanges and high-level contacts throughout the year. On 8 May the first EU – Morocco High Level Dialogue on Security took place. It provided an opportunity for exchanging on regional and broader security developments and identifying potential areas of cooperation.

The EU continued its engagement with **Algeria**, with a particular focus on enhancing the energy partnership, which is successfully implemented and still offers potential for mutually beneficial expansion. Discussions also addressed other areas of joint interest in which cooperation can be stepped up, such as regional security.

The EU continued to actively engage and provide assistance to **Tunisia**, which remained in a delicate political and socio-economic situation. Contacts at various levels were maintained during the year and included official working visits of EU Commissioners and Member States Ministers of Foreign Affairs on behalf of High Representative Borrell. The President of the Commission visited the country twice, to announce and witness the signature of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding on 16 July 2023, which outlines a range of joint priorities to be implemented.

In **Libya**, the EU's efforts focused on fostering stability both in the country and the wider region. The EU remained engaged with partners, supporting the inter-Libyan dialogue and mediation efforts in the UN framework. The EU also continued its engagement in Libya through Operation **EUNAVFOR MED IRINI**, which enforces the UN arms embargo, and the **EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission (EUBAM)**, which provides capacity-building to Libyan authorities in the areas of border management and law enforcement. The Mission continued to provide advice, facilitate trainings and equipment to Libyan interlocutors. EUBAM also has the mandate to coordinate activities of other EU actors operating in Libya.

The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** continued its work towards enhanced regional development, cooperation, and integration. The EU has remained fully engaged in supporting the UfM's reform efforts to enhance its efficiency and visibility. However, in light of the war in Gaza, the Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean on 27 November focused on the critical situation in the Middle East, regional consequences of the war, and the way forward.

Some good examples of Global Gateway initiatives, with a transformational, regional, and cross-regional connectivity dimension, were launched in 2023 (e. g. MEDUSA, ELMED, the Aqaba Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance Project).

The EU continued to implement its comprehensive policy approach of critical engagement towards Iran, considering all options at its disposal. Within this framework, the High Representative kept diplomatic channels open with his counterpart through regular contact on all issues of concern while remaining ready to engage where interests align.

The EU continued followed closely the human rights situation in the country, including of those arrested in connection with the 2022 protests and urged **Iran** to refrain from imposing and carrying out death sentences against protesters. The EU also contributed to accountability by supporting the UN fact finding mission and by adopting 10 two additional packages of restrictive measures for serious Human Rights violations. The EU also called on Iran to pursue a consistent policy towards the abolition of capital punishment and to end the disturbing practice of arbitrary detention, including

of EU citizens. The EU strongly condemned Iran's military support to Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine and in response established a dedicated framework for restrictive measures in July 2023. Following the unprecedented drone and missile attack by Iran on Israel in April 2024, the Council broadened the scope of these restrictive measures in view of Iran's military support for armed groups in the Middle East and Red Sea region. Following the attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October 2024 and the ensuing war in Gaza, the High Representative's regular engagement with his Iranian counterpart was important to pass messages of restraint and to urge Iran to use its influence on actors in the region not to contribute to further escalation. The High Representative, as coordinator of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) Joint Commission, continued to be in touch with all parties including Iran and the US to preserve space for nuclear diplomacy based on the JCPOA. This is still the best way to address the Iranian nuclear programme, which is expanding at an alarming rate.

Africa

In Africa, the EU continued to advance the implementation of the commitments under the Joint Vision for 2030 agreed during the 6th European Union - African Union Summit (February 2022): i) Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package worth EUR 150 billion; ii) peace, security and governance; iii) migration and mobility; and iv) multilateralism.

Africa has been very actively advancing its quest for greater representation in the international system. The European Council sent a strong signal in supporting the **African Union's (AU)** reinforced presence in international fora, notably the **AU's permanent membership of the G20**. The ensuing G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration of September 2023 welcoming Africa as new permanent member of the G20 was a positive development. The EU Political and Security Committee and the AU Peace and Security Council held an informal dialogue meeting in Addis Ababa on 1 March 2024.

The 19th **EU-AU annual dialogue on human rights** held in Addis Ababa on 25 January 2024 allowed both actors to review and reinforce their cooperation on human rights and democracy, with discussions paying specific attention to 'Safeguarding the Right to Education in Africa and Europe.'

Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean

The EU further deepened its partnership with the countries of the region and with the **South Africa Development Community (SADC)**. It continued working on the development of stronger relations with **Angola** as it held the 6th EU-Angola Ministerial Meeting end of 2023 and signed with the latter the first ever Sustainable Investments Facilitation Agreement worldwide. Its engagement with **South Africa** remained intense, with the organisation of the two Dialogues early 2024 (Political and Security Dialogue Forum; Human Rights Dialogue) and the visit to Pretoria of the Ambassadors of the EU Peace and Security Committee.

The **EU and SADC** agreed to have their biennial Ministerial Dialogue in June 2024 in Luanda to exchange on their respective political and security situations, to discuss regional cooperation in the context of Global Gateway and to take stock of the implementation of the bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement and other trade and investment initiatives. With **Mozambique**, the EU remained fully engaged in its support to fight armed violence in Cabo Delgado, notably with the

training of more than 1,650 Mozambican special forces soldiers between end 2021 and spring 2024 through the **European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mozambique**.

The EU increased its cooperation with **Zambia** with the signature of a Critical Raw Materials Partnership and launched the Global Gateway Lobito corridor project linking Angola, Zambia and Democratic Republic of the Congo. It also promoted close links between its business community and local partners to boost investments in both directions, in particular with the organisation of Business Fora in the region (Botswana, Angola, Mozambique, and Zambia) and in Brussels (with Namibia).

In terms of elections and democracy, the EU sent an Elections Observation Mission to **Zimbabwe** where the democratic and civic space further contracted. The EU concluded that the elections on 23 August 2023 fell short of international standards. The EU also sent Election Experts Missions to **Madagascar** (elections of 16 November 2023) and to **Comoros** (elections of 14 January 2024), both marked by tensed political environments. The EU has been invited to observe the elections in Mozambique (7 October 2024) and sent experts to **South Africa** (elections of 29 May 2024).

Finally, in the context of its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the EU became a Dialogue Partner of the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** based in Mauritius and confirmed its role as security provider in the Indian Ocean with the conclusion of an EU-**Seychelles** agreement to fight drugs and arms trafficking off the coast of Somalia.

Western Africa

The region faced many challenges in 2023, suffering notably from political instability, in particular with the coup in **Niger** (July 2023) and the continuous house arrest of President Bazoum since then.

In early 2024, the central Sahel military regimes (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) announced their decision to leave the Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**) and joined in a new group called “Alliance des États du Sahel” (AES), plunging ECOWAS in deep political crisis. The weakening of the regional organisations also touched coordination bodies such as the G5 Sahel, now only composed of Mauritania and Chad.

In 2023-2024, the **Regional Advisory Coordination Cell in Sahel (RACC)** has contributed to the Libya-Sahel Coordination Forum and “one desert” initiative on border management. Its five security and defence experts hosted in EU Delegations advised, identified and followed the identification and implementation of EU projects. They also organised workshops to increase civilian participation in the security mechanisms and advised and coordinated training for security and defence forces regionally and nationally.

The EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM) established in Niger in December 2022, as well as the **European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger)** are now de facto closed. Since the coup in Niger in July 2023, all activities of EUCAP Sahel Niger have been suspended. Following the request made by the de facto authorities in December 2023, EUCAP Sahel Niger has started its withdrawal from Niger with the objective to achieve it by the end of its current mandate on 30 September 2024. At present all international mission members have left the country. Several EPF assistance measures adopted in 2022-2023 have also been terminated or suspended, and an EU autonomous sanction regime framework has been adopted by the Council (no individuals listed so far).

In **Mali**, the current political situation led to the non-renewal of the **European Union Training Mission (EUTM)** mandate and therefore the closure of the mission on 18 May 2024, while the **European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali)** remains. In 2023-2024, **EUCAP Sahel Mali** continued to work on the strengthening of the operational and institutional capacity of the Malian Internal Security Forces through advice, training and projects. Of particular interest is EUCAP Sahel Mali's engagement in building a stand-alone capacity to deliver training within the Malian Internal Security Forces, and the focus on border management, including migration flows, human trafficking and migrants smuggling and document fraud.

Situation also considerably worsened in **Burkina Faso**, in particular on the security and humanitarian side, but also with unprecedented exactions and human rights violations as well as a growing authoritarian turn of the transition regime. Most of the EU instruments and actions, in particular related to security, remain suspended.

With several high-level visits to Brussels, **Mauritania**, the current Chair of the African Union, remained a key partner of the EU in the region, in particular regarding security and migration.

Meanwhile, the partnership with several **coastal countries of West Africa** has also been strengthened. The HRVP visited Ghana in October 2023. The President of the **European Council** visited Senegal, **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Benin** in April 2024. The EU launched a new CSDP initiative for the Gulf of Guinea in **Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin in December 2023**. The EU has been implementing an integrated approach to help building stability as well as long-term socio-economic development to address root causes of the conflicts in the region as well as the continuous important challenges related to migration.

All these challenges were also raised with **Guinea**, where the EU is progressively reengaging after the 2021 coup, even though the transition is running at a very slow pace. The EU also engaged with **Nigeria** to support outreach to third countries with regard to the global consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to encourage its regional role as it currently chairs the ECOWAS. Ministerial meetings are foreseen for 2024 or early 2025 with both Nigeria and ECOWAS.

Regarding maritime security in the **Gulf of Guinea**, the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept helps to address the security challenges affecting freedom of navigation. It has contributed to reduce maritime security incidents and enhanced the cooperation with coastal countries. In December 2023, the "**EU Security and Defence Initiative**" (EUSDI) was created in support of West African Countries of the Gulf of Guinea. The Initiative has a civilian and a military pillar. It consists of civilian and military advisers hosted in the EU Delegations of coastal countries (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo), bringing operational expertise to strengthen the EU dialogue with local authorities in the field of security and defence and to help identifying potential requests to reinforce defence and security forces capabilities and the regional efforts to fight terrorism.

Regarding elections in the region, the EU sent Election Observation Missions to **Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone** in 2023, and to **Senegal** in 2024, while expert missions will cover the presidential election in **Mauritania** (June 2024) and in **Ghana** (December 2024). Despite notable exceptions such as the positive outcome of the presidential election in Liberia and, after some complications, in Senegal, the region also faced several worrying dynamics in terms of governance, democracy and human rights. The region also suffered from macro-economic and debt sustainability challenges,

while the geopolitical landscape continued to have implications on many countries. Hostile views towards the West are increasing in a tense geopolitical environment affecting the entire region. This complex and sometimes hostile environment led the EU to adapt its overall political approach and to work specifically on strategic communication and against disinformation and foreign interference.

Central Africa

In 2023-2024, the **EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic (EUAM RCA)** continued to support the Central African Internal Security Forces (ISF) and their modernization in structural and organizational reform. EUAM RCA also actively took part in the co-drafting of legislation, the reinforcement of the penal chain and the interoperability of all security providers. The EU continued to monitor and take precautions to avoid that its assistance to the CAR authorities, including the training and advice provided by the European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic (EUTM RCA) and EUAM RCA, be misused by Wagner-affiliated forces, while continuing to work for the benefit of the population of CAR.

The EU held consultations on security and defence with **Rwanda**, the first such consultations with a Sub-Saharan Africa partner. The EU continued to support the difficult transition process in **Chad** and consistently encouraged a peaceful resolution of the crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. The EU condemned the coup d'état in **Gabon** and called for the restauration of the constitutional order. In **the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, the EU was unable to deploy an Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) to the general elections in December 2023, because the authorities refused to clear the use of communication equipment necessary for our observers to work in a safe and independent condition across the country. Instead, the EU maintained a small mission of electoral experts who followed the elections from the capital, Kinshasa. In addition to swiftly transposing any applicable UN sanction regime, the EU regularly reviewed and adapted its autonomous restrictive measures against human rights violators and conflict drivers in the DRC and **Burundi** and calibrated its Global Human Rights Sanctions regime to individual and entities operating in the **Central African Republic (CAR)**.

The EU started implementing the various strands of its new **Great Lakes Strategy** adopted in February 2023 via the support to the regional initiatives to restore peace and security in the eastern part of the DRC (the Nairobi and Luanda processes) and the conclusion of raw material partnerships to foster the development of "sustainable" value chains. The EU also adopted an assistance measure under the European Peace Facility to support the Yaoundé Architecture and strengthen the capacities of military actors and navies of selected coastal states – including **Cameroon** – involved in maritime security operations in the Gulf of Guinea.

Horn of Africa and East Africa

The EU continued to work on developing stronger relations with the countries of the region, especially through an intensified political dialogues, notably with **Kenya**, a key pillar of stability in the region. The signature of a landmark Economic Partnership Agreement in late December 2023 is one of the many concrete successes of this partnership. The EU-Kenya Strategic Dialogue holds particular importance and serves as a political testimony to this close and strong relationship.

The already fragile political and security situation in the Horn of Africa deteriorated markedly, in particular due to the escalating war in Sudan and the start of Houthi attacks on ships in the Bab el

Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden. The EU continued to invest in the development, stability and security of the countries in the region. The degradation of maritime security in the Red Sea led to the decision to deploy **the Operation EUNAVFOR ASPIDES** in 2024, to protect the freedom of navigation through a defensive mission. The operation underpins the EU's role as a maritime security provider, in close cooperation with countries in the region.

After a year of armed conflict, Sudan became the largest displacement crisis in the world with over 11 million people displaced in and out of the country. At the one-year mark of the conflict in 2024, the EU together with France and Germany co-organized an International Humanitarian conference for Sudan and its neighbouring countries where humanitarian funding was increased to respond to the ever-growing needs of the calamitous humanitarian situation in the country. The EU remains actively engaged with the civilian forces of the country and has adopted a first set of restrictive measures early 2024 against six entities undermining the stability of the country under its new EU autonomous restrictive measures regime on Sudan which was adopted by the **European Council** in 2023.

In April 2023, FAC adopted Council Conclusions on **Ethiopia** for a gradual normalization of relations following the signature of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022. However, progress is slow, notably on the front of accountability and transitional justice. The situation in Amhara and Oromo regions are source of concern.

In **South Sudan**, the EU continued to support the implementation of the peace agreement, given the fast-approaching end of the transitional period in February 2025.

The EU-Somalia Joint Operational Roadmap adopted in May 2023, as well as the Council Conclusions on **Somalia** of June 2023, reaffirmed the EU's continued commitment to supporting Somalia in its state-building process, its security transition, as well as its socio-economic development. The EU has continued its engagement through its three CSDP missions: 1) The military European Union Training Mission (**EUTM**) **Somalia**, providing training to Somalia's National Army, 2) the civilian European Union Capacity Building Mission (**EUCAP**) **Somalia**, providing capacity building to Somalia's police and civilian maritime security authorities, and 3) the maritime Operation **EUNAVFOR Atalanta**, deterring piracy and combatting illicit trafficking off Somalia's coast.

In 2023-2024, EUCAP Somalia has enhanced Somali Navy and Coast Guard and Maritime Police Units and has refurbished the Somali Police Force Federal offices. It has also supported the creation of an Integrated Fisheries Management System. In Somaliland, the Mission has seen positive results by pursuing a "training of trainers" concept approach. As Somalia enters a crucial phase in the fight against al-Shabaab with the scheduled drawdown of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) by the end of 2024, the EU will continue to work with all international partners to support Somalia in its security transition. Furthermore, the EU is committed to supporting Somalia to achieve a lasting constitutional settlement, as this is a necessary pre-condition for stability and security.

Asia-Pacific

The EU's Strategy on Cooperation in the **Indo-Pacific** provides the framework for the intensification of the EU's engagement and the strengthening of partnerships with countries across the region. The increased geopolitical competition saw the EU working with partners to enhance mutual resilience.

The third EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum on 2 February 2024 brought together around 70 countries and organisations to discuss how to enhance cooperation in the fields of sustainable prosperity, green transition and security. The EU hosted the first ever Pacific Day in the European Parliament on 1 February 2024. Both events demonstrated the EU's convening power and its increasing role in the Indo-Pacific, under the new Samoa Agreement.

EU relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) continue to advance, building on the success of the 2022 EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit. **Indonesia's 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship** led to an intensification of dialogue with ASEAN's largest member. The EU-ASEAN Plan of Action to Implement the Strategic Partnership (2023-27) was taken forward, with the High Representative reviewing progress at the EU-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in Jakarta in July 2023, where he also took part in the ASEAN Regional Forum.

At the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum in September 2023, the EU presented 22 Global Gateway Team Europe projects contributing to green infrastructure and resilient supply chains, sustainable and innovative financing, and digital transformation in ASEAN. The High Representative hosted a full EU-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels on 2 February 2024.

Concerning bilateral relations with ASEAN Member States, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements signed with **Malaysia** and **Thailand** received the consent of the European Parliament in June 2023, allowing the agreement with Thailand to be provisionally applied as soon as the new Thai parliament has granted its consent. For the first time, a President of the Commission visited the **Philippines** in July 2023. The EEAS has continued to follow up on the mutual commitments made during the visit, including enhancing maritime cooperation. The EU worked closely with the Indonesian and Lao ASEAN Chairs to address the situation in **Myanmar**. Following the 2021 military coup, the Council continued to extend its targeted sanctions on those responsible for the coup and for the suppression of democracy, as well as against entities which provide financial and other support to the military regime. The EU continued to support ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus to address the Myanmar crisis, advocated for a global arms embargo and deepened its engagement with the National Unity Government and other anti-coup stakeholders. The EU continued the temporary and partial withdrawal of so-called Everything but Arms trade preferences from **Cambodia** due to serious human rights concerns. The EU sought in particular to engage new governments in Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand to strengthen bilateral relations.

The EU's multifaceted approach to **China** was confirmed by the **European Council** Conclusions on China on 30 June 2023. China's positioning on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine remained at the centre of exchanges between the EU and China at all levels and continued to have an impact on EU-China relations. While engagement with China has continued, de-risking aims at strengthening resilience by addressing critical dependencies and concerns persist over economic imbalances. Throughout the past year, the EU also expressed concerns for growing tensions across the Taiwan Strait, as well as in the South China Sea. The EU repeatedly called for dialogue, restraint and the respect of international law.

Relations with **Taiwan** continued to be developed in line with the EU's One China Policy. The EU expressed concerns about the erosion of fundamental freedoms and of autonomy in **Hong Kong**,

referring in particular to the implementation of the National Security Law and to the adoption of Hong Kong's 'Safeguarding National Security Ordinance', as well as continuing to observe trials.

The partnership with **Mongolia** was further strengthened during the reporting period, inter alia through the holding of the EU-Mongolia Development Working Group and the EU-Mongolia Human Rights Dialogue, the EU-Mongolia Joint Committee in Brussels and the EU-Mongolia Sub-Committee on Trade.

The EU continued deepening its ties with **India**, holding several rounds of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement, as well as an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications. The very first meeting of the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was held in May 2023 followed by regular meetings of the three TTC working groups, focusing on strategic technologies, digital governance and connectivity, green and clean energy, and trade and investment. There was positive momentum in security and defence cooperation with four dialogues held on cyber and maritime security, counter-terrorism, and non-proliferation. A first joint naval exercise (involving IN, FR, IT and ES) was held in the Gulf of Guinea in October 2023.

Bilateral relations with **Bangladesh** further intensified with the participation of Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina at the Global Gateway Forum in October 2023 and the launch of the start of negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The EEAS also continued, jointly with the European Commission, to monitor respect for labour and wider human rights conditions linked to the preferential trade schemes benefiting several partners in **South Asia**, notably Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The EU also reviewed its development assistance to support those most affected by the financial and economic crisis in **Sri Lanka** and fielded an Election Observation Mission to the **Maldives**.

The **EU-Japan Summit** of July 2023 bore testimony to the increasingly deep and dynamic strategic partnership between the EU and Japan. Bilateral relations continue to grow under the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement, and in view of unprecedented global challenges to peace and stability. Likewise, the EU-Republic of **Korea** Summit of May 2023 underscored once more our rich strategic partnership. At both summits, the leaders agreed to establish a strategic dialogue at foreign minister level and to further develop respective bilateral security and defence partnerships.

Afghanistan's already dire humanitarian and economic situation further deteriorated, as the Taliban continued to violate systematically the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Afghan people, especially of women and girls. The **Foreign Affairs Council** guided the EU's approach to Afghanistan through the Council Conclusions of March 2023, in addition to those of September 2021. The EU remains at the forefront of a principled approach to provide humanitarian and basic needs assistance to the Afghan people, supporting women and girls, without recognizing the Taliban *de-facto* authorities. The EU also adopted additional Global Human Rights Sanctions against two acting Ministers and the acting Chief Justice in July 2023. The **Safe Passage Task Force** continued the operations to allow those at risk to leave Afghanistan. The **EU Special Envoy for Afghanistan** engaged in dialogue with the Taliban-appointed interim government in line with the Council Conclusions and represented the EU in the UN Secretary-General convened meetings on Afghanistan in Doha.

On 8 February 2024, **Pakistan** held long-overdue general elections, described by experts as the most divisive and polarising electoral process in Pakistan's 76-year long history. Despite the fact that elections took place in a relatively peaceful atmosphere, security concerns persist in particular in relation to increased activity of terrorist organisations such as the Tehreek-e Taliban of Pakistan and of Da'esh Khorasan Province. The EU-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue took place in April, after a 5-year pause. The EEAS also engaged in several bilateral meetings and dialogues at different levels, where human rights issues including the blasphemy laws and enforced disappearances, as well as trade relations, sustainable development, migration and regional security issues, especially as regards Afghanistan, were raised.

Exchanges with **Australia** on foreign and security concerns grew under the EU-Australia Framework Agreement, while cooperation on climate, energy and the environment also developed well alongside progress towards a bilateral partnership on critical raw materials. The EU-Australia Memorandum of Understanding for a bilateral partnership to cooperate on sustainable critical and strategic minerals was signed on 28 May 2024. Following the conclusion of negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement between the EU and **New Zealand**, the FTA formally entered into force on 1 May 2024.

Americas

The United States and Canada

The EU further deepened the excellent relations with the United States and Canada in the second half of 2023 and early 2024.

This included work on a range of global challenges, with transatlantic unity on Ukraine a major ongoing priority for the EU. The EU continued to work in lockstep with the United States and Canada, including through the G7, to provide substantial financial, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine. The EU also coordinated closely with both partners on other foreign policy priorities, such as on the situation in the Middle East, the Western Balkans, the Caucasus, China, and the Indo-Pacific and in multilateral fora, in particular the UN.

In October 2023, the EU-US Summit consolidated the unprecedented gains achieved since 2021, notably in the areas of trade and technology, energy and climate, security and defence, justice and home affairs and people-to-people contacts. The EU-US Summit did not yet materialise in an agreement on Critical Minerals or an agreement on Global Sustainable Steel and Aluminium. Still, negotiations continue while progress has been made on various key issues.

The High Representative held regular meetings with US Secretary of State Blinken (bilaterally, and at the G7 and G20 amongst others) on all critical foreign policy and security issues, including Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East. A reflection of the closeness of the relationship is that the Secretary of State once more attended the FAC in March 2024, for a fifth time since the beginning of his term.

Among highlights in the EU-US relationship in 2023 and early 2024, were the meetings of the Trade and Technology Council in Lulea (Sweden) on 31 May 2023, Washington DC (US) on 30 January 2024 and Leuven (Belgium) on 4-5 April 2024, aimed at advancing transatlantic coordination on

global trade challenges such as non-market policies and practices, secure and resilient supply chains, de-risking, global AI governance, and emerging technologies.

The second Security and Defence dialogue in December 2023 helped to deepen the EU-US understanding and cooperation on critical matters relating to Europe's security and defence and global security challenges. The eleventh EU-US Energy Council in March 2024 carried forward the joint work on energy security, promoting energy diversification and reducing dependence on fossil fuels, with a focus on achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. The second half of 2023 and early 2024 also saw the successful continuation of the EU-US Emerging Leaders Programme, which offers young US leaders a combined visit to Brussels and a Member State on a specific priority theme.

Relations between the EU and **Canada** further advanced during the reporting period, with the 19th bilateral Summit in November 2023 in Canada, reaffirming a strong alignment of values and views on geopolitical issues and delivering concrete results in the field of innovation, trade, climate and digital. The Summit set the stage for the years to come with the establishment of a Green Alliance, a Digital partnership, an Action Plan for the commercialisation of hydrogen, Canada's association to Horizon Europe (Pillar II), the finalisation of the negotiations of a Passenger Name Record (PNR) Agreement, the establishment of an economic security dialogue, and of a humanitarian dialogue. Engagement at the highest level has been remarkable with President of the European Commission visiting Canada twice (8 March and 23 November 2023) to advance cooperation on critical raw materials and energy in view of the strategic imperative to secure supplies as the EU ramps up its green transition. Bilateral cooperation has been advancing steadily with a number of high-level meetings, such as the 4th Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Joint Committee on 9 February on Commissioner Dombrovskis' level, and a meeting between High Representative Borrell and Foreign Minister Joly, as well as several committees and dialogues taking place on various policy fields during 2023 and 2024.

EU-Latin America and Caribbean relations

On 7 June 2023, the EU adopted a "New Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean". The New Agenda proposes a closer and renewed strategic partnership between EU and LAC as equal partners, through reinforced political engagement, boosting trade and investment, and building more sustainable and inter-connected societies.

The third EU-**CELAC** (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit was held in Brussels on 17 and 18 July 2023, eight years after the last one in this format in 2015. The Summit brought together sixty countries with 48 Heads of State or Government attending. Both regions agreed on an ambitious Joint Declaration that upholds our mutual commitment to multilateralism, to defend common values of democracy, human rights and a peaceful rules-based international order, as well as our shared interests, based on our strong economic, social and cultural ties. At the Summit, the EU and CELAC also adopted an updated bi-regional Roadmap 2023-2025.

On 17 July 2023, the EU and Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay agreed on an EU-LAC Digital Alliance. On the occasion of the Summit, bilateral Memoranda of Understanding on enhanced bilateral consultations were signed with Ecuador, El Salvador, and Honduras. Bilateral Memoranda

of Understanding on Energy were concluded with Argentina and Uruguay, and on Sustainable Value Chains in Critical Raw Materials with Chile.

On 21 November 2023, the FAC discussed the follow-up to the Summit focussing on the state of play of the Global Gateway Investment Agenda, starting with 130 projects and with a total budget estimated at EUR 45 billion, and how to address investment gaps in line with the common priorities agreed. On the same occasion, the Council adopted conclusions on the EU's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean which build on the Summit Declaration and provide the strategic orientation to the EU policies towards the region.

Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean

The EU continued to engage **Mexico**, one of its two strategic partners in Latin America, through high-level visits and policy dialogues. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen visited the country on 15 June 2023, and met with President Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador. Commission Vice-President Margaritis Schinas visited on 31 October and 1 November 2023. Dialogues at senior officials' level took place on human rights (November 2023), foreign policy matters (March 2024) and multilateral affairs (May 2024). The EU was Guest of Honour at the Guadalajara International Book Fair (the second-largest book trade fair in the world) in November-December 2023.

In Central America, as part of its support to democracy in the region, the EU deployed an Election Observation Mission to **Guatemala** to observe the Presidential and legislative elections held in June and August 2023. Following attempts to undermine the outcome of the Presidential vote, which resulted in a clear victory for Bernardo Arévalo, the EU on 12 January 2024 established a sanctions regime to hold accountable those obstructing the country's democratic transition. Five individuals directly responsible for such obstruction were listed on 2 February 2024. High Representative Borrell attended President Arévalo's inauguration on 15 January. The two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral consultations on the occasion of President Arévalo's visit to Brussels on 19-20 February. President Arévalo also met with **European Council** President Charles Michel during this visit.

In October 2023, in view of the situation in **Nicaragua**, the Council renewed EU's existing restrictive measures on 21 persons and three entities responsible for serious human rights violations or abuses, or for the repression of civil society and democratic opposition, as well as persons and entities whose actions, policies or activities undermine democracy and the rule of law in the country.

In October 2023, the EU and **El Salvador** held their first bilateral consultations under the Memorandum of Understanding which had been signed in July, in the margins of the EU-CELAC summit. The first bilateral consultations also took place with **Honduras** and **Guatemala** in May 2024.

In March 2024, the EU held bilateral consultations with **Costa Rica**, an important like-minded partner in the region with whom the EU has held steady and fruitful bilateral relations for the past 40 years. This was the 7th round of consultations under the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2009.

On 1 May 2024, the EU-Central America Association Agreement entered into force, following the completion of ratification procedures. The agreement covers political dialogue, cooperation and trade. It is designed to support economic growth, democracy and political stability in Central America and foster collaboration on a wide variety of issues of common interest.

With regard to the **Caribbean**, a dedicated EU-Caribbean Leaders meeting was held in the margins of the EU-CELAC summit in Brussels in July 2023. The two sides discussed progress for the approval process of the agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Pacific and Caribbean States (OACPS) which – with its dedicated Caribbean regional protocol – will provide the basis for further strengthening relations between the two regions. The agreement was signed in Samoa in November.

The EU continued to pursue its policy of constructive but critical engagement towards **Cuba**. EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore travelled to the island in November 2023 for the 4th EU-Cuba Human Rights Dialogue. He also held a range of other meetings with the authorities and with civil society, including families of detainees. The EU and Cuba held political and sectoral dialogues under the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement in Brussels from 18 to 25 April 2024.

The deteriorating and multifaceted crisis in **Haiti** is clearly unsustainable and its regional impact should not be underestimated (notably for its direct impact in terms of irregular migration and illicit arms trafficking). The EU remains engaged both politically and in terms of humanitarian, development and stabilisation assistance.

South America

In 2023, South America faced a complex landscape with socio-political-security turmoil (Peru, Ecuador and continued crisis in Venezuela) and governmental transitions (Brazil and, more recently, Argentina). The EU navigated through these challenges to uphold and strengthen diplomatic ties.

EU-Mercosur negotiations resumed in the second half of 2023, with intense negotiations and good progress.

Relations with **Brazil**, a strategic partner, intensified since President Lula took office in January 2023. The reactivation of the relations was well reflected in the major increase of EU political visits to Brazil in 2023, including President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen (June 2023), Executive Vice Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Frans Timmermans, Commissioners Elisa Ferreira, Virginijus Sinkevičius, Wopke Hoekstra and Vice-President Margaritis Schinas. Since June 2023, the EU has been relaunching a number of existing dialogues and establishing new ones in key areas of common interest, such as security and defence, environment, critical raw materials or UN matters.

The **EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement** was signed on 13 December 2023, after five years of negotiations. It is the most modern and ambitious agreement signed with LAC countries and it will allow the EU to strengthen political dialogue, deepen cooperation and foster trade and investment. Moreover, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on critical raw materials was signed in July 2023 and important cooperation projects on renewable hydrogen have been agreed.

Strategic cooperation with **Argentina and Uruguay** has also been enlarged to new priority areas with the signature of Memoranda of Understanding on energy and critical raw materials with Argentina, during the visit of President Von der Leyen in June 2023, and the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding on energy with Uruguay, in Brussels in July 2023. The EU is also exploring the possibility to extend cooperation with **Bolivia** in the areas of critical raw materials and renewable energy.

On **Venezuela**, the EU continues to support Venezuelan-led efforts towards a peaceful negotiated solution to the protracted political, social and economic crisis. As part of our efforts, the EEAS pursued its support to the negotiations between the opposition and the government (a partial political agreement was reached in October 2023 in Barbados). And, in the context of the presidential elections of 28 July 2024, the EU is actively supporting Venezuelan efforts towards more inclusive and competitive elections, making use of all available tools.

The EU has been steadily strengthening its relationship with **Colombia** with an engagement at high level, including through visits by the High Representative in May 2023 and Vice-President Schinas in November. Last December, at the high-level political dialogue in Bogota, the EU and Colombia launched the negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Political and financial support to the implementation of the peace process remains key in our partnership with the country.

In response to the rapid deterioration of security situation in **Ecuador**, the EU has launched a number of projects to assist the authorities in their fights against organised crime, such as emergency support to prison security in Ecuador; expertise to assess the security of Guayaquil's ports and support for the establishment of a National Intelligence and Coordination Centre. A senior officials' dialogue on security was created and a first meeting took place in March 2024 in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in the margins of the **EU-CELAC Summit** in July 2023. Increasing security challenges in other countries, such as **Peru and Paraguay** are also being monitored and cooperation with the authorities in this area is being explored.

EU Special Representatives (EUSRs)

Ten Special Representatives provided the EU with an active political presence in key areas: four EUSRs in the European neighbourhood (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia), two on the African continent (Sahel, Horn of Africa), two in Asia and the wider Middle East (Central Asia, Middle East Peace Process, the Gulf region), as well as one EUSR with a thematic mandate (Human Rights). Over the past year, under the leadership of the HRVP, EUSRs have played an active role in defusing tensions and contributing to peace and stability. The EEAS and the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) continued to collaborate to strengthen the general handling of the instrument in the context of an effective and cost-efficient CFSP.

(2) GLOBAL ISSUES

On **multilateral and global issues**, the EEAS has focused on three strategic priorities. First, standing up for the UN Charter, rules-based multilateralism, international law, and International Humanitarian Law, accountability, human rights and democracy. Second, supporting EU resilience and economic security, and managing the external dimension of EU thematic policies and amplifying a positive narrative in support of EU policies. Third, addressing the geopolitical consequences of conflicts and leveraging Global Gateway investments and Financing for Development in a Team Europe approach.

Regarding the first strategic priority on **multilateralism, human rights and democracy**, the United Nations was at the core of the EU's multilateral work as it continued working to foster more efficient, inclusive and participatory processes at the UN. The main event of 2023 was the UN 'SDG Summit' in September 2023. As a tangible expression of the EU's deep commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the EU presented its first ever SDGs implementation Voluntary Review in July 2023. The EU also supported the preparations for the UN Civil Society Conference 2024, held in Nairobi on 9-10 May 2024.

The EU has played a leading role in preparations for the UN Summit of the Future taking place on 22-23 September 2024, as well as the work on the UN Global Digital Compact (GDC) and Declaration for Future Generations. This included engagement with young people, women and stakeholders. Respecting longstanding commitments and working with multilateral partners, the EU continued to invest considerable resources and effort in supporting work to address the consequences of Russia's illegal war in Ukraine. EU continued to support candidates for election who are best able to represent the whole UN membership. The EU actively engaged in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2719 on financing African-led Peace Support Operations. Throughout the year, the EEAS consistently prioritised strengthening international partnerships, as exemplified by support for events like the Fourth UN International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4) and Third United Nations Conference on the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDC3) Conferences.

Regarding the G20, the EU's actively engaged with the emerging economies during the 2023 G20 Indian Presidency and the 2024 Brazilian Presidency. In this context, the EU has fully supported the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member at the G20.

In pursuit of the EU's **support of democracy** worldwide, the EU deployed important Electoral Missions in 2023 in Africa, Asia and Latin. These Missions are one of EU's most concrete, visible and effective tool to promote democracy, good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights. This included Observation Missions in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Liberia and Sierra Leone; the Maldives; Paraguay and Guatemala. European Union Election Observation Missions were granted the Wilson Award for Public Service for their important contribution in the defence of democracy across the world.

The EU continued to put **human rights** at the centre of EU foreign policy in a global context of increased regression on democracy and human rights. The EEAS used the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to underline the enduring importance of human rights for addressing and shaping responses to today's key challenges, including climate change and the digital transition.

In close cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), a social-media campaign mobilised youth for human rights. Many events were also organised across the world, including the “UDHR: Fit for Purpose” conference on 4 October 2023. The EU Special Representative for Human Rights reaffirmed the EU’s staunch support to the universality of human rights and presented EU pledges at a UN high-level Forum on 11-12 December 2023 in Geneva. The Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World was issued in July 2023, reflecting the achievements under the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy. As in previous years, the EU engaged in multiple human rights dialogues and consultations with partner countries from around the world, including in the Policy dialogue with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the EU-AU human rights dialogue. The EU also engaged closely with partners to reach consensus on EU initiatives at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. Enhanced attention was also given to fostering economic, social and cultural rights, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as well as business and human rights. EEAS further supported human rights in the digital area and the protection of human rights defenders online.

Within the first strategic priority, the EEAS continued to promote initiatives ensuring **accountability** for international crimes committed in the context of Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. It provided further support to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and to the investigations of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, notably through the EU Delegation to Ukraine, the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine, and the Kyiv-based Atrocity Crime Advisory Group. The EEAS continued to support accountability and international justice mechanisms, celebrating in 2023 the 25th anniversary of the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court, and advocating for the respect for International Humanitarian Law.

On **global health issues**, the EU engaged in the implementation of the 2022 EU Global Health Strategy. The EEAS contributed to the Council Conclusions on the Strategy adopted on 29 January 2024. Placing high priority to cooperation at multilateral level, the EU actively participated in the work of the UN General Assembly through the September 2023 high-level meetings on global health. The EU actively engaged in negotiations within the WHO framework on a new agreement to strengthen the capacity of the international community on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Regarding the second strategic priority of supporting **EU resilience and economic security**, the key achievement was the Joint Communication by the High Representative and the European Commission on a European Economic Security Strategy on 20 June 2023 which laid the basis to develop a comprehensive approach to economic security. The EEAS has been working with the Commission on the implementation of the strategy. On Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism, the EEAS contributed to Commission efforts to pursue effective implementation of international standards, in particular in the framework of the Financial Action Task Force.

A key EU policy field with a major external dimension is the **EU Green Deal**. To accelerate international efforts towards a climate-resilient transition, the EEAS and EU Delegations continued ambitious climate and energy diplomacy, addressing big emitters and small island developing states. Ahead of COP28 in Dubai, outreach on the ambitious targets to triple renewables deployment and double energy efficiency capacity by 2030 led to the adoption of a political Pledge at COP28 and the

inclusion of specific energy transition goals in the Global Stocktake COP28 decision. The EEAS continued to support the implementation of the Global Methane Pledge and the Just Energy Transition Partnerships, in particular to increase available global financing and strengthen relevant institutions. The EEAS continued specific environmental diplomacy by promoting the swift ratification of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement, by continuing to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework and by engaging with partners on the EU Deforestation Regulation. To strengthen transboundary water management the EU promoted the accession of partner countries to the UN Water Convention – the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. In March 2023, the Council adopted Council Conclusions on Green Diplomacy.

Besides the green transition, the **digital transition** will shape the global future and has been a priority. Following the guidance of June 2023 Council Conclusions on EU Digital Diplomacy, the EU has strengthened its policy and action in global digital affairs. First, by enhancing digital partnerships and alliances (Digital Partnership with Canada launched in November 2023, and Ministerial-level meetings held of the Digital Partnerships with Japan, South Korea and Singapore). In July 2023, a Joint Declaration on the principles and objectives of the Digital Alliance was adopted by EU Member States and 20 Latin American Countries (LAC) countries and the EU-LAC Digital Alliance work has progressed since. Second, the EU increased the use of Global Gateway to shaping secure and trusted global connectivity while tackling digital divides through digital Global Gateway flagship projects around the world. Third, the EU has developed tools for a successful roll-out of EU Digital Diplomacy, for example by strengthening the Digital Diplomacy Network with EU Member States' Ministries of Foreign Affairs, enhanced training offer for EU Delegations, and the launch of informal digital hubs in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Colombia and Brazil.

A third major EU policy field where the external dimension is essential is **migration**. The EEAS continued to address the external aspects of migration as an integral part of the EU's foreign policy and dialogue with countries and regions around the world. Migration is also a key pillar of the new comprehensive Partnerships that the EU concluded with Egypt, Mauritania, and Tunisia. With a view to support the establishment of legal migration pathways, the EU has been working closely with partner countries to launch the first programmes under the Talent Partnerships with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. The EEAS has supported in the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, launched in November 2023, and contributed to the preparation and launch of the Call to Action to strengthen global cooperation to prevent smuggling, addressing the root causes of irregular migration and fight the organised crime of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

Regarding the third strategic priority of addressing **the geopolitical consequences of conflicts** and leveraging Global Gateway investments and Financing for Development, the EEAS has taken action at multiple levels.

Specifically on **Ukraine**, the EEAS continued to coordinate multilateral support mechanisms in dealing with the damages of the war on Ukraine. The EEAS Special Envoy on Energy Diplomacy contributed to structured support from Ukraine's partners on destroyed energy infrastructure and EU wide energy security efforts through the EU Energy Platform. The High Representative and the EEAS pushed strongly for the continuation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative and continue to advocate for alternatives, such as the Ukraine humanitarian corridor to get the 'grain out of Ukraine'.

The impact of Russia's war is global and has further raised the stakes of how the EU's action is perceived by partners around the world. As part of the "EU offer" to partner countries, the High Representative and the EEAS have spearheaded efforts to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable countries. The High Representative and EU Development Ministers have actively supported an ambitious reform of the **Global Financial Architecture**, including Multilateral Development Banks. The EU coordinated ahead of the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN General Assembly. Foreign and Development ministers engaged with EU Finance Ministers on the strong calls for reform from partners around the world, and the EU supported the financial mobilisation of IMF Special Drawing Rights for food insecure countries. The Global Gateway strategy is already delivering first impact and 220 Global Gateway flagship projects are identified and prioritised for delivery. To date, Global Gateway has already mobilised EUR 85 billion in concrete projects that demonstrate to our global partners that the EU is committed to supporting transformative investments.

With regards to **Afghanistan**, the EU delivered several statements at **UN human rights fora**, notably at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. The EU continued urging the Taliban to allow all Afghans to equally enjoy their human rights and for women and girls in Afghanistan to have free and equal access to all spheres of public life. An EU-led resolution extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett and called upon the Taliban to reverse its policies and practices that abuse human rights of people in Afghanistan, calling them to respect the country's international human rights obligations.

During the Mid-Term Review of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (**NDICI-Global Europe**) instrument, the EEAS has worked to assess the progress of the Multiannual Indicative Plans and amend them as necessary. This ensures that the NDICI – Global Europe remains fit for purpose in the dynamic geopolitical context, that it delivers on the EU's key priorities including Global Gateway, and that the EU retains flexibility and maximises impact of EU financial cooperation. In 2023 new approaches like comprehensive and strategic partnerships were finalised with Tunisia and Egypt with the aim of strengthening cooperation in specific areas.

Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security

The EEAS continued to promote the **universality and indivisibility of human rights for all** and the principle of non-discrimination throughout the EU's external action. Gender equality continued to be a priority in bilateral external actions and in multilateral and regional fora. High Representative Borrell, together with the European Commission, decided in November 2023 to extend the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 until 2027, thus aligning it with the multi-annual financial framework.

Promoting **gender-responsive leadership** is a key element in achieving gender equality. The EEAS launched an Executive Course on Gender-Responsive Leadership for senior management in partnership with the Folke Bernadotte Academy. Two modules in November 2023 and February 2024 focused on leading for gender equality internally and externally. In addition, together with the European Commission, the EEAS co-produced an online course on Gender-Responsive Leadership offered to all staff. The importance of Gender-Responsive Leadership was also raised during the

annual Ambassadors Conference, the pre-posting training of all staff assigned to EU Delegations, and others.

To continuously implement the **EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** and its Action Plan, the EEAS further engrained a gender perspective in EU diplomacy, political dialogue and policy decisions. WPS was consistently raised in different bilateral political, security and human rights dialogues, informal working groups and consultations with partner countries with the objective of identifying specific actions and deliverables. The EU continued to meet with women's civil society representatives and continued to support the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution.

Gender equality and the implementation of the WPS agenda have remained a matter of priority for the EU's regional partnerships, such as the Council of Europe, the African Union, the League of Arab States, NATO, the Organization of American States, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the OSCE and the ASEAN.

The EU is also a vocal advocate for gender equality, women's and girls' rights in bilateral political and human rights dialogues. Through these dialogues, the EU also supported the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women across the world.

On **sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**, the EU continues its efforts on a global scale, by supporting and protecting survivors. Importantly, the EU strives to address the root causes of violence while strengthening legal frameworks and institutions as well as education, improve services for survivors and access to justice for victims, support women's rights organisations and civil society organisation. The EU has also used restrictive measures as a tool in its gender equality policy toolbox in order to enhance accountability.

In the case of Ukraine, the EU has supported the work to ensure full accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes including with a gender-responsive, survivor-centred and trauma-sensitive approach in efforts to respond to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU liaised closely with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to implement the **Framework on cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the UN on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)**. The EU also provided support to local civil society organisations and first responders and to specialised investigation teams led by the office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine.

On 19 June 2023, the Ambassador for Gender and Diversity paid a visit to **Ukraine** in the context of the International day on the elimination of sexual violence in conflict to discuss policies and approaches to addressing CRSV in context of the Russia's war of aggression, as well as EU support in enabling accountability. In her engagements with senior government interlocutors, the Ambassador also engaged on the importance of mainstreaming gender equality considerations across governmental policies, including in Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery process. High-level political support for Ukraine has included regular support through the ambassador's engagement with Ukraine's Government Commissioner for Gender Equality, and sponsoring Ukraine-led political events in multilateral contexts (e.g. Commission on the Status of Women).

The EU continued supporting the **Afghan Women Leaders Forum (AWLF)**, launched in March 2022, through forum meetings and by facilitating additional platforms for Afghan women to engage on topics of concern. The forum brings together over 100 Afghan Women Leaders from diverse backgrounds, aiming at ensuring the participation of Afghan women in different dialogues concerning Afghanistan. During a visit to the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September, members of the AWLF met inter alia with EU Member States as well as with the UN Special Rapporteur Richard Bennett, continuously seeking broader platforms and entry points for engagement.

The EU civilian CSDP Missions implement the **EU Gender Action Plan III** and **EU Strategic Approach and Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024** in their actions. The new Civilian CSDP Compact introduced strong commitments related to gender equality and the women, peace and security agenda. The EEAS works hard to enhance women's participation in civilian CSDP Missions. An example is the mentoring programme for women that in 2023 was conducted the third time by the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management in Berlin. Civilian Missions also support increasing women's participation in all aspects the mandate implementation, e.g. in civilian security sector.

Diversity and Inclusion

Since the High Representative and EEAS Secretary-General (SG) launched the **EEAS Diversity and Inclusion Agenda** in February 2023, its implementation is ongoing. The SG hosted two Lunch and Learn sessions for all staff, addressing discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin and religion or belief. The EEAS also organised the first-ever session on Diversity and Inclusion during the 2023 Ambassador's Conference, aiming at mainstreaming diversity and sensitising Ambassadors to their role in ensuring diversity and inclusion.

In October 2023, the Ambassador for Gender and Diversity contributed to the launch conference of the EEAS' report on LGBTIQ+ foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). The report is the first of its kind to provide an explanation of **LGBTIQ+ FIMI**, analysing instances and debunking narratives.

For the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (**IDAHOT**) **2024**, the EEAS supported IDAHOT celebrations around the world, and its dedicated communication campaign took due account of the principle of 'doing no harm'.

The Ambassador for Gender and Diversity and her team organised and participated in numerous exchanges with civil society representatives to feed their views and political assessments into political processes. Engagement with Human Rights Defenders remains a priority of the mandate, and included civil society representatives with a multiplicity of nationalities: e.g. Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Uganda, Syria, Afghanistan, India, Russian Federation, Kuwait, and more.

Strategic Communications

Manipulation of the information environment and **interference** by foreign actors is a political and security challenge for the European Union and its partners across the world. New technologies are being abused to manipulate the information environment, often targeting directly the EU or its individual Member States.

In 2023 and 2024 actors like **Russia**, but also others such as **China**, continued to engage in activities aimed at eroding European societies' cohesion, undermining the international rules-based order and our democratic systems through various forms of information manipulation and interference.

Following up on the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, the EEAS continued to strengthen and further develop the **EU's toolbox to address and counter FIMI** (EU FIMI Toolbox) across all four areas of action – situational awareness, resilience building, regulation and disruption as well as the EU's external action.

The EEAS worked closely with the European institutions, EU Member States, international partners, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders in advancing a whole-of-society approach to prevent, deter and respond to FIMI. The EEAS continued the efforts to build a more effective and collective responses to FIMI threats, including under the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and setting-up a **FIMI Information Sharing and Analysis Center (FIMI-ISAC)** in collaboration with civil society.

In January 2024, High Representative Borrell presented **the 2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) Threats**. The report introduced a proposal for a Response Framework and highlighted the need to link analysis of FIMI even more effectively to timely responses, highlighting the importance of cooperation between all stakeholders. In light of the 2024 European elections, the report also paid special attention to addressing FIMI during electoral processes.

Close cooperation with the EU Member States continued via both **the EEAS managed Rapid Alert System**, the EU's main mechanism to share information on and work on responses to FIMI connecting all the EU Member States and the EU Institutions, and also in relevant formats of the Council of the EU. 2024 is a critical year for democracies around world, including for the European elections taking place in June. The EEAS stepped up its efforts to protect the integrity of elections by working on common policy approaches, stepping up information sharing and conducting various activities and projects to raise awareness and build resilience against manipulative information operations by foreign actors.

Through the work of its geographical Strategic Communication (**Stratcom**) **taskforces**, the EEAS continued to denounce Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and reinforced the EU's messages of support to Ukraine and provided evidence for sanctioning of Russian instruments of FIMI and war propaganda. The team continued to raise public awareness and build resilience against Kremlin's information manipulation and interference activities around the globe, including through the setting up a dedicated StratCom Task Force on Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the EEAS continued to systematically provide situational awareness on FIMI actors and deployed dedicated instruments to address FIMI to CSDP deployments in the **Eastern Partnership**, Sub-Saharan Africa and at sea.

EUvsDisinfo, the EU's flagship project in raising awareness about pro-Kremlin information manipulation and disinformation, reached an estimated audience of over 20 million people via its website and social media channels in 2023. The website remains the world's largest public database of pro-Kremlin disinformation cases, which counts to date more than 17 000 exposed and debunked disinformation cases.

Considering the global nature of the threat, the EEAS' established **dialogues with like-minded and international partners** (NATO, G7) continued throughout the year. Based on the EEAS' proposal

for a common analytical framework and methodology to systematically collect evidence of FIMI activity, the EU and the US committed to a shared standard for threat information sharing under the EU-US Trade and Technology Council framework. Moreover, the EU-US Summit in October 2023 marked the commitment to reinforce transatlantic cooperation with like-minded partners on this matter based on a set of common principles and in full respect of freedom of expression and fundamental values.

Public diplomacy and communication campaigns

In today's competitive information environment, **Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy** have become essential foreign policy tools to convey EU messages and explain EU actions to third countries' citizens to facilitate cooperation and, ultimately, achieving EU policy goals.

During the reporting period, important efforts were made to communicate on the newly launched Operation ASPIDES in the Red Sea and Gulf area. A specific campaign was dedicated to promote the **Strategic Compass** activities as reported in its March 2024 implementation report. The EU Delegations were invited to garner interest from partners in the run up to the **Schuman Security and Defence Forum** (28 and 29 May 2024) through organisation of Road to Schuman events in Canada, Chile, India, Jordan, Moldova and Nigeria in order to give a voice to partners as regards shared security and defence issues with dedicated local and HQ communication. The EU Military Staff, Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability as well as the European Defence Agency participated in the EU OPEN DAY activities with tailor-made information material to the public.

During the year, EEAS launched a number of **thematic campaigns**, including a digital campaign focusing on **youth and democracy**, called #OurVoiceOurFuture for the UN General Assembly meeting. Since its launch in 2022, the campaign has an estimated reach of 98 million people globally. This network of young influencers resonated in over 100 countries across the world.

For the 2024 International Women's Day (IWD), the EEAS launched a global campaign promoting **women's and girls' rights** across all aspects of life. Following last year's launch of the EEAS Agenda for Diversity and Inclusion and echoing the IWD Community's global theme 'Inspire Inclusion', the aim was to acknowledge women's inclusion by showcasing portraits of women and men who inspire inclusion and strive to achieve gender parity, thus also generating ideas on how each one **can** inspire inclusion.

On 17 May, the EEAS marked the **International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia** (IDAHOT) by raising awareness on the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and drawing attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by persons with different sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGI) globally. Activities continued throughout the Pride Month of June. The IDAHOT theme for 2024 was 'No one left behind: equality, freedom and justice for all'. This year's communication efforts aimed to: 1. Counter disinformation and false narratives (hence integrating a FIMI angle, following the report on FIMI against LGBTIQ+ persons launched in October 2023); and 2. Promote social acceptance and inclusion via messages that resonate locally.

Public diplomacy activities continued to build trust and support for EU policies and principles by developing networks and new alliances. This included recurrent engagement with students,

academics, youth groups, think tanks, media, business communities, civil society or cultural professionals as well as initiatives fostering people-to-people contacts.

Both in 2023 and in 2024 the EEAS implemented successful **EU OPEN DAY activities** with over 5000 visitors each, marking a true institutional communication success. Several activities tailored to visitors of all ages, including workshops, conferences, cultural events, talks to EU Ambassadors, and interactive materials, were an inspiration for EU Delegations, which tailored and adapted their own activities around Europe Day to local circumstances.

Additional specific activities were the **EU Alumni Engagement Initiative** (project allowing to engage with alumni of a variety of EU programmes and development of an online networking platform), the **EU Film Festival** (project providing movies local film festivals and supporting side events and trainings), and the **Cultural Relations Platform** (EU-funded project supporting cooperation between European and global cultural and creative sectors. In November 2023, the EEAS coordinated the EU participation as **Guest of Honour at the International Book Fair in Guadalajara** in cooperation with Member States in Team Europe spirit.

Furthermore, the EEAS continued the preparation for a significant EU presence and public diplomacy activities, the **Expo 2025 Osaka**, where the EU will participate with a pavilion and a rich agenda of policy and cultural activities, many of them in cooperation with the Member States in a Team Europe spirit.

The EEAS has maintained its strong digital presence with a large **website** and six corporate **social media** channels (X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Threads and LinkedIn). They publish digital products daily to inform its audience on EU foreign policies priorities, disseminate the High Representative's activities and portray the EU as an active and engaged global player on the world stage. In 2023, through its social media accounts, featuring over 500 audio-visual products, the EEAS reached close to **1 million followers** combined on Facebook, Instagram, X, Threads and LinkedIn. Only during last year, the EEAS website had **10 million page views** and gathered interest of 6 million web visitors.

EEAS Crisis Response Centre

In recent years, the EU has faced a series of major crises – from the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine to the crises in the Sahel and in the Middle East. The EEAS Crisis Response Centre (CRC) was created to serve as a **permanent crisis response capability** and to strengthen the EU's ability to anticipate, prepare for, and react to emerging security and consular crises outside its borders. As of last year, the CRC is now fully operational in its physical premises in the EEAS.

Over the course of the past year, in addition to the continuous work on protracted crises, the CRC was instrumental in the EU's response to a number of emerging crises. From the evacuations following the crises in Sudan and Niger, to the complex response to the crisis in Israel and Gaza, including the evacuation of EU citizens stuck in Gaza with the outbreak of the crisis. These crises have demonstrated the added value of having a dedicated crisis response capability providing real-time situational awareness and facilitating fast decision-making in a crisis. They also show that ensuring close cooperation and coordination with EU Member States and like-minded partners' crisis

structures is vital in responding to the threats we face and in ensuring the safe evacuation of EU staff and facilitating the repatriation of EU citizens.

(3) COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Two years after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU and Member States continue to provide substantial support to Ukraine to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to make progress in order to meet the level of ambition of the EU's security and defence agenda. The **Strategic Compass**, adopted by EU Member States in March 2022, continues to guide the EU's evolving policy and actions in security and defence. Throughout 2023, the implementation continued at a high pace, with significant progress achieved across its four pillars: Act, Secure, Invest, and Partner. The High Representative presented his second annual progress report of the Strategic Compass to Foreign Ministers on 18 March 2024. Member States acknowledged the concrete advancements and urged for a full and swift implementation of all commitments. The Council adopted Conclusions on Security and Defence on 27 May 2024.

The **European Peace Facility** continues to constitute a key part of EU's military support to Ukraine. By 31 May 2024, the EU had allocated EUR 11 billion to the military assistance of Ukraine under the EPF. This includes EUR 5 billion for the Ukraine Assistance Fund (UAF), agreed in March 2024 to support new deliveries, notably of jointly procured European equipment. Through the **three-track ammunition initiative** launched by the Council in March 2023, Member States announced their intention to deliver more than 1 million shells to Ukraine, including through joint procurement through the European Defence Agency (EDA). Under the **Act in Support of Ammunition Production** supporting the EU defence industry in ramping up its production capacity, the Commission selected 31 projects, with a total funding of EUR 500 million, covering explosives, powder, shells, and missiles. In March 2024, funding priorities were set up by the Commission together with Member States, under the **European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common procurement Act** (EUR 310 million) to support common procurement in ammunition, air and missile defence, as well as platforms and replacement of legacy systems, in order to address urgent defence needs and replenish stockpiles. By the end of May 2024, the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine trained more than 50,000 Ukrainian armed forces.

Faced with the return of high intensity warfare in Europe following Russia's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the Union also intensified efforts to enhance its **defence readiness**. The **2023 Capability Development Priorities** were approved by the EDA Steering Board in November 2023. These provide the baseline for all EU Defence initiatives and defence-related instruments. Following a comprehensive consultation process with key stakeholders (including Member States and industry) and based on a mandate by the European Council, the Commission and the High Representative presented the first-ever **European Defence Industrial Strategy** on 5 March 2024. Setting an ambitious vision until 2035, the Strategy aims to (1) strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), (2) improve the responsiveness of the European defence industry and strengthening security of supply at EU-level, (3) mainstream a defence readiness culture across EU policies, and (4) team up with strategic, like-minded and international partners, notably Ukraine and NATO. In support of the Strategy, the Commission proposed a **European Defence Industry Programme** (EUR 1.5 billion over 2025-2027), to strengthen the competitiveness and responsiveness of the EDTIB, ensure the availability and supply of defence products, and help reinforce Ukraine's defence industry. On 6 May 2024, the EU co-hosted with Ukraine the first EU-

Ukraine Defence Industries Forum in order to create closer ties between the industries and better respond to Ukraine's defence needs.

The EU continued to take a leading role as a **global peace enabler, security provider and defence actor**. Two new CSDP missions were established: a Security and Defence Initiative was launched in December 2023 in four countries of the Gulf of Guinea (Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana) to address the spill-over of terrorism from the Sahel; and a new maritime operation, the EU Naval Force Operation ASPIDES, was launched in record time in February 2024 with the aim to protect freedom of navigation and safeguard maritime security in the Red Sea. In light of the evolution of the political situation in Niger and Mali, Member States decided to end the military and civilian missions in Niger as well as not to extend the mandate of the military training mission in Mali. With a total of 24 **CSDP missions and operations** (13 civilian, 10 military, 1 civ-mil) as of May 2024, the EU continued to support partners' security and defence capabilities and contributed to addressing security challenges on several continents. The EU also provided military assistance from the EPF to more than 20 countries worldwide. It financed military components of African-led peace support operations under the assistance measure taking the form of a general programme for support to the African Union, as well as a number of assistance measures aimed at strengthening capacities of partners in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, the Western Balkans, and in Africa, including new partners such as Cameroon, Ghana, Benin and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It also covered the common costs of military CSDP missions and operations.

Among the key priorities of the Compass is the operationalisation of the EU **Rapid Deployment Capacity** (EU RDC) by 2025. To that effect, preparatory work continued. The first-ever EU live military exercise, held in October 2023, was a success with the participation of 19 EU Member States. Work has also progressed on strengthening the **Military Planning and Conduct Capability**, in terms of staffing, infrastructure and communication and information systems. The re-assessment of scope and definition of common costs for military missions and operations, exercises and EU RDC was launched. The **Permanent Structured Cooperation** (PESCO) has also undergone a strategic review, launched by the Council in November 2023; three dedicated events were held in the first half of 2024 as part of a reflection phase with the 26 participating Member States (on PESCO commitments, collaborative projects, and strategic outlook) – to be followed by a decision phase in the second half of 2024.

In order to enhance the **effectiveness of civilian CSDP Missions**, an ambitious new **Civilian CSDP Compact** was adopted in May 2023, containing both political commitments and actionable deliverables to be implemented by mid-2027. In line with the Compact, a more structured Civilian Capability Development Process (CCDP) is being set up to provide a clear overview of available capabilities as well as existing shortfalls, to better support civilian CSDP missions. The First Annual Conference on Civilian Capabilities took place on 25 April 2024, back to back with the first Human Resources Capacity Generation Conference. They addressed the civilian capabilities development and ongoing efforts to increase Member States contributions to civilian CSDP missions. Further implementation steps also include the revised concept for the use of Specialised Teams, approved by the Political and Security Committee on 30 April, which is a rapid deployment tool to temporarily strengthen civilian CSDP missions with specialised personnel.

The 2023 Civilian CSDP Compact also established clear commitments to address challenges related to climate change. Several missions have begun to mainstream environmental aspects into their external activities, including advising on environmental crime and climate security-related issues.

Furthermore, civilian CSDP Missions continued to systematically mainstream **human rights** and exercise human rights due diligence in compliance with international law. The EU human rights and international humanitarian law due diligence policy on security sector support to third parties, approved by the FAC on 19 February 2024, consolidates the EU's long standing commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law in its external action.

The EEAS worked to enhance the support and coordination between EU civilian CSDP missions and UN entities. The **Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC)** and the UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) held a roundtable in December 2023 in New York to improve the already close collaboration between CPCC, civilian CSDP Missions and OROLSI, UN peacekeeping missions and agencies, and identified suitable pilot theatres for closer cooperation between the two organisations in CAR and Somalia where both organisations have deployed missions. CPCC also signed an exchange of letters with the UN Department of Operational Support to boost the **logistics and supply chain support** that the UN can provide to the civilian Missions. In response to the new civilian Compact's commitment on partnerships, Norway and Canada have recently been confirmed as contributors to EUPM Moldova and EU Mission to Armenia.

The EU further consolidated and developed tools to strengthen the **Integrated Approach**. Stabilisation assessments missions were conducted to Ukraine and to Ethiopia. The policy review of the EU-wide strategic Framework to support Security Sector Reform (SSR) was launched to address the relevance of SSR for the EU and how to better implement the policy in the coming years. The EU adopted in 2023 an EU human rights and international humanitarian law due diligence policy on security sector support to third parties, a practical human rights risk management tool that helps ensuring compliance with human rights and the international humanitarian law.

The EU engaged in **mediation and dialogue support** actions in more than 25 conflict contexts across the world, and continued assessing conflict risks. The 2023 Annual Report on EU Peace Mediation was prepared and the EEAS Peace Mediation Guidelines were updated and published. The EU toolset for Early Warning and conflict analysis, which shapes EU **conflict prevention**, was also updated. The EU further developed expertise on thematic areas of dialogue and mediation support, for example mediating ceasefires and engaging with insider mediators or non-state armed actors.

The EEAS advanced work to be better able to detect, prevent and respond to multi-faceted **hybrid threats**. Based on the EEAS and Commission proposal, the Council on 21 May approved the Guiding framework for the practical establishment of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams. The teams can be deployed to support Member States, partner countries and CSDP missions and operations in countering hybrid threats, and constitute a key instrument in the EU Hybrid Toolbox. The Hybrid Risk Survey is another instrument to support partner countries facing hybrid challenges. In July 2023, the EU concluded the survey with Moldova by identifying a set of recommendations on how to strengthen Moldova's resilience.

The implementation of the 2020 Joint **Cybersecurity** Strategy continued with promoting the rules-based order in cyberspace as well as strengthening and using capacities to prevent, deter and respond

to cyber-attacks. The EU has further supported the proposal of a UN Cyber Programme of Action (PoA) to be established by 2026. The support of 161 positive votes for the PoA resolution in the 2023 UN General Assembly paved the way for the establishment of the PoA as a permanent, inclusive and action-oriented mechanism with support of all regions. The EU continues to actively engage in multilateral, regional, bilateral and multi-stakeholder settings, including by organising trainings and workshops, to promote a global, open, stable and secure cyberspace and support third countries. In cooperation with the European Commission, the EEAS has worked to further develop cyber capacity-building projects to enhance global cyber resilience, tackling cybercrime and allow to meaningfully engage in multilateral and regional negotiations on cyber. To raise awareness and promote accountability in cyberspace, the EEAS continued to develop and make use of its EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox. The EU aims to use the Toolbox to implement a more strategic and sustained response to malicious cyber activities, using the full spectrum of measures available.

As regards securing access to strategic domains , the Council adopted a **Revised EU Maritime Security Strategy and Action Plan** on 24 October 2023 with the goals of stepping up activities at sea, cooperating with partners, leading on maritime domain awareness, managing risks and threats, enhancing capabilities, and providing education and training on maritime security. The revised strategy also provides for annual live EU maritime security exercises. On 23-28 May 2024, the first such exercise took place off the Mediterranean coast of Spain, focused on seabed infrastructure protection, as well as on the fight against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. Thanks to EU Member States' vessels participating in **EU Coordinated Maritime Presences** in the Gulf of Guinea, in September and in October 2023 the EU conducted joint sea activities with Brazil and with India in the region for the first time.

In the field of **space security and defence**, the first EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence was adopted in March 2023 as a joint Communication by the High Representative and the Commission. Implementation of the strategy has started: the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) released its first yearly classified space threat landscape report, the EEAS held a space exercise in March 2024 with a view to training and improving the Space Threat Response Architecture. In August 2023, the High Representative called for a second Board of the **EU Satellite Centre** at ministerial level to discuss the Centre's role and achievements, as well as to offer political guidance on its future development and ways to boost the EU's autonomous geospatial intelligence.

The EU continued to reinforce its role in **countering terrorism** and preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE). It did so as a donor for capacity-building projects around the world and as a norm setter, promoting a rights-based and whole-of-society approach to Counterterrorism (CT)-P/CVE within multilateral structures, in particular within the UN and the **Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)**. The EU worked closely with third countries and international organisations, including through dedicated counter-terrorism dialogues and cooperation on the ground, facilitated also through its Network of counter-terrorism/Security Experts deployed in 20 EU Delegations. The EU delivered on its role as co-chair of the GCTF, alongside Egypt, steering the work of the Forum to support the EU's vision for a rights-based and comprehensive approach. This was supported by two new Initiatives under GCTF framework, on Oversight of and Accountability for counter-terrorism operations and on Education in P/CVE. The EU also led a civil society consultation, alongside Kenya, in the margins of the GCTF Coordinating Meeting in Nairobi in February, as well as engaging East

and Southern African partners in the fight against terrorism. Further, the EU also continued to actively participate in the work of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, sharing its experience and coordinating on stabilisation efforts, adapting its activities to address the new hotspots of Da'esh operations in Africa and Asia.

The **global disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control** architecture continued to be under strain throughout 2023, in the wake of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, China's increased assertiveness and the Middle East crisis. EU efforts throughout the year focused on upholding and strengthening the relevant multilateral instruments and institutions. This included strong EU positioning at the 5th Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the first Preparatory Committee to the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the 78th UN General Assembly, and the Fifth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. The EU maintained its commitment to preventing and curbing the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition and promoting accountability and responsibility with regard to their legal trade. The EU also continued its review process of Common Position 2008/944 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment. In 2023, the EU continued to provide significant political and financial support for its non-proliferation, disarmament and arms export control priorities, including through 9 new CFSP Council Decisions on projects for an accumulated value of EUR 29.5 million. Within that effort, the EU put emphasis on strengthening its support to the biological and chemical security through four Council Decisions with financial contributions of EUR 13 million and by concluding a Memorandum of Understanding on strengthening cooperation with the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The EU further strengthened its engagement with numerous **bilateral, multilateral and regional partners** worldwide on peace, security and defence issues. The EU consolidated cooperation with the **UN**, including on the implementation of the new set of joint priorities until 2024. Cooperation with **NATO** was further strengthened, through continued high level engagement as well as the dedicated EU-NATO Staff Coordination mechanism. In the framework of three Joint Declarations of 2016, 2018 and 2023, implementation of the 74 common actions continued, from countering hybrid threats to strengthening the resilience of critical infrastructure, from military mobility to exercises and defence industry. New EU-NATO Structured Dialogues were launched on space, cyber, emerging and disruptive technologies as well as climate and defence.

Security and defence dialogues and consultations were held with more than 20 partners, including for the first time with Australia, Iceland, Kenya, Rwanda and Switzerland as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council. Sixty thematic dialogues and/or consultations were also conducted with many partners on various issues such as countering terrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism, conflict prevention and peace mediation, cyber, hybrid threats, maritime security, space, non-proliferation, disarmament and arms export control. Partners further contributed to CSDP missions and operations, such as Norway for the EU Mission in Armenia and EUPM Moldova. In April 2024, the Council authorised the negotiation of a new Framework Participation Agreement with Armenia. The EU further developed its partnership toolkit, by proposing the Council to enhance relations with selected partners in the shape of **Security and Defence Partnerships**. Two such partnerships were signed in May 2024, with Moldova and with Norway. The second edition of the **Schuman Security**

and Defence Forum was successfully held on 28-29 May 2024, gathering more than 600 participants from EU Member States, partner countries, international and regional organisations, think-tanks/academia, as well as EU institutions representatives.

(4) PRIORITIES FOR 2024

The EU will continue to provide **unwavering support to Ukraine** and accelerate the implementation of the Strategic Compass across all work strands. Continuing and increasing military support to Ukraine through the co-funding of the provision and joint procurement of military equipment and training will remain a key priority, notably through the UAF. With EU accession as the ultimate EU security guarantee, and building on existing support, the **EU's security commitments will contribute in helping Ukraine to defend itself, resist destabilisation efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future**. It will be equally important to increase the outreach to global partners to rally the widest possible international support around the need to reach a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace in line with international law and the UN Charter. Tackling persistent defeatist narratives and FIMI, including among EU audiences, also feature among key challenges. On Ukraine, given the massive destruction by Russian attacks of the country's energy grid, the EEAS will remain strongly engaged in the support to **Ukraine's energy system reconstruction** while remaining fully responsive to all the EU energy security challenges, with close attention to their ongoing geopolitical impacts. The EU will also continue **isolating Russia internationally**, imposing sanctions, ensuring accountability (including through international justice), supporting its neighbours and global partners in addressing the impact of the war while also enhancing its own resilience. The EU will continue supporting Russian civil society, human rights defenders and independent media inside and outside Russia.

The **escalation in the Middle East region** has put the Middle East at the top of the EU's foreign policy agenda jointly with Ukraine. The EU needs to keep moving on the following three key priorities in the Middle East and North Africa at the same time: reinforcing the EU's role in conflicts zones and in tackling the crisis in the Middle East; strengthening the links with the Southern Neighbourhood; and deepening EU-Gulf relations. The **Israel-Hamas** war and the regional spill-over have prompted the EU to reinforce its role in responding to conflicts and to mobilize the full toolbox (political, humanitarian, cooperation, security and defence). On **Southern Neighbourhood**, the review of the Agenda for the Mediterranean (foreseen for 2024) is the next horizon. On the **Gulf**, the EU is the implementation phase of its Strategy and needs to deliver on all the pillars of the Joint Communication.

The EU will monitor the run up to the presidential elections in **Iran** as well as the posture of the new government and will continue to react to any issue of concern. In particular, the EU will continue to follow the domestic and human rights situation in the country as well as Iran's regional and foreign policy, including its unacceptable military support to Russia. If Iran were to supply ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU will take significant new restrictive measures. The need to preserve space for nuclear diplomacy and contributing to regional de-escalation will remain key priorities.

On further **regional focus**, delivering on the **Western Balkans'** EU membership perspective, will be one of the shared priorities looking forward. This should include advancing in the accession negotiation process with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia based on the implementation of EU-related commitments; encouraging full alignment with CFSP, including on positions and restrictive measures related to the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, advancing the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, including by

implementing the Agreement on the Path to Normalization between Kosovo and Serbia and all past Dialogue agreements. The EU should further enhance cooperation on CFSP/CSDP with the region, based on a common vision of geopolitical challenges as demonstrated by partners' alignment with the CFSP.

The EU maintains a strategic interest in the development of a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean. **Türkiye's** own constructive engagement across the board of EU-Türkiye relations, including on the Cyprus issue, will be instrumental in advancing the various areas of cooperation identified in the Joint Communication.

On the **Arctic**, continued posturing in global security rivalry to spill-over to key locations can be expected along with vulnerabilities from climate change to become further exposed in the region.

EU-UK cooperation will continue on a constructive path, alongside contributing to the protection of the rights of the large number of EU citizens in the UK, including in the context of the June 2024 European Elections, through a large number of FPI funded public diplomacy projects.

In 2024, the EEAS will also continue promoting resilience, stability and the rule of law in the **Eastern neighbourhood region** by keeping the **Eastern Partnership** high on the agenda, in a more flexible framework under the existing "Recovery, Resilience and Reform" agenda, in preparation of the **Eastern Partnership Summit in 2025, under the Polish Presidency**. Despite the suspension of Russia and Belarus from all regional activities, the EEAS will continue working in these formats to promote sustainable development, people-to-people cooperation and to address environmental and energy security aspects.

The **EU enlargement process** has gained new historic momentum with the decision to open **negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova** and to grant **candidate status to Georgia**. Together with the European Commission, the EEAS will continue supporting Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in this merit-based process while monitoring the implementation of necessary reforms by the three countries.

The EU should continue with its enhanced security and defence cooperation with **Moldova in order to strengthen its resilience**, inter alia through the support under the European Peace Facility and using the full potential of the recently signed Security and Defence Partnership. It should also continue supporting Moldova in pursuing the necessary reforms on its EU accession path.

The EU should continue urging **Georgia** to pursue the necessary reforms on its EU path. In light of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, it should continue strengthening Georgia's resilience, including with European Peace Facility support where appropriate. It should also continue its involvement in conflict resolution efforts, including through the work of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia and the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia.

The EU should continue supporting **the normalisation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan**, while urging Azerbaijan to use the momentum of COP29 to come with a constructive agenda. In parallel, the EU should continue to **engage with both Armenia and Azerbaijan on connectivity** based on principles of sovereignty and jurisdiction as well as equality and reciprocity. The EU should continue deepening its relations with **Armenia** in all areas, including in the field of security and defence, in order to support Armenia's resilience. In this context, the EU should proceed with

negotiating the new EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda as well as continue its support to Armenia's democratic reforms.

The EU should continue efforts to promote democracy and human rights in **Belarus**, including through actions to promote accountability and support to relevant initiatives, including in multilateral fora. The promotion of people-to-people contacts and strategic communications efforts will remain at the core of EU future actions towards Belarusian people.

Beyond the neighbourhood, across all regions, a strong focus on the delivery of **Global Gateway** through transformative flagship projects is key, including on connectivity, digital, and on the new Mineral Security Forum.

Russia's war has accelerated the **Central Asian countries'** objective to reduce their dependencies on Russia. The EU has continued its outreach with Central Asia in view of further strengthening relations. These efforts are supported by the EU Special Representative for Central Asia. The EU has a strategic interest to continue deepening this cooperation, including in the field of security, connectivity, diversification of EU supply chains, transport corridors (in particular the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor), climate change and green transition. The first EU-Central Asia Summit will highlight EU's strong commitment to develop the Strategic Partnership with the region.

The EU will strengthen and deepen EU-Africa relations, in a Team Europe approach, with a focus on continued implementation of the commitments of the 6th AU-EU Summit and through deepening AU-EU engagement on multilateralism. Working as strategic partners, the EU and the AU can pursue shared interests and provide mutual support: The first Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi in September 2024, the AU's membership of the G20 as well as the continuation of the Trilateral AU-UN-EU cooperation should reinforce dialogue and promote common solutions proposals at the multilateral level.

The EU will continue supporting the AU in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. At continental level, the implementation of the Samoa Agreement is another priority. The EU will continue implementing its regional strategies on the Sahel region and coastal countries, the Great Lakes region, and the Horn of Africa - and on the bilateral level, focusing on key African partners with potential for deepened relations. In Sudan, where the war has provoked the largest displacement crisis in the world, the EU will remain actively engaged and also support action by the ICC. On the Sahel, the FAC on 19 February 2024 gave clear guidance on political relations that should be more transactional with the military regimes in place and CFSP instruments that will be followed in 2024. On the crisis in Eastern DRC, the EU will maintain its role as a balanced honest broker, supporting Luanda and Nairobi processes as the only way out of the long and deep-rooted crisis, in consultation with the African Union, regional and international partners.

Looking ahead in the **Indo-Pacific Region**, the High Representative will attend the ASEAN Regional Forum and related meetings in Vientiane in July after which the position of the ASEAN Coordinator for relations with the EU will transfer for 2024-27 to **Brunei Darussalam**, while **Malaysia** will take over as ASEAN Chair in January: the EU will therefore deepen cooperation with both countries. The EU will also advance its enhanced engagement with **Indonesia** and **Vietnam**, which have been prioritised for outreach in the context of the EU Action Plan on the geopolitical consequences of

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and look forward to engaging the new Indonesian administration from October.

The EU will continue to carefully articulate work on de-risking with robust engagement with **China**, focusing on outcome and results in line with the recalibration of the EU's multifaceted approach to China. This will be pursued through continued consolidation of EU unity and by engaging with China on the basis of EU's principles, values and interests; increasing resilience and continuing to address risks linked to unbalanced trade and economic relations; and working with partners.

In the Americas, the EU will keep working to reinforce our longstanding strategic partnerships with the US, Canada and LAC countries. The EU will continue working closely with them against the background of ongoing global geo-political tensions, and taking into consideration the eventual changes in leadership resulting from the upcoming elections in the US and various LAC countries..

EU-US cooperation over the past three years, including in 2023, has been unprecedented, to address foreign policy priorities, crises, and conflicts across the globe. The EU-US relationship in 2024 will continue to be close, intensive cooperation will continue on all critical security and defence issues, with a focus on the continued support for Ukraine against Russian aggression, as well as on all thematic issues.

The EU will continue its strategic engagement with **Canada** in the second semester of 2024 both bilaterally in the framework of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement and in the multilateral for a (G7, G20 and NATO).

The EU will further strengthen its relationship with Strategic Partners in the region, **Brazil** and **Mexico**, and will keep developing EU-LAC political, cooperation and trade relations, by fostering the full implementation of existing Association, Trade and Political Cooperation Agreements that cover all 33 LAC countries (with the exception of **Venezuela and Bolivia**) and finalising ongoing negotiations.

The EU will continue efforts to conclude the negotiations of **EU-Mercosur** Agreement and to accelerate ratification of the **EU-Chile** Advanced Framework Agreement. The EU will advance with the implementation of the Summit Joint Declaration, and the **bi-regional Roadmap** presented at the Summit, with a view to next **EU-CELAC Summit** to be held in Colombia in 2025 (to be confirmed). The cooperation on security aspects of the bi-regional relations will also be enhanced, exploring bi-regional security partnerships and organizing the first EU-LAC Security and Defence Seminar.

The EU will continue to engage with **Mexico**, its strategic partner, following the general elections taking place on 2 June and the inauguration of the new President on 1 October.

With regard to **Central America**, following the entry into force of the Association Agreement on 1 May, the EU will prepare for making full use of its provisions and institutions in order to further strengthen its ties with the region. The EU will also continue to engage with a view to upholding democracy, human rights and inclusive sustainable growth, including through relevant bilateral frameworks such as its MoUs with several of the countries of the region.

The EU will continue to strengthen its ties with the countries of the **Caribbean**, including under the regional institutions and bilateral partnership dialogues established under the **Samoa Agreement** which is under provisional application since 1 January 2024.

Over the next twelve months, the EU's work in **South American** will focus on the implementation of the various Memoranda of Understanding and agreements and the holding of the new created dialogues, notably in the areas of security and defence, as well as environment, with countries such as, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. Progress is expected in the negotiations of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Colombia.

The reinvigoration of relations with **Brazil** should allow the holding of an **EU-Brazil Summit** at the end of 2024 or beginning of 2025.

The EU will pursue and develop its support to the fight against organised crime in countries such as **Ecuador, Peru and Paraguay**. Efforts to promote peace in **Colombia** and democracy in **Venezuela** will remain a priority for the EU.

Regarding multilateral priorities, the main focus will be on preparation and outcomes of the **UN Summit of the Future**. The EU's contribution to the outcome document of the Summit – the 'Pact for the Future' is driven by determination to uphold the UN Charter and reform multilateralism. This will include a recommitment to the foundations of international order; support for international peace and security and the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace; advancing sustainable development and financing for development with the ambition to accelerate action to achieve the SDGs and to implement the Political Declaration; redoubling efforts to make the UN fit for the future and more representative, and reducing the trust gap towards institutions and among UN members.

On **promoting democracy**, the EU will continue to enhance its engagement with countries across the world, supporting efforts to consolidate democracy and fulfil their international commitments, including through our **Electoral Missions**. The EU remains committed to defending democracy, supporting civil society, with a special focus on youth participation.

In the foreseeably charged political context on **accountability**, the EEAS intends to stay the course on fighting impunity and strengthening accountability efforts globally, including through the International Criminal Court (ICC), and to stand up for International Law and International Humanitarian Law. Beyond new Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, and aligning the duration of the 2020-2024 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy with the EU Multiannual Financial Framework cycle, the EEAS also intends to consolidate EU guidance in the field of Business and Human Rights, and to pay attention to the human rights aspects of digital and AI policies.

Regarding the second strategic priority of supporting **EU resilience and economic security**, and managing the external dimension of EU policies, the contribution of the EEAS is rising as EU policies have an ever stronger political impact around the world in the foreseeable geopolitical context. Priorities include the **EU Economic Security Strategy** and the **EU Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism policies**. In the field of **Critical Raw Materials**, the EEAS will also encourage cooperation with resource-rich countries, both bilaterally and in the context of the Minerals Security Forum, aligning these efforts closely with the implementation of Global Gateway.

The EEAS and the European Commission will continue the implementation of the EU Action Plan on the consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on third countries. The EU's comprehensive offers to our neighbours will benefit from increased leverage, focus on reform and

coherence amongst the different EU policies and financial instruments. Through **Global Gateway** and the implementation of the European Fund for Sustainable Development+, the EEAS will continue its engagement with the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The objective is to increase their presence and activities in non-EU countries, including in the least developed countries.

Given the essential importance of the **European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus** (EFSD+) in delivering these strategic EU investments around the world, the EEAS will continue its engagement with the **European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development** as well as with national development banks and international financial institutions to increase their presence and activities in non-EU countries, including in least developed countries. The EEAS and the European Commission are working on increasing the EU's ability to remain engaged in supporting populations in fragile, conflict-affected and politically estranged countries as well as especially vulnerable countries like the Small Island Developing States.

In this increasingly challenging context with massive financing needs, the EEAS will work to strengthen EU leadership in the reform of the **international financial architecture, including multilateral development banks**. Beyond the Summit of the Future in September 2024 and the Annual Meetings of World Bank Group and IMF, the next milestone will be the 4th Financing for Development Summit in June 2025. The EEAS will continue to support stronger partnerships with partners such as like-minded governments, development finance institutions and the United Nations, particularly in fragile, high-risk countries.

The EEAS will work on proposals for a common EU and Member States approach to **fragility**, including amongst others: vulnerable countries to climate change like the Small Island Developing States, conflict-prone regions, fragile states, and others.

The EEAS also intends to consolidate EU guidance in the field of Business and Human Rights, and to pay attention to the human rights aspects of digital and AI policies. Current technological shifts (e.g. next level of AI) will require improving synergies between digital, cyber and economic security policy. The progress report on **EU Digital Diplomacy** will be submitted to July 2024 **Foreign Affairs Council**. In 2024, the EU should further improve the joint positions and outreach towards the Global South including in the context of the **World Summit on the Information Society review process** culminating in 2025, and in the context of the follow-up of Global Digital Compact.

The EEAS will continue to promote unified action against the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, and to foster global support and action towards a **sustainable green transition** around the world. Through the EU's green diplomacy, encompassing climate, environment and energy policies, guided by the **Council Conclusions on green diplomacy** adopted by the **Foreign Affairs Council** of 18 March 2024, strengthened coordination and joint outreach with EU Member States will continue. The EEAS will also continue to promote biodiversity and the accession to the **UN Water Convention**. A further focus for 2024 will be to mobilise support for ambitious outcomes of three Rio Conventions (COP16 on Desertification, COP16 on Biodiversity and COP29 on Climate Change) and their **Conference of the Parties** in 2024. On energy diplomacy, the EEAS will prioritise outreach in the areas of the global energy transition driving forward the implementation of the specific energy transition goals set at COP28.

In line with the external dimension of the **Pact on Migration and Asylum the EU**², the EEAS will further contribute to the formulation and operationalisation of actions and funding priority areas identified for specific countries. The EEAS will also continue actively address the **instrumentalisation of migrants** through diplomatic engagement in selected third countries. The EEAS will continue to engage with international partners and organisations regarding **migration cooperation** in all its facets, including protection. This would translate, for instance, in engagement with Pakistan to ensure the continued protection of Afghans with a right to international protection and with Bangladesh regarding cooperation on migration. EEAS will continue contributing to the proper implementation of the EU's comprehensive partnership with Tunisia, Egypt and Mauritania.

Key priority for the entire EEAS is to ensure that the EEAS external action contributes globally to **challenge discriminatory structures** and advancing equality. This requires gender-responsive action across all our geopolitical and regional priorities, and fostering a work culture and environment where gender equality and human rights are a shared responsibility of all EEAS staff.

On security and defence, the EU looks forward to an increased and strengthened **European Peace Facility** to support partners around the world, as well as military CSDP missions. The EU will strive for conducting existing and planning upcoming **military and civilian CSDP missions** with a more flexible, robust and partnerships-based approach. The EEAS will continue work in order to make the EU **Rapid Deployment Capacity** fully operational by 2025, thereby strengthening the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), seek expanding the scope and definition of common costs, and conducting the second EU live military exercise at the end of 2024. The EU will continue implementing the **Civilian CSDP Compact**, working with Member States on priority commitments to increase the effectiveness of civilian missions, including rapid response, guiding principles, evaluation, strategic reviews methodology and the strengthening of the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability as the headquarters at operational level for civilian CSDP missions.

In order to enhance **defence readiness**, the EU also needs to rapidly reinforce its own defence capabilities while at the same time be able to continue providing support to Ukraine. Therefore, the implementation of the European Defence Industrial Strategy and strengthening of EDTIB is a top priority in 2024. In this regard, an agreement on the European Defence Industrial Programme should be found as soon as possible. The EU and its Member States will continue implementing the EU defence initiatives, notably with the decision phase of the **PESCO Strategic Review** in the second half of 2024. The EEAS together with relevant European Commission services and the EDA, will be working with Member States on the new ambitious **Military Mobility** Pledge adopted in May 2024, with a set of concrete commitments by Member States to enhance the swift, safe and unimpeded movement of military equipment and personnel through Europe and beyond.

A pilot action to facilitate exchanges on **countering hybrid threats** with partners in the Indo-Pacific region will be launched in 2024. In the **cyber domain**, the EU will continue to engage with partners to prevent, deter and respond to malicious behaviour jointly. This will include raising awareness and showing solidarity with partners affected by malicious cyber activities; enhancing global cyber resilience; and addressing persistent threat actors through strengthened international partnerships. To further strengthen the cyber resilience and ability of the EU to address malicious behaviour in

² https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

cyberspace, work to establish the EU Cyber Defence Coordination Centre (CDCC) by 2026 will continue.

By the end of 2024, the High Representative will prepare a proposal to amend the Council Decision on the security of systems and services under the **Union Space Programme(s)** to adapt it to the new space threat landscape.

The EU will continue to steer efforts of the **Global Counterterrorism Forum** in particular to help tackle the scourge of terrorism in the countries facing the greatest risk, notably in Africa. The EU will also aim to expand the Network of counter-terrorism/Security Experts, including to cover domains such as terrorist propaganda and communications, but also gender, to support this effort and advance the EU's policy priorities.

The EU will continue to defend and, where possible, strengthen the **multilateral framework for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control**, and work to protect, strengthen, implement, and universalise the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regime, including the multilateral export control regimes. In order to ensure responsible military use of emerging technologies, respecting international law, the EU will continue to engage in negotiations at the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. The ongoing review of Common Position 2008/944 defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment is expected to conclude by the end of 2024. The EU will furthermore intensify its formal dialogues and consultations on non-proliferation and disarmament issues with like-minded partners and key actors.

The EU will implement the **new Security and Defence Partnerships** and look at options for negotiating new Partnerships and additional Security and Defence Dialogues and consultations with selected countries. The EU will also work towards further strengthening the strategic partnership to with NATO and the UN.