



Watch List 2024

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Every year Crisis Group publishes two additional Watch List updates that complement its annual Watch List for the EU, most recently published in January 2024. These publications identify major crises and conflict situations where the European Union and its member states can generate stronger prospects for peace. The two additional updates include an overview of the policy environment and main challenges for the European Union and five crises and conflict situations, which can update those identified in the annual Watch List or present a new focus of concern. For each of the five cases included in this update, Crisis Group provides field-based analysis and specific policy advice to the European Union and its member states, with the aim to guide and improve their efforts to prevent, mitigate or end conflicts.

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Preventing War. Shaping Peace.

President's Take: A Pivotal Moment for EU Foreign Policy

As the spring of 2024 draws to a close, the peace and security situation in and around Europe is as fraught as it has been in decades. Russia is pressing its advantage in Ukraine, moving into the Kharkiv region, which Kyiv liberated in 2022, and showing signs of increasing confidence. The western Balkans' fragile peace is under increasing strain: in Bosnia, the Serb-majority Republika Srpska is inching closer to secession and lingering disputes between Kosovo and Serbia are a continuing source of friction. Farther afield, Israel continues its harsh campaign in Gaza in response to Hamas's attacks of 7 October 2023 – a war that has [killed upward of 35,000](#), pushed the strip to the brink of famine and created serious risks of escalation elsewhere in the Middle East. On 20 May, the International Criminal Court's prosecutor announced that he is seeking arrest warrants for leaders on both sides, citing evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Sudan's civil war – now more than a year old – is exacting an appalling human toll and threatening to splinter this large, strategically significant country for decades.

But much as these and other crises command the attention of the European Union and its member states, many European policymakers will be spending the coming weeks in election mode. With just two weeks until voters go to the polls, all eyes in Brussels are on the European Parliament elections, which will determine who represents the close to 450 million EU citizens. The results will shape both the forthcoming selection of the EU's top officials and the EU's overall political direction in the years ahead. The stakes in 2024 seem especially high – and not just because of the wars and crises in the bloc's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Far-right parties are as strong as they have ever been in the EU's history. These parties are either in government or part of governing coalitions in five member states (Italy, Finland, Hungary, Sweden and the Netherlands), and highly visible far-right leaders in Italy (Giorgia Meloni), Hungary (Victor Orbán) and France (Marine Le Pen) are actively seeking to make Europe more inward-looking and EU member states' politics, economies and security less integrated.

Stepping Up and Facing Challenges

That vision stands in stark contrast to the direction that the current EU leadership has tried to set for the bloc. Over the past five years, the EU has at least in some respects become a more active geopolitical player than it was when Ursula Von der Leyen first became president of the European Commission in 2019, [vowing](#) to enlarge the EU's role on the world stage. Certainly, today's EU is increasingly committed to developing its own defence capabilities and vocal in asserting its interests vis-à-vis Russia and, to a lesser extent, China. These trends are most pronounced in the EU's reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Defying predictions that European unity would crumble, the bloc and its members rallied behind Ukraine in the face of Russia's all-out invasion in February 2022 – supplying billions of euros

in military and non-military aid as well as training; working with the U.S. and other partners to apply sanctions far tougher than might have been expected; and weathering fuel shortages brought on by the severing of economic links with Moscow.

But the EU and its member states still face significant challenges as they seek to attain the higher geopolitical profile that Von der Leyen and other EU leaders have worked toward, as well as achieve the overlapping goal of strategic autonomy – the [idea](#) that Europe is better able to defend its own political, security and economic interests – that French President Emmanuel Macron originally championed and many other European leaders at least notionally now subscribe to [in some form](#). The most basic problem is that of military power. With limited (although growing) arms production capacity, Europe still looks to the United States to supply the bulk of the materiel that Ukraine requires for its defence – a task that most European powers see as critical to deterring further Russian aggression, considering the existential threat they perceive it poses not only to Ukraine but also to Europe's peace and stability.

This level of reliance leaves the bloc ill prepared for what could be coming should the November U.S. presidential election return Donald Trump to power. Trump has strongly hinted that he would twist Kyiv's arm to reach a settlement, quite possibly on terms that it (and many of its European backers) would find unpalatable and dangerous. More broadly, Trump has made no secret of his views that Europe should pay more toward its own defence, going so far as to say he would invite Russia to attack countries that did not meet NATO's financial bar. Reducing the trans-Atlantic alliance to crudely transactional terms will mean a rocky ride for a Europe that still depends heavily on the U.S. for its security.

Arriving at a more cohesive European approach to China will be another challenge. In recent years, the EU and member states began to see it as important to reduce their economic dependency on Beijing, and they have also been under pressure from Washington to do so. But despite concrete steps in this direction, recent meetings of leaders such as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Macron and Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán with Chinese President Xi Jinping suggest that [fundamental policy gaps](#) persist both among member states and between Europe and the U.S. Whereas Macron stressed trade tensions and [urged](#) Xi to offer "fair rules for all", Scholz emphasised tightening economic ties, signalling resistance to "de-risking", which has become jargon for reducing strategic dependencies. Orbán went even further in seeking a deeper relationship – which Xi characterised as an "all-weather" strategic partnership. As Crisis Group has argued [before](#), Europe should not outsource its China policy to Washington, particularly given the latter's fraught relationship with Beijing. But if it wishes to stand up for its interests, it should do more to come up with a common vision of what these are.

Thirdly, and consequentially for Europe's geopolitical ambitions, relations with the so-called [Global South](#) have become strained. One source of frustration is resentment of colonial-era powers that have worn out their welcome, as with France in West Africa. Another is a sense that European and other Western partners too often fail to account for the implications of their policies outside Europe, as with Ukraine-

related sanctions that have had damaging ripple effects on fragile economies. A third is the perception that on fronts from managing the COVID-19 pandemic to combating climate change, Europe (and the West at large) have failed to provide the resources required to help poorer countries respond effectively – even, as in the case of climate change, where they are disproportionately responsible for creating the challenge in the first place. The sense of Western double standards on matters of ostensible principle – browbeating others to join the West in condemning Russia’s aggression and atrocities in Ukraine while tolerating (or in some cases actively supporting) Israel’s devastating offensive in Gaza – hardly helps.

A Spanner in the Works

Making progress on these new and old challenges would be difficult under any circumstances – but the results of the forthcoming parliamentary elections could add a whole new level of complexity. Amid a rapidly changing [political landscape](#), [polling](#) suggests that the two right-wing and Eurosceptic political groups, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy Group (ID), could gain a larger share of seats than they now hold – perhaps as much as 25 per cent, up from about 18 per cent – thus increasing their influence. One of them could become the third largest group in the assembly, displacing the liberal Renew Europe group and [shifting the centre of gravity](#) of European Parliament policymaking to the centre-right.

These two far-right groups traditionally do not have clearly defined [positions](#) when it comes to EU foreign and security policy, with the radical right ID group particularly divided over issues such as relations with Russia and China, and the more moderate ECR still broadly following the political mainstream. But most ID and some ECR politicians have [begun to converge](#) on certain positions that, if they got their way, would have major implications for Europe’s ability to engage on global issues including international peace and security. These include resistance to EU enlargement, development assistance (unless used as leverage to reduce migration), climate diplomacy and even maintaining a strong European diplomatic service.

Although there is no likely scenario in which the ECR and ID could form a majority, a stronger and more assertive far-right minority bloc within the European Parliament would still be able to affect the EU’s geopolitical aspirations. That is especially true if it could command enough votes to influence the choice and mandate of top EU officials like the Commission president, the high representative and powerful commissioners who deal, for example, with the EU’s neighbourhood, international partnerships and humanitarian engagement (and possibly defence). Even Von der Leyen, who is reasonably popular among voters, may not be a shoo-in, though her role in brokering deals with Mauritania, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon to stem migration, as well as in scaling back green policy ambitions, may help protect her political right flank.

These groups’ growing bargaining power may also complicate negotiations on trade, association agreements and EU enlargement, as well as the EU budget’s allocation of funds, including those designated for external action and foreign policy initiatives

– areas where the European Parliament holds direct competencies (unlike many other EU foreign policy files). In 2025, negotiations will start about the new seven-year EU budget, which means that much is at stake. Beyond these direct areas of influence, the potential to [shape foreign policies indirectly](#), by shifting the discourse, pressuring mainstream parties or blocking consensus-building, is arguably even greater.

A surge in far-right representation in the European Parliament would not happen in isolation. It would be part of a [wider trend in Europe](#), whereby far-right parties are participating in a growing number of national governments, with the Netherlands the latest country to join the ranks. These national governments wield an even bigger influence over EU foreign and security policy than the parliament, not least because of their de facto veto power at the European Council – where decisions on EU foreign policy have to be taken unanimously. The potential these trends have to disrupt, fragment and polarise EU foreign policy discussions, including about key issues such as support for Ukraine, is significant.

Pushing Back

Moving in this direction would be to Europe's detriment and the wider world's as well. At a time when instability and violent conflict directly threaten Europe's own security, and global threats such as the climate crisis are on the rise, the bloc can ill afford to turn inward. It has to invest more in hard power to meet the challenge of an aggressive Russia and a potentially unreliable U.S., but that is not the extent of it. Building a safer Europe and a more peaceful and stable world also requires continued investment in the tools that keep war and humanitarian catastrophe at bay both on Europe's borders and farther afield.

It will be important to resist the impulse to concentrate energy on the EU's immediate neighbourhood and on winning over powerful or wealthy states such as Brazil, India and the Gulf monarchies. The EU and member states should also work to mitigate the pressures such as debt, climate change, demographic forces and internal violence that threaten more vulnerable low and middle-income states on an individualised basis. Such efforts, particularly if they come with tangible financial, technical and diplomatic support, would help the EU both expand its geopolitical reach and cultivate a more peaceful and prosperous world in which to advance its own interests.

In this spirit, this Watch List Update offers suggestions for how the EU can engage with a range of external actors in the service of crisis management and conflict prevention – in Bosnia, Haiti, Israel and Lebanon, the South China Sea and Sudan. As always, the list is far from comprehensive. But in offering this snapshot Crisis Group is pointing to conflict situations where the stakes for Europe are particularly high and where the EU and its members states are well placed to make a substantial contribution.

Comfort Ero, Crisis Group President & CEO
May 2024

Helping Keep Bosnia and Herzegovina Together

Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter, Bosnia) is at its most fragile moment in years. Republika Srpska (RS), the smaller of its two ethnically divided parts, is taking cautious but steady steps to break away, due to grievances with the country's international supervision. A dispute about who should supervise local elections due on 6 October created a confrontation pitting RS leaders against High Representative Christian Schmidt, the international overseer appointed under arrangements that have secured the country's tenuous peace for nearly three decades. That crisis erupted just days after 21 March, when European Union member state leaders approved opening accession talks with Sarajevo. While dissolution is not imminent, should it happen, neighbouring Serbia will be under pressure to support RS, though a wary Belgrade knows that doing so would wreck its ties with the West. Violence is possible, especially in ethnically mixed areas, though it is unlikely in the near term.

For now, the crisis is political, but the challenges to resolving it are still significant. Leaders in Banja Luka have for the first time gone past secession rhetoric to take concrete steps denying Sarajevo's authority in RS territory, passing laws that preemptively reject all future decisions of the constitutional court and the High Representative. They do so as Serb leaders stoke anger about a draft UN General Assembly resolution commemorating the genocide in Srebrenica. (The resolution will be voted on shortly after this Watch List is published.)

RS President Milorad Dodik has sought Russian, Serbian and Hungarian support for his agenda. He has promised that independence will come when geopolitics allows. He surmises that such an opportunity might arise if Donald Trump is elected a second time as U.S. president in November. The EU and member states have leverage in Bosnia, including in RS, which they should use vigorously, lest the situation become worse.

To keep Bosnia and Herzegovina from falling apart, the EU and member states should:

- ❑ Work toward a deal in which RS stops trying to run its own elections; the High Representative refrains from imposing punitive measures absent consensus support from the Peace Implementation Council's Steering Board – an international body comprising eleven states and agencies helping manage the peace process; and Bosnia's parliament enacts a new election law;
- ❑ Coordinate with the U.S. through the above-referenced Steering Board and the Quint – France, Germany, Italy, the UK, the U.S. and the EU – to provide guidance to the High Representative so that he uses his powers (which RS sees as lacking democratic legitimacy) solely when there is clear consensus that they are needed to prevent irreparable damage;
- ❑ Offer to take the lead in helping Bosnian leaders settle ownership of state and defence property, which is the remaining condition identified by the Peace Implementation Council before the High Representative's office can be closed.

- ❑ Make clear that EU accession for Bosnia (and Serbia, should it play a spoiler role) would face insurmountable impediments if the integrity of the Bosnian state is compromised through secession.

Collision Course

The present dispute hinges on the question of who exercises supreme authority in RS – its own government or some combination of the central government and the High Representative. The Dayton peace agreement that ended the four-year Bosnian war in November 1995 settled this question only on paper. It created a nominally sovereign central government, but one with few powers, able to act only when representatives of all the Bosnian peoples – Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Croats and Serbs – agreed. It also planted the seed for a High Representative appointed by the Peace Implementation Council with the prerogative to appoint and remove officials and enact or amend legislation. In effect, RS remained in charge on its own territory, but at constant risk of having its decisions overruled by the centre or the High Representative using what are referred to as the Bonn Powers.

The Bosnian state has grown stronger over the years, by agreement and by High Representatives' fiat, but without fully resolving certain tensions and ambiguities in the Dayton arrangements. The High Representative's role is the source of particular friction, given that this unelected official enjoys vast sovereign powers but is viewed by Serbs and others as lacking democratic legitimacy.

Within this framework, RS President Dodik and High Representative Schmidt are on a collision course with no obvious off-ramp. Over the last few years, as Dodik has become more aggressive in steering a secessionist course, the High Representative's office has been more assertive in using its Bonn Powers. On 26 March, Schmidt imposed sweeping [amendments](#) to Bosnia's election law to promote integrity and thwart cheating, which has been a lingering problem.

The RS National Assembly, which rejects Schmidt's authority in principle, resolved three days later to enact its own election law. It also threatened to instruct Serb representatives to cease participating in Bosnian state institutions and to withdraw from the state armed forces, the VAT system and the state body that appoints judges. The U.S. embassy immediately [called](#) the resolution a "direct attack" on Bosnia's state structure and on the Dayton accord; two weeks later, in mid-April, it [warned](#) of consequences for anyone involved in organising what it called "an unconstitutional, parallel election system".

Further escalation around the election law issue may get pushed back to 2025 or later. Bosniak delegates appealed the RS election law to the RS's constitutional court, which will likely approve it, but with too little time left for the entity to organise for the October vote. Against this backdrop, Banja Luka agreed on 21 May to participate in local elections organised by the state election commission, which is a de-escalatory step. The dispute with the High Representative has not gone away, but Bosnia's leaders at least get another chance to find a negotiated solution before the 2026 national elections force the issue. The RS strategy continues to be to

push out the High Representative and other foreign officials (another vestige of the Dayton constitution is that foreign judges occupy three of nine seats on the constitutional court), while waiting for a chance to break away and unite with Serbia. This campaign shifted into higher gear after Schmidt imposed his election law.

A Cagey and Incremental Approach

As in the past, Banja Luka has mixed incendiary rhetoric with cautious practice, taking mainly incremental steps in an effort to avoid provoking a strong U.S. or EU response.

The signs of Dodik's cagey and incremental approach are easy to see. While the RS parliament formally rejected Schmidt's authority in June 2023, its courts are still respecting past High Representative decisions in their jurisprudence. A special parliamentary session on 18 April passed the RS election law, but quietly shelved all the other, more inflammatory measures they had threatened, like boycotting Bosnian state institutions and withdrawing from the joint armed forces. Instead, the assembly moved bit by bit to shore up RS defences against further steps by Schmidt and Washington. The assembly's actions include requiring employers to pay in cash staff whose bank accounts are frozen due to sanctions and granting sweeping legal immunity to top RS officials, though it is unclear what effect that would have on state-level prosecutions.

Also on 18 April, the Bosnian governing coalition (which includes Dodik's party) proposed a deal in which the Sarajevo parliament would adopt a new state election law, superseding Schmidt's imposed statute. In response, Dodik's party submitted a draft resolution to parliament condemning Schmidt's action and welcoming a new state-level election law. Though written in provocative language that guaranteed it would not pass, the draft still included a [provision](#) endorsing the "sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina". Similar formulations have appeared in RS National Assembly legally binding conclusions. The message is that Serb leaders are willing to support Bosnia – at least for the moment – in return for their coalition partners' help in getting rid of the High Representative. What happens afterward – whether a good-faith attempt to work together in a Bosnia without international supervision or a renewed push for separation – is unclear.

Schmidt is likely to annul the RS election law, and Banja Luka will probably ignore him, as it did when he struck down two other laws on 1 July 2023. Dodik is already on trial before the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina for failing to implement High Representative decisions – a crime Schmidt [added to the criminal code](#) on 1 July 2023. Dodik filed the charges against himself, as a way of scoffing at the spectacle of an international official making defiance of his own authority a crime. He is participating in the trial but says any attempt to detain him will be met by force; his party has likewise said it will not accept a guilty verdict, which could lead to up to five years in prison. Yet even before issuing its ruling, the Court can provisionally remove him from office if it finds he is likely to repeat the offence. The High Representative can also dismiss him.

If the crisis escalates to the point that Dodik is defying an arrest warrant or a High Representative decision to remove him, Bosnia will be in uncharted waters. It is hard to predict who would then hold the stronger hand.

That might depend in part on what kind of support Dodik would get from outside. While Dodik has appealed for support to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Serbia is his main partner; indeed, the RS leadership enjoys a closer relationship with Belgrade than it has for many years. The two governments are coordinating policies. Dodik now talks of unification with Serbia, a shift from past rhetoric that focused on RS independence alone. At a rally attended by former Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and a former Serbian intelligence chief, Dodik told a cheering crowd that RS would eventually unite with Serbia, adding that “Belgrade is our capital”. He said RS would act when the time is right. In a February [interview](#) with a Russian newspaper, he seemed to go a step further: “For example, if it happens that Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidential election, certain conditions may arise for [an independence referendum] to happen”. Trump’s inner circle includes individuals with notable [connections](#) to Belgrade, though it is not clear how a Trump administration would view RS secession.

For Serbia, however, the situation would present something of a bind. Supporting RS secession would likely poison relations with the EU and the U.S., while withholding recognition would be very unpopular at home. Belgrade is still trying to avoid this choice; Brnabić’s speech emphasised Serbia’s ironclad support for the Dayton accord along with fraternal ties with Banja Luka.

The Politics of Genocide Denial

Parallel to the elections crisis, an emotional controversy over a UN General Assembly resolution on commemorating the Srebrenica genocide is fuelling Bosnia’s woes. On 23 May, the General Assembly is voting on a resolution making 11 July an “international day of reflection and commemoration of the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica”, when Bosnian Serb forces killed some 8,000 Muslims. The resolution does not call for any action to be taken against Serbs, Serbia or RS – indeed it does not even mention them; rather, it calls for reflection and for combating “denial of the Srebrenica genocide”. Nevertheless, it has sparked a furore.

While on one level the resolution breaks no new ground, it has played into local sensitivities in a way that Dodik and other RS politicians have effectively manipulated. That the Srebrenica massacre constituted a genocide is confirmed by [judgments](#) by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which the International Court of Justice later [endorsed](#).

None of this jurisprudence was intended to do what Dodik and other RS and Serbian leaders complain about, namely tarring the Serbian people or their states as inherently genocidal. Indeed, one of the tribunal’s main goals was to repudiate such notions of collective guilt by focusing on individual criminal responsibility. Yet there is a widespread popular belief among Serbs – encouraged by Dodik and other

leaders – that the genocide label cannot be allowed to adhere because it brings with it an indelible stain with fateful political consequences.

Dodik, Vučić and many other Serbs tend to walk a complicated line when it comes to wartime atrocities. They generally acknowledge that Serb forces committed crimes after Srebrenica fell, but some also promote a [parallel rhetoric](#) of war crimes denialism, and virtually all firmly reject the idea that their actions amounted to genocide while portraying the UN resolution as part of a campaign to libel the Serb people. At a rally to oppose Schmidt and the UN resolution, Dodik made familiar denialist points, while complaining that the war's many Serb victims have been ignored. He went on to [warn](#) the resolution's sponsors that "this will not bring us together. This always separates us, and we do not want to live with you who say the Serb people are genocidal. We do not want to live with you, and we will not be in the same state with you".

Serbian frustration over the resolution goes beyond substance. The original [idea](#) for the resolution dates back to a [2019 appeal](#) by a Bosnian NGO called Mothers of Srebrenica and it was subsequently picked up by Bosnian state officials. Yet the officials promoting it – the Bosniak and Croat members of the state presidency and the country's permanent representative at the UN – bypassed the procedures for setting the country's foreign policy, which give Serb representatives a say. This manoeuvre has provided grist for Dodik's grievance that the Bosniak majority's representatives treat the country as belonging to them alone, disregarding the views of others.

Politically, the controversy over the genocide resolution has come at an opportune moment for Dodik, allowing him to unify Serbs who might otherwise differ behind a common cause. The RS opposition parties are divided about the wisdom of his confrontation with Schmidt, in part for fear of provoking the U.S., but they are in lockstep with Dodik in opposing the Srebrenica resolution. Belgrade also has its doubts about RS moves toward independence but welcomes the chance to show its support for Banja Luka's defiance of alleged international pressure. This cohesion may not last long once the resolution recedes into memory.

What Europe Can Do

The latest escalation in Bosnia's political crisis comes as the EU is distracted. Its institutions are gearing up for European Parliament elections in June, and policy-makers' attention is fixed on the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. U.S. policy after the November presidential election is also uncertain. The RS and Serbian leaderships openly say they are looking to the U.S. vote – suggesting that they hope for a Trump win – which they believe will give them opportunities to advance their respective agendas.

The EU's priority should be to break the cycle of escalation that Banja Luka and the High Representative are locked in. Brussels and member states engaged in Bosnia, notably France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, should use their influence with the High Representative to discourage him from further use of his extraordinary

powers, as that would likely push RS further along the road to secession. They should also push Dodik and the RS leadership not to implement their controversial – arguably unconstitutional – new law for the 2026 national elections. The Bosnian governing coalition should go ahead with its plans to [adopt and then amend](#) Schmidt's imposed election law.

While this is a tall order, the EU has considerable leverage in Bosnia, including in RS. The prospect of starting membership talks and benefiting from the EU's [€6 billion growth pact](#) for the western Balkans, announced in 2023, is more attractive than anything Brussels has had to offer before. EU officials should be clear that full EU accession for both Bosnia and (if it plays a spoiler role) Serbia depends on there being an intact, stable and fully functional state in Bosnia. While the history of accession as leverage is fraught to say the least, it is also true that membership will not move forward with this crisis, and the attendant risk of disintegration, unresolved.

The EU should also use the start of membership discussions, on a date yet to be determined, to stimulate dialogue about re-evaluating the Dayton accord framework, which underpins the recurrent crises between RS and the High Representative. They should push Bosnian leaders to begin articulating how they see their country dispensing with the need for a High Representative and the foreign judges on its court in favour of more conventional democratic institutions and taking on the responsibilities of membership in the Union.

The EU should do what it can to make progress in the same direction. In 2008, the Peace Implementation Council set conditions for closing the High Representative's office. Most of these have already been met, and only the issue of apportioning Bosnia's state- and military-owned property remains outstanding; the EU should revive the push to settle it. In the meantime, through the Council and the Quint, Brussels should insist that the High Representative obtain consensus support for any further use of his powers, the exercise of which he should view as a last resort to avoid irreparable harm.

Brussels should in parallel work with the U.S. on a roadmap to closing the High Representative's office down. It may take some convincing: Washington sees Dodik as a major threat to Bosnian sovereignty and the High Representative as the most potent tool for reining him in. Yet if the standoff between Dodik and Schmidt escalates out of control, it would create a crisis on the EU's doorstep. RS secession would, too, but at this point the High Representative's powers are no longer an effective tool for stopping it and may instead be hastening it.

Haiti: A New Government Faces Up to the Gangs

Gang violence, which has tightened its grip on Haiti since President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in July 2021, took a drastic turn for the worse at the end of February. Rather than fighting each other for turf, as they have done for years, the most powerful criminal gangs operating in Port-au-Prince and its surroundings made a non-aggression pact in order to [forge a united front](#) against the Haitian authorities. The gangs, which had been loosely organised in two rival coalitions known as the G9 and the Gpèp, proceeded to launch coordinated attacks on government buildings and critical infrastructure while the interim prime minister, Ariel Henry, was out of the country. In an unprecedented offensive, they assaulted dozens of police stations, the country's two largest penitentiaries (from which some 4,600 prisoners escaped), the main seaports and the international airport in Port-au-Prince, which is only now very slowly resuming operations. The groups in this new federation, called Viv Ansanm ("living together" in Haitian Creole), have also been looting and burning down schools, health facilities, businesses and private residences, upending the lives of thousands of people and exacerbating the deep privation already besetting the country.

As Haiti's crisis has worsened over the last three years, Caribbean neighbour states, along with foreign powers such as the U.S., Canada and the EU, have been pressing the country's politicians to conclude a power-sharing agreement, which all have seen as a necessary step on the way to restoring democratic institutions, breaking the gangs' stranglehold and addressing the country's humanitarian emergency. In April, a way out of the protracted political deadlock finally began to emerge. Henry, who had been de facto head of state since Moïse's murder, [resigned under pressure from the U.S.](#), and Haiti's most important political groups came together with private-sector and civil society representatives to form a transitional government under a plan hatched with international support. The new government's first task is to enable deployment of the Kenya-led multinational security mission authorised by the UN Security Council in October 2023 to help the police fight the gangs. As it strives to regain control of gang-held areas, the new administration will also have to start preparing the ground for elections. It will not be easy, and the transitional government's first weeks have been marred by internal discord. But the problems are bigger than that: Haitian institutions have been gravely weakened as a whole, and the state will need a surge of international support to consolidate its authority throughout the country and meet people's basic needs.

The EU and its member states should:

- ❑ Provide financial and in-kind support to help the Kenya-led multinational security mission acquire the staff and equipment it needs to counter armed gangs as soon as possible, while also helping ensure appropriate training and other measures to guard against acts of gender-based violence and other abuses of civilians by foreign officers. European aid can also enable the mission to hire local experts as community liaisons.

- ❑ Using the EU's autonomous framework for sanctions, impose comprehensive restrictive measures on powerful individuals and entities that sponsor or have sponsored gang activity in Haiti.
- ❑ Assist the Haitian state in developing a demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration program for thousands of gang members.
- ❑ Help the incoming transitional government rebuild democratic institutions and eventually convene national, regional and local elections.
- ❑ Bolster the Haitian authorities' response to the humanitarian crisis through increased funding for food aid, access to water and health care services, and resettlement programs for displaced persons.

Haiti's Parlous State

Haiti's crisis is multifaceted, but the most immediate peril to many people's lives is posed by criminal gangs, which have long [outmatched](#) the police in organisation and firepower. With the government in disarray following Moïse's assassination, gangs expanded their ranks and built up their arsenals. Combined, the gang coalitions now have around 5,000 members. They tote [heavy weapons](#) such as AR15s, AK47s, Galils, .50 sniper rifles and belt-fed machine guns. The gangs have also greatly widened their territorial footprint: they operate in almost the entire capital and a sizeable portion of the Artibonite department (Haiti's breadbasket), and they have recently started spreading toward the south of the country. Gangs look to dominate strategic locations for various illicit purposes, among them extorting businesses and residents, establishing improvised highway tolls, and asserting control of larger areas where they keep their kidnapping victims.

For over two years, the G9 and Gpèp coalitions waged a brutal battle for hegemony using indiscriminate violence against civilians, including [collective rapes](#) of women and children, with the goal of intimidating residents and discouraging them from collaborating with rival groups. But as plans to deploy an international security mission led by Kenya began to move forward, the top gang leaders started piecing together a scheme to stop fighting each other and unite their forces. The late February attacks, timed to coincide with Henry's trip to Nairobi to hammer out the details of deploying the multinational force, aimed to paralyse the capital by simultaneously hitting locations throughout the metropolitan area, thereby stretching the police to the maximum. The gangs' main goals were to derail plans to send the mission, force Henry to resign and secure from his replacement an amnesty for all their crimes. As of early March, there were [more than 360,000](#) internally displaced people in Haiti, about half of them children. Since then, [around 100,000](#) people – some of whom were already among the displaced – have fled the capital to escape the violence. There is a high risk of cholera spreading in the ramshackle camps where many now live without adequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

As gangs wreaked havoc in Port-au-Prince, several prominent Haitian political groups and private-sector representatives [agreed to form](#) a transitional presidential council at a meeting convened by members of the Caribbean Community, better known as

CARICOM, on 11 March. It was decided that the council should comprise seven voting members and two non-voting observers from civil society. After lengthy negotiations, all the groups appointed their representatives, and the council was officially sworn in on 25 April in a brief ceremony under heavy police guard, while gunshots from gangs clashing with police rang out in the distance. The day before, Henry, who had been exiled in the U.S., resigned from his post at Washington's request.

The presidential council has had a rocky start, and its first weeks in office saw a swift return to polarisation and traditional political manoeuvring. Vying to secure key posts in the administration, four of the political groups involved made a pact to vote the same way on every question and thus control the council's decisions. Their first move was an attempt to impose a president and a prime minister. Faced with threats from the remaining council members to withdraw from the body, the groups reversed course, agreeing to a rotating presidency and a minimum of five votes for every major decision.

This inauspicious start complicates the ambitious roadmap toward strengthening and restructuring Haiti's state institutions charted by the [agreement](#) that paved the way for the new administration. The transitional government is meant to organise general elections so that local, regional and national authorities can be sworn in by February 2026, almost a decade after elections last took place. A first step will be to appoint a provisional electoral council, which is expected to carry out an assessment of the country's voting system. This council's recommendations on how to conduct the polls are supposed to help shape a constitutional reform process before elections are held. Even in the best of circumstances, the transitional government might struggle to accomplish these goals in such a short time.

Preparing to Face the Gangs

Plans to hold long overdue elections will depend on progress in blunting the threat posed by the gangs. As the rampage beginning at the end of February demonstrated, these groups have a clear upper hand over the Haitian police force, which suffers from scarce resources, pervasive corruption and rising attrition rates. International assistance has recently enabled the police to create elite units with the training and equipment to combat gangs, but these alone cannot change the balance of power. Without significant outside support, the police and the embryonic armed forces – re-established by Moïse in 2017 after being disbanded over twenty years earlier – will not succeed in regaining control of key sites and restoring a modicum of order to the capital.

Help should be on the way, in the form of the Kenya-led multinational security mission [authorised](#) by the UN Security Council. But the mission's dispatch has encountered several delays, despite [seven countries](#) having promised to contribute military police, and the challenges it will face are daunting. First came a [judicial appeal](#) in Nairobi, which aimed to stop the Kenyan government from sending a contingent to Haiti on the grounds that deploying police officers abroad, rather than military forces, violates the Kenyan constitution unless a reciprocal agreement with

the receiving country is in place. Then came the uncertainty of the political transition in Port-au-Prince. Those two issues are resolved, so the main obstacle to prompt deployment is now financing. Only \$21 million of the [\\$600 million Kenya estimates](#) the mission will cost are available in the trust fund set up by the UN for this purpose. Despite the funding gap, U.S. and Kenyan officials were planning that the mission would begin deploying around the time of President William Ruto's state visit to Washington on 23 May. But things are not ready on the ground (though senior commanders arrived on 20 May). Once on the ground, the mission will likely have its hands full immediately, as it may have to respond to coordinated attacks from Viv Ansanm. It will need to deter and, where necessary, fight the gangs, while ensuring the protection of civilians; Crisis Group has previously offered [recommendations](#) for how to approach these imperatives.

Even if the mission handles those challenges well, it is unlikely to facilitate enduring positive change unless progress is made in addressing the roots of gang expansion. Haitian elites have long used non-state armed groups as tools to impose their political and economic authority, especially in metropolitan Port-au-Prince. They provided gangs with funds, weapons and impunity as needed, in exchange for which the armed groups helped clamp down on protests, ensure the victory of particular candidates in elections and protect turf for legal and illegal businesses. While still extant, the ties between gangs and elites have been fraying. Meanwhile, the personal ambitions of the most prominent gang leaders and the fierce competition among gang coalitions, among other issues, have compelled the groups to seek new sources of funding – including through protection rackets, kidnapping and, more recently, drugs and arms trafficking.

Foreign powers have sought to break the links between Haitian gangs and elites, but these measures have become less effective over time. The U.S. and Canada imposed [unilateral sanctions](#) on some of the most influential politicians and powerful businesspeople, including two former presidents, two former prime ministers and several former senators who are accused of having directly or indirectly supported the gangs. Meanwhile, the UN established a [special sanctions regime](#) in October 2022 specifically aimed at cutting ties between the gangs and their third-party sponsors. More than a year and a half later, however, Security Council members have agreed to include only five gang leaders on whom financial sanctions and travel bans have an extremely limited impact. The sanctions have not focused on the elite patrons whose activities must be curtailed in order to sever the pernicious linkages that have allowed gangs to thrive. The European Council announced in July 2023 that the EU would impose its own sanctions to complement those levelled by the Security Council, but so far it has only penalised the [same five gang leaders](#) identified by the [Security Council](#).

What the EU Can Do

Restoring order to Haiti, while an urgent task, will not happen overnight, and rebuilding a state that can serve the population will take years. The European Union has much to contribute to this effort both right away and in the long term.

Hopes of respite from the gangs' oppressive hold now hinge on the Kenya-led mission. The EU has declined to fund the mission but has [promised](#) to support "complementary actions that can provide an enabling environment for the work of the mission or uphold the sustainability of its results". The EU should reconsider this decision. While ensuring the conditions for rebuilding state institutions and support for civil society are of great importance, without enough funding the mission could fail, endangering progress in addressing the political and humanitarian crises. The EU could play a major role in plugging the resource gap by contributing to the trust fund created by the UN to support the effort, as well as by directly assisting Kenya, with which it is working to strengthen security and defence ties. It should do so. So should EU member states, particularly France, given its colonial history in Haiti. These funds could help pay for the logistical costs of deploying the mission and increased vetting and training for special Haitian police units, as well as for hiring local experts who could act as community liaisons to monitor and promptly report any cases of abuse of force or sexual exploitation and violence.

Past international security interventions have succeeded in achieving a fleeting reduction in violence, only for criminal groups to resurge once foreign troops have left. To prevent the Kenyan-led mission from achieving nothing more than a short-lived respite, the Haitian government and counterparts such as the EU should back complementary measures aimed at dismantling these armed groups and the networks that have enabled their expansion. They will need, first, to sever the links between powerful gangs and influential politicians and businesspersons; and secondly, to find ways to entice gang members to abandon the gangs and re-enter civilian life.

At first, sanctions played an important role in deterring elites from collaborating with gangs, but the focus (particularly from the UN) on gang leaders, and not those who have financed them, appears to have undermined their effectiveness. During the review of its sanctions regime to be carried out in July, the EU should consider including new individuals, in particular powerful elites and less visible intermediaries who play an important role in arms trafficking and money laundering. More broadly, an independent judicial system that is resistant to manipulation by the executive will be essential to efforts to permanently break links between gangs and powerful individuals in Haiti, as well as to attempts at curbing high-level corruption. In line with [previous Crisis Group recommendations](#), the new government has said it will set up a specialised financial prosecuting authority to probe the corruption that has drained public finances. Through its [Multinational Indicative Programme](#) for Haiti for 2021-2024 – which aims, among other things, to make the state more accountable to the citizenry – the EU should support creating this body and provide legal assistance to launch investigations as soon as possible. Rapid action on this front would be a strong deterrent to politicians who might be tempted to misuse their powers or embezzle public funds during the transitional period or after the elections.

Meanwhile, exit paths will be indispensable for individuals willing to leave the gangs. Upon the mission's arrival in Haiti, the Haitian authorities and their foreign partners should identify people who can engage in the delicate tasks of establishing channels of communication with the gangs to negotiate ceasefires; opening humanitarian corridors; and tailoring demobilisation and disarmament programs. The EU could

provide technical and financial support to these endeavours, including by strengthening the operational capacities of the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration, a Haitian institution that [has been dormant](#) for several years, but that could develop programming to enable gang members who are willing to quit to do so safely. The EU could also support the new authorities in designing a legal framework to reintegrate gang members who decide to turn themselves in, with a special approach to minors, who account for a large proportion of gang members; and provide technical support to the Commission to help it collect, document and dispose of the weapons these individuals hand in.

The EU should also look to support the transitional government as it prepares for fresh elections before February 2026, offering technical assistance to the electoral council as it evaluates the existing system and helping build its capacity to organise transparent, competitive polls. The EU could also offer financial and logistical assistance to the consultations that the new government hopes to conduct throughout the country to gather input on desired constitutional changes.

In response to Haiti's dire humanitarian emergency, the EU has [already allocated](#) €20 million for the country in 2024, earmarked to respond to the needs of people affected by gang violence, provide educational services and reduce the risk of cholera spreading. Extra help will be needed to support local and international humanitarian partners to establish displacement camps with adequate facilities to accommodate the needy, particularly as many of the makeshift camps have extremely limited access to food, water and health services, and numerous cases of sexual and gender-based violence have been reported there. As the number of displaced persons is likely to increase during the security mission's first few months, the EU should also increase its contributions to the [severely underfunded](#) UN humanitarian plan, which is essential to provide much-needed aid to the more than four million people who cannot get enough to eat. Unlike in places such as Gaza or Sudan, relief agencies in Haiti can reach hungry populations, but they lack the resources to respond to all basic needs.

Finally, Haiti will need help to restore some sense of normalcy after years under the thumb of gangs. Quick-impact programs to create jobs in areas retaken from the gangs, for example, could provide livelihood alternatives to locals. These could focus at first on rebuilding public infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, public parks and police stations, as well as on setting up drinking water and electricity services. While curbing Haiti's extreme violence is the top priority, the EU could be an essential partner in building a state that can help Haitian citizens lead dignified lives.

Preventing Escalation between Hizbollah and Israel

Since the Gaza war began in October 2023, hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel have slowly grown in scope, in terms of both the territory under fire and the weaponry used. The sides have managed to avoid all-out war thus far, but that could change at any time: the conflict's gradual expansion in itself increases the risk of inadvertent escalation. The U.S. and France have attempted mediation, but Hizbollah has said it will continue fighting unless and until Israel stops its Gaza campaign. For now, Hizbollah and Israel are locked in a war of attrition, with more than 100,000 Lebanese and similar numbers of Israelis evacuated or forced to flee their homes. Israel has also indicated that it may step up military action if diplomacy fails to allow people living in the areas along its northern border to return safely. Significantly sharper exchanges would put civilians in both countries, especially Lebanon, in severe danger. It would prompt even greater displacement in Lebanon, possibly pushing many to seek refuge in Europe. It might also spiral into a broader Middle East war. While tensions between Israel and Iran have ebbed since the unprecedented confrontation in April, which saw the first-ever direct Iranian attack on Israeli soil, an Israeli assault on Hizbollah in Lebanon could well trigger a wider confrontation involving Iran. Along with other outside powers, the European Union has consistently warned of these perils, but thus far no one has been able to reverse the worrying trajectory.

To do their part in restoring calm, the EU and its member states should:

- ❑ Throw their diplomatic weight behind attempts to achieve a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and a release of all hostages held there, an end to the Gaza war being key to preventing further escalation. European leaders should also consider what more they might do to press the parties to make such a deal.
- ❑ Give full support to French and U.S. efforts to mediate sustainable security arrangements in southern Lebanon. France should, where possible, keep its European partners informed of progress in its mediation efforts in order to ensure coordinated political messaging and planning within the EU.
- ❑ Reaffirm their commitment to Israel's security, including on its northern border, while stressing that this goal is best pursued by diplomatic rather than military means, as the U.S. has done.
- ❑ Prepare to provide material aid for measures designed to increase mutual security along the Lebanon-Israel border at short notice and step up support for and troop contributions to the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon.
- ❑ Take steps to prepare for the humanitarian fallout and displacement an escalation might cause. These include support for anticipatory humanitarian action that can enable international organisations to scale up aid operations inside Lebanon and in Syria, as well as increasing the capacity of reception centres and sea rescue operations on the maritime route to Europe, in particular in Cyprus and Greece.

Escalation Risks

The tit-for-tat war between Israel and Hizbollah, which the Shiite party-cum-militia initiated on 8 October 2023 and framed as imposing a cost on Israel for its military operations in Gaza, continues to escalate in slow motion. Where once the parties limited their bombardment to small areas, some of them uninhabited, both are now striking deeper. Israel has repeatedly hit sites as far north as Baalbek and Hermel in the Beqaa valley and near Saida on the coast. Hizbollah has largely restricted its attacks to a swathe of Israel some 10km south of the border. It has lobbed occasional missiles farther south – eg, at Nahariyya and the occupied Golan Heights – but using projectiles that Israeli’s advanced air defences can intercept with relative ease. Yet the group has gradually introduced new weapons, such as guided anti-armour rockets, attack drones and air defence missiles apparently capable of taking down advanced Israeli drones, showing that it can deploy these in complex operations. By mid-May, Hizbollah drone attacks had reached as far south as Tiberias, some 35km from the border. To date, the fighting has reportedly destroyed some 6,000 dwellings in Lebanon and over 1,000 in Israel.

Both Israel and Hizbollah appear interested in avoiding all-out war, showing some restraint, in particular striving to avoid civilian casualties, which would be most likely to trigger a dangerous escalation. Hizbollah has focused its attacks on Israeli military targets, while Israel has relied on precise intelligence to minimise civilian harm when hitting Hizbollah assets in Lebanon. But as the battlefield expands and the weapons used increase in potency, the risk mounts that a tactical error – eg, a strike that unintentionally takes many lives – or strategic miscalculation about what would prompt the opponent to launch a strong response will set off an escalation that is difficult to control.

A full-scale Israeli invasion of Rafah, the city and district in southern Gaza where most of the territory’s population had found uneasy shelter from the war, could also trigger further escalation between Israel and Hizbollah. Hamas has suffered military setbacks, but it is far from defeated and continues to stage vigorous counterattacks on Israeli ground troops, despite the massive suffering Israel’s offensive has inflicted on the Palestinian population.

The frequent exchanges of fire across the Israel-Lebanon border since October have prompted the U.S. and France to mediate (the U.S. reportedly communicates with Hizbollah through other Lebanese politicians). They have floated ideas for ways to contain the conflict, in particular a withdrawal of Hizbollah fighters and their equipment to an area some 10km north of the border, to be replaced by the Lebanese army. Yet Hizbollah has refused to consider any arrangement until there is a Hamas-endorsed permanent ceasefire in Gaza. As a result, negotiations have remained stalled. Absent a Gaza ceasefire, Hizbollah and Israel will remain on high alert, each ready to respond to what it sees as the other’s provocations. Israel, in particular, may continue attacking Hizbollah as a way to convince it to stand down or, failing that, to degrade its capacity to harm Israel in what could become a drawn-out war of attrition.

Impact of Failure

The situation in the north puts significant political pressure on the Israeli leadership. Displaced civilians are demanding more decisive military action against Hizbollah. Such public campaigns may prompt Israeli leaders to deal Hizbollah a bigger blow if diplomatic efforts to restore calm to the border areas fail. Some in the Israeli government vow to do precisely that. Foreign officials speaking to both sides say they of Hizbollah-dominated areas sooner or later, potentially with a level of destruction similar to that in Gaza. It is hard to see how Israel can carry out an effective attack to restore security without triggering all-out war. A concerted Israeli attack would prompt Hizbollah to activate its reported arsenals of longer-range missiles, some of which are reportedly equipped with precision-guidance systems and can reach crucial nodes of Israeli infrastructure, including the nuclear facilities at Dimona in the Negev. Such a conflict between Israel and Hizbollah would risk bringing their respective patrons, the U.S. and Iran, into direct confrontation, sparking a regional war with far-reaching consequences. (Conversely, a direct escalation between Iran and Israel, the potential for which the events in April underscored dramatically, could see Hizbollah enter the fray.)

If the worst-case scenario comes to pass, Israel could well suffer greater damage than it has ever experienced before, while parts of Lebanon would be destroyed. Such a war would also cause mass civilian displacement, in particular as Israel bombs densely populated areas in Lebanon, which it accuses Hizbollah of using as launchpads for its missiles. Significant numbers of refugees may try to escape, either by sea to Cyprus and Greece or by land to Syria and potentially on from there.

Pathways to Stabilisation

The European Union and European capitals should all factor in these risks and their potentially grave implications for Europe. At present, discussions in Europe lack a sense of urgency, with some seeming to believe that the Hizbollah-Israel clashes are manageable. The EU and its member states should instead step up their diplomacy aimed at de-escalation in this highly perilous flashpoint.

An end to the war in Gaza remains the key, not only to ending the agony of the Palestinians there, but also to banishing the spectre that the conflict will contribute to further destructive wars in the region. EU member states should throw their full diplomatic weight behind efforts to achieve such a ceasefire (the most likely form of which probably remains the phased approach entailing an initial pause and the release of the hostages held by Hamas and other militants in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, ideally leading to an end to hostilities, which appeared to be at least under discussion some weeks ago).

Europe has leverage it could use to this end, though it remains hamstrung by discord among EU member states. Efforts by some member states, most prominently Ireland and Spain, to push Europe to review, for example, whether Israel is complying with the EU-Israel Association Agreement's human rights principles, and potentially suspend that agreement if not, have gained little traction. In private, some

European officials broach the option of stronger sanctions, potentially against parts of the Israel military (Hamas is already designated and sanctioned as a terrorist organisation), but such a decision would require unanimity among member states. Nor do any of the European capitals exporting arms to Israel, albeit in far smaller quantities than the U.S., show any inclination to withhold those supplies. Still, given European opposition to a full-scale Rafah operation (which European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen, usually a strong Israel supporter, has stressed would be “completely unacceptable” and would provoke European action) and the disastrous consequences of an Israel-Hizbollah war, Europe would be better served by trying to reach consensus on what pressure it might apply to avoid both.

An end to the war in Gaza could also pave the way for security arrangements in southern Lebanon that would address Israel’s demands. Hizbollah refuses to negotiate as long as the conflict in Gaza is under way, but it has not rejected an agreement in principle, and Lebanese government intermediaries have reacted somewhat favourably to proposals submitted by the U.S. and France. A settlement in southern Lebanon will not end the longstanding conflict between Israel and Hizbollah. Iran will almost certainly keep supplying Hizbollah with arms and funding, leading Israel to keep targeting shipments passing through Syria and the personnel accompanying them. But new security arrangements that calm cross-border tensions and allow the displaced on both sides to return home are worth pursuing.

European countries should prepare to lend their full support once workable security arrangements become possible. France may not be able to reveal all the details of its diplomacy, but it should remain in as open communication as possible with its European partners about its mediation efforts, so that the latter are ready to supply what is needed at short notice. The Lebanese army will need substantial aid in order to station sizeable numbers of troops on the border, given the dilapidated state of Lebanon’s public finances. The EU is already providing some direct support through individual member state measures and the European Peace Facility. Additional assistance through the latter is on the way. Member states should approve the proposed measures and EU institutions should ensure swift delivery. UNIFIL, the international peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, will likewise need a financial boost, but also additional troop commitments from major Western countries. Financial support for Israel to bolster security measures along the border, by finishing construction of a border wall, for example, may help reduce its sense of vulnerability created by the 7 October events and increase its trust in the proposed measures’ effectiveness.

The latter type of support could be initiated immediately once the fighting pauses and may also help dissuade Israel from continuing attacks on Hizbollah or taking unilateral action in the time that elapses until negotiated security measures can be put in place, which may be significant. Europe should make a larger effort to emphasise the EU’s commitment to Israel’s security, while at the same time prevailing on Israel to address the security situation through diplomacy and not unilateral military action. The U.S. has taken this line, suggesting that a unified trans-Atlantic position on this matter is possible and likely to be effective.

At the same time, European countries should prepare contingency plans, particularly for the displacement that an all-out war between Israel and Hizbollah, which could erupt with very little warning, would cause. Through anticipatory humanitarian action, the EU and its member states should therefore enable international humanitarian NGOs and agencies to rapidly scale up their operations in Lebanon, which are already hugely overstretched. Massive refugee flight from Lebanon would likely follow the maritime route to Cyprus and Greece. Experience suggests that the countries involved, as well as the EU border agency Frontex, would need proper preparation to respond to a new influx of refugees across the sea in a fashion that is compatible with international humanitarian and human rights law and the EU's professed values. Other refugees will escape over the border to Syria, where they would need immediate humanitarian support but where European assistance would be complicated by the lack of relations between the EU and Damascus. Given Syria's desperate economic plight, most refugees are likely to try to travel farther, with European countries the likely destination for many due to geographic proximity and the Lebanese diaspora communities already living there.

Philippines: Calming Tensions in the South China Sea

Rising maritime tensions between China and the Philippines have highlighted the risk of armed conflict in the South China Sea and the dangers it would pose to global trade. Several countries are implicated in the set of [complex sovereignty disputes](#) in the sea, which stem from rival claims to various features and the maritime entitlements they generate, but recent incidents involving Beijing and Manila have triggered the greatest concern.

The Philippines controls [nine outposts in the Spratlys](#), a contested group of land and maritime features at the heart of the South China Sea. A submerged reef known as Second Thomas Shoal has become a dangerous flashpoint, with Chinese boats continually trying to block Manila's efforts to resupply the BRP *Sierra Madre*, a rusting ship housing a handful of soldiers that a former Philippine government purposely grounded in 1999 in a bid to assert sovereignty over the atoll. China, which also claims the shoal, first started interfering with these missions in 2014, but relations between the two countries in the maritime domain have never been as [volatile](#) as during the last seven months. Chinese boats have regularly rammed the Philippine supply vessels or doused them with water cannons, occasionally wounding the sailors on board. Manila has a Mutual Defence Treaty with Washington, making this burgeoning maritime dispute part of the geopolitical competition between the U.S and China. In effect, the South China Sea has become a zone where conflict risks are rife – and where Washington and Beijing could be drawn into direct confrontation.

Considering these developments, the EU and its member states should:

- ❑ Seek greater diplomatic engagement with both Beijing and Manila to keep tensions in check. They should also expand their diplomatic presence across South East Asia and, where relevant, establish reliable channels through which they could communicate with high-level authorities in China and other claimant states should disputes at sea escalate;
- ❑ Work to promote respect for international law, particularly the law of the sea, as a source of neutral rules for dispute resolution and conflict prevention, for example by organising public events, roundtables and dialogues in Manila and elsewhere. While this measure may not bridge the divides between Manila and Beijing, it could at least help establish a level of mutual support and understanding among the other South China Sea claimant states; and
- ❑ Strengthen coast guard cooperation with the Philippines, focusing on building capacity in areas such as environmental protection, safety and search-and-rescue procedures.

Troubled Waters

The sovereignty disputes that underpin the tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea go back decades. But it was Beijing's manoeuvres to take control of Mischief Reef (in the east of the Spratlys) from Manila in 1995 that altered the perceived balance of power between the two states and in the region, setting off the territorial [dispute](#) that has now taken a turn for the worse.

China's assertiveness in the sea has grown in the past few years, along with its military capabilities. The brewing territorial dispute made headlines in 2012 when Beijing in effect took control of Scarborough Shoal, an atoll 220km west of the Philippine mainland but within Manila's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), after a maritime altercation. The incident prompted then-President Benigno Aquino to file a case challenging China's territorial claims under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). On 12 July 2016, the presiding arbitral tribunal [ruled](#) in favour of Manila, dismissing China's claim to all the waters within its "[nine-dash line](#)", which constitute almost the entire South China Sea.

But it was a Pyrrhic victory. Beijing not only rejected the adjudication and the subsequent ruling, but it had also already undercut efforts to settle the dispute through legal channels by building and fortifying seven artificial islands in the Spratlys while the case was winding its way through the system. This move fundamentally changed the status quo, enabling Beijing to post permanent garrisons in the area for the first time. By [many accounts](#), China has thus ensured itself control of the sea in any situation below the threshold of armed conflict.

A short lull in the maritime dispute appeared to follow. After coming to power in 2016, Aquino's successor, Rodrigo Duterte, pursued a pragmatic policy toward Beijing. Duterte downplayed the tribunal's decision and cast sovereignty issues aside, hoping to benefit from Beijing's economic largesse in exchange. Yet his ambitious gambit did not pay off. Tensions at sea continued in the form of regular standoffs between the country's coast guard and Chinese vessels. Filipino fishermen struggled to reach their traditional fishing grounds, and Manila could not exploit the precious oil and gas reserves within its EEZ to which it is entitled under international law. In March 2021, Chinese ships massed around [Whitsun Reef](#), an unoccupied feature in the sea, ringing alarm bells in Manila, where senior officials voiced public criticism of China's behaviour for the first time in years. By the end of the Duterte administration, the Philippines had revived its ties with the U.S. and become more assertive still, filing several diplomatic protests with the Chinese government.

Elected in 2022, President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr., Duterte's successor, was initially disposed toward friendly relations with Beijing, but the relationship soured only a few months into his presidency. Although China remains the Philippines' top trading partner, Marcos, Jr.'s [meetings](#) with President Xi Jinping did not achieve the desired results: Beijing neither agreed to make major new investments nor curtailed [its "grey zone" tactics](#) in the South China Sea, understood as coercive actions that remain below the threshold of armed conflict. These rebuffs have helped push Marcos, Jr. toward strengthening ties with Washington, and the Biden administration

has, on several occasions, publicly [committed](#) that the countries' Mutual Defence [Treaty](#) would be deemed triggered in the event of an armed attack on Philippine warships, aircraft or [public vessels](#). In perhaps the most significant recent development, after a series of high-level visits by U.S. officials to Manila, the two countries agreed to scale up implementation of their [Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement](#), which gives U.S. troops rotational expanded access to Philippine military bases, and which China perceives as a provocation, especially given these bases' proximity not just to the South China Sea but also to Taiwan.

Manila has also received defence and diplomatic support from a host of other countries, particularly Japan and Australia. Despite the dispute it has with Vietnam over parts of the South China Sea, it has engaged, more quietly, with [Hanoi](#), and acquired maritime defence equipment from India, thus expanding its circle of partners. Joint naval exercises with various countries have included large-scale ones with the U.S. in April, which involved the [deployment](#) of missiles that can reach targets almost 13,000km away – something that was sure to draw Beijing's attention – and took place just after Manila wound up its first-ever [trilateral presidential summit](#) with Washington and Tokyo.

In the meantime, the Marcos, Jr. administration has pursued what it calls a "[transparency initiative](#)", publicising information about maritime incidents by inviting journalists to join its coast guard ships or posting video recordings of events almost as they are happening. Dramatic footage of Chinese vessels blocking, ramming or attacking its resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal with water cannons has generated widespread condemnation in the Philippines and abroad. Many consider these tactics to be bullying. For its part, and despite the 2016 ruling, Beijing asserts that Manila is intruding into its waters and maintains that it is demonstrating maximum restraint. China has also recently referred to a so-called gentleman's agreement under former President Duterte that it says foresaw preserving a status quo in the South China Sea, with Manila ostensibly agreeing to supply only humanitarian goods and no construction materials to the BRP *Sierra Madre*; Manila [denies](#) that there was any such arrangement.

Given the Philippines' determination to continue resupplying its troops on the BRP *Sierra Madre*, Second Thomas Shoal will likely remain a flashpoint. Due to the constraints imposed at sea by the Chinese maritime militia and coast guard, Manila is starting to look into other means of provisioning its outpost, some of which are likely to irk Beijing even more, such as [airdrops](#) or closer U.S. naval escorts. In September 2023, a U.S. plane was in the shoal's vicinity during a resupply mission, while a U.S. warship [passed](#) through waters nearby in December.

But the shoal is not the only possible source of tension. Chinese vessels, both official and non-official, sail through many areas where Philippine fisherfolk traditionally work, while other features, such as [Scarborough Shoal](#), are also points of friction. A large-scale encounter or accident at sea could be especially dangerous. Should [a Filipino](#) or Chinese national die during such a confrontation, it could stir nationalist sentiments in Manila and Beijing and heighten threat perceptions on both sides. In case of loss of life on the Philippine side, Manila would expect its U.S. ally to assist

under the Mutual Defence Treaty, especially given the recent exchanges with Washington on that topic, although the U.S. has not said precisely how it would come to the Philippines' aid. How such a dangerous situation would evolve depends in large part on Manila's [political decision](#) to invoke the treaty and the choices Washington makes about how to fulfill its commitments.

In principle, Beijing and Manila remain open to negotiations. But the bilateral consultative mechanism, a confidence-building measure designed in 2017 to manage maritime issues between the two countries, among other things, has generated no [results of note](#). Meanwhile, efforts to create a Code of Conduct, which aims to reduce tensions at sea by setting up norms and rules between claimants and has been under discussion between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for over two decades, have [stagnated](#).

Why the Sea Matters

The South China Sea is a vital waterway through which around one third of global shipping passes. Peace and stability in the sea are a prerequisite for safe trade and are demonstrably in the interest of the EU and its member states. At over 40 per cent, the share of the EU's trade with the rest of the world transiting the sea is even higher than the global average. Instability in the area would deal a major blow to the European economy; even a slight disturbance of shipping routes could result in higher transport costs, shipping delays and acute product shortages. Should there be an escalation that pits China against the U.S. in a direct conflict, the consequences could be catastrophic and global.

[European](#) positions toward South China Sea disputes have traditionally highlighted the importance of all parties respecting international law and the need for peaceful resolution, while being careful not to take sides. But over the last few years, China's assertiveness and expanding military capabilities have driven a greater sense of urgency and something of a shift in European thinking. First, the EU and several of its member states have developed "Indo-Pacific" [strategies](#), designed to guide and promote cooperation with countries throughout the region. Secondly, Brussels has increased its diplomatic support for the Philippine position following maritime altercations, offering supportive statements in [December 2023](#) and [March 2024](#). Brussels and several European capitals now back Manila in regularly underlining the importance of UNCLOS and maritime law in the South China Sea context.

Meanwhile, Europe's presence in the region is growing, if slowly and in part symbolically. In 2021, the EU appointed a special envoy for the Indo-Pacific for the first time, while European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen visited Manila in July 2023, the first trip to the Philippines by someone holding that office and an opportunity to express, at the highest level, the EU's readiness to strengthen cooperation with the government in maritime security, among other areas. A German frigate entered the South China Sea in 2021, and French and Italian ships made port calls in Manila in 2023. In March 2024, the EU and the Philippines agreed to resume negotiations over a free trade agreement, while a month later France announced talks regarding a [Visiting Forces Agreement](#) with the Philippines.

While EU interest in the region is rising, European stances on the South China Sea are complex, with member states harbouring different views on maritime disputes in the region and, more broadly, on big-power competition. Some, such as France – which is the only EU member state to have overseas territories in the region (and which has significant EEZ interests there) – see themselves as having stakes higher than others and are keen to participate in the region’s discussions on security. Others, such as Greece and Hungary, are less concerned with maritime flare-ups so far away and tend to ascribe greater importance to maintaining good relations with Beijing.

What the EU and Its Member States Can Do

As the EU and its most powerful member states are drawn deeper into the South China Sea, they should raise their diplomatic game in the region – both to ensure awareness of mounting tensions and to look for ways to manage corresponding risks. As a practical matter, Brussels could leverage its status as an ASEAN Strategic Partner to seek more participation in that bloc’s security mechanisms and regional forums; the EU and member states could seek higher levels of engagement with regional powers such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea on matters concerning the South China Sea; and Europe could post more diplomats to the region, including permanent defence attachés who speak the language of naval diplomacy.

Of particular importance will be maintaining strong lines of communication with Beijing, where Europe is seen as still having some distance from the U.S.-China strategic rivalry, which works to its diplomatic advantage. While to some extent this communication will be traditional bilateral statecraft, it may also mean looking for new opportunities and new channels for dialogue. For example, some member states could also seek to follow the precedent set by France and China in establishing a coordination and deconfliction [mechanism](#) between their militaries. Brussels should also continue [raising](#) the South China Sea in its engagement with Beijing as it did during the EU-China summit in 2023.

Maintaining these channels will become both more difficult and more important if and when the EU and member states expand their operational presence in the region – for example, if they decide to establish a [calibrated maritime presence](#) in the South China Sea, as [proposed](#) by the EU envoy to the Indo-Pacific. Such a move is still deemed unlikely for now.

As for public diplomacy, Brussels and EU member states should consider practical ways to promote principles of the law of the sea in the region, making the case that broader regional support for and adherence to these principles would provide neutral ground for peacefully avoiding and resolving disputes. While it is hard to see this approach appealing to Beijing, which has rebuffed the UNCLOS tribunal’s decision, there could still be benefits in forging closer cooperation among other claimant states. Convenings in Manila and other regional capitals could cover topics related to the continuing disputes but also to cross-cutting themes of regional interest such as fisheries. With negotiations over a regional Code of Conduct stuck, like-minded countries in the region could use these occasions to at least develop

common positions on discrete issues that might be addressed by the Code or that could foster regional confidence-building in the South China Sea.

Finally, in the realm of capacity building, European governments should continue to strengthen coast guard cooperation with South China Sea claimant states, helping them develop tools and protocols that might be used where appropriate to avoid confrontation and conflict. Since Aquino's administration, Manila has tried to boost its coast guard [capabilities](#). Given that many of the other claimant states' vessels in the South China Sea are coast guard ships, and find themselves embroiled in maritime confrontations, a common approach on rules of engagement could help avoid misunderstandings at sea. Building on the EU's integrated coast guard system, the EU could host or sponsor joint workshops to develop operating principles for the region's law enforcement vessels and exchange best practices with Philippine authorities. Brussels could also fund agencies such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to strengthen coast guard expertise on issues such as environmental protection, safety and search-and-rescue procedures. European member states could also participate in joint activities with the Philippine and other ASEAN coast guards to strengthen fisheries control and maritime border protection and deter piracy or smuggling.

Working with Others to Halt Sudan's Collapse

The catastrophic war in Sudan has entered its second year, with no end in sight. The conflict erupted in April 2023 amid a struggle between the country's two most powerful security forces, the Sudanese army, under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Daga-lo, known as Hemedti. After a year of fighting, much of the capital Khartoum lies in ruins, with major combat still raging there and in several other cities and parts of the countryside. The state has largely collapsed. The war has killed tens of thousands, displaced nine million and threatens millions more with starvation. Both belligerents – but particularly the army – are blocking food aid, even as Sudan barrels toward famine. Mediation efforts remain in disarray, and outside states are backing opposing sides in the conflict, adding fuel to the fire.

The imperative to end the war could hardly be clearer. The longer the conflict lasts, the harder it will be to resolve, as both the main protagonists face internal fragmentation and more and more armed groups join the fray. The country's humanitarian disaster – already extreme – will keep getting worse until the guns fall silent.

To bolster mediation efforts and help prevent mass starvation, the European Union and its member states should:

- ❑ Put their weight behind the formal ceasefire talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia;
- ❑ Help align the peace efforts of key players, including the UN, the African Union (AU), the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional bloc, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE);
- ❑ Support work toward a future political process in Sudan, including by continuing to convene and encourage dialogue among Sudanese political and civil figures;
- ❑ Meet their aid pledges and lead efforts to demand unhindered humanitarian access to all Sudanese in need; and
- ❑ Ensure that the need to resolve Sudan's conflict does not get lost amid the focus on crises in Ukraine and Gaza, which have consumed much of European and U.S. attention.

A Catastrophic Conflict

The conflict in Sudan ignited in April 2023 just four years after the Sudanese people managed to overthrow the 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir. It pits the two most powerful security institutions of Bashir's regime – the army and the RSF, which formed partly from the remnants of the Janjaweed militias that fought at Bashir's behest in the Darfur campaign in the early 2000s – against each other. A proliferating array of militias has been joining the war on either side in recent months.

By way of background, after Bashir's generals removed him from power in April 2019 in the face of a popular movement, they had to devise a plan for appeasing

the protesters, who opposed military rule. Eventually, they agreed to hand over power to a civilian transitional government that would pave the way for elections. But though the government was nominally civilian-led, the real authority continued to lie with the top military brass. The army's Burhan served as head of the Sovereign Council, making him Sudan's de facto head of state, while the RSF's Hemedti was formally his deputy. In October 2021, the two dissolved the civilian government and seized complete control of the government in a military coup.

But that power-sharing arrangement did not last, either. In time, the testy alliance between Burhan and Hemedti unravelled, eventually leading to civil war. The reasons were several, but one major trigger was Burhan's decision to reinstate Bashir-era security and military officials to their former roles, in part to counter Hemedti's growing influence. The RSF's recruitment of tens of thousands into its ranks, its political alliances, including with prominent civilian politicians, its commercial interests and its roots in Darfur had all stirred unease in the army's officer corps. The army has dominated the country's institutions and its rigged economy since independence in 1956. The tensions culminated in a standoff in Khartoum in early 2023, amid negotiations over a plan to integrate the RSF into the army and mounting external pressure to restore civilian rule. Conflict erupted on 15 April 2023. It is unclear who fired the first shot.

The RSF had the advantage for most of the war. Its rank and file have extensive battlefield experience as a paramilitary force, with many having fought in Darfur in the 2000s or alongside the UAE and Saudi Arabia in Yemen in the 2010s. The RSF quickly gained the upper hand, seizing most of Khartoum and much of the sister cities of Omdurman and Bahri within the first month. By the end of 2023, the RSF had expanded its control of vast territories encompassing much of the Darfur and Kordofan regions in western Sudan and, after a surprise offensive in December, Gezira state south of Khartoum.

In 2024, however, momentum seesawed, as the RSF appeared bogged down and the army scored its first significant victories of the war, taking parts of Omdurman across the Nile from Khartoum. From there, the army expanded its offensive into Bahri, directly north of the capital, though this area remains predominantly in RSF hands. The army is now attempting to seize the al-Jaili oil refinery, approximately 70km north of Khartoum, a critical asset for RSF ground operations. The army's offensive got a boost from Iranian drones, acquired after Burhan restored diplomatic ties with Tehran in October 2023. It also has used airstrikes to apply pressure to RSF positions in Darfur and Gezira. Meanwhile, the RSF's advance into Gezira, in the country's riverine heartland, sparked widespread popular mobilisation against it. The RSF and allied militias have committed numerous atrocities during the war, including in Gezira, looting residential areas, killing civilians and perpetrating sexual violence against women and girls.

Neither side has made notable gains in recent weeks, suggesting that the conflict may be entering another stalemate. Though both sides may try to launch new offensives, both will need time to regroup and resupply.

Deadlock or no, the conflict has entered a perilous new phase, with Sudan slipping deeper into disintegration. For one thing, both main belligerents are struggling with command and control. Burhan has grown increasingly reliant on ex-Bashir and Islamist elements, as well as communal militias and other armed groups, to battle the RSF. He risks losing his hold on the various factions. The RSF, meanwhile, is an ever more motley assortment of tribal militias and warlords, often motivated by the chance for plunder and varied local objectives. The multiplication of groups aligned with the warring parties, with each pursuing its own interests, has made both war-time coalitions more unwieldy.

Further, the war between the army and RSF has aggravated an array of inter-communal conflicts in many parts of the country. Recruitment along ethnic lines led to [mass killings](#) and displacement of the Masalit, a non-Arab community, from West Darfur at the hands of the RSF and aligned militias at the beginning of the war. Other Darfuri non-Arab armed groups, such as the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army led by Minni Minnawi, the Justice and Equality Movement headed by Jibril Ibrahim and Mustafa Tambour's Sudan Liberation Movement faction, have joined forces with the army, including by fighting the RSF in Gezira, on the other side of the country from Darfur.

The involvement of Darfuri armed groups and affiliated militias in support of the army has escalated conflicts between Arab and non-Arab communities around El Fasher, a city in North Darfur state. RSF fighters have encircled El Fasher, apparently poised to launch a final assault on the army's final stronghold in Darfur. Any such full-scale confrontation would likely lead to more mass atrocities along communal lines. These tensions are exacerbated by the army's continued bombing of Arab-inhabited areas of Darfur, the mobilisation by the pro-army Darfuri groups to fight the RSF and recurrent clashes between the opposing sides. Both the RSF and the army rally their supporters with narratives of existential threat. Fissures within many of these groups add to the fragmentation trend and increase the risk of inter- and intra-communal fighting.

Sudan is already facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent memory. Famine looms, with nearly 90 per cent of those experiencing acute food insecurity trapped in active conflict zones, including millions in areas like greater Khartoum, Gezira and El Fasher. To make things worse, both the army and RSF are obstructing aid delivery, though hunger is greatest in RSF-controlled areas, where the army has largely refused permission to UN agencies (which recognise Burhan's government as Sudan's) to deliver assistance.

The conflict in Sudan has far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond its borders, embroiling neighbouring states and fuelling regional instability. The involvement of external powers such as Egypt, Iran and the UAE complicates the conflict's resolution, while also raising the risk of spillover, particularly into Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Jihadist groups may also be able to establish a foothold in the country.

Meanwhile, mediation efforts continue to falter, in no small part because of Burhan's reluctance to participate. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia are working to convene a third

round of negotiations in Jeddah, this time broadened to include Egypt, the UAE, the AU and the Horn of Africa bloc IGAD, but they appear to be struggling to coax the army back to the table. Egypt, which backs the army, and the UAE, which is the RSF's main patron, succeeded in bringing top officials from the two sides together in Bahrain in January 2023, but the army eventually withdrew from those talks. Another prominent initiative by IGAD foundered after Burhan's government suspended Sudan's membership in protest of Hemedti's invitation to an IGAD summit on Sudan in January.

Key players have recently upgraded their diplomacy, raising hopes for a more serious response. The U.S. and UN appointed well-respected envoys for Sudan, while the AU named a new high-level panel, also headed by a veteran diplomat. Meanwhile, an April high-level donor conference on Sudan in Paris raised more than \$2 billion in aid pledges and convened important side discussions among Sudanese civil actors. Yet the various attempts to end the conflict still lack coherence and urgency, with the White House keeping a visible distance from the new U.S. envoy's efforts, the AU continuing to postpone its promised launch of a civilian political track and the initiatives of key international actors – the U.S., the UN, Arab powers, the EU and the AU as well as IGAD – remaining disjointed.

What the EU Can Do

To help halt Sudan's spiral, it is crucial for the European Union and its member states to push concertedly in the same direction.

To start with, the EU should rally its members in support of a new round of formal talks in Jeddah, regardless of whether Brussels has a seat at the table. That means helping push the warring parties to negotiate, while also encouraging other key outside actors – namely the U.S., Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt, as well as the AU and IGAD – to work together to avoid forum shopping and competition. Annette Weber, the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, is a key interlocutor shuttling among influential powers on both sides of the Red Sea and pressing for resolution of the war. EU member states should back her efforts.

Secondly, the EU and member states should also urge powerful actors in the region, such as Egypt and the UAE, to uphold the [commitments they made at the Paris donor conference](#) to refrain from exacerbating the conflict by supplying weapons and perpetuating political divisions.

Thirdly, the EU should continue to back the idea of an African-led political process, as it has done since the beginning of the conflict. It is well positioned to do so, as a member of the AU Core Group tasked with coordinating external engagement in Sudan. While the AU has yet to launch a process, the EU, in collaboration with various European organisations, has convened several dialogues among civilian leaders. The most recent happened on the sidelines of the Paris conference, where the EU convened the first major meeting of a range of Sudanese political actors with opposing stances and visions for the future. Many Sudanese consider this gathering a big step forward. Should the process gather momentum, the EU's active facil-

itation and support for transparent, inclusive consultations, which are representative of Sudan's diverse political landscape, can help lay the groundwork for robust discussions and ultimately for the Sudanese to find common ground.

Fourthly, Brussels and member states should continue to be leading providers of humanitarian assistance to Sudan, while also doing all they can to help the aid reach the country's most vulnerable people. In 2023, the EU allocated over €128 million in humanitarian aid. It made additional pledges at the Paris conference, which along with those from member states added up to close to half of the €2 billion promised there, although it is unclear how much represents new funding. It is imperative that Europe fulfil these pledges and that Brussels hold its member states accountable to their commitments. Beyond that, the EU should put more public and private pressure on the warring parties and their backers to allow humanitarian aid to reach all Sudanese, no matter where they live.

Finally, as the war in Sudan goes on, it is crucial for the EU to maintain pressure on the army and RSF to seek a negotiated resolution, while working to ensure that Sudan is not crowded out of the global agenda by headline-grabbing crises in Ukraine and Gaza. The further collapse of Sudan would be disastrous from both the humanitarian perspective and the vantage of peace and security. It could send shock waves through the entire Red Sea and Sahel regions, and it could make the country a haven for jihadists. Urgent action is vital to mitigate the human toll of violence and famine. By helping focus world attention on Sudan's tragedy and working in lock-step with key players, the EU can boost efforts to halt the country's spiral while helping prevent large-scale famine and curb the growing instability in the crisis-plagued Horn of Africa.