

The Gambia: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President



The European Union has been at the forefront of support to the democratic transition in The Gambia since 2017 and to the reforms aiming at entrenching democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Over the last months, it has observed with growing concern a marked slowdown in the pace of the reform process and in particular noted the recent important setback with the rejection of the draft new Constitution. It is key for the 2021 Presidential elections to take place on the basis of a new social contract.

The constitutional review process is linked to other pillars of the democratic transition, in particular the transitional justice process with the Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), as well as the Security Sector Reform (SSR). It therefore remains important to lay the foundations for the follow-up of these processes. Moreover, taking forward other significant reforms, such as the revision of the Public Order Law, media and access to information laws prior to the 2021 Presidential elections, requires decisive Government action.

The European Union calls upon the Government to take the lead in building the necessary national consensus around the future direction of the democratic transition, with a new Constitution at its core.

Regions and cities gain prominence on the EU's R&I agenda



□Members of the European Committee of the Regions have welcomed the European Commission's increased focus on regional and local innovation ecosystems. On

30 September, the Commission published a [communication on a new European Research Area for Research and Innovation](#). It promises strategic and coordinated support to regions and cities, building on successful initiatives such as the Knowledge Exchange Platform and Science meets Regions, which will be upgraded to a strategic level.

The CoR's Commission for Social Policy, Employment, Culture, Education and Research (SEDEC) hosted on 1 October a debate with **Jean-Eric Paquet**, European Commission's Director-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD). Mr Paquet highlighted the good experiences from the Knowledge Exchange Platform, a concept jointly developed by the CoR and DG RTD to present new R&I solutions, innovative products and best practices in response to societal challenges facing the regions and cities of Europe.

SEDEC Chair **Anne Karjalainen** (FI/PES) said: "We warmly welcome the European Commission's intention to further enhance the strategic cooperation with the European Committee of the Regions through the Knowledge Exchange Platform. Local and regional authorities are the linchpin in the process of deepening at the same time the European Research Area and the European Educational Area, which is crucial for bringing Europe up to speed with the green and digital transitions underway."

Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES), Member of the Pays-de-la-Loire regional council, will lead the CoR's work on the European Research Area communication. The draft opinion will be adopted at the next SEDEC meeting on 25 November. The newly-appointed rapporteur stressed that "there is still need to improve local and regional authorities' role in the governance of research programmes and increase synergies between R&I and cohesion policy. The European Research Area should allow for a wider approach where all stakeholders work together and should develop in synergy with the European Education Area."

During the exchange of views with Director-General Paquet, various members also expressed concerns on the innovation gap between EU regions, which the brain drain phenomenon risks to exacerbate. SEDEC vice-chair **Matteo Bianchi** (IT/ECR) suggested providing support and fiscal incentives to companies that invest in innovation in less developed regions.

Director-General Paquet concluded that "Europe needs to team up across policy areas and work with citizens to make R&I not only the best science in the world with ground-breaking innovations, but also a policy framework which provides knowledge and solutions Europe needs on digital and green transitions and artificial intelligence".

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre published this week the [end of term report](#) for the [Science meets Parliaments/Regions](#) pilot project, concluding that there is need to further improve evidence-informed policymaking in all levels of government.

The CoR will adopt in its plenary session on 12-14 October an [opinion](#) on the European Commission's [Regional Innovation Scoreboard](#) (rapporteur **Mikel Irujo**, ES/EA), the next edition of which will be published in 2021. The CoR

will also publish the first Annual Regional and Local Barometer, which focuses on the effects of COVID-19 in EU regions.

More information:

During the meeting on 1 October, SEDEC members had a preliminary discussion on following two draft opinions that will be adopted at the next SEDEC meeting on 25 November:

□Following new rapporteurs were appointed:

- **Yoomi Renström** (SE/PES), Member of Övanåker Municipal Council, for the opinion A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025
- **Gillian Coughlan** (IE/Renew E.), Member of Cork County Council, for Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027. Resetting education and training for the digital age
- **Emil Boc** (RO/EPP), Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, for Achieving the European Education Area by 2025
- **Christophe Clergeau** (FR/PES), Member of the Pays-de-la-Loire Regional Council, for A new ERA for Research and Innovation.

Belarus: Statement by the High Representative on demands to redu



The demand of the Belarusian authorities that Poland and Lithuania withdraw their ambassadors and significantly reduce their diplomatic representations in Minsk is unfounded and regrettable. It goes against the logic of dialogue and will only further isolate the authorities in Minsk.

Attempts by the Belarusian authorities to target certain EU Member States will not succeed in weakening EU unity, which was clearly reaffirmed by the European Council on 1 October when all EU Member States called on the Belarusian authorities to end violence and repression, release all detainees

and political prisoners, respect media freedom and civil society, and start an inclusive national dialogue.

The EU continues to support the democratic right of the Belarusian people to elect their President through new free and fair elections, without external interference.

Sudan: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the



The signing of the Peace Agreement between the civilian-led Transitional Government and the Sudan Revolutionary Movements today is an historic achievement paving the way for inclusive and comprehensive peace in Sudan. The EU acknowledges the role of South Sudan in hosting and mediating the Sudanese peace talks.

All stakeholders are expected to implement the different aspects of this peace agreement in good faith and with continued spirit of collaboration for the benefit of the Sudanese people, who deserve and wish for peace, stability and economic development.

Those who have not yet joined, in particular the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North-Abdalaziz Al-Hilu and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Abdul Wahid Al-Nur, should follow and engage in serious negotiations with the Transitional Government.

The European Union will continue to support the country's political and economic transition, which offers a unique opportunity to work towards a peaceful, democratic and prosperous Sudan.

Remarks by President Charles Michel after the Special European Council meeting on 2 October 2020



Nous venons de clôturer le Conseil européen avec, vous le savez, un menu intense à notre agenda. Nous avons longuement débattu des questions internationales, avec la capacité de démontrer, une fois encore, c'est important, notre unité sur des sujets qui sont difficiles, stratégiques, et importants pour l'avenir. Aujourd'hui, nous avons eu l'occasion d'aborder d'autres thèmes.

The first topic that we addressed today is the coordination related to the COVID-19 crisis. You know that our goal is to limit the spread of the virus. It means that it is important to make more progress between the member states, with the support of the Commission, and the rotating Presidency, and we have worked a lot, in recent days and weeks on that. We took the decision to strengthen our coordination, our cooperation on the basis of the concrete proposals put on the table by the Commission, with the involvement of the rotating Presidency, and we also took the decision to make more efforts to work together in the perspective of vaccines. The Commission had the opportunity to explain in detail what we are trying to do together as the European Union to be able, when vaccines will be available, to make sure that it will be possible for the different member states in Europe but also for our partners, to have access to those vaccines. In our opinion, this should be considered as a common good. It was a long, a substantive discussion, and we agreed that we will have the opportunity at our next European Councils to come back again to this very important topic. This was my first point.

Another important point: I had the opportunity this morning to present to the colleagues the Leaders' agenda for the next months. I think it's very important to have a clear vision about what are the strategies, the topics that we will discuss at the level of the European Council between today and June next year. This is a concrete proposal that I put on the table, knowing that this agenda would be flexible, based on the circumstances. We will probably adapt our way of working and I intend to continue to try to develop a strong preparation for each European Council. We have experienced the last two months, smaller formats, smaller video conferences in preparation for some difficult topics. We used these tools, smaller formats, for example, to prepare our position regarding China. We did the same regarding Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. We think it's an effective approach, in order to be certain that we have space for real interactivity, political interactivity among the leaders.

Then today we agreed formally our conclusions on the digital and single market. This is a very strong signal. This is a very important step that we are taking today.

Vous le savez, nous avons l'ambition de considérer que, naturellement, l'Union européenne est totalement mobilisée en faveur d'une économie ouverte. Nous croyons dans les vertus du libre échange et nous croyons dans le même temps que l'Union européenne doit être plus résiliente, plus en mesure de développer des priorités, plus en mesure d'affirmer sa capacité à être dans des secteurs stratégiques moins dépendants que nous le sommes parfois. C'est ce que nous avons constaté de manière parfois douloureuse dans le cadre de la crise du COVID-19. Et en cela les conclusions approuvées ce matin sont un signal fort que nous envoyons, puisqu'il y a là une capacité de développer des priorités très concrètes pour la souveraineté digitale, pour renforcer nos capacités et notre renforcement sur le plan du marché intérieur. Et chacun comprend que nous ne voulons pas simplement réparer le marché intérieur, mais travailler pour le faire mieux fonctionner, et faire en sorte que ce grand atout qui rassemble les Européens puisse continuer à être développé au service de notre projet et de nos valeurs. Et je voulais vraiment remercier très sincèrement la Commission pour le travail remarquable qui a été mené en coopération avec les États membres afin d'être en mesure de d'agréer sur des propositions qui sont concrètes, qui sont ambitieuses et qui fixent un cap stratégique extrêmement clair pour l'Union européenne tout au long des prochaines années.

Nous avons beaucoup travaillé ces derniers mois sur l'agenda digital, la grande transition pour laquelle nous sommes mobilisés grâce au European Green Deal présenté très rapidement par Ursula von der Leyen quand elle a pris ses fonctions.

Nous avons aujourd'hui, avec ce message, fixé un cap pour l'autre grande transition, la digitale. Et vous savez qu'il y a des liens très étroits entre les deux transitions. Enfin, deux derniers points.

We had a short update about the negotiations, the ongoing process of negotiations with the European Parliament in order to implement what we have decided in July: the MFF, the own resources and the Recovery Fund. We will have the occasion in the next days to be involved in order to try to make progress. We know that there are some difficult topics between the member states and with the European Parliament that we need to solve. We know that we know that our agreement in July was a political package and it's very essential to be able, as soon as possible to deliver, to implement what we have decided. It's a question of credibility and I feel a strong political will to make progress and to be able to implement the MFF and the Recovery Fund, but we will continue to work very hard in order to reach this goal.

And finally, just one word about Brexit, just an information point. We had the opportunity to have an update by Ursula (von der Leyen) and also an analysis by the Irish Prime Minister. But we didn't open the debate today because you know, we will have the occasion in October, during our next meeting, to have a more substantial exchange of views. And we will take into consideration the possible developments between today and the next European Council. We trust the Commission. We trust Michel Barnier. We have a clear European position. We are united. We are very calm. We have expressed very clearly the last weeks what we think about the current situation. And we will have the occasion in October to tackle this important topic.

Vous voyez, il y a beaucoup de points substantiels qui ont été abordés dans cette réunion. Nous avons un agenda qui est intense sur le plan politique à l'échelle du Conseil européen et cette réunion fut encore l'occasion de faire fonctionner ce que j'appelle la magie européenne. Les sujets sont difficiles, les sujets sont complexes, ils sont stratégiques. Mais cette volonté de dialogue, cette volonté de débat, d'aller au fond des choses, nous permettent d'avancer, nous permet de progresser. C'est en tout cas la manière dont je veux envisager cette ambition européenne.

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