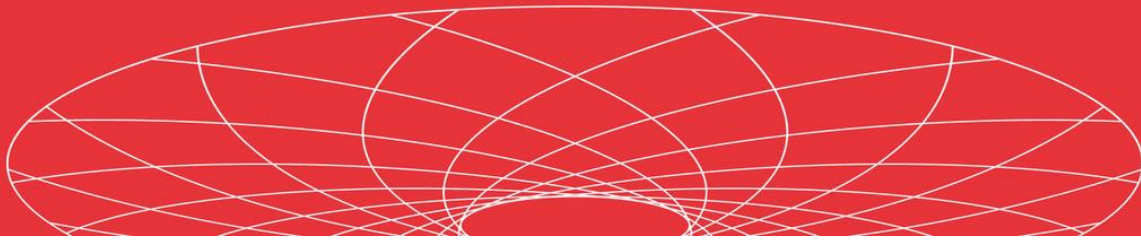


POST EU SUMMIT

A progressive take on European Council summits by the team of FEPS policy advisors



FEPS Post Summit Briefing: European Council, 22 October 2018

At last week's European Council summit in Brussels (22 October), Brexit negotiations took centre-stage although didn't feature as the main discussion point. European border security and migration were top of the agenda, with a Marshall Plan for Africa and internal security also being discussed by the leaders. Sustainable Development Goals as well as climate change also made it onto the agenda.

Brexit

As anticipated this summit did not bring about any significant change on the Brexit situation. Indeed although it took centre-stage of the summit, it was not a main point on the agenda, apparently not enough progress had been made including with regards to the backstop for the Irish border. With heightening internal and external pressures and an increasingly tight timeframe, the objective to find a workable solution seems more unlikely not to happen and the implications of extending the transition period started to be assessed. The situation of uncertainty that Brexit is causing seems to be attracting a lot of attention away from development of other policies.

FEPS held a debate and book launch just ahead of the summit of our latest publication with the Fabian society "Beyond Brexit: the Left's agenda for the UK and EU". Copies of the book are available to collect from FEPS office for free or you can find it available online [here](#).

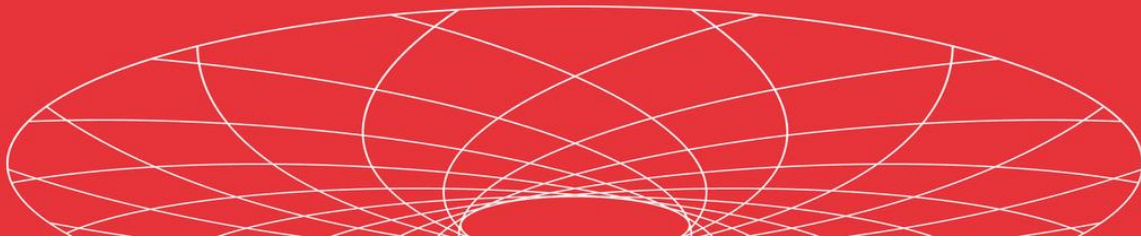
Migration

Here we go again. Another European Council summit has taken place and, in spite of the fact that migration continues to be one of the most important points on the agenda (first on the list), the summit has come and gone without EU leaders making any memorable decisions, but rather assessing "the state of implementation of its June conclusions" and calling for "work to be continued on all elements as part of its comprehensive approach to migration", therefore exposing the EU's incapability of delivering beyond the security aspects of migration.

Not surprisingly, in fact, the measures aimed at keeping people out take the lion's share in the document, notwithstanding that the European Council recognises that "the number of detected

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illegal border crossings into the EU has been brought down by 95% from its peak in October 2015”. “Further preventing illegal migration” and “strengthening cooperation with countries of origin and transit”, the developing of common minimum standards of external border surveillance”, and (rightly so) “the fight against people-smuggling networks” are repeatedly stressed.

Yet the most recent “obsession” for the EU Member States is the question of the way to facilitate returns and the so-called secondary movements. As for the former, the need to implement existing readmission agreements and to negotiate new ones (“creating and applying the necessary leverage by using all relevant EU policies, instrument and tools”) and the recent European Commission’s proposal for a Return Directive are strongly underlined. Secondary movement, instead, are not clearly mentioned, but a reference in the opening paragraph to “some internal (...) flows” that “warrant sustained attention” clearly concerns the unsolved tensions between Member States caused by irregular movements from the countries of first arrivals to another Member States.

In fact, what is most striking is what is lacking from the document rather than what is mentioned. Questions such as integration of migrants – a true emergency – or the need to establish safe and legal pathways are very far from the European Council’s radars, while only a short last laconic paragraph is dedicated to the question of the utter lack of steps forward in the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) – including the (non-mentioned) Dublin regulation – about which the European Council encourages the Council Presidency “to continue its work with a view to concluding it as soon as possible”.

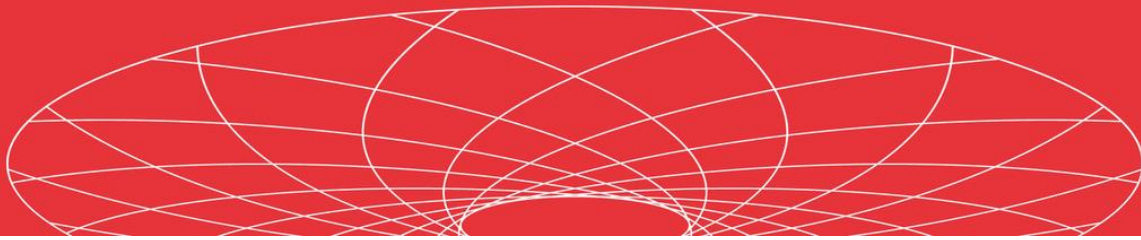
In general, there was not so much to be expected from this European Council summit and so its mediocre conclusions cannot really be disappointing. In the present European political landscape – unless a surprising act of boldness by some Member States will take place – the possibility for introducing even urgent reforms seems to be very feeble.

Internal security

With migration being the epicenter of yet another European Council meeting when it comes to the foreign and security policy agenda, discussion here focused on the new threat landscape that the Union is dealing with. Terrorism was of course a big part of that discussion, but the focus was also on cyber threats, combatting disinformation, radicalisation and hostile activities of foreign intelligence networks.

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The EU Heads of State or Government stressed the need to more quickly and effectively implement all steps taken in previous years in the area of internal security, in certain cases recommending an acceleration of work in specific dossiers.

Out of these, it is important to highlight:

- The European Council's condemnation of the attack against the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, recalling its previous conclusions concerning the Salisbury attack in the United Kingdom, and announcing the need to 'further strengthen its deterrence and resilience against hybrid, cyber, as well as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats';
- The call for measures to 'combat cyber and cyber-enabled illegal and malicious activities and build strong cybersecurity', which follows a letter by the governments of the UK, the Netherlands, Romania, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania pushing for sanctions to be imposed on perpetrators of cyber-attacks. This call was combined with a specific reference to co-legislators for 'all cybersecurity proposals [to] be concluded before the end of the legislature';
- The European Council's call for the Commission's proposals *inter alia* on 'election cooperation networks, online transparency' and 'fighting disinformation campaigns' to undergo 'rapid examination and operational follow-up by the competent authorities';
- And the call to 'provide Member States' law enforcement authorities, Europol and Eurojust with adequate resources to face new challenges posed by technological developments and the evolving security threat landscape'.

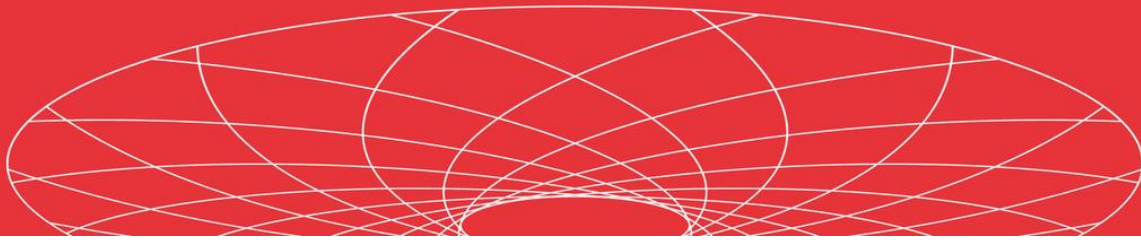
Overall, the summit discussion was a show of appreciation of how quickly this landscape is changing and the urgent steps that the Union needs to take in order to update and enlarge its toolbox in all these critical areas, especially in the context of the upcoming European elections.

External relations

Focusing on a partnership very close to the actions undertaken by various progressive stakeholders in the last few months, the EU Heads of State or Government confirmed the

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Union's pledge to take the EU-Africa cooperation to 'a new level', stipulating that this process needs to be underpinned by the necessary resources, including through the European External Investment Plan and the EU Trust Fund for Africa. The European Council also welcomed 'the presentation of the Commission's initiative for a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs' and called 'for actions to be taken forward, including through concrete proposals for Member States' involvement.'

While the call for a more effective multilateralism and rules-based international order was called for in the October 18-19 the EU-Asia (ASEM) was acknowledged, part of the discussion was also dedicated to the preparation of the forthcoming first summit between the 28 EU Member States and the League of Arab States, hosted by Egypt on 24-25 February 2019. This summit is to take place at a critical time for the entire region, given the internal divisions within the League and proliferation of issues where a progressive EU stance would be direly needed.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

It is generally good news that European leaders declared they were "fully committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its implementation". A comprehensive implementation strategy requires, however, recognition that SDGs are a stepping-stone to move to a more sustainable society in the long-term. We need practical ways forward on transforming EU economic policies, including measurable policy actions that allow us to track progress. A holistic approach must also acknowledge that we cannot talk about reforming economic policies without taking into account its social and environmental consequences.

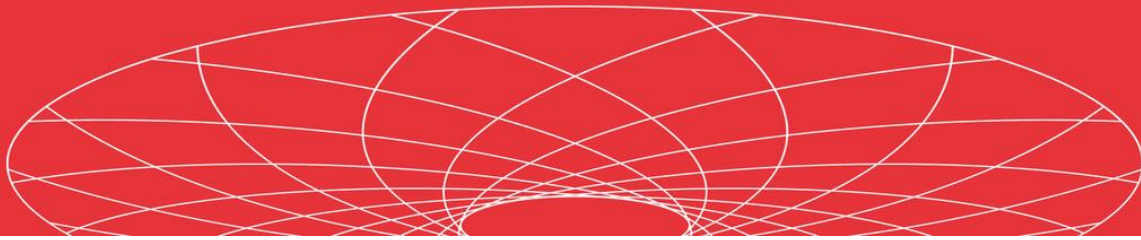
Although we welcome the Commission's intention to "pave the way for a comprehensive implementation strategy in 2019", sustainability can only be achieved if is combined with a matching legal framework to ensure accountability and responsibility of implementation. We should also keep in mind that the stability and growth pact as it stands now does not allow for a long-term investment strategy and reducing inequality. If we want to succeed in implementing the SDGs, we need to start rethinking our economic model. As long as goods are produced to be cheap, natural resources are exploited, and growth is pursued at all costs, we will not be able to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

Climate change



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It is significant that the European Council recognised the importance of the latest IPCC report which warns of the need for an urgent and thorough response to reduce the effects of climate change. It is useful too that support is given to the Polish government in hosting a successful upcoming COP UNFCCC climate summit in December. However it is unfortunate that the leaders did not see it as an occasion to rethink Europe's own contribution to preventing climate change, to scale-up, bring forward or make fully legally-binding the EU climate and energy targets or other related action would have been a more significant response that the IPCC report justifies.

With food waste contributing to a large share of global emissions FEPS recent publication “(Food) Waste Not Want Not” with Freedom and Solidarity Foundation addresses how to scale-up preventive action. Copies of the printed book are available to collect from FEPS office for free and the online version is available [here](#).