

**DISCUSSION PAPER No. 260**

## **EU-UN cooperation: CONFRONTING CHANGE IN THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM**

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September 2019

This paper looks at the role of the European Union (EU) and its member states in the United Nations (UN). It examines opportunities for deepening EU-UN cooperation in the years to come, in light of the 2019 reform of the UN development system, and taking into account the EU's evolving role as a global player.

The multilateral system, with the UN at its core, is changing. The normative uniformity of the post-Cold War international system is fading as its centre of gravity shifts away from the West. The EU remains a stable presence within the UN, but is faced with its own fragmentation which weakens its ability to defend the EU's agenda for a rules-based multilateral system.

Collectively, the EU and its member states are the single largest financial contributor to the UN system. Yet, the EU struggles to coherently leverage its funding relationship with the UN for greater influence and stronger cooperation. The prospect of improvements in the UN's in-country architecture can open doors for more effective collaboration on the ground. However, the UN reforms also reveal how funding patterns, including those of EU institutions and member states, help maintain the fragmentation of the UN system.

At the start of a new political cycle, the EU faces critical choices in its external action. The EU's continued commitment to a 'rules-based multilateralism' provides a good basis for its engagement in the UN. It does not, however, alter the EU's power and influence within the UN. The success of this ambitious agenda will depend on the EU's capacity to act jointly, on its strategic autonomy, and on its ability to set the tone in both the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC).



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## Acknowledgements

This study was funded by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The authors thank the people we interviewed in connection with this study, in New York City (United States) and Brussels (Belgium). We are particularly grateful to Lennart Peck for support and feedback throughout the execution of the study. The study has also substantially benefited from the review and feedback of Andrew Sheriff, Alexei Jones and Matthias Deneckere. Layout was done by Annette Powell. The views expressed in this study are exclusively those of the authors and should not be attributed to any other person or institution. All errors remain those of the authors.

## Acronyms

ASG	Assistant Secretary-General
CAR	Central African Republic
CIV-MIL	Civil-Military Cooperation
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CONUN	Council United Nations Working Party
CODEV	Council Working Party on Development Cooperation
COHAFA	Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
DPO	Department of Peace Operations (previously DPKO)
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DSG	Deputy Secretary-General
DAC	Development Assistance Committee, OECD
DG CLIMA	Directorate-General for Climate Action
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG RTD	Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission or Western Asia
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EC	European Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
EEAS	European External Action Service
DEVE	European Parliament Committee on Development
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUFOR RCA	European Union Force République centrafricaine
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FAFA	Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization, UN
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G77	Group of 77
HRVP	High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ITC	International Trade Centre
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework-European Commission
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, European Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
QCPR	Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review
RC	Resident Coordinator
SASE	Safe and Secure Environment
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SWSD	System-Wide Strategic Document
TEU	Treaty of the European Union

USG	Under-Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group (Now UNSDG)
DOCO	United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDS	United Nations development system
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNLOPS	United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (formerly UNDAF)
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Executive Summary

1. **Geopolitics are changing the multilateral system.** The United States' policy under Donald Trump and a more assertive China are altering global power relations. Future multilateralism will likely be less stable and less uniform. The EU's and its member states' trust in the UN system's ability to reform itself is often low, yet at the same time, they have high expectations for it to deliver change, while their relative power and influence are far from guaranteed.
2. **The EU's role at the UN is only as strong as its own internal coherence.** Especially in the UNGA, the coherence of EU member states' positions has grown significantly. Since 2011, it has also gained a much stronger regional foothold in the organisation. However, the EU's coherence is fragile and subject to divergence driven by domestic politics and interests within Europe, as illustrated by the opposing views around the UN Global Compact for Migration.
3. **The EU faces critical choices in its external action.** Before taking office in November 2019, the von der Leyen Commission has been presented as a "geopolitical college" and a "guardian of multilateralism". The need for a more strategic, more assertive and more united EU in its external relations appears to be well understood by the new leadership. Making this happen will not be easy. On a more technical level, the negotiations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the programming of the EU external financial instruments for 2021-2027 aim for a more strategic and political approach from the EU. The 'direction of travel' set by the new Commission, the EU budget negotiations and the strategic programming of these resources will all have an impact on EU-UN relations.
4. **UN reform opens doors but is not without limitations.** There is broad EU support for the UN Secretary-General's (UNSG) reform agenda. One should be careful however not to overestimate the possible gains from the current wave of administrative reforms. Bureaucratic changes have been fast-tracked, yet these do not necessarily affect the wider power relations that underpin the UN system. The reforms do not (yet) address the incentives for UN entities created by their funding environment and other structural challenges of the UN over which the Secretariat has partial authority at best. Because of this, the EU's ability to influence change will always be somewhat limited.
5. **EU member states are part of the solution and part of the problem.** There is a contradiction between the reform expectations from EU member states and the incentives they create for the UN. As an intergovernmental body and a loose federation of entities, money is power and influence in the UN. This leads to a difficult situation in which EU member states call on the UN to be more independent, accountable and effective, yet at the same time will hesitate to give the organisation the necessary space to do so. Collectively, the EU and its member states are the single largest financial contributor to the UN system, yet this is far from a coherent funding relationship. The use of tightly earmarked contributions in particular fosters fragmentation and competition between UN agencies, and has consequences for the coherence and the pursuit of common results. If the EU is to further strengthen its multilateral identity, a stronger, more strategic and more collective approach by the EU and its member states on how it engages and funds key parts of the UN is needed. This requires a different approach to foreign policy and external spending by EU member states, one that would be a significant break from the past.



## Introduction

Global governance and multilateral cooperation are changing. The multilateral system, with the UN at its core, appears increasingly under pressure from within. In order to address member states' concerns and enhance the delivery capacity of the UN, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has introduced ambitious reform proposals for the development system, management and peace and security architecture. While they reflect a momentum for change from within the UN institutions, implementation has only just started in 2019.

European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen sees the EU as the 'guardian of multilateralism' (European Commission 2019a). This commitment to multilateral cooperation is not new. It is enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union (TEU Art. 21-2), and reiterated in the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) and the European Consensus on Development adopted in 2017. In the margins of UNGA in September 2018, the EU and UN agreed to strengthen their partnership on peace operations and crisis management, and on sustainable development. The recently renewed EU priorities for the 74th UNGA (adopted in July 2019) also underline that "[the] EU-UN partnership in advancing and shaping the multilateral agenda is needed more than ever." (Council of the European Union 2019a: 2). EU-UN cooperation also has a strong financial dimension and operational component. Between 2014 and 2017, the EU channelled no less than EUR 10 billion through UN institutions.

The EU and its member states not only have a strong interest in strengthening and reinvigorating multilateral cooperation, but also in the institutional reform process to get a more effective UN system on the ground. At the 2018 UNGA, President of the European Council Donald Tusk called these reforms "badly needed and overdue", and expressed the EU's firm support to the process (Tusk 2018). In its priorities for the 74th UNGA, the EU reiterated its resolve "to be at the forefront in pushing for reform, as well as for the sustainable financing of the UN" and to "promote its effective implementation to achieve results" (Council of the European Union 2019a: 3).

2019 is a year of big decisions in Europe. The outcome of the MFF negotiations will define the way in which the EU will position itself in the world, the financial means and instruments it will have at its disposal, as well as the partners it will seek to work with after 2020. The outcome of the 2019 European elections is critical in defining the future focus of EU external action and international cooperation. The new leadership of the Council and Commission will face the challenge of bringing an increasingly divided EU together in a more competitive and fragmented world. Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen's mission letter to the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President (HRVP) reaffirms the EU's commitment to multilateralism and to leading the way "when it comes to upholding and, where necessary, updating the rules-based global order" (European Commission 2019b: 4). While the challenges faced by the EU in the international system appear to be understood, the question is how they can be addressed.

This paper looks at the role of the EU and its member states within the UN, and opportunities for deepening EU-UN cooperation in the years to come. The first three sections put the relationship between the EU and the UN in perspective by looking at the evolving role of the EU as a global player, the internal cohesion of the EU 'within' the UN, and the cooperation of the EU 'with' the UN system on development cooperation. The fourth section looks at the reform of the UN development system before a fifth section examines specific opportunities for deepening cooperation at the operational level. A final and concluding section links the above to the complex and at times contradicting interests of the EU and its member states in the UN affairs.

This paper is based on a literature review and 12 semi-structured interviews with EU, UN and member state officials and experts in Brussels and New York in February-March 2019.

## 1. The EU as a global player: Old power in transition

With every year of Donald Trump's presidency of the United States, the end of multilateralism as we know it gets reannounced. While American withdrawal from key agreements and partnerships has shaken up the international arena, focusing on the US alone fails to acknowledge a broader dynamic of profound structural transformation in international affairs that has been going on for much longer.

Following the Lisbon treaty (2009), the EU came into a global arena that was going through a major shift in power from West to East. By the late 2000s, the post-Cold War unipolar world order, marked by the military and economic hegemony of the United States, was fading (Tocci 2018). At the start of the global financial crisis, the rise of China and other emerging powers in world politics and trade heralded a new multipolar world order, which also called into question the post-Cold War system of global rules, responsibilities and institutions.

Today, there is little doubt that the years to come will witness a further decline of US hegemony, coupled with a further expansion of the global role and reach of China. In fact, Natalie Tocci (2018) classifies both the Obama and Trump administrations as post-imperial presidencies. While Obama's foreign policy called for a redistribution of global responsibility, Donald Trump's approach is an open rejection of global public goods, and expresses an inability and unwillingness to support the international liberal order.

China, in turn, has completely overhauled its foreign relations in the past ten years. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, it has spelled out a clear ambition for an infrastructure- and investment-driven global commercial expansion, commonly known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Goodman et al. 2018). China's soft power approach to "economic globalization" (Goodman 2017) goes hand in hand with increasing influence in global regimes and institutions.<sup>1</sup> As a major power, however, China does not necessarily promote a distinctive 'Chinese model' or an alternative vision of the world order. The larger pattern is that it tends to be a more conservative global power, which will resist changes in all areas ranging from human rights to maritime law that could be unfavourable to China and its partners (Nathan 2018: 17).

This reconfiguration of global power dynamics has led to largely premature eulogies of the liberal international order (Haas 2018, Switzer 2018), often fuelled by the common misconception that international regimes are a stable system that fully depends on the Western conception of liberal world order (Nathan 2018: 3). The diffusion of power and influence however means that the current system will need to evolve in order to stay relevant. Three tentative trends can be noted that could mark the evolution of global politics in the years to come (Tocci 2018):

1. Less normative uniformity: the rise of illiberal powers and nationalist and populist movements within liberal democracies means that the future international system will see less normative uniformity. This will open the door to more conflict, but greater diversity of views also makes global politics more inclusive.
2. Less institutionalised global governance: fixed intergovernmental institutions including the United Nations will remain important, yet we are likely to see more flexible alliances in global

<sup>1</sup> The liberal international order includes regimes (treaties) and institutions that govern a wide range of issues including trade, finance, arms control and disarmament, human rights (Nathan 2018: 2).

governance comprising both state and non-state actors. Regional and cross-regional frameworks will also become more important.

3. Less stable coalitions: greater diversity of views within global regimes implies more conflict and contestation within the world order. This is not only essential for its resilience, it also means that traditional ideological and geopolitical coalitions are likely to lose ground, and that new alliances may become more ad-hoc and issue-driven.

All three of these dynamics also shape the EU's current role in global governance and the UN. The EU is generally seen as one of the strongest defenders of the liberal global order. In its policies and discourse, the EU indeed somewhat reflexively supports multilateral institutions, trade liberalisation, cooperative security and human rights and democratic values, as part of its core identity as a global player. In recent years, however, there have also been clear signs of a more selective and pragmatic approach to international challenges and the global order (Smith & Youngs 2018). The 2016 EU Global Strategy, while it unambiguously commits to a 'rules-based order', also opens the door to a more flexible 'principled pragmatism'.<sup>2</sup> While there is much confusion on the precise meaning of 'principled pragmatism', the term does illustrate the composite global role of the EU today. The EU's historical identity as a benevolent normative power in the world – coupled with significant financial support through multilateral institutions and bilaterally – is now complemented by a drive towards a more strategic, autonomous and interest-driven engagement as a group.

This is an ongoing transformation of the EU's role in the global arena, and today, idealist and more pragmatic approaches to foreign relations tend to coexist in the EU's external action. This is most apparent in the way the EU promotes values of democracy and human rights in its own neighbourhood and beyond. In the strict sense of the word, democratisation in many of the countries with which the EU has relations means regime change, which antagonises those governments the EU seeks to engage (Biscop 2016: 11), and may ultimately harm EU strategic interests.<sup>3</sup> This explains, for example, why in 2013 the EU decided to quietly align with the government of President Al-Sisi in Egypt (Biscop 2016: 12). The 'transaction costs' of an explicitly normative agenda in the EU's foreign relations increase in parallel with the strategic interests and vulnerability of the EU in a given context. This is why in the wake of the Ukraine-Crimea crisis, the EU has been very careful, if not hesitant, in asserting greater (political and security) tutelage over the Eastern Partnership countries. The EU's approach to an increasingly hawkish Russia is one of 'negotiated containment', which at least implicitly accepts that part of the Eastern Neighbourhood is to serve as a geopolitical balancing area between East and West (Smith & Youngs 2018: 50).

What from the outside looks like the decline of the EU's normative power or increasing contradictions between policy and practice, may in fact be a transition of the EU's external identity towards what Smith and Youngs call 'contingent liberalism' (2018). This is not simply an erosion of principles that underpin EU actions, but rather a change in the use of tactics. The EU's external policies broadly defend a rules-based liberal order but it will be more flexible and selective in order to deliver tangible results, and secure its most pressing security and strategic interests (in the wider EU neighbourhood). This "un-avowedly pragmatic approach" (Biscop 2016) to the global order is a difficult balancing act because it opens the EU up to criticism, both from outside and from within. In multilateral institutions, this is even more complex given the expectations on the EU to hold the normative line in the UN on all matters relating to democracy and human rights after the retreat of the United States. Its own actions at times make it difficult to take the

<sup>2</sup> 'Principled pragmatism' to some extent replaced the mantra of the 2002 European Security Strategy 'effective multilateralism' (Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2017: 6).

<sup>3</sup> There is also a strong internal component to this. The hybrid nature of EU foreign policy makes it difficult to move quickly if one of the 28 member states disagrees. Inaction, which from the outside can be perceived as weakness or complacency, is often a sign of internal struggle.

moral high road, and at the same time, the EU's liberal democratic standards are being questioned by political movements and governments inside the EU.

One conclusion we can draw is that the global reconfiguration of power dynamics is compelling the EU to evolve more quickly. In this context of transformation, the EU is regularly called upon as one of the 'last defenders' of the post-Cold War form of multilateral cooperation. At the same time, the EU's relative power and influence in the world is eroding, which compels the group to increasingly act as a regional power within its own wider neighbourhood. The internal cohesion of the Union is also under more pressure than it has ever been, which makes it all the more difficult to come up with a strong collective external presence. One of the main challenges of the new EU leadership over the next five years will be to keep a more politically fragmented union together, while fighting the inward-looking forces that might want the EU to be more selective in its role on the international stage. This was, to some extent, recognised in the mission letter to the new HRVP, which states that the EU "needs to be more strategic, more assertive and more united in its approach to external relations" and that the new Commission must be "geopolitical" (European Commission 2019b: 5). In light of all this, it is important to look beyond the rhetoric of multilateral cooperation at the practical dimensions of EU cooperation 'within' and 'with' the UN.

## 2. EU cohesion 'within' the United Nations

The current EU and the UN systems have their roots in the same post-war history, which is reflected in a broadly similar, if not identical, worldview and set of values. On a formal and principled level, the EU and UN can be seen as natural allies. The EU's support for multilateralism and the rules-based order is even enshrined in the EU treaties. Article 21 TEU, which forms the normative basis of EU external action, unequivocally commits the EU to the principles of the United Nations Charter, and does so in some detail (Art 21(c) TEU). Article 34 TEU also provides that EU members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) will defend the positions and the interests of the Union.

In practice, however, the role of the EU on the global stage, and notably at the United Nations, depends fully on the degree of internal coordination and convergence of member state positions. The EU itself is not a member of the United Nations, but has enjoyed permanent observer status since 1974. Following the Lisbon Treaty reforms, the EU's status at the UN was increased to reflect the reforms of EU external action. The UNGA resolution 65/276 of May 2011 granted to the EU an 'enhanced observer' status. While this does not give the EU voting rights or the right to (directly) initiate policies, it does mean that the EU can formally express common positions, and that its representatives can speak on behalf of the EU and its member states.

While its special status gives the EU a framework of institutional representation at the UNGA and a unique prominence among regional observers, the real measure of the role of the EU at the UN is in its internal coordination of member state positions. Over the years, the EU has indeed developed a significant degree of coordination in UNGA affairs.<sup>4</sup> Ahead of the UNGA meetings in September, the Council of the European Union adopts its joint priorities for the UNGA,<sup>5</sup> and a large number of other official documents complement

<sup>4</sup> Though this is not always without difficulty or having to tone down or overspecify certain positions in order to get all member states on board.

<sup>5</sup> For the 74th UNGA (September 2019 – September 2020), for example, these include 1) conflict prevention, peace and security; 2) a common positive agenda (promotion and protection of human rights, sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity and sustainable water management); and 3) engagement on global challenges (migration and forced displacement, preserving the humanitarian space and improving the humanitarian response system, digitalisation, counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism, non-proliferation and disarmament architecture). (Council of the European Union 2019a).

and refine EU positions on various issues (Galariotis & Gianniou 2017: 65). Since 2012, for example, the Council also produces annual priorities for EU action in the various UN human rights fora.

This section examines the evolving role of the EU ‘within’ the United Nations system by looking at the level of cohesion in EU member state positions. Voting behaviour in the UNGA (section 2.1) is used as a measure of group cohesion at the political and normative level. We also look at the unique role of the EU institutions and delegation as a regional body in an intergovernmental setting (section 2.2.), and the limits of group cohesion, when EU member states fail to agree (section 2.3.).

## 2.1. EU voting cohesion in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand the role of the EU in a changing UN, it is critical to look at how it operates and performs as a regional group. Voting behaviour in the UNGA gives an indication of relative group cohesion and the limits of the unity of the EU in the United Nations. The UNGA passes resolutions relating to six thematic and managerial areas (see table 1). UNGA resolutions are not legally binding, yet they do serve to legitimise certain actions and delegitimise others, and are often used as a reference point for hard international law (Panke 2017: 29). Coordination within the EU group tends to be strong on UNGA resolutions and processes, and is supported by the EU Delegation in New York which acts as a venue for coordination, as well as a facilitator of internal convergence where possible.

**Table 1:** Main committees in the UNGA

UNGA Committees	Thematic areas
<b>First Committee:</b> <i>Disarmament &amp; International Security Issues</i>	Disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace
<b>Second Committee:</b> <i>Economic &amp; Financial Issues</i>	Financing for development, sustainable development, human settlements, globalisation and interdependence, eradication of poverty, food security and nutrition, and information and communications technologies for development
<b>Third Committee:</b> <i>Social, Humanitarian &amp; Cultural Issues</i>	Human rights, advancement of women, protection of children, indigenous issues, treatment of refugees, promotion of fundamental freedoms through the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, right to self-determination, issues related to youth, family, ageing, persons with disabilities, crime prevention, criminal justice, and international drug control
<b>Fourth Committee:</b> <i>Special Issues, Political Issues &amp; Decolonization</i>	Subjects related to decolonisation, Palestinian refugees and human rights, peacekeeping, mine action, outer space, public information, atomic radiation and University for Peace
<b>Fifth Committee:</b> <i>Administrative &amp; Budgetary Issues</i>	Administration and budgetary matters, urgent matters relating to the financing of a peacekeeping mission authorised by the Security Council at any of its sessions
<b>Sixth Committee:</b> <i>Legal Issues</i>	Legal questions in the General Assembly

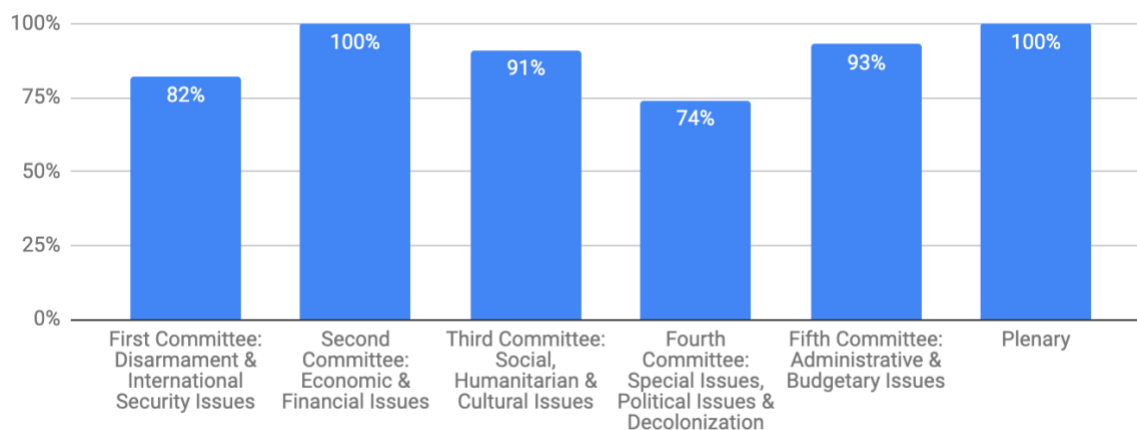
Source: Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2017: 14-15.

While there is no perfect voting coherency between EU member states, its cohesion is remarkably high as compared to other regional organisations like the African Union, the Arab League, the Association of

<sup>6</sup> Given the limited and rotating membership of the UN security council, as well as the way in which voting is recorded in the UNSC, it is difficult to assess the role of the EU in the UNSC on the basis of voting behaviour.

Southeast Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community, or the Economic Community of West African States (Burmeister & Jankowski 2014).<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 below shows EU voting coherence between 2009 and 2015 broken down into the five main committees of the UNGA. With the exception of the first and fourth committees, voting coherence in this period was consistently over 90% of voting procedures.

**Figure 1: Average voting coherence in the 64th – 69th UNGA (2009-2015)<sup>8</sup>**



Source: Galariotis & Gianniou 2017: 68

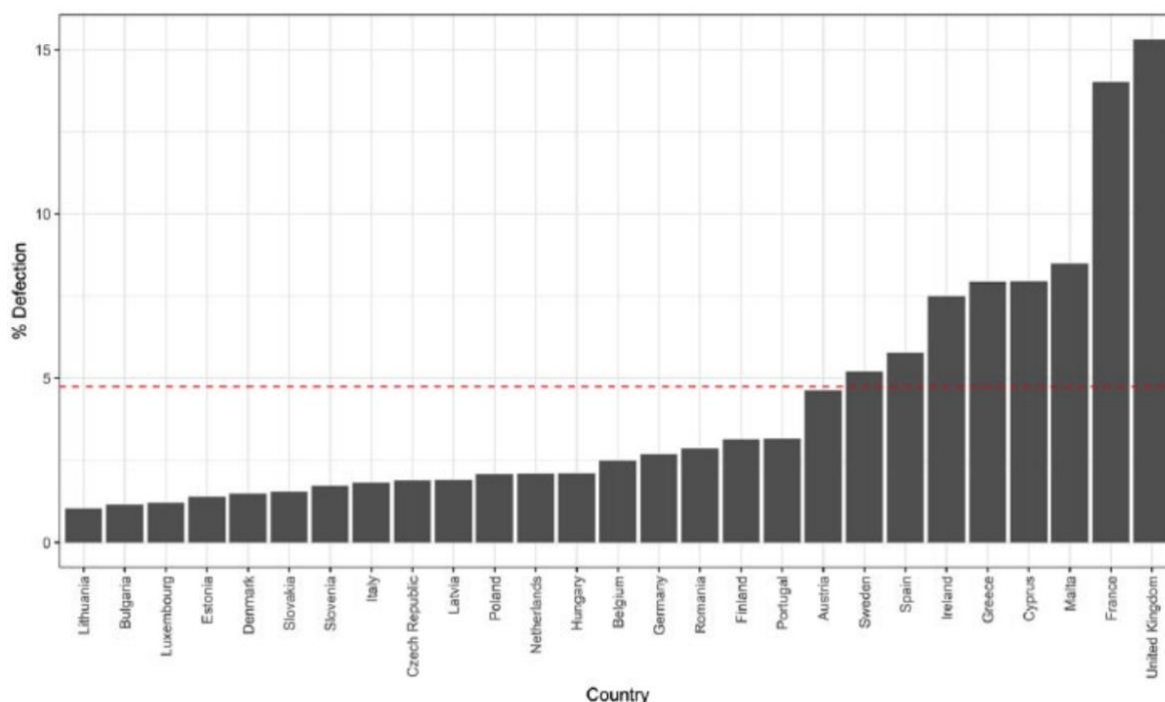
While this makes the EU a significant identifiable group in the UNGA, these figures give little insight on what drives cohesion and especially the lack thereof in certain instances. The overwhelming majority of resolutions in the UNGA are passed without a vote. ‘Voting defection’ – instances when the EU was unable to come to an agreement – therefore can give more insight into the strategic interests of member states (Burmeister & Jankowski 2018: 653-4). Within the UNGA, the first (disarmament) and fourth (decolonisation) committees are the least cohesive ones among EU membership. This mostly reflects the voting record of France and the UK, both nuclear powers and former colonial powers that still maintain overseas territories. Figure 2 below shows the average vote defection by member state in the period from 1991 to 2011.<sup>9</sup> Beyond matters of disarmament, non-proliferation and decolonisation, France and the UK do not stand out from the rest of the EU member states, all of which tend to occasionally deviate from the majority position.

<sup>7</sup> Burmeister and Jankowski (2014) argue that the EU’s relative group cohesion (as compared to other regional groups) is especially higher in areas where there is greater disagreement within the UNGA.

<sup>8</sup> Values represent the percentage of total common voting attitudes of EU member states. This means that in 82% of the first committee voting procedures, the EU effectively behaved as a bloc. This excludes those decisions/resolutions that were adopted without a vote, and therefore can be seen as a conservative measure of the coherence of EU member states’ positions.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from the UK and France, other countries that stand out with a significantly higher degree of voting defection are Malta, Cyprus, Greece and Ireland. With the exception of Greece, those four also show an above-average defection on resolutions relating to nuclear proliferation. Greece, Malta and Cyprus are also seen to deviate from the EU’s majority position in resolutions relating to the Middle East conflict, which could possibly be explained by their relative proximity.



**Figure 2: Average voting defection by EU member state (1991–2011)<sup>10</sup>**

Source: Burmeister & Jankowski 2018: 661.

Overall, the EU's role in the UNGA is remarkably coherent. Particularly on resolutions relating to human rights, a regular source of contention at the UN, EU voting defection is very low (Burmeister & Jankowski 2018). This illustrates the traditional normative convergence between UN and EU action that has marked European engagement since the end of the Cold War period. The primary obstacles to full cohesion are a stable pattern relating to deep-rooted national interests and strategic considerations linked to national security and sovereignty (Burmeister & Jankowski 2018: 669). It is highly unlikely that full coherence on these matters can be achieved in the near future.

## 2.2. Regional agency in an intergovernmental setting

The unweighted voting system of the UNGA gives large coalitions and groups (e.g. G77) a distinct arithmetical advantage. The EU with 28 UN members is a significant presence in the UNGA, yet despite its economic and financial footprint, it represents just 14.5% of the total voting UN membership. The power of numbers is ingrained in the working culture of the United Nations, and successful resolutions tend to pass through a long and thorough diplomatic process in order to increase the attractiveness of a proposal and leverage support from other UN members.

In an area as crowded as the UNGA, speaking time is a valuable commodity. Before 2011, the EU had accrued preferential speaking rights in the UNGA by means of the rotating presidency system (Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2017: 49). Under the 1974 observer status, the EU was represented by the European Commission on matters relating to exclusive EU competence, and by the rotating presidency of the European Council on all other matters. Through the presidency, the EU was able to speak in the first slots among the major regional groups in formal UNGA meetings, and could therefore also set the tone in

<sup>10</sup> The chart shows per country the percentage of deviating voting behaviour from the majority of EU member states, including abstentions, if the majority position of the EU was 'yes' or 'no' (Burmeister & Jankowski 2018: 660). The dashed red line indicates the overall average of 4.75% for all EU member states.

discussions where a clear EU consensus existed. The Lisbon Treaty shifted much of the representation duties to the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP),<sup>11</sup> which in the case of the UN in practice meant a downgrading of the EU's status. As a mere observer, not a member state, the EU institutions could only be given time after the UN member states had already taken the floor. Resolution 65/276 grants the EU participating rights, which means the EU Delegation (under the responsibility of the HRVP) is the primary actor representing the EU at the UNGA (Galariotis & Gianniou 2017: 62). Table 2 below shows how the EU's direct presence in the UNGA has significantly changed over time. Interventions by the rotating presidency (on behalf of the EU) have largely been replaced by interventions of the EU Delegation. Furthermore, member states' interventions are also increasingly in support of a joint EU position than purely national ones.

**Table 2: EU and member states oral interventions in UNGA plenary and main committee meetings (2009-2015)**

	64th	65th	66th	67th	68th	69th	Total
<b>Rotating presidency</b>	132	122	23	25	30	32	364
<b>EU Delegation</b>	3	16	62	84	93	82	340
<b>EU member states' interventions (EU position)</b>	147	149	171	197	195	135	994
<b>EU member states' interventions (National position)</b>	49	90	121	122	72	32	486

Source: Galariotis & Gianniou 2017: 66

While the EU's enhanced observer status does not allow it to sponsor draft resolutions, it can do so through its member states. Between 2009 and 2015, EU member states have introduced on average five resolutions per year on behalf of the European Union, all of which were debated in the third committee dealing with human rights issues (Galariotis & Gianniou 2017: 72-73). This again reflects the normative focus of the EU's priorities for action at the UN.

There is a clear pattern of the EU becoming more visible and more vocal within the UNGA. This is not without criticism. A previous version of resolution 65/276 for example was voted down by a narrow margin, precisely because other, often smaller UN member states saw the EU's proposal as a threat to the intergovernmental nature of the UNGA (Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2017: 48-50). The 2011 resolution however did set a clear precedent for a more direct regional involvement in UN politics, and formally opens the door to other regional organisations such as the African Union to apply for 'enhanced observer' status.

<sup>11</sup> While this has been institutionalised for some time, there continues to be some criticism from member states, for example on the HRVP chairing the Foreign Affairs Council as opposed to the rotating presidency.



**Box 1: Vow renewal at the 73rd UNGA (2018)**

During the 73rd UNGA, the EU has made a clear effort to consolidate its visibility and legitimacy in the UNGA. In September, the EU prepared a dense schedule of events and speeches by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, HRVP Federica Mogherini, accompanied by a delegation of no less than 11 other Commissioners (European Commission 2018a), in what one interviewee called a “carefully orchestrated performance”. The EU and UN also issued a joint statement in which European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and UN Secretary-General António Guterres renewed their “full commitment to [jointly promote] multilateralism and a rules-based global order” (EU and UN 2018a). In a more recent statement at the UNSC in March 2019, HRVP Federica Mogherini stressed the importance of EU-UN cooperation in peacekeeping, and made some bold statements calling out Russia for violations of international law (Mogherini 2019). The EU’s push for visibility at the UN reflects its continued ambition to lead in multilateral affairs but also the expectations from EU member states to step up in a context where the UN’s normative agenda is under pressure from within. The September 2018 UNGA was also the last opportunity for the current Commission to leave its mark on the UNGA, since the September 2019 meetings will come after the European elections of May 2019, but before the new Commission takes office in November 2019. The Juncker Commission and HRVP will therefore likely act in ‘current affairs’ mode.

**2.3. Political and structural limits to EU convergence**

While the EU has come a long way in establishing a regional presence within the UN’s walls, the UN is and always will be an intergovernmental setting, which means that member states are the primary agents of UN positions and initiatives. Beyond the joint priorities for the UNGA sessions and UN human rights fora, there is no common masterplan for the EU to steer the UN in a certain direction. EU member states’ convergence is mostly a reflection of EU integration and its foundation of liberal internationalist values.

Migration to some extent is a counter-example to these demonstrations of collective action within the UN, and illustrates that the EU’s role at the UN is only as strong as its own internal coherence. The EU showed some unity during the discussions of the voluntary UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the EU and its member states often spoke with one voice. At least between November 2016 and May 2018, there was presumably a “common position”, but Hungary then distanced itself from an EU line for not considering migration an “unfavourable and dangerous process” (Permanent Mission of Hungary to the UN 2018: 1). Other countries followed suit, either because the Compact did not provide strong enough guarantees for countries to have the right to independently decide who they choose to accept (Poland), because it damages national interests (Bulgaria) or because of the Compact’s take on migration as a generally positive phenomenon (Slovakia) (Gatti 2018).

In December 2018, the adoption of the Compact in Morocco caused widespread political backlash and infighting in ruling political parties and governments in EU member states (most notably in Belgium, where the largest political party left the governing coalition). While 152 countries voted in favour of the Compact in the UN General Assembly in December, five EU member states abstained (Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and Romania)<sup>12</sup> while three (Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary) voted against it (along with Israel and the United States). Slovakia did not vote (Gotev 2018). This shows that there was hardly any collective European solidarity on that topic.

While EU institutions and member states in the past demonstrated a certain degree of convergence in the area of migration, it has become such a politically sensitive issue domestically and interests and needs

<sup>12</sup> Although countries such as Austria and Bulgaria had maintained their support for the EU position throughout the process (until the text of the Global Compact was finalised in July 2018). Austria then left the Compact in October 2018, during its own presidency of the EU (Gatti 2018).

related to migration are so diverse, that achieving a united position among the 28 members seems impossible today. This challenge will become more important in a world in which domestic and international dynamics increasingly intersect and where migration influences European national politics at the highest level (Sherriff et al. 2018). EU member states' inability to agree on migration also extends to practical aspects of migration management. For more than a year, the EU has been unable to reach a common position on the overhaul of the European asylum system, which includes the harmonisation of the Union's asylum procedures as well as the difficult question of relocation quotas for refugees (Brzozowski 2019).

Migration is not the only divisive issue among member states. The rise of populism and conservative voices across Europe has led to disagreement on the symbolic issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), as some member states increasingly reject SRHR – particularly abortion rights – in new EU policies. This could impact the EU's ability to position itself as a global leader on SRHR (Thijssen et al. 2019), and to respond effectively to the outright hostile stance of the Trump administration toward SRHR in the UN. In April 2019, for example, the UNSC adopted resolution 2467 on sexual violence in conflict, yet references to sexual and reproductive health services and LGBTI communities had been removed in order to avoid a veto from the US (Davies & True 2019). The US has also cut funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the third year in a row (Deen 2019).

These examples show that the EU's commitment to multilateralism and collective action is a fragile and vulnerable form of cohesion. Internal divisions also increasingly damage the EU's credibility and its ability to influence global politics. This is implicitly recognised in the June 2019 conclusions on EU action to strengthen rules-based multilateralism, which underline the need to "further strengthen internal cooperation and cohesion within the EU" (Council of the European Union 2019b: 3).

Speaking with one voice in international fora is a commitment many regional organisations make, yet the EU's role in the UN has given a unique and concrete meaning to the phrase. However, there are structural limitations to how far the EU can go in presenting a unified position. It can only do so following extensive coordination and when all EU member states are on board.<sup>13</sup> This not only implies that the EU's single voice is generally restricted to the lowest common denominator. It also makes it difficult for the EU to be a proactive influence in the UN. While there is a priori coordination on a number of matters relating to the UNGA and human rights fora, in relation to the bigger and more sensitive questions around the future of multilateralism, such as reforming the UN Security Council or the financing of the UN system, there is no common EU strategy in the UN, and member states will act on the basis of their national interests first.

That said, EU member states will at times take symbolic actions that illustrate European coordination. Security Council membership is generally an opportunity to do so, and member states will use the spotlight to support a stronger EU line within the UN. This was the case for example when France and Germany announced they would observe a joint presidency of the United Nations Security Council in March and April 2019, when Germany was elected for a rotating seat of the UN Security Council.<sup>14</sup> This symbolic action was meant to defend a multilateral system, which the German and French foreign ministers said is "experiencing its perhaps gravest crisis since its emergence after the Second World War", referencing that "the rivalry among major powers and growing nationalism have resulted in an increasingly fragmented

<sup>13</sup> Yet, in the mission letter to the new HRVP, Commission President-elect von der Leyen asked Josep Borrell to "seek to use the clauses in the Treaties that allow certain decisions on the common foreign and security policy to be adopted by qualified majority voting", for the Union to take decisions in a faster and more efficient way and overcome unanimity constraints that hamper its foreign policy (European Commission 2019b: 5).

<sup>14</sup> Closer cooperation in the UN was agreed as part of the Aachen Treaty signed by French president Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in January 2019, which also reaffirms a German permanent seat in the UNSC as a priority for the French-German diplomacy.

world order – in political, economic and social terms” (Maas & Le Drian 2019). Ahead of the September 2019 UNGA, the same two countries also announced a new “alliance for multilateralism”, a loose alliance of countries (including also Canada, Japan, Ghana and Chili to support multilateral cooperation (Représentation permanente de la France 2019).

While these symbolic acts matter, they do not alter the structural limitations of EU coherence in the United Nations, which are linked to its nature and mandate as an intergovernmental organisation.

### 3. EU cooperation ‘with’ the United Nations

The EU’s role ‘within’ the UN is only part of the picture, and goes hand in hand with the direct cooperation of the EU ‘with’ the UN family. This operational level is partly where the EU gets its legitimacy to address the UN on behalf of its member states, and where it directly engages on matters relating to EU strategic interests and operational priorities. It is also an area where the EU and UN can jointly push for innovation and a common understanding of multilateral cooperation.

Both the EU and UN are complex ecosystems on their own. The EU’s relationship with the UN therefore also varies significantly according to the EU institutions:

- **The European External Action Service (EEAS)** focuses on the political and diplomatic relations with the UN, including the UNGA, UNSC and several of the Geneva-based UN organisations. It also oversees the UN Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management. It engages mostly through the EU Delegations in New York and Geneva.
- **The European Commission** in turn plays a leading role in the operational cooperation with the UN system:
  - **DG DEVCO** oversees most cooperation with the development-oriented agencies and programmes. Together with DG ECHO, it oversees the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement. It engages through the Brussels-based administration (often with the UN/UNDP office in Brussels), as well as through the network of EU Delegations in the field.
  - **DG ECHO** oversees cooperation with the UN humanitarian agencies and EU humanitarian aid channelled through the UN system.
  - **DG NEAR** engages with UN organisations, often as implementers of EU-financed programmes in EU neighbourhood and accession countries.
  - **FPI** (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments) manages various instruments in the foreign policy domain, often to implement UN resolutions (e.g. sanctions or crisis management missions) or to support UN operations in the domain of crisis response and conflict prevention through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.
  - **DG HOME** increasingly works with UN agencies and programmes on migration. It provides critical EU funding to IOM and UNHCR.
  - Other EU departments such as **DGs RTD, EAC and CLIMA** have relations with the UN system in their respective policy areas.
- **The European Parliament (EP)**, while it has no direct control over EU-UN cooperation, has been vocal in favour of strengthening the partnership. The EP also has budgetary authority over funds under the EU budget, and can exert some indirect influence over other EU funding sources (e.g. EU Trust Funds).
- **The Council of the European Union** prepares joint member state positions on a range of UN matters. The United Nations Working Party (CONUN) is concerned with the broad EU-UN issues; however, other working parties such as COHAFA and CODEV also play a role in preparing EU positions in UN executive boards of which the EU is a member.

For the purpose of this study, we focus primarily on EU-UN cooperation in the area of development cooperation and humanitarian aid, and briefly touch on EU-UN cooperation in peace and security. The latter warrants a full study on its own.

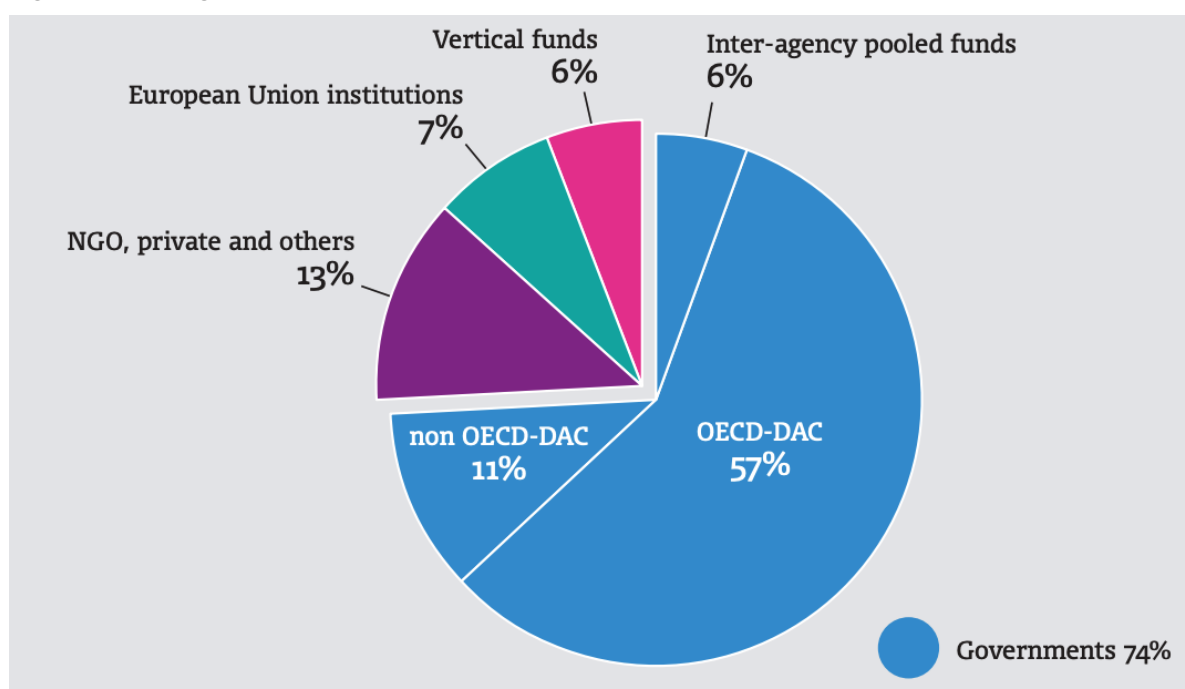
### 3.1. EU and member states' funding for the UN system

The EU often prides itself on being the single largest financial contributor to the UN system, citing collective figures that include both EU institutions and EU member states. In a 2017 Security Council address, for example, HRVP Federica Mogherini said that “the European Union’s voluntary contributions [as opposed to assessed contributions] to the United Nations funds and agencies amount to half of its total budget. This means we proudly and smartly invest in them as much as the rest of the world combined. We believe that it is in our best interests to do so.” (UN Security Council 2017: 4).

Funding through the EU institutions has also increased over time. The OECD’s 2018 Multilateral Development Finance Report notes that “multilateral organisations, including the EU, are becoming increasingly important funders to other multilateral institutions. [...] The European Union could continue to grow in importance as a financier of other multilateral organisations, especially if the EU budget proposing an increase in resources for external action is approved.” (OECD 2018a: 21).

Overall, the EU institutions and its member states provide almost one quarter of all financial contributions to the UN’s funds and programmes, while the EU member states also provide almost one third of the UN’s regular budget through assessed contributions. Together, EU member states are also the largest contributor to the UN’s peacekeeping budget, covering almost 32% of it in 2017 (European Union 2018). With regard to the UN Development System (UNDS), in 2017, the EU institutions accounted for 7% of all funding to the UNDS, down from 9% in 2016 (UN MPTF Office and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019: 40).

**Figure 3: Funding sources for UN operational activities (2017)**

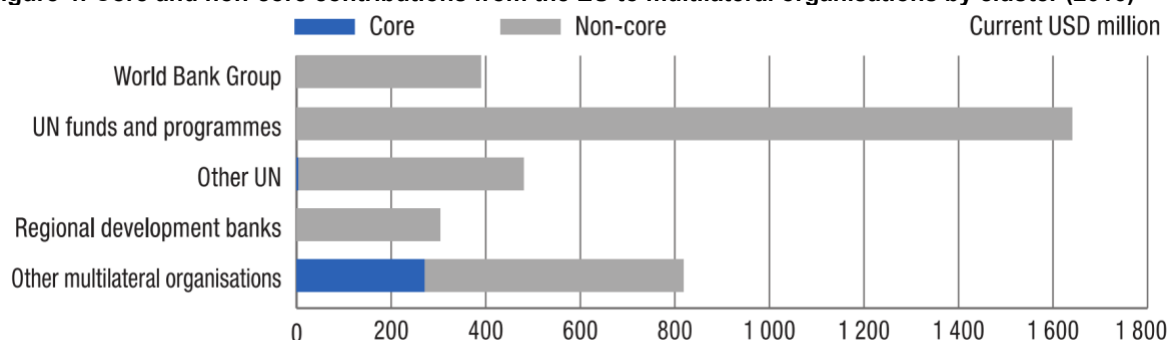


Source: UN MPTF Office and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019: 41 (n.b. EU member states are represented in the OECD-DAC category)

Unlike other DAC members, the EU institutions do not provide core funding to UN bodies. In 2015-16, just 1% of its total ODA, amounting to an annual average of USD 199 million, was disbursed as multilateral ODA, chiefly to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Yet the EU channels a significant proportion of its bilateral ODA through multilateral organisations. Such funding comprised 18% of EU bilateral ODA or 24% of the Commission's bilateral ODA in 2015-16, totalling on average USD 3 billion per year (OECD 2018b: 61).

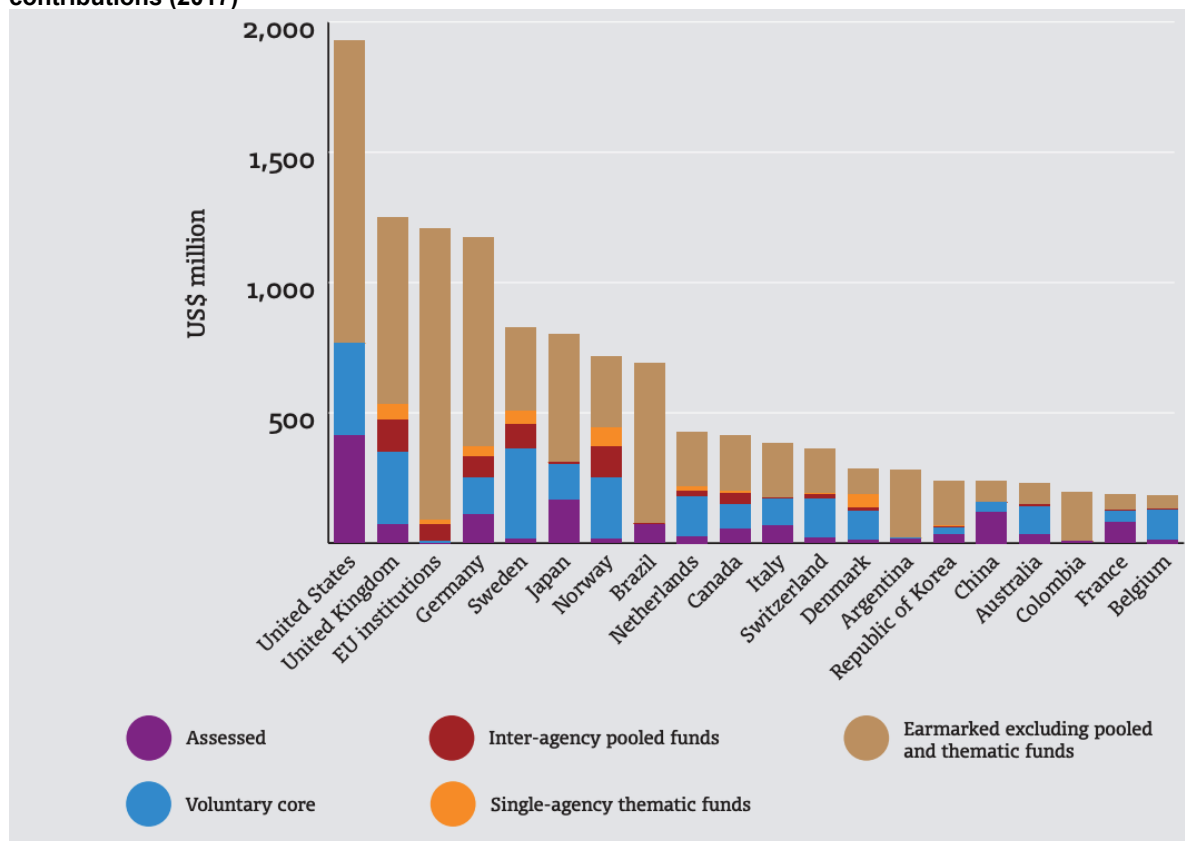
Figure 4 below shows that UN funds and programmes benefit the most from the EU's (non-core) contributions to multilateral organisations.

**Figure 4: Core and non-core contributions from the EU to multilateral organisations by cluster (2016)**



Source: OECD 2018a: 50

**Figure 5: Development assistance funding mix of the top 20 contributors to the UNDS, including assessed contributions (2017)**



Source: UN MPTF Office and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019: 48

**Box 2: The Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA)**

The funding relationship between the European Commission and the UN is governed by the 2003 Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA) between the European Union (represented by the European Commission) and the United Nations (EU and UN 2018b). The agreement streamlines the financial and contractual aspects of programmes funded by the Commission. It applies to UN programmes, funds and organisations, and simplifies all practical aspects of programme implementation (European Commission n.d.). It is reviewed annually and relies on UN standard auditing, control, accounting and procurement procedures. In 2006, an agreement on how to improve visibility, in both beneficiary and donor countries was added, yet the issue of EU visibility for UN funding continues to be a contentious point.<sup>15</sup> The FAFA was revised in 2014 and 2018 to embrace changes in each of the organisations' regulatory frameworks. It states that "[f]or EU contributions, a fixed percentage of direct eligible costs, not exceeding 7%, shall be eligible as indirect costs." This provision can be a source of tension at times, most recently in the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, managed by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), which issued a call for expressions of interest in December 2018 limiting indirect support costs to 4% and thus potentially side-lining UN agencies. This move caused tensions at the highest level, especially considering that UN (humanitarian) agencies implement a significant portion of the Turkey Facility, including the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN). The EU has been made aware that UN Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) Amina Mohammed has instructed agencies and programmes to apply the standard 7%, yet given the limited control of the Secretariat over these entities, it is unclear whether all agencies and funds have held this line.

Non-core contributions can be significant for the receiving organisations. For example, the EU was the second largest donor of the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2016, contributing to 15% of the organisation's total funding. It also contributed to 9% of the public sector revenue of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and 7% of the total contributions to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in 2016 (OECD 2018b: 61). Table 3 below shows the repartition of EU funds among UN agencies.

**Table 3: Total funding from EU institutions (including EU budget, EDF, and trust funds) to UN agencies in 2018**

UN Agency	Year 2018
UNHCR	EUR 621,916,977
UNDP	EUR 575,276,465
IOM	EUR 396,089,630
UNICEF	EUR 325,868,820
WFP	EUR 305,023,276
FAO	EUR 197,446,841
UNRWA	EUR 145,538,269
IFAD	EUR 119,500,000
UNFPA	EUR 85,166,863

<sup>15</sup> The joint visibility guidelines for EC-UN actions in the field have been designed to ensure that UN actions funded by the EU incorporate information and communication activities designed to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for and impact of the UN-EU cooperation and identify EU support for the action in the country or region concerned, as well as the impact of that particular action (United Nations and European Commission 2006).

ITC	EUR 85,107,666
UNIDO	EUR 82,893,812
UNOPS	EUR 71,008,472
WHO	EUR 48,116,249
Others	EUR 305,175,086
<b>Total</b>	<b>EUR 3,364,128,431</b>

Source: UN internal reporting

EU contributions to the entire UN system in 2018 amounted to EUR 3.36 billion, which represented a slight decrease of 8% in relation to the record amount of EUR 3.63 billion of 2017. It is also the second highest ever amount provided by the EU to the UN in a single year. The unusually large amount for UNDP (2<sup>nd</sup> top ranked UN agency in terms of EU funding in 2018) was partially due to a large contribution of EUR 220 million for the Spotlight initiative, an EU-UN multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>16</sup>

According to the 2018 OECD-DAC peer review of EU development cooperation the Commission's 'multi-bi funding'<sup>17</sup> enables member states to provide support to refugee-related and other politically sensitive activities with a lower level of political visibility for the members. For instance, the high rankings of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the table above can be explained by the large amount of EU funding for its internal rather than external priorities. UNHCR, for example had a large contract of EUR 190 million with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) to strengthen and develop the common European asylum system and enhance solidarity and responsibility-sharing between the member states. It also received EUR 167.5 million from the DG for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) for emergency support activities within the European Union. IOM also received over EUR 127 million over three separate large contracts from DG HOME. This is a major new development in the overall EU-UN relation, which reflects the prominence of migration on the EU's political agenda. Before these major contracts, past DG HOME contributions to the UN in particular was been limited and ad hoc.

Beyond the overall EU funding to the UN, therefore, it is important to look at what the EU specifically funds in the UN system. The 2018 OECD-DAC peer review of EU development cooperation also notes that EU member states can provide core or multi-bi funding to the same organisations for similar types of activities, and questions the rationale and added value for the EU institutions to channel such a high proportion of its ODA to other multilateral organisations (OECD 2018b: 61).

<sup>16</sup> The Spotlight Initiative was launched in 2018 with an initial investment in the order of EUR 500 million, with the EU as the main contributor. It is the first time that the EU works more strategically around a specific thematic area with the UN. It displays both the EU's support to the UN reform and a new modus operandi. Yet the Initiative was strongly criticised by several member states which were dissatisfied with the fact that the European Commission did not consult them in the preparation of the Initiative. This shows that member states want to be consulted systematically, while the Commission prefers to act quickly on some issues. See <https://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/index.shtml>; Interview with member state representative, March 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Donor contributions to multilateral organisations earmarked for specific purposes (Reinsberg 2017). These earmarked contributions are generally reported as bilateral ODA.



### 3.1.1. Core vs. tightly earmarked funding

In the context of the negotiations of the new EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), a EUR 90 billion external action instrument part of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, Belgium had proposed to include the possibility of giving core funding contributions to UN entities in the regulation. While this could indeed increase the EU's influence over these organisations' mandates and roles, many other member states objected, as they do not see an interest in channelling core contributions through the EU institutions.

Beyond the headline figures, it is also important to unpack the dynamics behind the EU funding to the UN system. As a non-member, funding is an important means for the EU to influence the UN. A key challenge for the EU is to leverage its funding relationship with the UN to be seen as more than just a 'payer'. While the significant financial support demonstrates a commitment to multilateralism and the UN, our interviews also revealed a perception that UN entities see the EU as a 'giant ATM machine' but do not include it in their engagement and programming on the ground. In addition, the limited visibility of EU contributions to the UN remains a recurring concern.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the EU is also becoming pragmatic in its choice of implementing partners that offer the highest added value on the ground (which may not always be UN agencies). There is also a growing demand from member state agencies (including the smaller ones) to be included.

The EU increasingly channels funding to specific purposes in line with its internal and strategic interests. The trend towards more earmarking can also be observed in individual EU member states contributions (OECD 2018a). While the effects of earmarking should not be generalised<sup>19</sup>, there is agreement in the literature that it produces fragmentation, increases transaction costs and fosters unhelpful competition between UN agencies (Gulrajani 2016; Reinsberg 2017). From the UN's perspective, tightly earmarked funding has long had a huge impact on the coherence and the pursuit of common results. Going forward, if the EU is serious about its commitment to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and support the multilateral system, it will have to rethink its strategic approach to multilateral institutions, including the UN, which unavoidably transpires through its funding patterns.

The Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027, which is currently being negotiated, can be a tool for the EU to support its vision for multilateralism through sustainable funding. Yet, in the current proposed regulation of the NDICI, no changes regarding UN financing have been included. It seems unlikely that the trilogue negotiations (inter-institutional negotiations between the Council, the Commission and the Parliament) are going to change this. Furthermore, some (including the UN in Brussels) have expressed concerns over the fact that thematic programmes have been considerably reduced with the underlying logic that actions should be preferably implemented through geographic programmes (European Commission 2018b). Yet there are still opportunities to be seized in the next long-term budget and programming of the NDICI which will show the extent to which funding is aligned to strategic priorities<sup>20</sup> (see section 5.1). UN entities for their part, will need to move beyond their 'fundraising mindset' and seek common ground and shared interests on a strategic level as well as on the resources.

<sup>18</sup> Some member states are also frustrated that their significant core contributions to UN entities are not always well recognised and visible (interviews with member states representatives, March 2019).

<sup>19</sup> There are varying degrees of earmarking and in some cases, for example, it has enabled agencies to broaden and expand their mandate. An upcoming report from the German Development Institute ('Shades of Grey: Earmarking in the Multilateral Development System') unpacks trends and the consequences of the various instruments of earmarked funding as well as donor interests.

<sup>20</sup> The pre-programming phase is ongoing and will run until the end of 2019 or beginning of 2020 when the programming process will formally kick off.



### 3.2. Money, influence, and the reconfiguration of power

EU funding to the UN has to be seen in light of a broader changing funding environment for the UN. At the end of 2017, UN member states agreed on a budget for 2018 which reduced funding with USD 286 million or 5% from the previous year, a cut for which the US claimed credit, pointing at the inefficiency and overspending of the UN (Business Standard 2017).<sup>21</sup> Aside from the US, others like Japan, the second largest contributor to the UN for some time, have long been calling for “the elimination of unnecessary spending” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: 4). While EU member states remain committed to funding the UN system, they too have high expectations for UN reforms to produce efficiency gains.

Funding, both through assessed and voluntary contributions, equals influence within the UN system. Through funding, member states can weigh on strategic choices, but also on the recruitment of high-level staff within agencies and programmes. The push to reduce spending and the reluctance of the UN's biggest individual contributors to increase their contributions are also leading to a reconfiguration of influence within the UN system. The 2019 general budget for example saw China take the place of second largest funder of the UN budget (after the US), replacing Japan (The Straits Time 2018).<sup>22</sup> Over the past five years, China has also steadily increased its financial and personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. In 2016, China became the second largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping reaching a share of 10% (Institute for Security & Development Policy 2018; Pauley 2018), a trend that is set to further increase to over 15% in 2021 (The Straits Time 2018). Five EU countries however are still in the top 10 of financial contributors to UN peacekeeping:<sup>23</sup>

**Table 4: Top 10 providers of assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and top 10 troop contributing countries for 2018**

Rank	Largest financial contributors	Share	Largest troop contributing countries	Share
1	United States	28,47%	Ethiopia	8,46%
2	China	10,25%	Bangladesh	7,37%
3	Japan	9,68%	Rwanda	7,27%
4	Germany	6,39%	India	7,17%
5	France	6,28%	Nepal	6,79%
6	United Kingdom	5,77%	Pakistan	5,86%
7	Russia	3,99%	Egypt	4,19%
8	Italy	3,75%	Indonesia	3,41%
9	Canada	2,92%	Ghana	3,11%
10	Spain	2,44%	China	2,80%

Source: United Nations peacekeeping website: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>; <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (data for December 2018)

<sup>21</sup> The budget however increased again with USD 415 million for 2019, so no long-term trend can yet be drawn from those cuts (Schaefer 2019).

<sup>22</sup> China's contribution will rise to 12.01% in the next three years from 7.92% for the 2016-2018 period, while Japan's contribution will fall to 8.56% from 9.68% (The Straits Time 2018).

<sup>23</sup> However, EU member states contributed 6,760 troops to UN peacekeeping (as of May 2018), approximately 7.4% of total troop contributions. This lower ranking in terms of troop contributions is often criticised by others, notably African countries.

This increase reflects China's growing GDP but also a policy of increasing Chinese prominence in international affairs. In strategic terms, it also helps China strengthen its military and foster stronger relations with African countries (e.g. through its participation in MINUSMA in Mali) (Cabestan 2018). The budgetary pressure from Washington is also seen by many as an open door to advance Chinese influence in the UN system, and particularly in strategic affairs. China's involvement and influence in budgeting, staffing and agenda-setting has particularly been growing in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in recent years, which makes sense given the Chinese government's prioritisation of economic development as a core mission for the UN (Okano-Heijmans & van der Putten 2018). It also shows that China is increasingly willing and able to employ the UN to internationalise and legitimise its own national interests (Okano-Heijmans & van der Putten 2018: 19).

For the EU and European governments, this shows that the UN is starting to reflect a new world order, and that the UN is becoming a less western system. Funding remains an important way to set the direction of travel, especially at the operational level. In this context, EU governments therefore have an interest in greater coordination of their voluntary contributions to the UN system, as well as in reviewing their position on the provision of core funding to key UN agencies whose mission corresponds to the EU's normative interests.

### 3.3. Cooperation on peace and security

Contrary to the fragmented UN development system, peace and security is very much a core function of the UN under the UNSC and Secretariat. Along with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and the EU's action on conflict prevention and peacebuilding since the early 2000s, the EU and UN have gradually built up a record of cooperation and operational alignment in the area of peace and security provision, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Since 2003, the EU deployed 10 missions in Africa under the Security Council's authorisation; and 11 out of the total 16 EU missions and operations are deployed in parallel with UN missions (EEAS 2019; European Parliament 2015).

EU-UN cooperation in peace and security is characterised by, on the one hand, a strong focus on crisis management, and on the other hand, an emphasis on integrated approaches, conflict prevention and peacebuilding through civilian and developmental means. Clear reference to this integrated approach is made in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, which is in line with the UN vision of prevention and the UN Charter. This also informs the priorities of the EU-UN strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management for 2019-2021 that was agreed upon by member states in 2018 (EEAS 2018a).<sup>24</sup> Concrete EU-UN projects as part of this partnership are being identified as of 2019. While the EU cannot directly provide funds to UN peacekeeping operations, this could in theory change with the proposed creation of the European Peace Facility that, as a new off-budget fund, could allow financing to the UN under the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The new EPF will also replace the African Peace Facility, through which the EU currently finances peace support operation under an African Union mandate (Deneckere 2019). That said, many member states do not currently see a clear added value in channelling the contributions they already make to UN peacekeeping through the EU.

<sup>24</sup> The main pillars of the partnership include: cooperation between UN and EU missions and operations in the field; focus on women, peace and security; complementarity during the planning and execution of transitions of missions and operations; further facilitate EU member states' contributions and support to UN peace operations and the UN Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping Initiative as well as cooperation on training and capacity building (Council of the European Union 2018).

The EU-UN partnership on peace and security is ambitious; however, there are certain limitations to the extent to which this cooperation can deepen. This is mostly linked to the potentially divergent interests of EU member states and relatively slow progress in terms of defence cooperation and integration. While there is a strong case for maximising a common EU approach in peace operations, this is not always politically feasible. At the same time, Europe's security situation is evolving with EU member states' security interests becoming more urgent and closer to home. The growing EU interest in cyber and hybrid threats and migration management and resilience can also play a role in directing the partnership towards different actors such as NATO (especially for its capacity to counter hybrid and cyber threats) or the African Union (in relation to migration).

## 4. The UN reform process: Implications for the EU

The UN's intergovernmental nature and heavily institutionalised structure make it notoriously difficult to reform. Since the late 1990s, calls for reform have increased, ranging from the politically charged debate around the UNSC to improving efficiency and effectiveness of the UN bureaucracy. Since the start of his term, Secretary-General António Guterres has made comprehensive proposals for reforming the UN system broadly covering three areas of the functioning of the UN: (1) the UN development system (UNDS); (2) the UN peace and security architecture; and (3) UN management. Each past SG has introduced reforms in one form or another, yet the current round of changes is generally seen as substantially more ambitious than previous rounds.

The reform proposals respond to accumulated pressure from UN member states to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the UN system, but they can also be seen as a direct result of the highly critical stance of the current US administration towards the United Nations. As such, the reforms serve a dual purpose, namely to bring the UN system in line with the global agendas and challenges of today, and to increase the trust and support of its members for the United Nations. In 2019, implementation of the UN reform agenda entered a new phase that directly alters some of the core administrative and operational systems of the UN. EU member states have been involved in the reform process from the very start, and the way implementation plays out will likely have significant bearing on the future of EU-UN cooperation, especially at the operational level. This paper takes a closer look at one key area of the reform process, namely the 'repositioning' of the UN development system.<sup>25</sup>

### 4.1. Repositioning the UN development system

The EU and its member states are among the largest contributors of the UN's development cooperation, and therefore have a strong interest in the proposed reforms. The overall purpose of the 'repositioning' of the UN development system is to align the UN with the difficult objective of implementing the 2030 Agenda. UN member states understood that if the 2030 Agenda is the new software for global cooperation, the hardware needs an upgrade as well (Baumann 2018a: 626). Yet the 'repositioning' of the UN development system is also a complex and multidimensional process that reveals the sensitive relationship between the UN Secretariat, powerful UN agencies, funds and programmes, their funders, and partner countries on the receiving end of UN development cooperation.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the changes in the UNDS, significant reforms have been introduced in the UN's peace and security architecture and the internal systems of the UN with the aim of aligning responsibility for mandate implementation with the authority to manage resources, simplifying the administrative policy framework of the Secretariat, and moving decision-making closer to the point of delivery. Changes introduced in 2019 relate to decentralising and delegating authority and increasing accountability of UN programmes and agencies. While this is critical for the UN reform process to succeed, it goes beyond the limited scope of this study, and would warrant a separate analysis focusing on the administrative and bureaucratic systems of the UN.

EU member states are both on the demand side of reform and a major stakeholder in the UN development system, leading to a difficult balancing exercise between reform objectives and donor interests. Discussions on the UN development system reflect a strong North-South dynamic. Donor and recipient are strong political roles in the UN, and the dichotomy between the OECD (with the EU) on one side and the G77+China on the other is remarkably resilient (Baumann 2018a: 627). This means that the reform of the UNDS is ultimately a struggle about control and delegation. Donors seek to delegate more functions and some degree of authority to the UN as an international organisation to enable it to respond to development needs in a flexible manner (including though nexus approaches, non-state partnerships), while the G77+China will seek to restrict the function of the UN to an implementing agency in service of developing countries with a strong voice for governments (Baumann 2018: 634-635). On the funding, paradoxically, the roles are somewhat reversed. While the G77+China emphasises the need for core funding (as a way to push back on bilateral influence), donors instead tend to be more defensive, insisting on a better, more coordinated form of voluntary contributions.

The same polarity between donors and recipients also played out in the discussions on the reform mandate for the repositioning of the UN development system,<sup>26</sup> and to some extent limits the scope for the reforms. The EU and its member states reportedly worked closely together and presented a united front throughout this negotiation process.

In its compromise form, the repositioning 'mandate' is ambitious in that it seeks to break with the implicit acceptance of the UN as a loose system of semi-autonomous entities (Baumann & Weinlich 2018), yet at the same time it also avoids announcing far-reaching structural reforms.<sup>27</sup> Concretely, it calls for:

1. A 'new generation' of UN country teams (UNCTs), including a revision of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)<sup>28</sup>, and a review of multi-country offices in order to streamline UN action;
2. 'Reinvigorating' the role of the Resident Coordinator (RC) system;
3. Revamping the regional approach, including the role of the five regional commissions<sup>29</sup>;
4. Strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results;
5. Funding the UN development system; and
6. Following up on the repositioning efforts at the global, regional and country levels.

In January 2019, several of these reforms came into effect, including the launch of the new Resident Coordinator system. The reform implementation affects all major UN development agencies and is taking a gradual approach, overseen by a transition team under the UN Secretariat, in order to ease into the new way of working, ensure agency buy-in and keep the momentum for the overall process. At the UN Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC) operational activities for development segment (OAS) in May 2019, the UNSG presented a comprehensive update on all the different reforms, including an annotated

<sup>26</sup> The formal basis of the repositioning is what the UN calls a 'landmark resolution' from December 2016 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development (QCPR) (A/RES/71/243). The QCPR process is an intense consultation and intergovernmental negotiation process over a period of 18 months. On that basis the UNSG proposed a series of organisational reforms, later adopted by the UNGA in a series of resolutions (A/RES/72/236; A/RES/72/279).

<sup>27</sup> For example, it does not call for the integration of the executive boards on New York-based UN agencies, by many seen as the most effective measure to combat fragmentation in the UNDS (Baumann & Weinlich 2018).

<sup>28</sup> The UNDAF (now renamed UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework – UNSDCF) contains the UN's joint strategic priorities for development cooperation in a given country.

<sup>29</sup> The five UN regional commissions are: The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

outline of a new proposed system-wide strategic document (SWSD)<sup>30</sup>, which is meant to guide the crowded UN development system to work together collaboratively at country, regional and global level, building on the strengths of each entity (Lebada 2018a). The SWSD outline remains rather superficial, and avoids making clear operational choices, an issue that was also raised in the EU's statement during the meeting (EEAS 2019b). Progress on the UN's regional assets and mechanisms also remains limited, however the report does announce measures to unify regional systems, strengthen accountability towards the UN Secretariat, and a change management process meant to reduce duplication.

Two issues stand out in light of this study: the reform of the UN's in-country coordination and leadership architecture, which could offer opportunities for greater EU-UN cooperation on the ground, and the modalities for financing the implementation of the reform process, which link back to the role and influence of the EU member states within the broader UN system.

#### **4.1.1. A new country architecture: Working with the grain**

The first two reforms are critical, as they address the aging UN country systems and the increasingly problematic fragmentation of the UN development system and inter-agency dynamics. Frustrations have long been raised on the way UN agencies work together on the ground. The comprehensive nature of the 2030 Agenda also increasingly invalidates the strict sectoral division of labour and prevalent internal competition between UN agencies, and makes it more difficult to maintain business as usual.

At the same time, path dependency in an institution as old and wide as the UN is strong. A side effect of the UN's decentralised ecosystem is that different UN agencies tend to compete for the same funding both within the UN (global and multi-donor funds) and from government donors (both core and tightly earmarked funding). UN agencies and programmes are mostly in charge of their own fundraising and while they operate under the UN flag, this situation also gives them a high degree of independence. In countries where there are many agencies and programmes,<sup>31</sup> this is often seen to lead to undercoordination, competition, and, in some cases, even duplication or direct contradictions in the way UN agencies and programmes operate (Medinilla, Tadesse Shiferaw & Veron 2019: 14-15). This also makes it particularly difficult to implement the 'new way of working', and pursue a nexus approach between peace, development and humanitarian actors in crisis-affected countries.

The form and effectiveness of UN coordination varies from country to country, but historically the lead role in coordination of the development system has been observed by the Resident Coordinator, which in most cases was the resident representative of UNDP.<sup>32</sup> In 2019, the RC system was delinked from UNDP to ensure that the RC system functions independently from all agencies and has a single and direct reporting line to the UN Secretariat. The delinking of the RC system is also meant to empower Resident Coordinators in their role, by giving them additional support and a stronger profile within the UN family to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

At the beginning of 2019, most RCs moved out of UNDP and settled into their new position. UNDP also started the recruitment of 126 new resident representatives. In parallel, the UN Development Operations

<sup>30</sup> In January 2019 the UNSG presented a first version of such a SWSD; an annotated outline dated 18 April 2018 can be found here: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/Reference%20document%20-%20SWSD-Annotated%20outline%20-%2018%20April.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> In Somalia for example, there are no less than 21 different UN agencies and programmes (Medinilla, Tadesse Shiferaw & Veron 2019: 11).

<sup>32</sup> In some complex settings such as Somalia, the RC is part of a dedicated UN mission structure, yet this is an exception to the general rule.

Coordination Office (DOCO) in New York was transferred from UNDP to the Secretariat under the DSG.<sup>33</sup> DOCO serves as the secretariat for the newly renamed UN Sustainable Development Group<sup>34</sup> and is tasked with providing support and oversight for the global network of RCs and UN Country Teams (Risse 2019).

Human resources operations of this magnitude tend to create what DSG Amina Mohammed called “anxieties within the system and amongst [...] partners on the outside” (Mohammed 2018). In order to manage expectations, and maintain agency support, the approach taken by the UNSG and his team is one of working with the grain. Any change is preceded by significant consultation with all parties involved, and a major effort is made to communicate on the UN reform process. This strategy has borne fruit in that the reforms are underway and broadly supported by member states, but also from within the UN system. UNDP, which by some interviewees is seen to be on the losing side of the development system reforms, provides significant financial and logistical support to the transition process.

The gradual approach to the reforms also means that it is difficult to foresee what the ultimate effects of these reforms will be in practice. What we see today is a largely bureaucratic process, focused on strengthening the accountability and reporting lines of the UN Country Team entities. What remains to be seen is how the new RCs can and will be empowered in their role, as was requested by the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) resolution.<sup>35</sup> One direct source of influence for the RCs will be in the decision-making of the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda, an inter-agency, pooled mechanism for strategic financing and integrated policy support across all 17 SDGs. As of yet, the extent of this fund however remains modest, with total commitments for 2017-2021 standing at USD 97 million.<sup>36</sup>

Interviewees for this study remarked that the reform of the UN’s country architecture, while carried out in good faith by all parties, does not fundamentally alter the incentive environment for UN agencies and programmes, as they remain subject to the same competitive and often restrictive fundraising environment as before. Opinions are also mixed on what degree or what type of ‘empowerment’ is ultimately desirable and feasible for the RCs. Powerful agencies tend to see the RCs as purely conveners and facilitators of cooperation, and would be wary to see them gain power over their own decision-making process, or worse, become an additional agency which would compete on the same market for donor funding. Ultimately, the success of the transition will depend on agency and programme ownership over the process, but may also require a different approach to funding the UN development system.

#### **4.1.2. Funding the United Nations Development System**

As part of the UN development system reform, the UN Secretary-General proposed to launch a funding dialogue for finalising a Funding Compact in order to ensure adequate funding for the reform and the 2030 Agenda. This was also taken up in the UNGA resolution on the reform of the UN development system (72/279) in May 2018. Following several months of dialogue with the UNDS, member states agreed on the final draft of the Funding Compact in March 2019. The Compact translates the UNGA resolution’s commitments into concrete actions, time-bound targets and indicators (Lebada 2019a). At the operational

<sup>33</sup> In December 2018, UNSG António Guterres also appointed the former chair of the development transition team to lead DOCO, a post at the level of Assistant Secretary General (Risse 2019).

<sup>34</sup> The Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), formerly the development group (UNDG), regroups the 34 UN funds, programmes, agencies, departments and offices that have a role in sustainable development. Under the chairmanship of DSG Amina Mohammed, the UNSDG guides, supports, tracks and oversees the coordination of development operations in 165 countries and territories (UNSDG website).

<sup>35</sup> The QCPR resolution “requests the Secretary-General: [...] To further enhance the planning and coordination function of the resident coordinators by empowering them within the United Nations country team to make final decisions on the strategic objectives in the [UNDAF]” (A/RES/71/243).

<sup>36</sup> See Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office: <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/IPS00>



activities for development segment of the May 2019 ECOSOC meeting, member states welcomed the new Funding Compact and recognised “that the current funding architecture does not lend itself to incentivise joint efforts and collective outcomes” (ECOSOC 2019c: 9).

The compact provides commitments and targets both for UN entities and member states. It commits member states to bring core resources to a level of at least 30% in the next five years (in order to restore a “healthier balance” between core and non-core resources (Lebada 2019a)), to increase the share of multi-year contributions, and to double the levels of resources channelled through inter-agency pooled funds and single agency thematic funds. The assumption is that pooled and thematic funds, such as the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda (which proposes a new way to empower the UN RCs and make the UNCT work as one, by bringing coherence and coordination on the ground), provide the type of quality and predictable funding allowing the UN to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and to become more flexible and responsive.

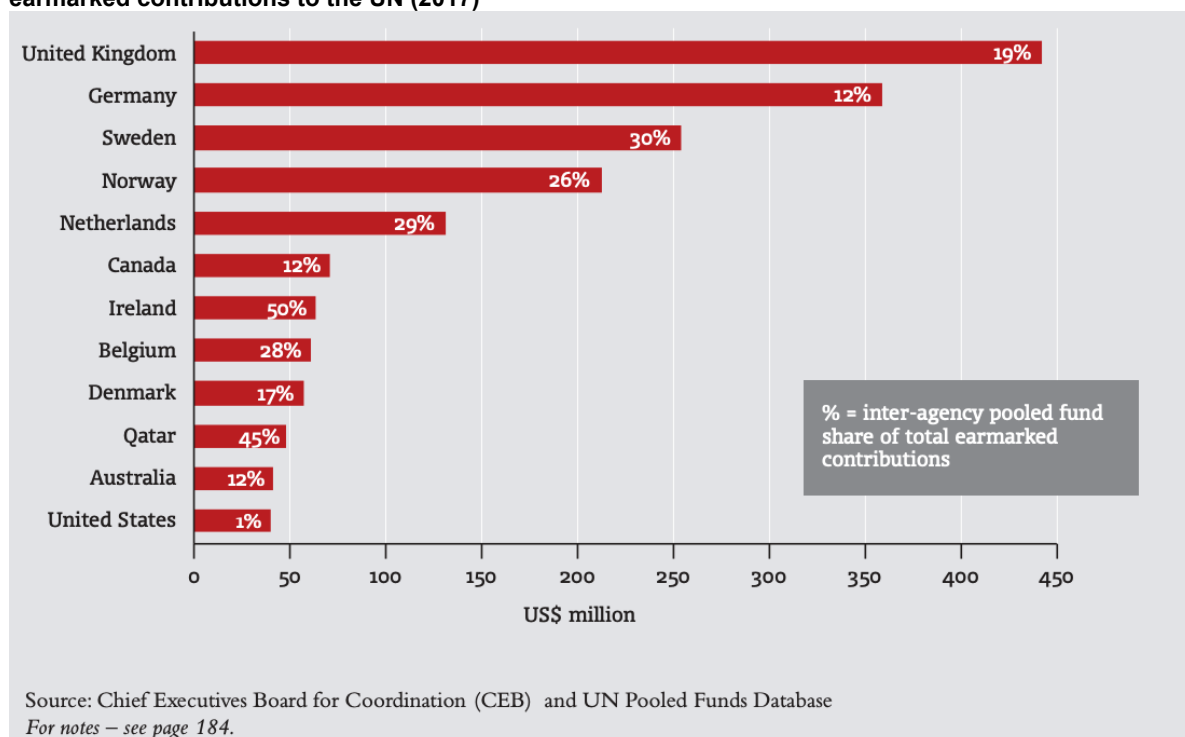
The UN, for its part, commits to accelerate results for countries through more collaboration, to report on needs and results more clearly, consistently and transparently and to be more efficient in doing so (Lebada 2019a). This responds to member states’ requests to see the UNDS work in a more joined-up way as well as more transparently in order to increase trust in the value of the UN development work. At the operational activities for development segment of the May 2019 ECOSOC meeting, member states also emphasised that “key to the success of the Compact will be the ability of the UNDS to demonstrate what it is delivering with core and pooled funding versus funding that is earmarked to a single entity and project.” (ECOSOC 2019c: 9).

The Secretariat will work with the Resident Coordinators and the UN country teams to “unpack” this compact at the country level. The EU fully supports it, although in recent statements, it noted that the collective target (for UN member states) to achieve 30% core resources for the UNDS may be too ambitious (EEAS 2019a). It recalled its reservations regarding the commitment to facilitate and support the implementation of efficiency measures where relevant and possible, highlighting that “the costs necessary to achieve those savings are to be found within existing resources, supplemented if needed by in-kind contributions” and the target is not contingent on additional financial resources (EEAS 2019b). The European Commission has pledged EUR 30 million to the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda in 2018 (European Commission 2018c).<sup>37</sup> It now remains to be seen whether the EU will adapt its funding patterns over the long-term and encourage its member states to fulfil their commitments as part of the Compact. The June 2019 Council conclusions to some extent recognise this and commit member states to work towards a more strategic approach to quality voluntary funding for key UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies, as well as to prioritise predictable, multi-annual support for multi-agency actions by the UN (including through core funding and interagency pooled funds) (Council of the European Union 2019b: 9). This is a soft commitment however, which does not alter member states’ incentives when it comes to funding patterns.

The top five donors to UN inter-agency pooled funds are all European countries (which together contributed 69% of the total contributions) and seven out of the top ten donors are EU member states (UN MPTF Office and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019: 52).

<sup>37</sup> The Netherlands (USD 25 million), Sweden (USD 20 million), Spain (USD 10 million), Denmark (USD 10 million) Germany (USD 0,9 million) and Ireland (USD 0,5 million) have also pledged.

**Figure 6: Deposits to UN inter-agency pooled funds from the 12 largest contributors, and share of their total earmarked contributions to the UN (2017)**



Source: UN MPTF Office and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 2019: 53

## 4.2. The cost of reform

The initial proposals of the UNSG (A/72/124–E/2018/3) emphasised potential cost savings and efficiency gains of the reform process, and member states also called for the changes to be cost-neutral. However, over the course of 2018, it became clear that the administrative and bureaucratic changes, especially if no significant cost-cutting measures would be taken first, would come at a price. The Resident Coordinator system in particular increases spending as it creates a function that was hitherto taken up by UNDP.

In 2018, member states agreed to an investment of USD 281 million for 2019 to cover the initial costs of the new RC system. The RC funding package is covered in three different ways (Lebada 2018b):

1. A 1% coordination levy on tightly earmarked third party contributions to UN development-related activities, to be paid at source.<sup>38</sup>
2. Doubling the current undg cost-sharing arrangement among UN development system entities. The undg cost-sharing arrangement is managed by UN DOCO and provides joint funding for country-level coordination functions of the RC system from undg entities, including the UN Secretariat. The cost-sharing agreement has been in place since 2014. For 2019, the doubled amount will correspond to a total of USD 77.5 million.<sup>39</sup>
3. Voluntary, predictable, multi-year contributions to a dedicated trust fund to support the inception period.

<sup>38</sup> The 1% levy is generally accepted by agencies and member states, even if some practicalities still need to be fleshed out. The EU for example, along with a handful of member states including Sweden, will not directly implement the levy but will transfer an equivalent amount into the Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) using other means. The details of this approach may still need to be worked out.

<sup>39</sup> See: [https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org/ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/RC\\_system\\_funding-Technical\\_Note.pdf](https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org/ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/RC_system_funding-Technical_Note.pdf)



All these contributions are centralised in a Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF). In order to maximise transparency (Benson Wahlén 2019), an open access portal was set up to track member states' and other contributions in real time.<sup>40</sup> An appropriation of USD 13.57 million for the UN Secretariat's share of the undg cost-sharing arrangement for 2019 (17.5%) was also approved in November 2018 (Lebada 2018c).

Given that an increase in assessed contributions in the current climate is a politically unattractive move, the choice to finance the RC system through voluntary and internal contributions was made early on in the process. Some sources see the reliance on voluntary contributions as a risk for the politicisation of the RC system, while others see this as a purely pragmatic move, which may also serve to avoid Fifth Committee's bickering about individual appointments.<sup>41</sup> Looking ahead, it is in the interest of the UNSG and member states to maintain a certain balance in the way the RC system is funded, as well as sufficient distance between funder and function.

### 4.3. In search of efficiency gains

The more difficult question to tackle in 2019 is the issue of efficiency gains, and the level of ambition for significant changes in the UN's ecosystem of offices, programmes, commissions and agencies. In 2018, the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations (JIU) issued a report on 'opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness in administrative support services by enhancing inter-agency cooperation' (Kramer 2018). The report states that inter-agency cooperation offers a significant opportunity for efficiency gains, which is largely in line with the UNSG's call to improve horizontal coherence within the system.

The JIU report also gives a rather sobering analysis of the "overall level of accomplishment" so far, and goes beyond the loss of potential cost savings, into the joint delivery capacity of the UN on the ground.<sup>42</sup> The report also notes "few evident incentives for inter-agency cooperation at the country level", and that "[h]orizontal integration at the country level has not been supported by corporate policy changes to create the necessary conditions" (Kramer 2018: v-vi). This lack of incentives for cooperation is well known (Medinilla, Tadesse Shiferaw & Veron 2019), yet the JIU report serves as a critical reminder of what is ultimately at stake in the reform process, and that in order to succeed, the reforms will need to address both the financial and bureaucratic incentives that obstruct joint action within the UN system.

The EU and most UN member states have insisted on clear options for increasing the efficiency of the UN system, however this proves difficult. At the May 2019 ECOSOC OAS meeting, the EU again reiterated its expectation to "receive concrete figures and detailed information on progress as soon as possible" (EEAS 2019b). The UN has hesitated to produce these proposals, which reflects a difficult reality the UN system faces today. Beyond efficiency gains through mere administrative reforms and alignment, a more difficult and politically sensitive question is whether the current lay-out of the UN's complex ecosystem of programmes, agencies and commissions is due for an update. Figure 7 below shows the full extent of funds, programmes, commissions, departments and other entities that make up the UN family, as well as

<sup>40</sup> As of September 2019, USD 114 million has been committed by 38 UN member states including 15 EU member states. 6 out of the 10 largest contributors are EU member states. See: <https://soc.un.org/SPTF/>

<sup>41</sup> The choice for a significant voluntary component for financing this particular reform may open the door to stronger member state influence over the new Resident Coordinator system. High level positions in the UN system in general tend to be subject to extensive negotiations between member states, both formally and informally.

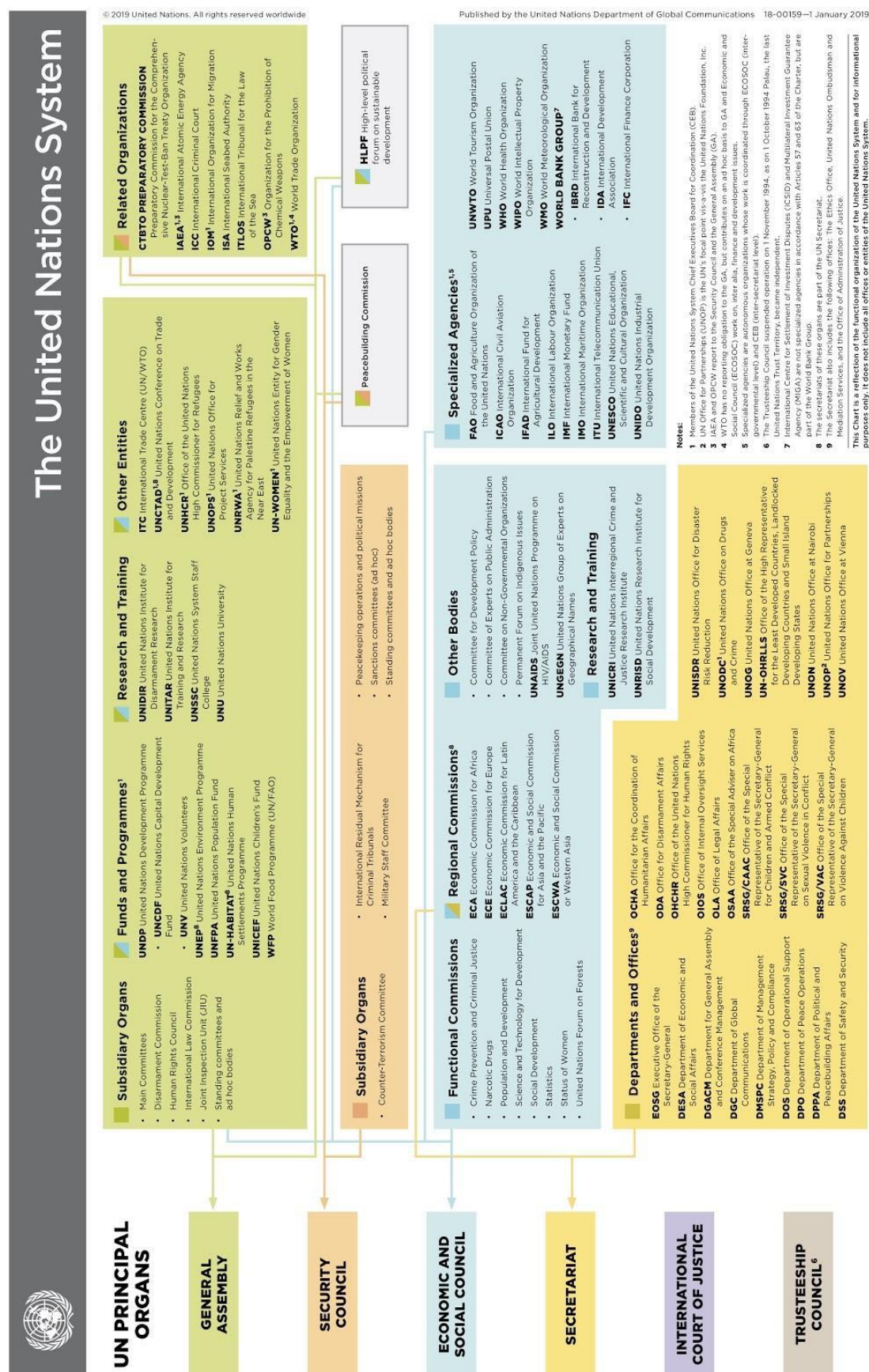
<sup>42</sup> Most UN Country Teams still manage their 'business operations' (procurement, logistics, IT, HR, facility management, etc.) through agency-specific departments, and an "overwhelming majority of operations management teams" see differences in policies, procedures and rules and regulations as the main obstacles to 'common business operations' (Kramer 2018: vii).

the main reporting lines to the UN's principal organs.<sup>43</sup> This complex layout of entities is the result of an organic evolution of the UN reflecting historical needs and evolving mandates, and has to some extent solidified over time. Over the years, calls have grown stronger to prioritise function over form, and rethink the Byzantine composite structure of the UN. However, a rationalisation of UN entities is extremely challenging for two reasons, namely because the UN Secretariat has only partial authority over many of these entities, and because UN entities, posts and programmes tend to have their own advocates among UN member states.

This has led to the proliferation of a complicated network of semi-independent UN entities that each reflect a particular time and need, many of which are indispensable, while others are in constant search for relevance. The UN's regional commissions for example were set up shortly after the Second World War (ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP), or during or after decolonisation (ECA, ESCWA), and while these entities have been repositioned to some extent, their original mandates have long been overtaken by regional organisations and integration processes. There have been calls in the past to abolish UN entities because of redundancy, however, in the absence of clear performance criteria to assess individual entities, no UN organisation has ever been closed, though the occasional merger has taken place (Brown & Weiss 2013: 4).

<sup>43</sup> Funds and programmes are financed primarily through voluntary contributions. Specialised agencies are financed by both voluntary and assessed contributions, yet they function as autonomous organisations under the authority of ECOSOC.

Figure 7: Organisational chart of the United Nations (January 2019)



#### 4.4. Implications for the EU and its member states

EU member states have repeatedly expressed their full support and confidence in the UNSG's reform agenda, and have worked through the UNGA and ECOSOC structures to support it. The EU and its member states reportedly also played a crucial role in the adoption of resolution 72/279 (2018) on the repositioning of the UN development system, even though they worked within a broader group of donor countries.

From an EU perspective, the EU's and UN's fates are to some extent intertwined, and EU officials realise that a failure of the reforms to take root will lead to a further detraction of multilateral cooperation from the US and others, which will ultimately also affect the EU. The question remains, however, whether the reforms are indeed sufficiently transformative to address the long-standing concerns and appease future criticism. The reforms are significantly more ambitious than previous rounds and the reshuffling of departments and country architecture is at least hitting some of the desired notes. In the current divisive international environment, it is already a significant achievement to have these changes agreed (Cliffe 2019: 5) and to maintain the support and momentum from the various UN entities for this reform agenda.

That said, in 2019, bureaucratic change has been fast-tracked, and it remains to be seen whether the organisational and operational culture will follow. Many of the changes, especially those relating to the delegation of authority and the 'reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system' require a degree of behavioural change to become effective (Cliffe 2019: 5). UN staff across different entities will need to work together, and commit to a different approach to coordination, planning, and ultimately funding, in order to substantiate the formal changes with a new way of working.

When it comes to the UN development system and the rather fragmented UN family in general, the UNSG does not have a choice but to work 'with the grain'. The UN Secretariat has little control over the decision-making process of UN funds, programmes, and specialised agencies, which respond to their own executive boards and member states directly through the UNGA and ECOSOC. Maintaining support from at least the larger UN entities therefore is crucial.

The overall incentive environment for UN entities also appears not to have been majorly affected by the start of implementation. The UNDS reform in particular will likely only work if voluntary contributions follow the same logic of cross-UN cooperation. This is a difficult issue to tackle, as funding a reformed UN is ultimately about influence, and empowering the UN to act as one does imply giving it a higher degree of autonomy. The question remains, is the EU also willing to move in this direction?

### 5. Direct opportunities for deepening EU-UN cooperation

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a common ground for the EU and the UN to work together. On a strategic level both organisations, together with the World Bank, can easily rally behind the 2030 Agenda. Yet this may also bring a unique opportunity to cooperate operationally on the ground, which requires much deeper changes in the ways of working, but is also necessary.

In their joint communiqué of 27th September 2018, the EU and the UN pledged to join forces to enhance joint policy dialogue and consultation with partner countries and to find EU-UN synergies to support partner countries' efforts to integrate the Agenda 2030 into their national strategies and priorities (Herrero et al. 2019): "We intend to enhance joint policy dialogue and consultation with partner countries to identify opportunities for collaboration and possible areas of support including synergies between EU programming



(including joint programming) and the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).” The communiqué also calls for greater coordination between UNCTs, RCs and EU delegations, and for making use of the joint SDG fund to the extent possible (European Commission 2018d).

In 2019-20, there are two major processes that offer immediate opportunities to put this into practice: the negotiations around the future MFF and the start of the programming of EU development cooperation. Yet there are significant structural and political constraints for the EU to achieve its stated ambitions in multilateral affairs.

### 5.1. Strategic choices for the MFF

After the EU's Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the creation of the European External Action Service in 2010 and the EU Global Strategy in 2016, the next ‘building block’ of a more strategic and coherent external action is the EU budget proposal for the 2021-2027 period. The underlying logic of the proposal is a much more interest-based EU international cooperation that has more political steering while being more coherent and consolidated, leading to a significant change in the heading for external action (now called ‘Neighbourhood and the world’) of the overall EU budget. While the 2030 Agenda is key, it is not the only driver for the new budget. Today, the EU funds the UN through different pots of resources (or external financial instruments – EFIs), each with their own ring-fenced allocations and legal basis. The European Commission has now initiated a major and significant rationalisation of its external funding that will impact the way that it collaborates with and funds the United Nations.

Two important parallel EU processes will have significant implications. First are the actual **negotiations of the next EU budget 2021-2027** between the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, which will set the overall amount and the legal basis, as well as the geographic and thematic focus of the EU's external funding. In an attempt to be more strategic, the Commission's proposal prioritises geographic approaches over global thematic ones within the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The lion's share of funding would be channelled through the geographic programmes (76% compared to 8% for the thematic programmes), with significant ring-fenced allocations to the neighbourhood window and Sub-Saharan Africa (Jones et al. 2019). Concerns about the small size of the thematic pillar have been expressed by the UN in Brussels and NGOs, who have called for a rebalancing of the geographic and thematic pillars (European Commission 2018b). According to Concord, for example, thematic budget lines “help to deliver results for public goods and global challenges at global level, notably through contributions to global initiatives and by lending support to issues that lie at the core of EU values but are often neglected in bilateral cooperation” (CONCORD 2018).

While this new prioritisation of geographic programmes could indeed mean less funding for global challenges – which could affect the UN system – there is also a possibility that the new Global Challenges thematic programme (allocated EUR 3 billion), and thematic programmes in general, would genuinely focus on global initiatives, by covering issues that are better dealt with at the global level and in international settings rather than at the country level (Jones et al. 2019).<sup>44</sup> That said, the proposal for external action funding does not foresee any changes on the way the UN is funded. This could potentially even lead to further fragmentation. While the NDICI is a consolidated instrument, for peace and security related aspects

<sup>44</sup> The proposal states that “actions implemented through thematic programmes shall be complementary to actions funded under geographic programmes and shall support global and trans-regional initiatives for achieving internationally agreed goals, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals, protecting global public goods or addressing global challenges.” (European Commission 2018e: 29).

for instance, it could fund the UN from the thematic or regional envelopes as well as from the unprogrammable reserve or rapid response elements, all of which would have different procedures and different parts of the EU institutions' individual units responsible for them.

Secondly, the **EU programming process** will be led by the European External Action Service and the European Commission (primarily DG DEVCO and DG NEAR, with some thematic elements of interest to the UN also being taken forward by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments). In 2019, the 'pre-programming strategic phase' is unfolding, during which significant country, regional and thematic assessments are undertaken as well as first notes on cooperation (see diagram in annex A). While effective multilateralism and cross-cutting global issues will feature prominently, this analysis will be synthesised to feed into political validation that will occur when the new European Commission takes office later in 2019. There will then be space for the new leadership to provide some direction, including potentially specific requests concerning the United Nations system and agencies.

There are both risks and opportunities for the UN system associated to the next MFF and programming process. A sustained political push (beyond the Directorate-Generals) will be needed to align funding to strategic priorities and political considerations outlined in this paper.

## 5.2. SDG dialogues and country programming

In parallel, preliminary discussions are ongoing with some UN agencies, particularly UNDP, on cooperating more closely at field level on delivering on the SDGs. This is where the greatest potential for improving the EU-UN partnerships lies. In the pre-programming process of the NDICI, which is currently unfolding, EU delegations have been instructed to pursue informal consultations with EU member states as well as potentially UN Resident Coordinators and 'other stakeholders' before the end of the summer 2019. On the one hand, 'SDG dialogues' could be an opportunity to involve the UN in partner countries to identify shared agendas that could serve as a basis for programming choices. This would help overcome the common critique that the UN in country only comes to the EU for funding but does not involve it in its programming, and concomitantly, that the EU sees the UN merely as an implementer rather than a cooperation partner more broadly. On the other hand, these dialogues would strengthen the role of UN RCs and contribute to the UN reform.

While the interviews for this study showed that there is strong support for such dialogues in some parts of the European Commission as well from some member states, it is not clear whether this approach has drawn any consensus yet within the EU itself, given some of the questions it raises (e.g. regarding at which stage of the process the EU member states would be involved) and the perception of the UN as fragmented, costly and inefficient on the ground. This explains why the EU consistently emphasises its call for "a more flexible and efficient UN" (Council of the European Union 2019a: 3).

It remains to be seen whether any such coordination will actually take place in the next EU programming process. Some in the EU believe that it would be wiser to wait for the new UN RC system to function at country level and fragmentation to be tackled before the UN-EU partnership is enhanced (Herrero et al. 2019). The role of the RC will indeed likely be crucial in any future coordination. A strong RC function, especially in countries with a strong UN presence, for example stemming from a UNSC mandate, could be an opportunity for the EU.<sup>45</sup> Instructions from Brussels to lend joint EU-member states support to the RCs in their new role is encouraging in that sense. The assumption is that a strengthened RC system and

<sup>45</sup> Although, as one of our interviewees pointed out, there may even be diplomatic complications, since the RCs do not have the status of ambassador while EU Heads of Delegation do.

stronger accountability lines in country can offer opportunities for the EU to engage in joint dialogue and analysis with the UN, at least partially disconnected from the fundraising question of UN entities.

Yet, a UN system delivering as one, is still far from a reality. Organisational cultures are slow to change, and as the rest of this study has shown, there are strong interests and dynamics that can sometimes be hurdles to deepened cooperation. Although both organisations have a joint interest in 'localising the multilateral agenda', there is a long way to go before the UNCT, rallied behind the RC, can have a dialogue with the EU, which would also have to overcome its internal disagreements about coordination with the UN, in the interest of partner countries. Going forward with joint dialogues and consultations at country level may be best done on a case-by-case basis to be as strategic and effective as possible.

### 5.3. The EU's autonomy and influence in the UN

The EU's and UN's approach to development cooperation and ODA, their comprehensive approach to peace and security abroad, and the UN's human rights architecture are areas of clear and historical normative alignment between the two organisations. In those areas, both the EU and UN can and do benefit from increasing operational linkages through efforts of shared analysis, structural cooperation and pooled funding to avoid duplication. Yet to some extent, the level of EU-UN cooperation – and therefore the opportunities for further cooperation – is a function of the EU's internal cohesion and capacity to act. This is most apparent in contexts of fragility and (protracted) crisis. In crisis response and peace operations for example – either UN, EU, or joint – the scope for EU-UN cooperation partly depends on the ability of the EU to quickly mobilise resources and strategic assets. Similarly, the case for EU-UN coordination on the ground increases in function of relative weight of the EU's presence in a given country. Where the EU and member states are able to present a strong unified approach, the need for coordination with the UN and usefulness thereof increases considerably. Conversely, when the EU is seen as just another donor among many, there may be much less to gain in seeking closer cooperation with the UN.

Moving forward, the question is perhaps less how cooperation can be deepened at the technical and financial level, but more how the EU can increase its relative weight and influence in a changing UN environment and do so strategically. Much will depend on how the EU positions itself in critical international challenges, not least the climate crisis, international trade, security well beyond its direct neighbourhood, as well as other sources of global uncertainty such as cybersecurity and hybrid threats. The EU's continued commitment to a 'rules-based multilateralism' provides a strong principled basis for its engagement in the UN. However, it does not alter the EU's power and influence within the UN. This can only be done by increasing the EU's capacity to act, its strategic autonomy, as well as its ability to set the tone in both the UNGA and UNSC. Doing so requires a different approach to foreign policy and external spending by EU member states, one that would be a significant break from the past.

## 6. Conclusions: EU and member states' interests in the UN

### **The role of the EU in the UN is evolving**

The United Nations are subject to changing global power dynamics. The comfortable normative uniformity of the post-Cold War international system is gradually fading as the centre of gravity of world politics shifts to the East. In parallel, we see a steady reprioritisation of national sovereignty over global commons in international affairs in events such as the US withdrawal from the Paris agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.



In this tense environment, the European Union is a remarkably stable presence within the United Nations, and has steadily carved out a unique form of regional agency within its walls. While Brexit is a major step backwards, the EU still has significant market power, which it can use to lead on areas ranging from climate change, sustainable development, cyber security, maritime law, etc. The limit of the EU's role within a changing UN, however, is its own internal fragmentation, for example on migration, but also the fact that it continues to underperform in terms of hard power through defence spending and cooperation.

The rise of China, and most of all the (temporary) retreat of the US, could affect the traditional coalitions in the UN system. As a regional bloc, the EU has long sought to promote cross-regional cooperation within the UN, particularly with Africa and the African Union, an ambition it reiterates in the 2019 Council conclusions on multilateral affairs. In reality, however, the North-South divide within the UN, with the G77 (and China) on one side and traditional donor countries on the other, has shown to be quite resilient.<sup>46</sup> This is to some extent a design feature due to the structural underrepresentation of the global South in the UN, and particularly its Security Council, and will likely create further and increasing tensions in the years to come.<sup>47</sup> Breaking this pattern will require more than symbolic commitments, and clear incentives for cross-regional action in the UN, both in terms of common interests and in terms of representation.

While the 2019 Council conclusions capture the ongoing transformation of the multilateral system, they also maintain the existing approach of the EU, i.e. to support existing frameworks, and where possible, strengthen the EU's role as a normative player in the international system. Part of the task for the new European Commission President and her HRVP is to renew the EU's foreign policy and to regain a degree of strategic power and prominence in a context of global disruption and power competition. In order to do so, the EU will first and foremost need to get its own house in order and augment its coherence and voice on difficult matters such as the Middle East and climate change, but also to strengthen European security and defence capabilities beyond what is currently projected.

In the current global environment, the EU will also need to position itself more strategically and invest more in EU-UN cooperation where it has a strong potential, while leading by example. Areas that stand out are tackling the climate crisis and protecting global commitments and frameworks. The EU also has a natural added value in peace operations. While it may not lead in absolute contributions, its approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding is grafted on the UN's internationalist approach to peace and security, offering opportunities for future leadership. In other areas, the EU has had little choice but to react. The gradual US withdrawal from UN human rights regimes and non-proliferation efforts puts the EU in the spotlight, and the EU and its member states are called on to fill the gaps, championing issues such as SRHR and maintaining negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programme.

Commission President-elect von der Leyen's strong pledges on climate in her address to the European Parliament in July 2019 (e.g. for Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent in the world by 2050; a Green Deal for Europe in her first 100 days in office; a European Climate Law which will set the 2050 target into law) and her support for a European Defence Union are encouraging signs for strengthening common European action in various areas (European Commission 2019c). In a changing UN environment, the standard European approach of the lowest common denominator is unlikely to suffice. The EU institutions have created a space for themselves within the UN system (both at the UNGA and in the

<sup>46</sup> This was again confirmed in the discussions on the reform of the UN Development system (Baumann 2017).

<sup>47</sup> European countries regularly speak out in favour of the expansion of the UNSC, including a permanent African representation. Permanent members France and the UK have long called for the expansion of permanent and non-permanent members, and France spearheaded a voluntary initiative for veto reform in 2013. Actual reform however is difficult by design as it requires a two-thirds majority in the UNGA as well as unanimous agreement among the five permanent members.

UNSC, with HRVP Mogherini increasingly addressing UN bodies directly) which will need to be maintained and expanded. Yet, the new leadership also needs to realise the extent to which the EU's internal divisions are reflected in the UN system. Ways will need to be found to provide a stronger and more inspiring narrative member states can rally behind and play an active role in.

### **Opportunities for deepening cooperation**

The basis for a stronger future partnership between the EU and the UN is partly already there. Beyond the political role of the EU within the UN, the two have gradually but steadily increased their cooperation at the operational level, particularly on peace and security in Africa and through the EU's funding to the UN development system. As the UN goes through reforms, and the EU prepares for a new European Commission and budget, there are opportunities to further deepen direct cooperation between the EU and UN systems, yet they should be approached with the necessary care.

The programming of a future Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument (NDICI) may open avenues for joint dialogue and analysis, and ultimately joint action, but while the case for some form of EU-UN coordination in achieving the SDGs is clear, this may be very difficult to put into practice. There also appears to be a significant disconnect between the policy level in Brussels and New York and the operational level on the ground. In principle, everyone agrees on the desirability to work closer with the UN, especially at a political level and in complex and fragile contexts. At the operational level, however, the UN and its different entities are often seen as implementing partners, which in some cases have a good working relationship with the EU, but are often also perceived as fragmented, costly and inefficient on the ground with an uneven quality in senior and specialist staff. UN entities, in turn, tend to see and approach the EU as a funder first, and a strategic partner second.

Future opportunities for cooperation on the ground depend to a large extent on the reform of the UN's country architecture, the ability of the UN to address the fragmentation and internal competition between its different entities, and the extent to which the EU and its member states are willing to make the effort on the ground. While first steps have been taken towards a stronger country architecture, the incentive environment for UN entities remains largely unchanged, and often favours competition and the partitioning of efforts over joint action.

### **Improving the UN starts at home**

The UN reform agenda is significantly more ambitious than previous rounds, and the UNSG's proposals are widely supported by both the EU institutions and its member states. The momentum for change however also reveals a major contradiction in the way the EU and member states approach the UN system. Fragmentation in the UN is driven by the way it is funded, and as major funders of the UN system, member states and the EU institutions are both part of the solution and part of the problem.

The nature of the UN as a loose federation of semi-autonomous entities does not allow for radical change. The changes that were introduced in 2019 therefore are still largely a matter of bureaucratic and administrative reform. On their own, they are likely insufficient to address the longstanding fragmentation of the UN, simply because the downstream incentives for change have not been altered. EU member states and the European Commission contribute to the UN's fragmentation by relying on tightly earmarked funding, which increases strategic coherence with their own agenda, but often at the expense of coherence within the UN. Insistence on diplomatic returns for voluntary contributions through positions and influence also further contaminates the organisational culture of the UN. This has also led to a difficult situation in the reform of the UN, where the EU and member states expect the UN to work differently, yet they hesitate to empower it to do so.

Neither the EU or the UN are prone to rapid change unless driven by crisis. Change in an intergovernmental setting tends to be slow and incremental. In a context of changing power relations in the UN, and a less stable multilateralism, the EU and its member states however have an interest in pushing for more substantial reform and a stronger autonomy of the UN system as a whole. They can do so by reducing the *de facto* 'bilateralisation' of the UN Development System (Baumann & Weinlich 2018), and strengthening its ability to work independently and in an integrated manner for delivering the 2030 Agenda. There are opportunities in the UN reform agenda, including the Funding Compact, but mostly by ensuring a coherent all-EU approach to the UN.

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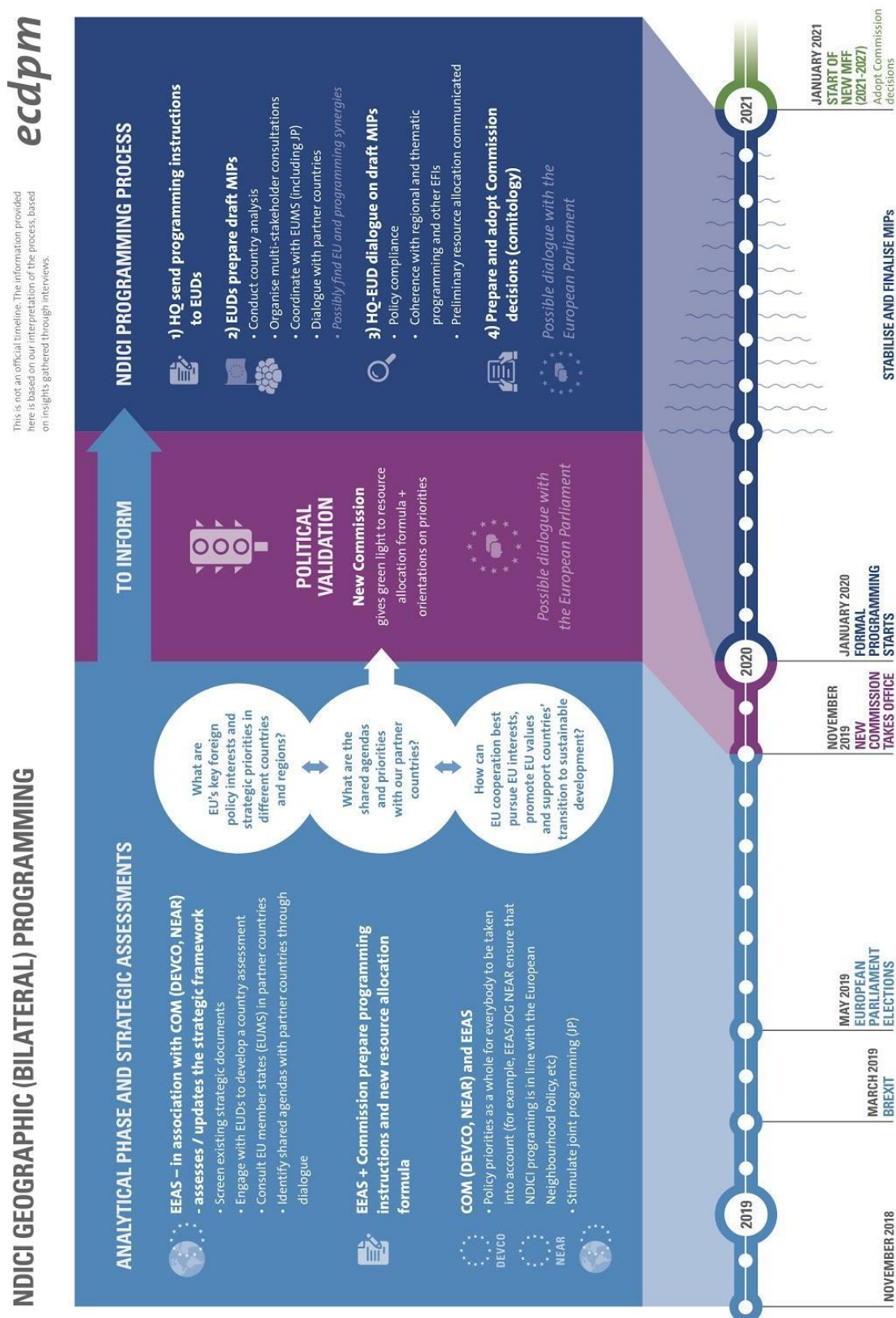
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## Annex A: NDICI Strategic Programming (2021-2027)





## About ECDPM

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In addition to structural support by ECDPM's institutional partners: The Netherlands, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark and Austria, this publication benefits from specific funding by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.



**Government Offices of Sweden**

ISSN1571-7577

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