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Focus: The EU Council of Home Affairs Ministers [EN](#)

On October 7th and 8th was held a European Council of Ministers for Home Affairs. Among many topics on the agenda, the Ministers, under the presidency of Slovenia, tackled the topic of migration and related Human Rights issues.

First, the Commission and the presidency informed ministers about progress on the development of action plans for strengthening comprehensive migration partnerships with priority countries of origin and transit, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tunisia, Niger, Nigeria and Iraq. In an exchange of views, the Slovenian Minister for the Interior, urged to “do more today to improve cooperation with third countries, including regarding returns of migrants who cross borders illegally and are not entitled to international protection”, while legislative proposals continue. An action plan is due to be put forward in the autumn 2021.

Concerning border direct surveillance, which may include screening and detention of migrants, the ministers agreed that harmonized rules are essential on security and health checks. But some countries called for flexibility, depending on the nature of the borders and national circumstances. The number of illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders in the first eight months of 2021 was 64% higher than one year ago when COVID-19 restrictions were in place.

The need to ensure coherence with the ongoing asylum reform was also outlined. No concrete decisions or actions were taken but Slovenia guaranteed to continue working on technical proposals.

Afghanistan was also the subject of a particular focus. The Commission and the European External Action Service gave a status on the migration consequences. A counter-terrorism action plan was also developed by the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator with the Member States at the end of September and presented to deal with the consequences of the Taliban victory.

European Union military cooperation and external operations [EN](#) [EN](#)

The 13 ministers of the European Intervention Initiative partners met in Stockholm

On September 24th, the 13 ministers of the European Intervention Initiative met in Stockholm. This initiative, launched by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2018 and gathering Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, the United-Kingdom, and more recently Finland, Sweden, Norway and Italy. The aim is to create a framework to foster a common operational culture among European partners' armies.

On the agenda were the important lessons identified so far after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, including views on the implications for European coordination and capability requirements, and for transatlantic cooperation. Mali was also discussed, with a presentation by France of the security situation and the concerns about foreign mercenaries, to widen to how the Initiative could exchange information and analysis on global and regional terrorism.

Portugal presented the initial results, positive, from the EU Training Mission in Mozambique, followed by Sweden to detail the recent Zapad-21 Russian-Bielorussian military exercise at EU borders, and Finland on a Working Group on Disinformation. The country has indeed tackled the issue fiercely, with some results.

Spartan exercise 2021 in Bulgaria

From September 28th to October 8th, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania and Italy conducted a joint exercise in Bulgaria, called European Spartan Exercise 2021. This is an annual flying exercise with users of the C-27J aircraft, to increase their interoperability and identify cost-reduction solutions. This is the 5th edition of this meeting, supported by the European Defence Agency and organised by Italy. It is also one of the concrete outcomes of the European Air Transport Fleet (EATF) partnership signed in 2011 by 20 EDA Member States.

The C-27J aircraft is designed to perform tactical missions in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

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Industries [EN](#) [FR](#) [FR](#)

Greece concludes a military agreement with France and purchases 3 frigates

On September 28th, at the occasion of a visit to Paris, the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, signed a military agreement with France. It mainly ensures mutual military assistance in case of the aggression of one of the two countries, be it from a NATO country. Quite similar to NATO Article 5, it represents for Greece the support of France in case of aggressive behaviour of its neighbour, Turkey. Turkey and Greece relations were quite tense during the summer of 2020, and France showed great support to Greece while NATO stayed neutral, Turkey being a NATO member. Both countries however officially called the agreement a first step towards a European NATO pillar and strategic autonomy.

Turkey officially reacted 2 days later, stating it was a threat to peace and stability in the region.

The alliance goes with the purchase by Athens of 3 French defence and intervention frigates, with an additional one in option. The country already bought France 18 Dassault Rafale and added in September 6 additional aircrafts. Along with an "exceptional interoperability", both countries will cooperate for maintenance and support.

Czech Republic purchases 52 Caesar canons from French company Nexter

Czech Republic officially announced the purchase of 52 Caesar canons to Nexter. This truck is equipped with 8 driving wheels and 36 bombshell capacity artillery, giving it a great autonomy for high-intensity combat.

The country will get 40% of the 335 million euros contract, with Tatra Trucks for the structure and Tatra Defence Vehicles for the armoured cabin. Communication systems will also be integrated by a local company.

Czech Republic becomes the third European user of the vehicle, after France and Denmark. It was already a client of Nexter for the TITUS programme.

International relations [EN](#)

The EU sends a Election Observation Mission (EOM) to Gambia

Invited by the Independent Electoral Commission of the Republic of The Gambia, a legal commission backed up by the UN Development Programme, the EU agreed to deploy an EU Election Observation Mission in The Gambia for the presidential election scheduled on December 4th, 2021. The country faced difficult elections in 2017, when the former president, beaten, refused to leave his seat until the intervention of the Senegalese army with a UN mandate. This allowed a non-violent transition. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, stated that "anchoring the democratic change [...] achieved in 2017 continues to be on top of the EU agenda".

16 long-term observers reinforced by 16 short-term observers will be deployed across the country, and will deliver a report after the entire process with some recommendations.

A similar mission was decided for the election in Kosovo scheduled on October 17th.