

The European Council's Strategic Agenda

Setting the EU's political priorities

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Clingendael Report



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About the authors

René Cuperus is Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. He is also Visiting Fellow at the Germany Institute (DIA) of the University of Amsterdam. Before he worked as 'Scholar in Residence' to the Strategy Unit of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and as Director for International Relations at the Wiardi Beckman Foundation, thinktank of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA). René Cuperus writes a political column for the Dutch daily newspaper *De Volkskrant*.

Claire Dhéret is Head of Programme and Senior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre where she leads the EPC's Social Europe and Well-Being Programme. Her current work focuses on employment, social and health policies and how EU policies in these areas can positively impact citizens' life. She has worked on various research projects, including with the EU institutions, and has led several Task Forces and expert groups, in particular on youth unemployment and social investment.

Stefan Kok is lecturer in law at the University of Applied Sciences Leiden (Hogeschool Leiden). He holds a degree in international law and specializes in European law. He has worked as a legal advisor and international policy officer for *Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland*. He has, amongst other things, followed the development and realization of the European Common European Asylum System.

Cathelijn Padberg is a research assistant at Clingendael's Europe and the EU Research Unit, where she focusses on a wide range of EU related issues. In this capacity she closely follows inter- and intra-institutional relations and processes in the EU, specifically the development of the European Council's Strategic Agenda.

Fabian Zuleeg is Chief Executive of the European Policy Centre, with overall responsibility, including providing strategic direction, managing its staff and resources and representing the EPC. He remains Chief Economist at the same time. Fabian holds a PhD on the political economy of EU accession from Edinburgh University. Before coming to the EPC he has worked as an economic

analyst in academia, the public and the private sector. He is currently Honorary Fellow at the Europa Institute of the University of Edinburgh and Honorary Professor at Heriot Watt University.

The Clingendael Institute
P.O. Box 93080
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

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Email: info@clingendael.org

Website: www.clingendael.org

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Abstract*

This Clingendael report focuses on the European Council's Strategic Agenda of 2014, and looks forward to Sibiu, where a new Strategic Agenda will be prepared by the European Council on 9 May 2019. It thereby asks to what extent the Strategic Agenda has provided direction for EU policy-making and affected the EU's inter-institutional balance in the latest political cycle 2014-2019. To do so, this report first describes the *future of Europe*-debate and the related inter-institutional battle over political power. This includes an analysis of the European Council's Strategic Agenda as an instrument in agenda-setting and implications for policy output by the European Commission. It takes note of the attempted politicisation of the Commission, the current socio-political context and the increasing divisions between the EU's Member States. Subsequently, the report assesses the outcome of the Strategic Agenda in three specific domains: the European Monetary Union; Social Europe; and Migration and External Borders through contributions by Fabian Zuleeg (EPC), Claire Dhéret (EPC) and Stefan Kok (Hogeschool Leiden).

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An Inter-institutional battle: who decides upon the EU's future?

René Cuperus & Cathelijm Padberg / Clingendael Institute

The future of Europe remains contested. This contestation does not only apply to the EU's ultimate institutional structure or policy objectives, but rather to the question of who has the authority and ability to decide upon them. Who is steering the EU's political direction? This question entails a continuous inter-institutional battle between the European institutions: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council.

The so-called *Future of Europe*-debate is played out at multiple fronts, indicated by the many initiatives that were created by the various European institutions during the latest political cycle 2014-2019. The European Commission, headed by Jean-Claude Juncker, published a *White Paper* outlining ten policy areas, meant to lead Europe towards its destiny.¹ The European Parliament organised a series of high-level debates with Heads of State and Government, trying to provide for a democratic platform.² The European Council issued a Strategic Agenda, defining five priority areas intended to guide the union until 2019. It aimed at (1) building stronger and more competitive economies; (2) enabling societies to empower and protect themselves; (3) safeguarding a secure energy and climate future; (4) ensuring a trusted area of fundamental freedoms; and (5) encouraging effective joint action in the world.³

The Strategic Agenda, in addition to the later adopted *Bratislava Roadmap*, *Rome Declaration* and *Leader's Agenda*, is a perfect example of a document through which the European Council tries to play its role as political trendsetter in the EU. Particularly, the way in which the Strategic Agenda was shaped can be seen as a "reflection of, and

1 "A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change." *Political Guidelines for the next European Commission*. Strasbourg, 15 July 2014.

2 Anghel, S., Dinan, D., Drachenberg, R. "From Rome to Sibiu. The European Council and the Future of Europe Debate." *European Parliamentary Research Service* (2018): p. 15, 41.

3 European Council. "Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change." *Conclusions –26/27 June 2014*.

precondition for”, the kind of role the European Council plays in EU politics.⁴ Besides institutional importance, the Strategic Agenda intended to increase the EU's focus in terms of policy output and promote an EU which is “big on big things, and small on small things”.⁵

The process of developing the Strategic Agenda might be of more importance than the final product itself. Since the Strategic Agenda was a high-level consensus document, it was not likely to result in concrete, delicate and precise policy outcomes. The undisputed vagueness and broad objectives were namely a precondition for consensus by all the members of the European Council, looking for common ground. However, the development of the Strategic Agenda could contribute to Member States' internal priority-setting, and support countries in thinking explicitly about their strategy towards the EU. Some argue that the Strategic Agenda required a longer-term horizon, 15 years instead of 5, as it would have helped Member States to envision where they wanted to go in the long term. Moreover, it could have delivered some discipline to a permanently changing European political arena.

On 9 May 2019, Europe's leaders will prepare a new Strategic Agenda under the presidency of Romania in the old town of Sibiu. Romania started its presidency on the first of January, and has already been criticized by various actors across the political spectrum for an assumed inability to lead the EU.⁶ The informal meeting will precede the formal adoption of the Strategic Agenda during the European Council meeting on 20 and 21 June 2019. With the launch of a new political cycle and the appointment of a new Commission after the parliamentary elections of 23-26 May 2019, the adoption will come at a strategic moment.

However, one might wonder whether the mere adoption of a new strategic document will truly affect policy-making in the EU and (re)affirm the European Council's political role, especially in the light of inter-institutional shifts such as the increased power for the European Parliament brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon or the attempted politicisation of the Commission. Therefore, it seems timely to assess whether the 2014 Strategic Agenda has truly provided for the political impetus it intended to deliver. Did it really induce the European Commission to take note of the European Council's political priorities in terms of policy-output? Or did other institutions take the lead in shaping Europe's pathway? And what does this mean for the EU's inter-institutional balance of power?

4 Carammia, M., Princen, S., Timmermans, A. “From Summitry to EU Government: An Agenda Formation Perspective on the European Council.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* vol. 54, no. 4 (2016): p. 812.

5 “A New Start for Europe.” *European Commission* (2014).

6 Von der Burchard, H. “Juncker has ‘doubts’ about Romania's ability to lead the EU”. *Politico* (29 December 2018).

These questions appear especially important in the current dynamic socio-political context, which entails:

- attempts to politicise the Commission through, amongst other things, the *Spitzenkandidaten* process;
- continuous migration pressure and disagreement over burden-sharing;
- Italy's populist government and Orbán's illiberal reforms challenging the consensus within the EU;
- divisions between East and West (rule of law and migration) and between North and South (the solidarity and solidity dilemma within the Eurozone)
- an "incomplete" Banking Union and European Monetary Fund;
- climate change and energy scarcity;
- a diverging wealth-gap;
- the chaos of Brexit.

These are just a few examples of the numerous challenges within and beyond the EU that threaten the sense of European unity. This decade increasingly presents itself as the decade of the battle for survival of the European project. This means a political, cultural, strategic and, according to some, existential crisis on the European stage. In this context, can the EU afford an inter-institutional battle over political power and direction? How can the *future of Europe*-debate be balanced and integrated by the respective European institutions? Moreover, how can a balance be struck between the European Council and its Strategic Agenda, the political outcome of the European elections and the political priorities set by the Franco-German axis? An examination of agenda-setting by the European Council, the preparation of the new Strategic Agenda of 2019-2024 ("the road to Sibiu"), might be insightful in these critical times.

(I) The European Council and the European Commission: "competitive cooperation?"

The European Council is often framed as the centre of power par excellence, acting as "the political executive" of the EU. This presupposes an important role for the Council and its agenda in policy formation.⁷ However, as should not be forgotten, the European Commission retains the formal monopoly over legislative initiative.⁸ This entails that the European Council is, to a certain extent, dependent on the European Commission for policy delivery and implementation, as it does not hold formal agenda-setting powers.

7 Carammia, M., Princen, S., Timmermans, A. 2016, p. 809-811.

8 Bocquillon, P., Dobbels, M. "An elephant on the 13th floor of the Berlaymont? European Council and Commission relations in legislative agenda setting." *Journal of European Public Policy* vol. 21, no. 1 (2014): p. 20.

After the launch of the Strategic Agenda in 2014, President Juncker of the European Commission issued his so-called political guidelines, outlining ten priority policy areas for the new legislative cycle. Overlapping concerns ranging from a resilient energy union, a forward-looking climate policy, a competitive economy and a strong global role, seemed to affirm some alignment with the European Council's Strategic Agenda. However, these overlaps presuppose a rather broad understanding of policy congruence, especially as the Commission was able to (mis-)use the ambiguity of the broad strategic document and apply its own interpretation in its legislative proposals.⁹

As a matter of fact, the Strategic Agenda remains a "strategic" document, as such differing substantially from an operational policy document. This means that it differs in nature and serves a different purpose. Strategic documents provide general guidance rather than define specific policy objectives. Therefore, it is too simplistic to solely assess the Commission's policy output, especially since the community method lost some of its status as default method of policy-making.¹⁰ Even more, the advent of crises between 2008 and 2015 provided an impetus to ad-hoc intergovernmental decision-making by the European Council.¹¹ In this regard, strategic documents can provide the European Council with a window of opportunity in times of crisis by keeping the policy issue on the radar, as such legitimizing action. Thinking about the perks of the Strategic Agenda in these terms is more useful than an assessment of policy output. The European Council remains an institution that deals with issues at separate and consecutive conjunctures, being forced to prioritize a limited number of issues. Consequently, its influence on day-to-day policy-making is constrained.¹²

The high-level composition of the European Council justifies this mere focus on highly salient political issues, as capacity constraints are inevitable with Europe's leaders in charge.¹³ Thus, as the Treaty stipulates, the European Council is tasked with political leadership and the European Commission with policy formulation and implementation.

(II) A politicised council, or commission?

The functional division of the European Council as a political entity and the European Commission as an administrative institution might be less accurate in the light of

9 Bocquillon, P., Dobbels, M. 2014, p. 26.

10 Puetter, U. "New Intergovernmentalism and institutional change," in *The European Council & the Council* (2014): p. 3.

11 Carammia, M., Princen, S., Timmermans, A. 2016, p. 809.

12 Carammia, M., Princen, S., Timmermans, A. 2016, p. 811-812.

13 Alexandrova, P., Carammia, M., Timmermans, A. "Policy Punctuations and Issue Diversity on the European Council Agenda." *Policy Studies Journal* vol. 40, no. 40 (2012): p. 70.

recent developments. The *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure and attempts to resolve the EU's alleged democratic deficit through a politicised Commission go against the idea of a clear separation of tasks between the EU's institutions. The *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure, initiated for the first time in 2014, entails that all the main political parties of the European Parliament select a leading candidate for the post of President of the European Commission.¹⁴ The procedure is not legally entrenched in the treaties, as according to Article 17.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Council reserves the right to appoint the President of the Commission.¹⁵

The usage of the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure feeds into the inter-institutional battle over political power. Not only can it be seen as an attempt by the European Parliament to align the European Commission with the largest European party, but also as an effort to reinforce its own competences and power vis-à-vis the European Council.¹⁶ The Strategic Agenda of 2014 is perceived by many observers as a pressured response to the initiation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure. Through it, the European Council tried to reaffirm its role as political agenda-setter and form a counterforce to the Parliament and Commission, two proverbial proponents of an "ever closer union". Whether the European Council will appoint one of the "*Spitzenkandidaten*" after the 2019 parliamentary elections remains to be seen. If they decide to hold on to their autonomous right of appointing a different Commission President, as stipulated in Article 17.7 of the Treaty, an institutional and political crisis will be likely.

(III) The dynamic of priority setting in the European Council

Council Conclusions, and similarly the Strategic Agenda, are prepared and written in advance by the General Secretariat of the European Council. Subsequently, Europe's leaders discuss the draft text during their meeting, and try to reach consensus on its adoption.¹⁷ The working method of the European Council evolved with the adoption of Donald Tusk's *Leader's Agenda* in 2017. The idea to organise informal meetings with open and free debate prior to the official Council meetings, was meant to facilitate the required unanimity for adopting conclusions about politically sensitive topics.¹⁸ These informal chats can possibly aid the internal decision-making dynamic of the European Council in the process towards Sibiu. The European Council namely continues to experience

14 Castaldi, R. "The politicization of the European elections and its potential effects on the EU." *Perspectives on federalism* vol. 5, no. 3 (2013): p. 3.

15 Castaldi, R. 2013, p. 3.

16 Hobolt, SB. "A vote for the President? The Role of the Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament Elections." *Journal of European Public Policy* vol. 21, no. 10 (2014): p. 1533.

17 Alexandrova P., Carammia M., Timmermans A. 2012, p. 71;72.

18 Anghel, S., Dinan, D., Drachenberg, R. 2018, p. 8.

deadlock in a variety of policy areas such as EMU Governance and Migration due to large differences between its members. The enlargement of the EU in terms of Member States and competences has increased the complexity of negotiation and agreement.¹⁹ East to West, and North to South, perspectives on the way forward differ substantially.

(IV) Looking back in order to look forward

EMU governance, social policy and migration policy remain among the most sensitive issues on the European Council's agenda. Whereas the migration debate is characterized by fights over the relocation scheme and mandatory quotas, the completion of the Banking Union and European Monetary Fund remain stumbling blocks in the way forward for EMU governance.²⁰ Whereas the Netherlands calls for a reinforcement of the existing framework and increased fiscal responsibility, southern members mostly demand solidarity, which essentially boils down to a one-way street financial transfer. As such, the balance between risk sharing and risk reduction remains undecided. With regard to migration, legal channels to reach the EU, one of the crucial elements for a sustainable comprehensive approach towards the issue, are missing.²¹ Furthermore, internal border controls jeopardize a well-functioning Schengen area. When it comes to social policy, social divergence is a reality. The EU lacks the tools and competences for an effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. These pressing problems require comprehensive solutions by Europe's leaders. However, the dilemma remains: "we need to solve it together, but we cannot solve it together."

The fundamental disagreements between Europe's leaders have jeopardised, and continue to jeopardise, a coherent and consistent political strategy by the European Council. This has made real progress difficult, especially as the momentum for inducing action in times of crisis is fading away. If, and how, the European Council will move forward is largely dependent on external events and domestic political developments in the respective Member States.²² An in-depth analysis of the 2014 Strategic Agenda in the domains of EMU Governance, Social Europe, and Migration and External Borders could provide for some useful insights: *Looking back in order to look forward*. Fabian Zuleeg (Chief Executive, European Policy Centre), Claire Dhéret (Head of Social Europe, European Policy Centre), and Stefan Kok (Lecturer in Law, Hogeschool Leiden) have contributed to this report with policy reports on the 2014 Strategic Agenda in these domains. Before turning to their full contributions, each of the reports is concisely introduced below.

19 Alexandrova P., Carammia M., Timmermans A. 2012, p. 72.

20 Anghel, S., Dinan, D., Drachenberg, R. 2018, p. 31-33.

21 Zweers, W., Tiekstra, W. "Innovation in EU migration policy – towards a truly comprehensive approach to migration". Clingendael Publication (6 September 2018).

22 Anghel, S., Dinan, D., Drachenberg, R. 2018, p. 46.

Fabian Zuleeg argues “that the ambitions of the 2014 Strategic Agenda with regard to the actual implementation of EMU reform have largely not been met. While there has been some effort in reinforcing policy coordination, progress has been much slower than hoped for. Proposals for reforming the EMU and completing the Banking and Fiscal Union are still under discussion, and Member States with opposing opinions appear unwilling to compromise. With the economic crisis receding into the background, the momentum for EMU reform faded away, and new priorities emerged. (...) The main question concerning EMU reform will remain whether there is political will for compromise among the Member States. (...) A more ambitious future EMU reform agenda must envisage a central role for the President of the European Council, who will be the key for forging compromise and creating reform momentum. (...) A more positive agenda, potentially framed around investment and competitiveness, might be the route to achieve a consensus to make (small) steps forward.”

Claire Dhéret states that “pro-EU leaders realised that the failure to create a more social Europe contributes to people’s disillusionment with the European project and the growing political influence of anti-EU forces. With this in mind, the overall narrative of the 2014 Strategic Agenda was to better equip our societies for the future and foster confidence.” She thinks that the Strategic Agenda for the next political cycle will see no innovative ideas with regards to Social Europe, due to a lack of political consensus. However, it might be worth drawing lessons from the past while reflecting upon the following questions:

- Is the current level of integration in employment and social policies sufficient to fulfil citizens’ expectations, restore trust in the European project and counter the growing influence of anti-EU forces?
- What are the structural reforms needed to make the functioning of the Eurozone and the Single Market as optimal as possible?”

Stefan Kok reminds us that the 2014 Council’s Strategic Agenda does not place migration high on the agenda. The 2014 Agenda was also silent on the effects of free movement of workers within the European Union. Therefore, the impact of the Strategic Agenda on EU migration has been limited. “Policy developments at the EU and national level came about because of migration pressures later in 2015. (...) In 2015 and 2016 the EU’s instruments, such as the Dublin responsibility allocation system and the – never used – Temporary Protection Directive were inadequate to cope with the flows in a more systemic manner.” He concludes: “A large-scale refugee crisis close to the EU needs a proactive approach: there must be resources for significant investments in host and refugee communities and a mechanism for meaningful legal avenues for refugees to move to the EU. The EU needs a contingency plan and sufficient resources to deal with sudden influxes in the EU itself, which is based on a responsibility sharing mechanism that is fair for refugees and Member States.”

(V) “The road to Sibiu and ahead”: towards a new Strategic Agenda

The European Strategic Agenda of 2014 tried to identify main policy priorities in order to (re-)focus policy-making. Moreover, the agenda emphasised the importance of subsidiarity and proportionality: “big on big things, and small on small things.” What will the new focus for the Strategic Agenda of 2019 be? *The road towards Sibiu and ahead.*

As the above-mentioned analysis indicates, the *objective* of the new Strategic Agenda of 2019 should be (again) to give strategic guidance to the Commission as opposed to define specific policy objectives. Its content does not necessarily have to differ substantially from 2014, as many political issues remain unsolved. However, it should “accentuate different *themes* that gain importance in our current geopolitical climate:

- The Migration & Refugee Crisis of 2015 gave the impression to citizens and governments alike that there was a “total loss of control”. There is a need to find an effective response to these sentiments and to continuous migration pressure, otherwise it is likely that Schengen “dies”.
- Climate change and energy scarcity should be a more prominent issue on the new agenda.
- There should be a focus on shared EU values and the rule of law within the union, especially with current developments in Hungary and Poland.
- There should be an emphasis on a strengthened external dimension of the EU: “European Sovereignty” in a shifting geopolitical environment.
- Concrete plans to fulfil the ambitions for increased European Strategic Autonomy in a changing geopolitical context should be included.

The *overarching objective* should be a Europe that is fair for everyone. Leaders need to find an answer to political discontent and pressing problems across the union. Moreover, there should not only be a focus on the “what”, but also on the “how”. This requires, first and foremost, good governance in the respective EU Member States. This should include a focus on upward convergence, best practises and an increased role for national parliaments.

Not only the Strategic Agenda, but also the European elections will be important in setting the EU's political priorities, especially as these will display the concerns of the citizens. Nowadays, with the political turmoil of Brexit, citizens increasingly feel that the EU matters. The European Parliament with its *Spitzenkandidaten*-race could become more legitimate, and potentially strengthen its position within the institutional setting of the EU. Thus, the Strategic Agenda of the European Council should not be seen as a pre-emptive strike in agenda-setting, as the importance of the European elections in this regard should also be acknowledged. The following reports will provide for an analysis of the Strategic Agenda in the respective policy domains.

The Strategic Agenda and EMU Governance: results and lessons learned

Fabian Zuleeg / European Policy Centre

Context

What was the strategic context in which the 2014 strategic agenda was formulated? What were the positions of EU member states, and the Netherlands in particular, vis-à-vis the formulation of the strategic agenda within the domain of the EMU?

1. The Strategic Agenda²³ was approved by the European Council in June 2014, at the beginning of the new political cycle. Elections of the European Parliament (EP) had taken place in May and the new Commission was soon to be appointed.
2. The 2014 EP elections featured a new element: political parties campaigning with a “Spitzenkandidat” for President of the European Commission, with the expectation that the lead candidate of the winning party would be appointed President.²⁴ Up until then, it was the European Council who picked the Commission President behind closed doors.
3. The new system thus marked a notable shift of power and influence to the EP. In addition, there were concerns in the European Council that this stronger affiliation of the Commission President to an EP political party could result in a stronger alignment between the two institutions. Furthermore, campaigning as a Spitzenkandidat required having a political programme, potentially taking away from the ability of the Council to set the strategic agenda. Detecting a risk of losing

23 European Council Conclusions 26/27 June 2014. “Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change.” EUCO79/14 Annex 1.

24 While many Heads of State and Government had misgivings about the Spitzenkandidaten system, in the end the Spitzenkandidat of the EPP, Jean-Claude Juncker, became Commission President when the EPP won the largest share of the vote.

influence to a politicised Commission, the European Council set down the Strategic Agenda,²⁵ striving to determine the legislative and policy direction until 2019.

4. The 2014 Strategic Agenda agreed on priorities in five fields.²⁶ The first, “a Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness”, envisages a strengthening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) for it to become a “more solid and resilient factor of stability and growth”, recognising that in 2014 the EMU was far from perfect. While EU leaders had agreed on important reforms during the height of the crisis,²⁷ both Banking and Fiscal Union were still work-in-progress.²⁸ In addition, growth was sluggish; deflationary pressures, high debt levels and unemployment were a reality; and structural reforms were proving hard to implement.
5. Despite the acknowledged shortcomings, EMU reform was far from the top of the agenda, and the recommendations of the 2012 Four Presidents’ Report²⁹ were believed infeasible (at least at that point in time) by most political leaders in the Member States.³⁰ In essence this was down to Member States disagreeing on how to proceed: France, Italy and the Southern Member States advocated risk pooling and a relaxation of EU fiscal rules to promote growth and recovery, while a group of countries led by Germany, including the Netherlands, insisted on continued fiscal consolidation and austerity. The German-led group saw risk pooling as potentially creating moral hazard issues, i.e. they feared that going towards a transfer union would reduce the incentive for Member States to implement structural reforms and sustainable fiscal policy.

25 European Council Conclusions 26/27 June 2014. “Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change.” EUCO79/14 Annex 1.

26 A Union of jobs, growth and competitiveness; a Union that empowers and protects all citizens; towards an Energy Union with a forward-looking climate policy; a Union of freedom, security and justice; and the Union as a strong global actor.

27 Some new governance mechanisms worth mentioning include: the strengthening of economic policy coordination through the European Semester; the setup of the Excessive Deficit and Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedures; the (incomplete) Banking Union with common supervision and resolution mechanisms; and the creation of rescue funds, including the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), to help countries in financial distress.

28 See Schneider, J. D., Zuleeg, F., Emmanouilidis, J. A. (2014). “Policy recommendations for the new European Commission: priorities for stabilising the EMU.” EPC Discussion Paper; and Zuleeg, F. (2015). “Economic policy coordination in the euro area under the European Semester.” Study provided at the request of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, European Parliament.

29 Van Rompuy, H., Barroso, J. M., Juncker, J., Draghi, M. (2012). “Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union.”

30 This lack of momentum was noticeable when in 2015 the EU institutional leaders attempted to revive the EMU reform agenda through “The Five Presidents’ Report: Completing Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union” by Jean-Claude Juncker in close cooperation with Donald Tusk, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, Mario Draghi and Martin Schulz, which failed to trigger greater progress.

6. The position of the Dutch government was to avoid the creation of a transfer union and continued strong opposition to risk sharing. The Netherlands believed that there was no need for new institutions nor for new EMU rules. It advocated the more efficient use of the existing governance framework, calling for more fiscal responsibility and respect of the existing rules by national governments.³¹

Results

What has come about of the ambitions articulated in the strategic agenda within the domain of the EMU? To what extent has the strategic agenda provided direction for EU policy-making and related budgets within the domain of the EMU? What effect has the strategic agenda had on the inter-institutional balance?

7. The 2014 Strategic Agenda called for “stronger euro area governance, stronger economic policy coordination, convergence and solidarity”.³² Such vague formulation reflects the lack of an in-depth discussion when setting the agenda, but at the same time it allows a large margin for manoeuvre and can accommodate contrasting national positions.
8. The assessment of the Strategic Agenda's accomplishments must be done in relation to the functions such an agenda could have. Beyond concrete implementation of specific policies, an agenda can also fulfil other purposes. First, having jointly agreed but vaguely defined items on the agenda creates permission and legitimacy to act in case of a crisis or a window of opportunity. Second, it keeps items on the agenda for which there is less immediate urgency but an ongoing requirement for policy attention and an acknowledged need for further action in the longer term. Third, the agenda can be used to signal a policy direction and give a visible recognition of outstanding challenges to internal and external actors.
9. The ambitions of the 2014 Strategic Agenda with regard to the actual implementation of EMU reform have largely not been met. While there has been some effort in reinforcing policy coordination, progress has been much slower than hoped for. Proposals for reforming the EMU and completing the Banking and Fiscal Union are still under discussion, and Member States with opposing opinions appear unwilling to compromise. With the economic crisis receding into the background, the momentum for EMU reform faded away, and new priorities emerged.
10. However, if the intended function of the Strategic Agenda was different, some results can be claimed. Having the strengthening of the EMU on the agenda allowed to keep the door open in case action were to become necessary, because of a

31 The Netherlands (2015). Contributions from the Sherpas of Member States to the Five Presidents' Report.

32 European Council Conclusions 26/27 June 2014. “Strategic Agenda for the Union in Times of Change.” EUCO79/14 Annex 1.

renewed crisis, or if a political window of opportunity were to arise (although this has not been the case). The Agenda was also used to signal to Member States, third countries and market actors that the EMU was still an important matter for EU leaders, helping to shore up confidence in the EU economy.

11. The need for a strengthened EMU had already been identified by the Presidents of EU institutions in 2012,³³ the 2014 Strategic Agenda can therefore be seen as a statement of intent endorsing a policy priority that had already been recognised by most leaders. Nonetheless, the European Council, and even more so its President, did not have a strong ownership of EMU reform. National governments only agreed on some broad concepts and did not have an in-depth discussion on the real trade-offs to be made while writing down the agenda, making actual progress on reform implementation unlikely. President Tusk also has not been a strong driving force facilitating compromise on the EMU, which was not helped by him coming from a non-euro country. Despite being on the Strategic Agenda, in reality EMU reform was thus not a priority, a fact reinforced by the well-known barriers to making significant progress given the lack of consensus on the way forward.
12. The European Council thus left the role of pushing forward EMU reform proposals to the Commission,³⁴ albeit with little concrete success. However, EMU reform has made it onto the Leaders' Agenda, with the European Council, under the guidance of President Tusk, agreeing in October 2017 on a document that sets the timeline for future decisions, including on EMU reform. One of the explanations behind the European Council's felt need to develop an additional agenda can be seen in response to Brexit. A reinforced agenda is a way for the EU27 to demonstrate that EU policy-making advances even without the United Kingdom.
13. Nonetheless, progress is once again slower than perhaps hoped for. France is now the Member State who is pushing strongest for further EMU reform and has put new proposals on the table.³⁵ However, these have been met with reluctance, and even open criticism, by its counterparts. Governments, who, according to the Leaders' Agenda, were supposed to agree on major EMU decisions in June 2018, failed to reach a compromise and postponed the discussion to the end of the year. Such lack of urgency in the Council has been persistent over the past years and it reflects the lack of political will when it comes to discussing EMU reform as well as fundamental disagreements about the way forward.

33 Van Rompuy, H., Barroso, J. M., Juncker, J., Draghi, M. (2012). "Towards a Genuine Economic and Monetary Union."

34 See, for instance: COM (2017) 821 Final. "Communication from the Commission: Further Steps Towards Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union: a Roadmap"; The Five Presidents' Report "Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union"; The White Paper on the Future of Europe; and the Reflection Paper on Deepening the EMU.

35 President Macron speech at la Sorbonne, 26 September 2017.

14. Overall, the Council has arguably maintained its power and remains central to the strategic direction of the EU, with the collective political will of national governments determining whether progress happens or not. However, in the face of continuing fundamental divisions on the best way forward and in the absence of a crisis compelling Member States to act, this simply results in no concrete progress at all. Further divisions, such as the new Italian government and its challenge to the existing governance framework, makes significant progress rather unlikely in the near future.

Lessons learned

What lessons learned can be identified for the 2019 strategic agenda?

15. As noted above, policy agendas can have different purposes. If the function of the 2014 Strategic Agenda was to actually progress on implementing EMU reforms, it has failed, the main reason for this being the Member States' lack of urgency and unwillingness to compromise. Most of the last decade's EMU modifications were adopted because the urgency of the crisis had made it imperative. Once the crisis was over, interest faded away and there was no incentive for Member States to be flexible on their positions.
16. In the absence of a new economic crisis or of a leadership coalition among Member States, progress has not taken place. It appears that Member States, at least concerning the EMU, implicitly choose doing damage control and crisis management after a crisis occurs, rather than setting up mechanisms beforehand that would protect the EMU in case of future unexpected events. In this case, the purpose of the Strategic Agenda might be to broadly keep EMU reform on the agenda for it to legitimate action in case of an impelling crisis or the emergence of a window of opportunity.
17. Looking forward to 2019, it can be expected that the political divisions within both the European Parliament and the Commission will be larger than in the past cycle. With these two institutions weakened by internal dynamics, there could be a large role to play for the European Council (and its President) in setting the EU policy direction.
18. The main question concerning EMU reform will remain whether there is political will for compromise among the Member States. The expectations for the future thus have to be that the debate will not change radically and that significant EMU reform is unlikely. EMU reform will continue to have a low level of priority and Member States will hold to their contrasting positions. Nonetheless, it will remain an item on the 2019 Strategic Agenda, which is to be intended as a tool to set the overall policy direction rather than to push forward concrete proposals.
19. It could be argued that the focus should be on implementation rather than new reforms. This does, however, not solve the underlying issue: a lack of consensus on

the way forward. There are different visions on how economic governance should function at EU level and what the consequences should be for countries if they do not follow the agreed framework, a problem currently signified by the new Italian government's policy.

20. To make progress, a more ambitious future EMU reform agenda should embed EMU reform in a comprehensive package deal of reforms to prompt the decision-makers to move forward. The current framework of discussing policy reforms separately from each other creates political impasse and frustration. Instead, having a package deal on the table would potentially overcome political blockades on single issues by allowing compromise to take place across policy fields.
21. A more ambitious reform agenda must also envisage a central role for the President of the European Council, who will be key to forging compromise and creating reform momentum. The choice of the next European Council President should take into account the person's ability to embody compromise and build consensus among national representatives, as well as their technical skills and personal agenda. Additionally, the person should be able to collaborate effectively with the Commission President, as this could prove essential to ensure progress.
22. If there is a real wish to drive EMU reform, it is important to move beyond the ideological divisions between the different camps. Rather, EMU reform should be presented in such a way that all countries can feel the EU moving beyond the zero sum or even negative sum game of crisis management. A more positive agenda, potentially framed around investment and competitiveness, might be the route to achieve a consensus to make (small) steps forward.

The Strategic Agenda and Social Europe: a short paper

Claire Dhéret / European Policy Centre

The views expressed in this note are the sole responsibility of the author and cannot be quoted. This note is structured in three main parts. First, it looks at how the social dimension of the EU has evolved since the 2014 Strategic Agenda and its main achievements until the recent social Summit, which took place in November 2017 in Gothenburg. Second, this paper analyses the political attitude of the Netherlands towards Social Europe. And finally, the paper shares some insights related to possible prospects for the next Strategic Agenda to be adopted in Sibiu next year.

1. From the 2014 Strategic Agenda to the Gothenburg summit

In June 2014 the European Council adopted a new Strategic Agenda entitled “A strategic agenda for the Union in times of change” and agreed on five overarching priorities for the five years of the new political-institutional cycle (2014-2019). The second priority relates to the social dimension of the Union and highlights the need for the EU to become “more caring inside” and to “be perceived as a source of protection”, while ensuring that citizens’ interests are defended towards the external world. This rhetoric together with the notion of creating a “Union that empowers and protects” have marked the 2014-2019 political-institutional cycle and the discourse of many EU leaders throughout this period, in particular of Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Several factors explain the increased attention given to a more social Europe. One of them is the economic crisis, and the subsequent focus on budget restrictions and fiscal consolidation, which affected the economic and social situation of many citizens across Europe. Another important factor is the results of the 2014 European elections, which saw key gains for Eurosceptic forces. Both events made pro-EU leaders realise that the failure to create a more social Europe contributes to people’s disillusionment with the European project and the growing political influence of anti-EU forces. With this in mind, the overall narrative of the 2014 Strategic Agenda was to better “equip our societies for the future” and “foster confidence”.

More precisely, the 2014 Strategic Agenda set three concrete objectives in the area of employment and social policies, i.e. (1) help develop skills and unlock talents;

(2) guarantee fairness by combating tax evasion and fraud; and (3) help ensure that the right safety nets are in place to accompany change, reverse inequalities and make social protection efficient and fit for the future. Although the 2014 Strategic Agenda identifies a few concrete actions the EU needs to focus on, such as the fight against youth unemployment or combating tax evasion and tax fraud, it remains a very general document, leaving a lot of room for Member States to manoeuvre in the years to come. The 2014 Strategic Agenda presents neither a clear vision on how to further build a more social Europe nor a well-defined roadmap on how to achieve the objectives. In addition, it is worth noting that the proposals made in the 2012 Four Presidents' Report on how to reinforce the Union's social dimension, not least by equipping the euro area with fiscal transfer mechanisms (such as a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme), did no longer appear in the 2014 Strategic Agenda.

Four years later, it is now time to analyse what have been the EU's big achievements in employment and social areas. Concrete initiatives have been undertaken for each of the three objectives mentioned above. Youth unemployment went down: from a peak of 5.7 million unemployed young people (age group 15-24 years old) in January 2013 to approximately 3.4 million in the second quarter of 2018. In addition, following a decision in the Summer of 2017, the Youth Employment Initiative (i.e. the main EU fund, together with the European Social Fund (ESF), to financially underpin the implementation of the Youth Guarantee) was extended until 2020 and received an additional financial allocation of €1.2 billion. The EU also adopted new legislation to tackle tax evasion and fraud, such as the 2016 Anti-Tax Avoidance Directive. And finally, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPRS), which is a set of 20 principles (including on social protection), was adopted at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017 as an inter-institutional proclamation. Its main goal is to serve as "a guide towards efficient employment and social outcomes" and "a compass for the renewed convergence within the euro area".

From this perspective, the EU has met its initial goals. However, one can wonder whether this is sufficient to restore trust in the European project and foster convergence between Member States as stipulated by the 2014 Strategic Agenda and the 2017 EPRS. To conclude, the overall development of Social Europe over the political cycle 2014-2019 was, generally speaking, in line with the initial spirit of the 2014 Strategic Agenda. Despite some concrete achievements following a step-by-step approach, a logic of consolidation, and a growing attention to social issues in the public discourse, there has been no radical overhaul in how social policies are dealt with at the European level. For instance, the Commission emphasised that the Pillar "does not entail an extension of the Union's powers defined by the Treaties" and should therefore "be implemented within the limits of those powers". Furthermore, the debate on the future of Europe launched by the European Commission in 2017 was supposed to provide answers on how European integration should be pursued and which degree of integration is needed. However, many important questions that were raised in the 2017 Commission's White Paper on the

Future of Europe and the following reflection paper on the social dimension of the EU still remain unanswered today.

2. Perspective on Social Europe from The Hague: a pragmatic approach

The general position of the Netherlands towards the social dimension of the Union in the current political-institutional cycle is result-oriented and supportive of actions taken to improve national labour market outcomes. However, the Netherlands is resistant to recent proposals made by the Franco-German tandem on how to strengthen the social dimension of the Euro Monetary Union (EMU) by, for instance, equipping it with a dedicated budget and possible fiscal transfers mechanisms. Already in 2014, The Hague was not in favour of big institutional reforms that could grant increased powers to EU institutions in the area of employment and social policies. Instead, The Hague wants the EU to focus on concrete initiatives that are tangible and measurable and that can be presented in the national debate as the "Union's main actions" to support and protect citizens. The importance the Dutch government gave to the revision of the Posted Workers Directive is a case in point.

The same pragmatic approach can be found in the Dutch government's official statements or positions about the future of Europe. For instance, it presented its views on the future of Europe in the run up to the 2017 Rome Declaration in a document entitled "Benelux vision on the future of Europe". In this document, the three signatory countries refer to the Treaties and the subsidiarity principle, while stating that the EU should only act in areas where it can bring added value. Furthermore, it highlights that the Union's objectives have already been defined in the Strategic Agenda, implying that there is no reason to move beyond this line.

3. Prospects for the Strategic Sibiu Agenda

According to the announced schedule, the Strategic Agenda of the next political-institutional cycle will be adopted under the Romanian Council Presidency at the Sibiu Summit in March 2019. History is likely to repeat itself. As in the past, EU leaders will try to avoid taking "political risks" before the May 2019 European elections and will probably opt for a very general agenda. As regards Social Europe, it is doubtful that the Summit will see innovative ideas. Instead, priorities in employment and social area will probably build further upon recent achievements (such as the Pillar; the European Labour Authority, the Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed) and call for their implementation. There is a number of factors that make this scenario very likely, not least the lack of political consensus in national capitals on how to make progress in strategic areas and of a sense of urgency

for reforms on social policies that is fading away due to other “burning issues” such as the migration crisis and a much needed agreement on the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). To avoid such a scenario, it might be worth drawing lessons from the past while reflecting upon the following questions:

- Is the current level of integration in employment and social policies sufficient to fulfil citizens' expectations, restore trust in the European project and counter the growing influence of anti-EU forces?
- What are the structural reforms needed to make the functioning of the eurozone and the Single Market as optimal as possible?

Similar questions were already raised in various EU documents, such as the White Paper on the Future of Europe, and ambitious ideas were put on the table in others, such as in the Four and Five Presidents' Reports. Unfortunately, the EU has failed to answer them and agreements on the lowest common denominator have prevailed. It is also unlikely that member states will revert to these strategic questions before the end of the current political-institutional cycle. But one thing is clear: all these questions are highly political and require a politicised debate. The upcoming European elections in May 2019 and the nomination of lead candidates for the post of Commission President must be the occasion to put such questions back at the centre of the political debate.

The Strategic Agenda in the domain of migration and external borders

Stefan Kok / Hogeschool Leiden

The Strategic migration context in 2014

In 2014 the civil war in Syria was producing ever larger refugees flows, mainly to Lebanon and Jordan.³⁶ There were conflicts in the Ukraine and Libya, close to the EU.

The 2014 Council's Strategic Agenda does not place migration high on the agenda. It recognises that "geopolitical stability at our very borders cannot be taken for granted" and that migration flows are on the rise due to instability and poverty in large parts of the world and due to demographic trends. This requires solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. The agenda intends to improve migration management by addressing shortages of specific skills and attracting talent; by dealing more robustly with irregular migration, also through better cooperation with third countries; by protecting those in need through a strong asylum policy; and with a strengthened, modern management of the Union's external borders.

The 2014 Agenda does not refer to the conflict in Syria. Mid-2014 Germany had a humanitarian visa programme for 20,000 Syrians,³⁷ while other member states and the European Commission employed a Regional Development and Protection Programme for Syrian refugees.³⁸

36 UNHCR World Survey 2013, online: <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/country/5399a14f9/unhcr-global-trends-2013.html>, accessed December 5, 2018.

37 UNHCR press release, online: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2014/6/539afe256/unhcr-welcomes-germanys-decision-extend-humanitarian-admission-programme.html>, accessed December 5, 2018.

38 https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/nuclear-safety/7895/rddp-regional-development-and-protection-programme-for-refugees-and-host-communities-in-lebanon-jordan-and-iraq_en, accessed December 5, 2018.

The 2014 Strategic Agenda is also silent on the effects of free movement of workers within the European Union. During the economic recession between 2009 and 2014 many EU workers from eastern and southern Member States had moved to northern EU Member States. In 2015 about 11 million EU workers resided in another Member State.³⁹

The Dutch perspective

In its 2014 State of the European Union the Dutch government only briefly refers to migration.⁴⁰ The document mentions the importance of European cooperation with respect to assisting refugees in the region of origin; consolidating the common European asylum policies; strengthening the role of Frontex and combating human smuggling. The Dutch government specifically refers to the free movement of workers, warning against the negative side-effects. These are related to the vulnerable position of workers and unfair competition practices. The 2015 State of the Union calls for an ambitious EU platform to combat illegal work practices, and a revision of the EU Directive on the posting of workers.⁴¹ The Dutch government further proposes a comprehensive approach to migration challenges.

The impact of the 2014 Strategic Agenda

The impact of the 2014 Strategic Agenda on EU migration policies is limited. Policy developments at the EU and national level came about because of migration pressures later in 2015.⁴² In the second half of 2015 over 1 million people arrived in the EU, mostly by sea via Turkey and Greece. About half of the people were Syrians, but other main countries of origin were Afghanistan and Iraq. During the sea crossings thousands of individuals died or were reported missing.

In 2015 and 2016 the EU's instruments, such as the Dublin III regulation and the – never used – Temporary Protection Directive, were inadequate to cope with the refugee flows in a more systemic manner. Member States at the external borders and Member States that were main destination countries faced extreme pressures.⁴³ Most asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 qualified for international protection status in the EU.

39 European Commission, 2016 Annual Report on intra EU Labour Mobility, ISSN: 2529-3281.

40 *TK* 2013/14, 33877, nr. 1, Staat van de Europese Unie 2014.

41 *TK* 2014/15, 34166, nr.1, Staat van de Europese Unie 2015.

42 This was acknowledged by the Dutch government in EK 2017/18, 34585 B3, p. 3.

43 Eurostat, online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6>, accessed December 5, 2018.

In September 2015 the Council adopted two Relocation Decisions, establishing “hotspots” in Greece and Italy.⁴⁴ From these centres asylum seekers originating from conflict areas and countries in human rights crises were to be distributed over other Member States. The number of transfers was low, amounting to about 20,000 asylum seekers in 2017.⁴⁵ The conditions in the Greek hotspots were criticised by observers, including UNHCR.⁴⁶

In November 2015 the heads of the EU Member States and Turkey agreed that the EU would financially support Turkey with €3 billion.⁴⁷ In March 2016 the heads of the EU Member States pledged that they would resettle up to 54,000 refugees from Turkey.⁴⁸ Turkey agreed to take back Syrian refugees from the Greek islands, and in return the EU Member States would resettle as many Syrian refugees from Turkey (the 1:1 scheme). The number of returned migrants has been low.⁴⁹ Under the 1:1 scheme hundreds of Syrians were resettled by the EU states.⁵⁰ The legal question whether Turkey can be considered a safe third country under EU law is still pending in 2018.

The (registered) number of asylum seekers entering the EU via Greece has significantly decreased in 2017 and 2018.⁵¹ In 2018 new routes have emerged, in particular in Spain, but these consist of other migrant flows and numbers are relatively low compared to 2015.

44 European Commission, online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf, accessed December 5, 2018.

45 European Parliament, online: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583132/IPOL_STU\(2017\)583132_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583132/IPOL_STU(2017)583132_EN.pdf), accessed December 5, 2018.

46 UNHCR press release, online: <http://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2018/8/5b88f5c34/unhcr-urges-greece-address-overcrowded-reception-centres-aegean-islands.html>, accessed December 5, 2018.

47 European Council press release, online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/29/eu-turkey-meeting-statement/>, accessed December 5, 2018.

48 European Council, press release online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>, accessed December 5, 2018.

49 European Commission, Com (2017) 470 final, Progress report, online: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20170906_seventh_report_on_the_progress_in_the_implementation_of_the_eu-turkey_statement_en.pdf, accessed December 5, 2018.

50 European Commission, Fact sheet relocation and resettlement, online: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170613_factsheet_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf, accessed December 5, 2018.

51 UNHCR, Global Trends 2017, online: <http://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.pdf> and UNHCR, Operational Portal, online: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>, accessed December 5, 2018.

To what extent has the 2014 Agenda provided direction for EU policy-making and related budgets?

The 2014 Strategic Agenda's objectives were followed, but the agenda provided little direction for the Member States in the 2015 refugee crisis. After the EU Turkey Statement of March 2016, the implementation of the agreement with Turkey was closely monitored by the European Council.⁵² The Conclusions between 2015 and 2018 further include partnerships with third countries, including Libya; controlled centres for relocation and resettlement, on a voluntary basis; and monitoring of migration flows in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean.

The Commission's asylum package of July 2016 is in line with the 2014 Strategic Agenda's objectives, but mostly a reaction to the 2015 refugee crisis. The key proposal is that of reforming the Dublin III regulation. The Commission's proposals build on the "hotspot approach" and the distribution of asylum seekers after the numbers of asylum seekers in a Member State reaches a certain threshold.

The Frontex regulation of 2016 provides a clearer legal framework for joint border operations, also with respect to third countries.⁵³ Border control is a shared competence of the Member States and the EU, which means that the EU may intervene in case of pressures on external borders, but that border protection remains a national competence. In 2018 the Commission proposed to have 10,000 Frontex border guards.⁵⁴

The EU's focus on border controls is reflected in the Commission's proposal for an increase of the 2021-2027 budget to €33 billion,⁵⁵ including a significant (fivefold) increase of the Integrated Border Management Fund to €9 billion. The European Asylum Support Office's budget was increased to €90 million in 2018.⁵⁶ The proposed Asylum and Migration Fund was increased 2.6 times to €10 billion.⁵⁷ The integration of long-term residents may additionally be funded under the European Social Fund. The EU Neighbourhood budget may also be used for migration management.

52 European Council, online: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14-2017-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed December 5, 2018.

53 Regulation 2016/1624 of 16 September 2018.

54 European Commission, EU-budget for the future, p. 14, accessed online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-modern-budget-may_2018_en.pdf.

55 European Commission, EU-budget for the future, p. 15. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-modern-budget-may_2018_en.pdf, accessed December 5, 2018.

56 EASO, Statement of Revenues and Expenditures, 2018, online: <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Budget-2018-final-web.pdf>, accessed December 5, 2018.

57 European Commission COM (2018) 471 final, online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-asylum-migration-fund-regulation_en.pdf, accessed December 5, 2018.

The effect of the 2014 Strategic Agenda on the inter-institutional balance

After the 2015 refugee crisis migration has been a divisive issue in the relationships between and within Member States. It played a prominent role in national elections and was probably an important factor for many UK citizens to vote for the country to leave the European Union.⁵⁸ The 2014 Strategic Agenda did not foresee this. During and after the 2015 refugee crisis the inter-institutional balance shifted from an EU-coordinated approach to a more Member State-centred approach. EU solidarity has been, at best, limited.

The EU institutions all worked together in swiftly adopting the Relocation Decisions in 2015. However, the Visegrád countries (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) opposed the decisions and openly did not cooperate with them.⁵⁹ The EU Turkey Statement was later endorsed by the Commission and not challenged by European Parliament.⁶⁰ Member States took different approaches to exercising their influence on border policies in the Western Balkans in 2015 and 2016.⁶¹ The Commission's 2016 proposal to reform the Dublin regulation by a binding responsibility sharing system has met with resistance in the Council.⁶² The European Council stressed in 2018 that "controlled centres" for relocation and resettlement in the Mediterranean will be on a voluntary basis.⁶³

Lessons learned

From the period 2014–2018 lessons learned are:

- Real and perceived migration pressures are a significant political factor. Facts and myths are hard to disentangle in social media platforms. This affects the stability and effectiveness of the bloc. The EU needs to address this;

58 See for example Barnard and Butlin, online: <http://eulawanalysis.blogspot.com/2018/06/the-future-of-free-movement-of-persons.html>, accessed December 5, 2018.

59 Visegrád group joint statement, online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2016/joint-statement-of-v4>, accessed December 5, 2018.

60 The EP did, for example, not intervene in a case brought before the Court of Justice by an asylum seeker from Greece. EU Court of Justice (General Court) 28.2.2017 T 192/16.

61 For example FAZ, online: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/was-die-schliessung-der-balkanroute-bewirkt-hat-14915297.html>, accessed December 5, 2018.

62 EK 2017/18, 34585 B3, p. 4.

63 See for example European Council meeting conclusions of June 28, 2018, online: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9-2018-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed December 5, 2018.

- The EU has a significant strategic interest in monitoring the stability in neighbouring countries and addressing root causes of migratory movements;
- The EU has an interest in promoting multilateral migration policies, in line with international human rights and respecting challenges of neighbouring countries and regions of origin;
- A large-scale refugee crisis close to the EU needs a proactive approach: there must be resources for significant investments in host and refugee communities and a mechanism for meaningful legal avenues for refugees to move to the EU. The EU needs a contingency plan and sufficient resources to deal with sudden influxes in the EU itself, which is based on a responsibility sharing mechanism that is fair for refugees and member states;
- The EU needs a clear approach on whether the EU Member States should focus on the integration of refugees or on their safe return to Syria;
- In a more competitive global world in which wealth is not evenly distributed, various migratory movements tend to be directed at economically strong areas, thus becoming a factor of further growth, but also pressures. Areas from which migration takes place could face other demographic challenges; the EU and its Member States need to develop a clear strategy for urban areas and depopulating areas.