



**2021PORTUGAL.EU**  
**Parliamentary Dimension**

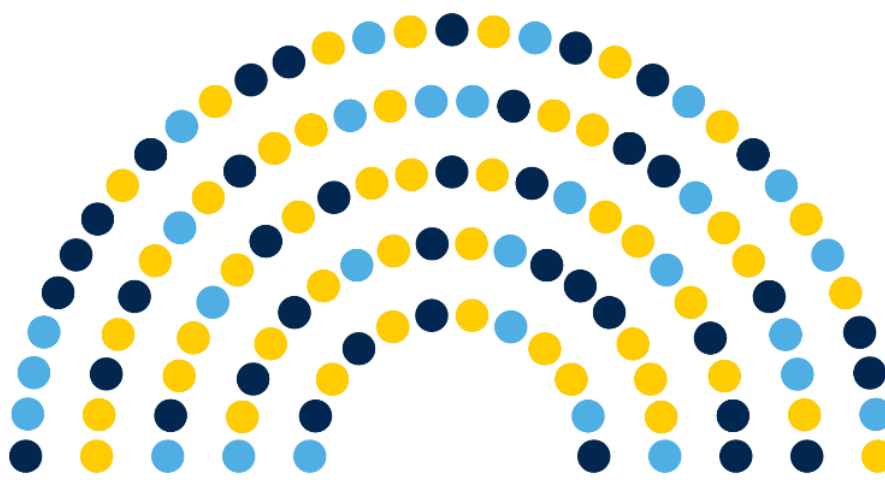
## **Background Note**

**Discussion with Josep Borrell i Fontelles, High  
Representative of the European Union for Foreign  
Affairs and Security Policy**

**Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security  
Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy**

**3 - 4 March 2021, Lisbon**

**Portugal**



## BACKGROUND NOTE

### **Discussion with Josep Borrell i Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

As Europe begins its path to recovery from a major health crisis, foreign policy issues that have been temporarily out of the spotlight are bound to resurface. Portugal's Presidency of the Council of the EU comes at a time when instability and unrest characterize the Union's borders, and major decisions on relevant topics are being considered.

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for a stronger, more autonomous, more united and assertive foreign and security policy to step up the Union's leadership on the international scene. Both the European Parliament, in its annual [report](#) on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the HR/VP have addressed this topic by underlining the need to intensify the EU's efforts to be more strategically autonomous while also strengthening cooperation with allies.

As the HR/VP recently [stated](#), multilateralism «defines common standards and introduces stability in international relations». By increasing cooperation with third countries, based on trust and mutual benefit, as well as building alliances with other democracies, Europe can diversify its partner base while simultaneously adding new stakeholders to common causes.

From Donetsk to Minsk, to Kastellorizo and the southern Mediterranean, the proliferation of disputes and frozen conflicts in the EU's closest neighborhood risk becoming a permanent, endemic concern. The EU needs to step up its action concerning conflict mediation and resolution, while also promoting solutions based on the norms and principles of international law. The use of the EU foreign policy toolbox should be adapted in recognition of the idiosyncrasies and unique background of each conflict.

Crucial to enhancing stability are the EU partners in the Western Balkans, as well as the Eastern and Southern Neighborhood countries. By pursuing the strategic responsibility to foster region wide security, peace and prosperity, the EU can help promote the development and democratic resilience of neighbour countries, and therefore maintain its commitment to enlargement as a key transformative policy.

The new COVID reality has also heightened the importance of the EU's relationship with Africa. The Commission's proposal for a new [Comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#) hopes to deepen existing cooperation based on shared interests and values in order to enable both sides to achieve common goals and tackle global challenges. In a recent [report](#), the European Parliament called for more coordination of the development, humanitarian, and security strategies in the Sahel region, where the EU has heavily invested and where 6 CSDP Missions are currently active.

With Brexit concluded, the public debate has mainly focused on the economic implications. Cooperation on foreign and security policy might very well be the next major challenge in the future EU-UK relationship. The EU's initial proposal for a structured, legally binding framework of cooperation was rejected, signaling that the UK might seek to prioritize bilateral relations on these and other issues.

EU-Russia relations remain a serious challenge on key issues such as Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Belarus, and Ukraine, the HR/VP considers that Moscow is «progressively disconnecting itself from Europe and looking at democratic values as an existential threat». The issue is tabled for discussion in the upcoming European Council.

The inauguration of a new administration in Washington has provided an opportunity to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. As Europe strives for more strategic autonomy, the US remains an effective partner, who is once again willing to place Diplomacy at the center of its foreign policy and engage the wider international community, as evidenced by the recent decisions to rejoin the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization. The HR/VP welcomed the Biden administration, hoping to renew the EU-US strategic partnership in order to jointly address pressing global challenges, in particular the Iran nuclear deal, Russia, the southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

The Inter-Parliamentary Conference for CFSP/CSDP remains the only forum in which representatives from Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees of all EU Member States and candidate countries, as well as the European Parliament, can address the HR/VP together. The EU must look within, to understand what lessons can be learned from our common response to the COVID-19 crisis, and without, in order to address the shifting power dynamics that define today's international system.