

Integration at a Crossroads: The Future of the EU and German European Policy

Factsheet: “Prepared for the Future? Forging a health- and climate-resilient Europe in a post-pandemic world”

In the face of the pandemic, member states in the EU needed to work on common priorities in order to implement a coherent strategy despite their many different interests and cultures. Against this unprecedented European mission, it is all the more important to investigate specific trends affecting the EU's future and its role on the global stage. In view of ongoing climate change challenges as well as the growing demand for more multilateral cooperation in the global health field, it is time that the EU strengthens its action in both sectors. In doing so, it is important for the EU to seek multilateral solutions and attempt to mediate between diverging positions.

- What are necessary conditions for a health- and climate-resilient Europe?
- Which links do exist between reforms to combat climate change and the health sector?
- How can Germany support the European/global transition towards climate neutrality and health security?

Goal

Two important initiatives within the European Green Deal revolve around further reducing net greenhouse gas emissions to at least 55% by 2030 ('fit for 55' strategy) as well as implementing the [new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change](#). The latter aims at making Europe a climate-resilient society that is fully adapted to the inevitable consequences of climate change by 2050. The further [Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union](#) ensures that EU planning and reporting are synchronised with the ambitious goals under the Paris Agreement. In the health sector, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for a European Health Union, announcing an expansion of EU competence in the field of health – which is also to be discussed at the Conference on the Future of Europe. On 11 November 2020, the European Commission put forward a proposal for a [regulation on serious cross-border threats to health](#). In the light of lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission thus aims to build up resilience and strengthen health security.

Challenges

- The Carbon Border Adjustment mechanism might put European companies at a competitive disadvantage. CO2 emission certificates for importing companies still foster international scepticism and rejection for fear of protectionism.
- On the global stage, climate diplomacy is on hold and the UN Climate Change Conference COP 26 had to be postponed.
- The European Green Deal will affect geopolitics through its impact on the EU energy balance and global markets; on oil and gas-producing countries in the EU neighbourhood; on European energy security; and on global trade patterns. This could have the potential for geoeconomic conflicts.

- In the health policy sector, the EU has only a coordinating competence and is therefore dependent on the cooperation of all member states.
- It remains unclear whether member states support the Commission's ambition to establish a European Health Union, although only a common European strategy can ensure effective measures in dealing with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Possible Solutions

- The polycrisis the EU is undergoing might give new momentum to reforms in the climate and health sectors. Scientific climate change committees could be strengthened and further empowered in order to hold governments accountable.
- If designed well, national recovery and resilience plans could further encourage comprehensive reform and long-term investments needed to make the green and digital transitions a success. The Commission, in particular, should strengthen the EU dimension by highlighting potential cross-country synergies recovery plans.
- Relations with the US have become friendly again and the two parties could work closer together in order to achieve sustainable development goals. The EU's external energy action and specifically the EU's energy and climate diplomacy should moreover strengthen environmental cooperation with third countries.
- The EU4Health 2021–2027 should enhance European competences and coordination in view of major cross-border health threats, strengthening health systems across the EU in an equitable way.
- The competences of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency should be delegated more powers.
- With the pandemic greatly affecting EU member states, the EU is increasingly interested in upholding multilateral cooperation in the global health field. Therefore, the EU should aim at closer cooperation between the European Commission and the WHO.

German Dimension

- *Relevance:* For historical and strategic reasons, Germany does not want to act alone and supports a stronger EU role in global health as well as in climate policy. Moreover, Germany's economic growth based on exports is heavily dependent on reliable global flows and rules that bind, also within the EU.
- *Position:* Germany actively supports the European Commission's climate policy and comprehensively supported the implementation of the Green Deal during the German Council Presidency of 2020. [Chancellor Merkel](#) maintained in 2020 that the aim of the Council Presidency was to make Europe's climate neutrality binding by 2050 and to adjust the targets for 2030. With regard to the 'fit for 55' strategy proposal of the Commission, Germany welcomed the proposal although it stressed that impact assessments are crucial and that the competencies of member states as well as the ["technical feasibility"](#) to implement the measures need to be assessed, as well. The Federal Government supports EU initiatives for a better and autonomous supply of pharmaceuticals, medical products and equipment. Germany also supports the empowerment of agencies such as the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. During the Council Presidency, political agreement was also reached on the independent health program EU4Health, which was actively supported by Germany.
- *Outlook in view of German federal elections:*¹ According to the CDU/CSU, European emissions trading is to be extended to the transport and heating sectors. Emissions

¹ Based on the party's respective electoral programme of 2021.

trading in all sectors will ensure a stable, fair and transparent price for greenhouse gases. The German Green Party addressed, predictably, numerous climate policy related issues in its programme. Among the most interesting ones were the call on increasing the global steering effect of the Single Market by ensuring that companies in the European market take international responsibility for their production and distribution methods along the entire value chain. In line with the European Commission, they also advocate for border adjustment of carbon costs so that ambitious climate protection does not become a competitive disadvantage. This is also echoed in the electoral programme of DIE LINKE. The FDP calls on enabling the EU to diversify its energy sources and reduce its dependence on individual suppliers.