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Perilous times renew EU cooperation: energy, security, economy

Day two of The State of the Union 2023

The second day of the 13th edition of [The State of the Union](#) conference took place at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence on 5 May 2023, bringing together policymakers from across Europe in a high-level political dialogue with scholars and experts.

The European University Institute (EUI) flagship event addressed the most important issues on the EU agenda. It opened with an intervention by **Josep Borrell Fontelles**, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. At the opening, Borrell addressed the future of EU foreign policy, in particular in the light of the war in Ukraine.

“The feeling of facing a real, existential threat has united us more than any speech, any theoretical approach about the need of integration, and has united also the West,” Borrell said.

“We did not want this war, but the war is a reality, and we have to face it.”

More specifically on the weight of the EU in the international arena, Borrell continued, “Europeans have to learn to use the language of power, but there are many kinds of power, power is not just military power.” In a more political comment, he also stated, “In the world we live in, we Europeans are too small. If we want to survive, we have to be more united; we have to abandon the unanimity vote on foreign policy.”

Tobias Billström, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, was the protagonist in a conversation about a safer, greener, and freer Europe. “I remain convinced that tackling the security threats

of today and tomorrow is best done in partnership with allies who share our commitment of defending democracy," Billström said. "These are perilous times, but they bring renewed opportunities for cooperation."

In a session focusing on energy and the war, **Ditte Juul Jørgensen**, Director-General for Energy, European Commission, addressed the weaponisation of energy and the EU's steps in addressing the crisis, including storage and the supply diversification. "Whatever we do in the short term should align with our longer-term structural objectives, our competitiveness, and energy security," she said.

"What we aim for is not linking the household prices to the price volatility of the market," Jørgensen explained, going deeper into the topic with an eye towards the future. "We should make more room for market arrangements and link the process to the lower cost for renewables. Managing this transition is the challenge."

In the same session, **Frank Elderson**, Member of the Executive Board, European Central Bank, said: "On the Capital Markets Union, the sooner the better. There is the urgency and the need," arguing that the EU should seize opportunities from the current crisis to unlock the financial resources necessary to support Europe's energy transition and efforts to mitigate climate change.

Broadly on the future of Europe, **Paolo Gentiloni**, European Commissioner for Economy, guest in a special conversation on a greener and fairer economy, stated, "We need to unite our forces to support common projects that need European scale and that have a clear European added value."

In a session on Central European politics, **Alexander Schallenberg**, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Republic of Austria, said, "When we look at Ukraine, we share full solidarity because we share the same set of values as small countries," referring to Austria and Slovakia in particular. Regarding the political balance in Europe in the light of the war, he noted, "The centre of gravity in Europe is moving towards the centre."

Rastislav Káčer, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Slovak Republic, in the same session, said, "Usually you hate one neighbour, and the other neighbour is your ally. Where I feel at home, also intellectually, can be defined by the *Mittleeuropa* concept." He continued by discussing the need to base foreign policy on commonalities among Central European states, "What I would like to see is a family unity and equal distribution of love."

More than 600 participants registered to attend day two of the event at Palazzo Vecchio. The number of people following the event online reached 4,000.

On the afternoon of day two, the EUI hosted local youth in Palazzo Vecchio's, Salone de' Cinquecento for a dynamic and interactive event **The State of the Union for Young European Citizens** ([#SOU4YOU](#)).

The State of the Union continues on **Saturday 6 May** as the EUI will welcome the public to Villa Salviati, home to EUI's Departments of History and Law and the Historical Archives of the European Union. This **open day** will be devoted to artistic discovery and leisurely activities.

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