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country report

Multilateral Dialogue Geneva



Geneva Barometer

Developments in the Geneva-based international organisations from the end of July 2022 to mid-October 2022

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The Geneva Barometer takes a look at key developments among international organizations based in Geneva.

Rarely has the density of politically tense votes in Geneva-based multilateral organisations been as high as in recent weeks. The Xinjiang report by the office of the outgoing High Commissioner for Human Rights sent waves, but Russia continues to be in the spotlight in many fora, including in the Human Rights Council. It is clear what unequal partners Russia and China have become in their influence among international organisations in Geneva. The Plenipotentiary Conference of the International Telecommunication Union laid out important plans in terms of personnel and content. Meanwhile, day-to-day business continued: WTO is trying to leverage the momentum of the ministerial conference but is facing old challenges. At the WHO, talks on a future pandemic agreement are taking shape. Various actors from the humanitarian sector gave sobering assessments about the current situation.

Novelty at the 51st Human Rights Council

Last-minute report on Xinjiang

Eight minutes before the end of her term, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, finally published her long-awaited report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang on August 31.¹ The report concluded, among other

things, that the extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of the Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities may constitute crimes against humanity. China had mobilised massively against the publication in advance and was able, among other things, to persuade some 40 permanent missions in Geneva to support a letter to the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) to this effect. A 127-page rebuttal of the situation by Beijing went online together with the report on the OHCHR site. On September 1, Beijing published a condemnation of the "so-called assessment" on Xinjiang, calling it a farce based on disinformation and lies from Western states, and claiming that it was not covered by the mandate of the High Commission. The office had closed the door to cooperation, and the arrangements discussed in the context of the High Commissioner's visit in May were on hold, Beijing argued. In contrast, 25 representatives of the Special Procedures underlined that the report builds on and confirms findings of several mandate holders and working groups. They reiterated their call for a special session of the Human Rights Council and the establishment of a mandate for a special procedure or a panel of experts.²

Two permanent members of the UN Security Council in the spotlight at the 51st session

The 51st UN Human Rights Council, which met less than two weeks later, therefore faced two difficult

¹ The OHCHR report, as well as a Chinese one is available [here](#).

² The statement can be found [here](#). Pakistan and Iraq later withdrew their signatures.

tasks: to address the Xinjiang report, and to establish a long-planned Special Rapporteur on the situation in Russia. Never in the history of the Council had a member of the UN Security Council been addressed in such a way. Right at the outset, China delivered a joint statement on behalf of 30 states³, denying the OHCHR report had any legitimacy. According to observers, China mobilised enormous resources during the Council, in respective capitals as well as in Geneva itself. A Chinese government delegation travelled to Geneva to make it clear that if China did not like the position missions took, appropriate countermeasures would be taken.

By September 26, 69 states and 15 Council members in addition to China had condemned any interference in China's internal affairs⁴. It was therefore clear that any resolution would have a hard time getting a majority. At the same time, countries of the liberal-democratic camp did not want to ignore the Xinjiang report, in view of the severity of the accusations it contained. In the end, the text drafted under the leadership of the United Kingdom contained a very restrained response, merely taking note of the report and calling for a debate at the beginning of the 52nd session under Item 2 - not under the agenda item for serious cases (Item 4). This aimed to make the text acceptable to a wider group of countries. When it came to a vote on October 6, 19 votes against, with 17 in favour and 11 abstentions, brought the initiative down⁵. Remarkably, most of the members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) voted against the text, partly after their diplomatic representatives stressed their countries' supposed commitment to the situation of the Uyghurs in bilateral dialogue. But other votes - the abstention of Ukraine as well as several Latin American countries - were also surprising. For China, the rejection was a matter of principle, rather than relating directly to the content of the text. Observers of the Human Rights Council saw the vote as a bitter blow to its credibility.

In contrast, the second initiative to establish a Special Rapporteur on Russia was adopted with 17

votes in favour, six against and 24 abstentions (including all African Council members except Eritrea)⁶. Unlike the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which the Council had established in March and recently found war crimes committed mainly by Russian forces⁷, the Special Rapporteur is to monitor the situation in Russia itself, collect, review and assess relevant information, make recommendations, and submit a comprehensive report at the upcoming September session. This was the first time the Council decided to use such an instrument against a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The mandate of the fact-finding mission on Venezuela was also extended. In its most recent report, the mission documented potential crimes against humanity. The mandate of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, which documented war crimes and crimes against humanity in Tigray, and the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan were also extended. After the UN General Assembly recognised the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Vanuatu submitted a resolution requesting technical assistance in addressing the human rights consequences of the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands and an OHCHR report. The nuclear powers represented in the Council, especially the USA, distanced themselves from paragraphs of the text. The human rights situation in Iran is expected to be addressed by a Special Session which may take place by mid-November.

New High Commissioner for Human Rights

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is considered one of the most difficult posts in the UN system. Only a few days after Michelle Bachelet left office at the end of August, the UN General Assembly confirmed the Austrian lawyer Volker Türk as the new UN High Commissioner on September 8. He is the eighth High Commissioner to head the OHCHR since the post was created in 1993, with Nada Al-Nashif acting as deputy on an interim basis until his term began on October 17.

³ China's joint statement is [here](#), a map [here](#).

⁴ The statement can be found [here](#), and a map [here](#).

⁵ The text A/HRC/51/L.6 can be found [here](#), the position of China [here](#), and a map of the vote [here](#).

⁶ The resolution A/HRC/51/L.13 can be viewed [here](#), and a graphic representation of the vote [here](#).

⁷ The latest findings on war crimes in Ukraine can be found [here](#).

Until now, Türk has been known mainly as a UN career diplomat and for his long-standing professional relationship with António Guterres. For many years, he worked at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including as Deputy Commissioner for Refugees, before following Guterres to New York, where he most recently held the post of Under-Secretary-General for Policy. He played a central role in the development of the "Global Compact on Refugees", as well as in the UN-wide coordination of two of Guterres' initiatives: "Our Common Agenda" and the "Call for Action for Human Rights". NGOs complained that they had not been involved in his selection process.

He is beginning his mandate in Geneva under difficult circumstances. On the one hand, many states from the liberal-democratic camp hope for a clearer address; on the other hand, China has already admonished him to adhere strictly to the principles of "objectivity, impartiality and non-politicisation", i.e., not to criticise members.

14 new members

On October 11, the UN General Assembly elected 12 new members (Algeria, Morocco, South Africa, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Vietnam, Georgia, Romania, Chile, Costa Rica, Belgium) and two current members (Germany and Sudan) from the five regional groups to the UN Human Rights Council (47 members) for a term of three years, starting January 1, 2023. Venezuela in the Latin American group and the Republic of Korea in the Asia-Pacific group were not re-elected. Afghanistan did not receive a seat either. Seven of the 14 new members were mentioned in the UN Secretary-General's report on reprisals for cooperation with the UN on human rights (Algeria, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Morocco, Sudan and Vietnam).⁸

Important elections within a little-known organisation: The Plenipotentiary Conference of the ITU

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was in the spotlight at its Plenipotentiary Conference (PP-22) in Bucharest, Romania. The organisation's most important decision-making body, which meets every four years, elected five top positions and voted on the new composition of the 48-seat ITU Council⁹. Important substantive dossiers were also on the agenda. These included, for example, (re)orientation in the area of artificial intelligence (AI), cyber security, the inclusion of ITU members from industry, and positioning in the area of internet governance.

Although she was increasingly seen as the favourite for the post of Secretary General in recent weeks, it remained uncertain until shortly before the conference¹⁰ whether the US candidate and head of the ITU Development Sector (ITU-D), Doreen Bogdan-Martin, would hold her own against the Russian candidate Rashid Ismaelov. The former, however, prevailed impressively with 139 votes to 25. The clear result is also testimony to her recognised work as Director of the Development Sector, whose mandate it is to both contribute to reducing the digital divide, and to collect and publish data on the state of global connectivity. Bogdan-Martin is the first woman to head the organisation, which is more than 150 years old. The respective candidacies stood for a different direction of the ITU's work – either an open, or a state-controlled internet model. Despite the election of Bogdan-Martin, it is up to the members of the ITU how they position themselves going forward with regards to the future of internet governance, standards for new technologies and radio frequency and satellite distribution.

The EU also landed a win with the election of Lithuanian Tomas Lamanauskas as Deputy Secretary General. When it came to the standardisation sector (ITU-T), the election result was a bitter pill for Germany. Thomas Zielke, who had not received official support from the EU, lost the election to Seizo Onoe from Japan. The other director posts

⁸ A graphic overview can be found [here](#), and the UN Secretary-General's report, A/HRC/51/47, [here](#).

⁹ See the [Map of the Month for September 2022](#) here

¹⁰ See the Geneva Barometer, July 2022 [here](#)

went to the re-elected Mario Maniewicz from Uruguay (Radiocommunications Sector, ITU-R) and Cosmas Zavazava from Zimbabwe (Development Sector, ITU-D). Geographical representation plays a central role in the election of the top posts - accordingly, Zielke's chances had clearly diminished after the election of Bogdan-Martin and Lamanuskas.

The election of the ITU Council offered some surprises: in the 'Eastern Europe' group, seven states were up for five seats, including Belarus and Russia. Neither were elected to the ITU Council, by a wide margin - a bitter defeat for Moscow given the importance Russia attaches to the organisation. Remarkably, China also performed only moderately well in the elections, obtaining the lowest score of all elected members in its own regional group.

During the three-week meeting, members approved, among other decisions, the extension of the membership fee reduction programme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). A resolution was also adopted to continue its work on artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to telecommunications technologies. Through platforms such as the AI for Good Conference, a common understanding of the technology should be developed, to contribute to better coordination with ITU members (especially academia and industry) as well as with other UN organisations. The Conference of Government Plenipotentiaries also took a position on the role of the ITU in relation to internet governance, including domain names and addresses. It mandated the Agency to explore ways to deepen cooperation with relevant organisations in the field of Internet protocols. In addition, the Working Group on International Internet-Related Public Interest Issues (ITU CWG-Internet) will be mandated to hold public consultations. So far, participation in the CWG-Internet has been reserved for governmental members of the ITU.

Humanitarian situation

The global food and livelihood crisis continues to deepen

Humanitarian organisations have been highlighting the global food crisis for months as a result of interdependent crises, conflicts, droughts, other extreme weather events due to climate change, the impact of COVID-19 and the secondary effects of the Ukraine war, especially in the Horn of Africa. In the coming weeks, up to 205 million people in 45 countries could face acute food insecurity (IPC 3¹¹) and be in urgent need of humanitarian assistance; 45 million of them could even be extremely malnourished (IPC 4); and some 970,000 people in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, and since mid-October also 19,000 people in Haiti, could be affected by famine (IPC 5)¹². Despite these alarming figures, less than half of the funds for most of these crises have been received so far.¹³ Observers see the "Black Sea Grain Initiative" of July 22, which has already enabled 7.7 million tonnes of grain and other foodstuffs to leave Ukrainian ports in about 300 voyages, as a glimmer of hope. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin is already threatening to let the initiative expire on 19 November.

The Global Crisis Response Group (GCRG), which was set up in March and in which Geneva-based organisations such as UNCTAD, WTO, ILO, UNHCR and OCHA are also involved, presented recommendations on the food and financial crisis and published its third report. Among other things, it calls for the taxation of excess profits of oil and gas companies, for energy saving and an accelerated energy transition, and for an increase in private and multilateral financial resources. The Geneva-based World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) also called for immediate action, as climate change is increasingly threatening energy security. With carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide levels in the atmosphere rising to new record levels, WMO secretary general, Petteri Taalas once again warned "we are heading in the wrong direction."¹⁴

¹¹ The IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) scale is a tool for analysing food security.

¹² Further information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

¹³ Details on current funding gaps [here](#).

¹⁴ The WMO report on energy security can be found [here](#), more on WMO's latest reports [here](#).

The outgoing ICRC head draws a sobering conclusion

Two years before the end of his third term, Peter Maurer handed over the baton to his successor, Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, on October 1, after ten years at the top of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Spoljaric Egger, who most recently served as Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Director of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), is the first woman to head the 160-year-old ICRC. Her predecessor, Maurer, had always stressed the need for serious efforts to resolve the increasingly protracted and complex conflicts the ICRC faces, denouncing indifference, unwillingness and inability. Overall, Maurer drew a gloomy conclusion: not a single conflict had been settled during his term in office. And although the ICRC's budget has now risen to over 2 billion US dollars, it is far from being able to cover the massive costs of current crises. "Band-aid solutions" are no longer sufficient to solve systemic crises; the traditional humanitarian system itself is at an end, says Maurer, calling for a change in mindset and approach.¹⁵

WTO: new narrative, old problems

The successful 12th Ministerial Conference in June lent fresh momentum to the crisis-ridden World Trade Organization. Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is trying to use this momentum to move the deadlocked discussions forward, and at the same time to give the WTO a new narrative. At the WTO Public Forum (September 27-30), the WTO's largest annual technical conference, Dr Ngozi made it clear that instead of de-globalisation, re-globalisation is needed, and that the future of trade must be 'green, digital and inclusive'.

Thus, issues such as e-commerce and sustainability needed to receive greater attention. She added that the WTO should contribute to addressing other global challenges beyond trade-related issues. The topic of sustainability in particular strongly shaped discussions, but it is still not always clear exactly what role the WTO should play in these domains.

Observers and diplomats cite the initiatives on fossil fuel subsidies and plastic pollution as examples.

Moreover, the WTO could contribute to transparency on climate protection measures with consequences for international trade, before these lead to countermeasures and spirals of protectionism. Despite the overall spirit of optimism, diplomats and WTO staff are aware that the old familiar problems have not yet been cleared away. Many of the agreements and deals reached at the ministerial conference have an expiry date in the near future. For example, there is still an ongoing debate about common rules to fight overfishing. If no agreement is reached, the compromise that has been established on limiting fisheries' subsidies at the ministerial conference would expire in 2026.

India continues to insist on being granted "political leeway" in the extension of the moratorium on tariffs on electronic transmissions, which was achieved with difficulty - a permanent waiver for such tariffs is not to be expected.

The minimum consensus reached on the TRIPS waiver will be put to the test in discussions pushed by India and South Africa on extending it to diagnostics and therapeutics (deadline: mid-December). Remarkably, since the June agreement, no country has yet applied for a waiver of patent rights on vaccines. For some issues, no solution could be found at the ministerial conference, such as agriculture, where India continues to demand policy space for public stockholding. Other unresolved issues include subsidies, anti-dumping and WTO reform. Observers consider the stated goal of re-establishing a fully functioning dispute settlement system by 2024 to be very ambitious. To prevent WTO members from reverting to old patterns and rigid positions after the breakthrough in June, WTO leadership is trying to create new stimuli for negotiations with thematic "retreats". There is not much time left; the next ministerial conference is to take place as early as the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024. The host (United Arab Emirates or Cameroon) will be decided in the coming weeks.

¹⁵ Further information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Global health: a pandemic agreement takes shape

At its special session in December 2021, the World Health Assembly (WHA) decided to create a complementary instrument to the International Health Regulations (IHR) adopted in 2005, dedicated to filling gaps in pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. To this end, the WHA created an Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) responsible for negotiating and drafting the text. The process offers opportunities for civil society participation in addition to the 194 WHO member states and representatives of UN agencies. In addition, the WHO Secretariat held "global public hearings" in April and September.

The legal basis, and therefore also the binding nature of such an agreement, was disputed in the run-up; while the EU and several African countries preferred the more binding Article 19 of the WHO Constitution as the legal basis for this kind of instrument, the USA, among others, argued in favour of Article 21, and thus a less binding provision.¹⁶ Ultimately, the INB agreed that the treaty would be designed in accordance with Article 19 of the WHO Constitution, which allows the WHO's highest governing body, the WHA, to adopt "legally binding conventions or agreements" if two-thirds of the members agree, to address "any matter within the competence of the organisation". However, the INB did not rule out including some "non-binding" clauses in the treaty, as well as clauses under Article 21 of the Constitution.¹⁷

An interim report is to be presented at the 76th WHA in 2023. By May 2024, the INB is to present a draft pandemic treaty or similar agreement to the WHA. Once adopted, it will enter into force for each Member State "in accordance with its constitutional procedures". Article 19 of the WHO Constitution has only been used once before - in the adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

Opinions still differ when it comes to the substance of the instrument.¹⁸ Discussions on the substantive elements were based on a working

draft published in early July. Some states underline the need to define specific terminology in more detail, such as "pandemic", "health technologies" or "vulnerable groups of people". Another substantive discussion revolved around the term "One Health", which refers to the interplay of human, animal, and environmental health. Many developed countries, such as the EU member states, are in favour of a mainstream application of the concept, while other countries, e.g. Namibia, argue that the term is still too immature and too little defined, or that "One Health" would exceed the WHO's competences.

In addition, some countries object to an - in their view - ill-balanced emphasis on pandemic response or control mechanisms as opposed to prevention. There is also debate on the level of information sharing among signatories of such a treaty. Based on public hearings and informal discussions between countries and experts on topics including equitable access to products and production capacities, intellectual property issues, and the One Health approach, the substantive priorities will be summarised in November and discussed from December 5-7.

At the political level, the emerging pandemic treaty has gained support in recent months. The role of parliamentarians in global health was also discussed at the World Health Summit in Berlin. WHO and UNITE, a network of parliamentarians for global health, signed a memorandum of understanding, also referring to their role in supporting the ratification and implementation of the accord. The aim is: to involve parliamentarians more closely in WHO's work; to work together to advance universal access to health and sustainable financing for global health security architecture; and to work towards the implementation of, and compliance with, the international pandemic treaty.

Monkeypox

On July 23, Dr Tedros declared monkeypox the seventh Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) after a meeting with the Expert

¹⁶ More on this in the Geneva Barometer, [July 2022](#).

¹⁷ INB timeline and targets can be found [here](#), and more background information [here](#).

¹⁸ Further details can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Committee on International Health Emergencies.¹⁹ WHO rated the risk as moderate on a global level, but high in the European and American regions. On 13 October, it also declared that the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic remains a public health emergency of international concern.²⁰

Refugees and migration

At the Geneva-based organisations dealing with refugees and migration, personnel issues continue to appear on the agenda. Although it is still unknown whether the head of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), António Vitorino, will run for a second term in June 2023, the USA entered Amy Pope, currently Deputy Director General for Management and Reform, into the race for this post. Pope would be the first woman to head the organisation since its founding in 1951 and given that there are eight Americans among the ten directors general, the nomination also appears to be accompanied by a claim to reassert this "traditionally" American top post.

At the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the term of office of UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi was extended for a second time by 2.5 years on September 26. The Nansen Refugee Award, given annually by UNHCR, was presented to Dr Angela Merkel this year for her "vision, courage and bravery" in hosting more than 1.2 million refugees and asylum seekers in 2015/2016. At the award ceremony, Grandi noted that she had also served as a moral compass beyond Germany's borders. Dr Angela Merkel thanked the many volunteers, local politicians and officials, and acknowledged the enormous efforts of other host countries. She dedicated the prize money of 150,000 US dollars to the four regional winners of the evening: gynaecologist Dr Nagham Hasan (Iraq), Vicenta González (Costa Rica), Meikswe Myanmar and the Mbera Fire Brigade (Mauritania).

WIPO Innovation Index: innovation stagnates, Asia continues to catch up

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)'s 20th Global Innovation Index²¹, published on September 29, offered insights into the global innovation landscape. As in the previous year, Switzerland scored the top position as the most innovative country. This year, the USA beat Sweden to the second place. With innovation scores almost unchanged, Germany landed in eighth place among the most innovative countries. China moved ahead of France into eleventh place.

The index reflects a continuing trend whereby countries from the Asian region are catching up with the most innovative countries in the world. Particularly for some Arab states, such as the United Arab Emirates, the diversification of their economies is slowly paying off. Despite low productivity figures - due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression - investments in research and science increased by about 10% during the pandemic. Venture capital investments also increased by almost 50%, especially in Latin America and Africa. Especially in the context of economic and geopolitical tensions, it remains to be seen whether these new research projects and start-ups will survive and be reflected in economic performance. The report suggests that the implementation of innovation is stagnating at a high level.

Science & Diplomacy Summit

The second GESDA Summit took place from October 12-14. The Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA) is a foundation established in 2019 to look at the technological and scientific breakthrough forecasts for the coming years and try to interpret their global implications for society. The organisers stressed the need to identify scientific trends early. One step in this direction, they said, would be the creation of an Open Quantum Institute within the next three to five years, with the aim of helping the global community be better prepared for the arrival of this novel technology - quantum computing - than it was for the

¹⁹ More on monkeypox [here](#).

²⁰ More on the COVID-19 pandemic [here](#).

²¹ The 2022 Index can be found [here](#), and the 2021 Index [here](#).

arrival of the internet. With over 1,000 participants from 44 countries, there was growing interest in the topic. There was also a lot of speculation as to what role the international location of Geneva should play, as the centre of many important international organisations and scientific institutions (Campus Biotech, CERN, among others). The Swiss government announced its intention to triple its financial support for GESDA.

Commentary

The Russia-China alliance in multilateral organisations is a topic of frequent discussion. The past weeks have made demonstrated the asymmetry of their respective levels of influence within Geneva-based organisations. While the Human Rights Council decided to establish a UN Special Rapporteur for Russia, most states shied away from even discussing the situation in Xinjiang. Nevertheless, the high number of abstentions in the vote on Russia also illustrates many countries' unwillingness to take a stance on the situation in Russia and isolate the country completely. The latest vote in the UN General Assembly on the Russian annexations in Ukraine shows that, for many of the member states, the generously drawn red lines have been crossed too. The underwhelming result in the fight for ITU leadership and the clear

failure to win re-election to the ITU Council also illustrate Russia's massive loss of reputation. China's success in the Human Rights Council is only a triumph at first glance. The fact that a text referring to China was put forward at all is a novelty. The narrow defeat is bitter for the liberal-democratic camp, but not discouraging. The fact that a part of the global community is suspicious of China's influence was also reflected in the ITU Council election results. The very close outcome of the Xinjiang vote in the Human Rights Council underlines the importance of identifying like-minded partners worldwide. This includes encouraging them to run for key positions in international fora. In this context, Costa Rica's success against Venezuela in the fight for a seat on the Human Rights Council is a good sign. However, a significant shift in favour of liberal democracies in the Human Rights Council is not to be expected - in the Asia-Pacific regional group, the alignment in voting behaviour with Germany is likely to become weaker. Thus, the focus should rather be on the upcoming elections when Russia could again run for a seat on the council. With the imposing victory of Doreen Bogdan-Martin as the new ITU Secretary General, the USA underlined its claim to influence in Geneva. Amy Pope's early candidacy to head the IOM sends a similar signal.

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