

Boosting the EU's role in the United Nations

Given the increasingly unstable security environment, upgrading the position of the European Union as a global actor appears more and more necessary. A new report by the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs argues that the EU could play its foreign policy cards more effectively by boosting its role in the United Nations (UN), which marks its 70th anniversary this year.

The EU in the UN system – a committed partner with restricted status

The EU and UN share the core values laid out in the [1945 Charter of the United Nations](#) and the [1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). [Effective multilateralism](#) is a key principle in the EU's external activities, and the UN – the only international organisation in which all sovereign states in the world are represented – is a principal forum for promoting this. The EU and its Member States together are the single largest [financial contributor](#) to the UN system, and it actively participates in advancing international peace and security under UN auspices through the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy. Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) [states](#) that the EU shall 'promote multilateral solutions', in particular in the framework of the UN, and act 'in respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law'. With the Lisbon Treaty, the EU gained legal personality and took over the rights and status of the European Community in the UN. In 2010, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) [turned down](#) the EU's request for an update of its observer status. However, in 2011, the UNGA [granted](#) the EU enhanced – although some say merely [symbolic](#) – participation rights, allowing EU representatives to present common EU positions, speak, and circulate EU communications as official documents.

The European Parliament: pushing for a greater EU role in the UN

The European Parliament monitors EU-UN cooperation and scrutinises the Union's financial and political support for the UN. The EP also maintains strong direct relations with the UN. The EP President and senior EP representatives hold bilateral meetings with high-ranking UN officials, and EP delegations regularly visit UN structures. Most recently, a Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) and Sub-Committee on Human Rights (DROI) [met](#) with high-ranking UN officials in New York on 1-3 November 2015.

A Security Council seat for the EU remains a 'long-term goal'

The EP has repeatedly urged the EU to enhance its role in the UN, for example, in the April 2014 [recommendation](#) to the Council on the 69th session of the UNGA. The new AFET report, adopted on 13 October, on 'the role of the EU within the UN' (rapporteur: Paavo Väyrynen, ALDE, Finland), reiterates these demands, urging more visibility for the 'active part' taken in the UN by the EU and its Member States. Citing the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and the rise of the ISIL/Da'esh terrorist organisation, the report urges the EU to increase its own and its Member States' influence within the UN system in order to better achieve its foreign policy goals.

The report stresses that an EU seat on an enlarged Security Council (UNSC) remains a 'long-term goal', and stresses the current EU [priorities](#) for the 70th UN General Assembly, not least the Union's continuing [calls](#) for reforms to the UN system, including in 'difficult' areas such as the UNSC. The EU's High Representative is urged to seek common EU positions on issues within the scope of the UNSC and to ensure that EU Member States on the UNSC (France and the UK are permanent members, while Spain is currently a non-permanent member) defend common EU positions. The report urges the UNSC to revise the 'opaque' [selection](#) process for the position of UN Secretary-General, the next being due in 2016.

The AFET [report](#) on 'the role of the EU within the UN – how to better achieve EU foreign policy goals' (2015/2104(INI)) is due to be debated by the European Parliament on 23 November 2015 in Strasbourg.