

EU and Japan seek to boost their relations

The EU and Japan have given a strong signal in favour of free trade and their shared commitment to fundamental values and principles. In July 2018, they signed the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement. The two agreements now need the European Parliament's consent for their conclusion.

Milestones in EU-Japan relations

EU and Japanese leaders have been holding summits since [1991](#), when they adopted [The Hague Joint Declaration](#). In 2001, they agreed on a [joint action plan](#) for EU-Japan cooperation. In 2003, the EU recognised Japan as a [strategic partner](#). At the May 2011 summit, the partners [agreed](#) to launch preparations for two agreements: a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA)/Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and a binding Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). They launched the negotiations in March 2013 and, after 18 rounds, reached a [political agreement](#) on the EPA during the July 2017 summit. The EPA and the SPA were signed during the [Tokyo summit](#) on 17 July 2018.

The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)

The [EPA](#) is the world's [largest-ever bilateral free trade](#) deal. At its entry into force, almost all customs duties paid by [EU companies](#) will be removed. The agreement will eliminate many regulatory barriers, including those for accessing the Japanese car market. More than 200 European geographical indications (GIs) will be protected and, over time, around 85 % of EU agri-food products will enter Japan duty-free. The EU is to open its markets to Japanese cars and car parts after specific transition periods expire. EU companies will have more opportunities to provide services on the Japanese market, will enjoy non-discriminatory access to government contracts in large Japanese cities, and greater access to railway procurement at national level. The agreement only includes provisions falling under exclusive EU competence. EU-Japan negotiations [continue](#) on investment protection standards, and on investor-state protection and dispute resolution.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)

The [SPA](#) is the first-ever bilateral framework agreement between the EU and Japan, and will help to promote their shared values and principles. It provides a legally binding overall framework for the decades to come, and establishes a Joint Committee with the objective of coordinating the overall partnership built upon the agreement. It supports deepening cooperation in multilateral fora, will upgrade and strengthen bilateral relations, and increase cooperation in more than 40 areas, including climate change, research and innovation, education, migration, counter-terrorism, and the fight against organised crime and cybercrime.

European Parliament position

The European Parliament voted in favour of an EU-Japan FTA in [May 2011](#). In [June 2012](#), it asked the Council not to authorise the opening of trade negotiations until Parliament stated its position, which it did in [October 2012](#). In [April 2014](#), Parliament gave its support to the negotiation of the SPA. In November 2018, Parliament's Committees on International Trade ([INTA](#)) and Foreign Affairs ([AFET](#)) recommended that Parliament gives its consent to the Council decisions on the conclusion of the EPA and SPA, respectively.

Consent procedure: EPA [2018/0091\(NLE\)](#), Committee responsible: INTA, Rapporteur: Pedro Silva Pereira (S&D, Portugal); SPA [2018/0122\(NLE\)](#), Committee responsible: AFET, Rapporteur: Alojz Peterle (EPP, Slovenia).

For further information see our 'International Agreements in Progress' briefings on [EPA](#) and on [SPA](#).



EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service

Author: Enrico D'Ambrogio, Members' Research Service
PE 630.322 – December 2018



This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy. © European Union, 2018.

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact) <http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu> (intranet) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank> (internet) <http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)