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5.1. EXTERNAL RELATIONS POLICIES



5.1.1. FOREIGN POLICY: AIMS, INSTRUMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was established in 1993 and has since been strengthened by subsequent treaties. Today, Parliament regularly contributes to the development of the CFSP, in particular by scrutinising the activities of its institutional actors and bodies: the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) and the EU delegations. Parliament's budgetary powers can also shape the scale and scope of the CFSP.

CFSP: DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TREATIES

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union was established by the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1993 with the aim of preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The TEU introduced the 'three-pillar system', with the CFSP as the second pillar. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam established a more efficient decision-making process, including constructive abstention and qualified majority voting (QMV). In December 1999, the European Council established the role of the High Representative for the CFSP. The 2003 Treaty of Nice introduced further changes to streamline the decision-making process and mandated the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which had been established under a Council decision in January 2001, to exercise political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, provided the Union with legal personality and an institutional structure for its external service. In addition, it eliminated the pillar structure introduced by the TEU in 1993. The Treaty created a range of new CFSP actors, including the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who also serves as Vice-President of the Commission (VP/HR), and the new permanent President of the European Council. Moreover, it created the European External Action Service (EEAS) and upgraded the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which forms an integral part of the CFSP. (For details [5.1.2](#))

The legal basis for the CFSP was set out in the TEU and revised in the Lisbon Treaty. Articles 21-46, Title V, of the TEU establish the 'General Provisions on the Union's External Action and Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)'. Articles 205-222, Part 5, of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) cover the Union's external action. Articles 346 and 347, Part 7, also apply.

Looking to the future, the [final report of the EU's Conference on the Future of Europe](#), presented to the Presidents of the three EU institutions on 9 May 2022, proposed 'that the EU improve its capacity to take speedy and effective decisions, notably in CFSP, speaking with one voice and acting as a truly global player, projecting a positive role in the world and making a difference in response to any crisis'.



PARLIAMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY POWERS AND INSTRUMENTS

Despite its limited formal role in foreign policy decision-making, Parliament has supported the concept of the CFSP from its inception and sought to extend its scope.

Article 36 of the TEU requires the High Representative to consult Parliament regularly on the principal aspects of and choices made under the CFSP and to inform Parliament of the policy's evolution. Parliament holds twice-yearly debates on CFSP progress reports and puts questions and recommendations to the Council and the High Representative.

Parliament's right to be informed and consulted about the CFSP/CSDP was further strengthened by [the High Representative's declaration of political accountability in 2010](#), attached to Parliament's resolution on creation of the EEAS. The declaration provided, inter alia, for:

- Enhancing the status of the 'Joint Consultation Meetings' (JCMs), which allow a designated group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to meet counterparts from the Council's Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EEAS and the Commission to discuss planned and ongoing civilian CSDP missions;
- Affirming the right of Parliament's 'special committee' to have access to confidential information relating to the CFSP and the CSDP. This right is based on an interinstitutional agreement of 2002;
- Holding exchanges of views with heads of mission, heads of delegation and other senior EU officials during committee meetings and hearings of committees of Parliament, including exchanges of views in the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) with selected newly appointed heads of EU delegations or EUSRs which Parliament considers strategically important, before they take up their posts;
- Mandating the High Representative to appear before Parliament at least twice a year to report on the current state of affairs regarding the CFSP/CSDP and to answer questions.

In addition to this political dialogue, Parliament exercises its authority through the budgetary procedure. As one arm of the EU's budgetary authority, Parliament must approve the annual CFSP budget. An interinstitutional agreement of December 2020 on budgetary discipline sets the framework for the annual approval and the basic structure of the CFSP budget, as well as reporting mechanisms. Parliament and the Council adopt legislation setting the framework for financing the EU's international cooperation and aid, based on a Commission proposal.

Parliament regularly scrutinises the operations of the EEAS and provides it with suggestions on structural issues, ranging from its geographical and gender balance to its interaction with other EU institutions and the diplomatic services of the Member States. Parliament also holds regular discussions with the High Representative and the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) appointed for certain regions or issues.

Parliament also has a role to play in monitoring the negotiation and implementation of international agreements. Parliament's consent is required before the Council can conclude such agreements. (For more details [5.2.1](#), [5.2.3](#))



INTERNAL PARLIAMENT STRUCTURES INVOLVED IN THE CFSP

Much of Parliament's work on the CFSP is done in specialised committees, in particular AFET and its two subcommittees (on Security and Defence (SEDE) and on Human Rights (DROI)). Their work is complemented by the Committee on International Trade (INTA) and the Committee on Development (DEVE). These committees shape the CFSP through the reports and opinions they issue, by providing recommendations, exchanging views with counterparts in non-EU countries during missions, and by means of parliamentary democracy. They also regularly exchange views with representatives of global and regional multilateral organisations (including the United Nations), other EU institutions, the Council presidencies and Member States' national parliaments.

CFSP-related work is also undertaken by parliamentary delegations, whose role is to maintain and develop Parliament's international contacts (especially through interparliamentary cooperation), promoting the Union's founding values, including liberty, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. There are currently 45 standing [interparliamentary delegations](#), including joint parliamentary committees (JPCs), parliamentary cooperation committees (PCCs), other parliamentary delegations, joint parliamentary assemblies and delegations to multilateral assemblies.

PARLIAMENT'S IMPACT ON THE CFSP

Parliament's involvement in the CFSP helps to enhance the policy's democratic accountability. Parliament has strongly supported the post-Lisbon institutional landscape, advocating an enhanced role for the VP/HR, the EEAS, the EU delegations and the EUSRs, as well as a more coherent policy and a more effective CFSP, including sanctions. It has pushed for greater coherence among the EU's political and financial instruments for external policies, in order to avoid duplication and inefficiency.

Parliament is consulted on CFSP, exercises scrutiny over it and provides strategic policy input. Its involvement is centred on regular debates on key foreign policy topics with the VP/HR in the plenary session or in the AFET committee, in particular on the annual report on the implementation of the CFSP.

In its [annual resolution on the implementation of the CFSP in 2022](#) adopted on 18 January 2023, Parliament underscored 'the tectonic shift in the geopolitical landscape caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine', in addition to other international challenges, such as the continued rise of global authoritarianism, increasing Sino-Russian cooperation, China's assertive foreign policy, the climate emergency and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges led to a 'call for a swifter implementation of the concept of strategic autonomy, solidarity and for a geopolitical awakening of the EU'. Parliament supported the imposition of EU sanctions (restrictive measures) on Russia and urged the Council to impose sanctions on countries enabling Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Importantly, Parliament's latest 2023 annual [resolution on the implementation of the CSDP](#) (For details [5.1.2](#)) and annual [resolution on human rights and democracy in the world](#) (For details [5.4.1](#)) set out further positions within their respective areas.



In its most recent expression of political guidance with regard to the EU's institutional framework for external action, Parliament recommended, in its [resolution](#) of 15 March 2023 on the functioning of the EEAS and a stronger EU in the world, that the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR 'improve the coordination and integration of EU foreign policy and the external dimension of EU internal policies'. It also asked for the reinforcement of 'the strategic coordination structure composed of all relevant commissioners, the VP/HR and the Commission and EEAS services to ensure coherence, synergy, transparency and accountability of the EU's external action'. Parliament also advocated meaningful revisions of both the [2010 Council Decision establishing the EEAS](#) and the VP/HR's [2010 Declaration on political accountability](#). Parliament repeatedly recommended the full use of qualified majority voting for certain foreign policy areas, such as the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, except for the creation of military missions or operations with an executive mandate, and advocated the use of constructive abstention in line with Article 31(1) TEU in the meantime.

In addition, it asked for effective delivery of foreign assistance under the brand of '[Team Europe](#)', established as a response to the global consequences of COVID-19, composed of EU institutions and Member States' and European external funding agencies and banks.

EU'S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The High Representative presented the [Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy](#) to the European Council on 28 June 2016. With its emphasis on security, its ambition for strategic autonomy and its principled yet pragmatic approach to Europe's environment, the EU Global Strategy signifies an important change of philosophy from the 2003 European Security Strategy. Together with Member States, national parliaments, experts and the wider public, the European Parliament was involved in the Global Strategy consultation process.

The EU Global Strategy's security and defence aspects were substantially complemented by the [EU Strategic Compass](#) endorsed by the European Council on 24 and 25 March 2022. As a consequence of the strategic challenge to European security and global stability posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has recently undergone a paradigm shift and launched several new initiatives on CSDP and the defence industry (For details [5.1.2](#)).

Furthermore, in order to provide for a sustainable option for global infrastructure investment and to rise to the geopolitical challenge posed by China's investment and governance model, the EU came up with a [Global Gateway strategy](#) in 2021. This initiative aims to raise up to EUR 300 billion in public and private investment into various sectors of connectivity around the world, promoting EU values and a global rulebook at the same time. Parliament also highlighted the 'geopolitical centrality' of the Global Gateway's connectivity approach in its recent resolution on the implementation of the CFSP in 2022. This initiative relies partly on money from the EU budget's [Global Europe instrument](#) (also known as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument — NDICI), worth approximately EUR 80 billion in 2021-2027.



For more information on this topic please see the website of the [Committee on Foreign Affairs \(AFET\)](#).

Michal Malovec
10/2023



5.1.2. COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

The common security and defence policy (CSDP) is an integral part of the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP). The CSDP is the main policy framework through which Member States can develop a European strategic culture of security and defence, address conflicts and crises together, protect the Union and its citizens, and strengthen international peace and security. As a result of the tense geopolitical context, the CSDP has been one of the fastest developing policies over the last 10 years. Since 24 February 2022, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has acted as a geopolitical reset for Europe and created further impetus for what should become an EU Defence Union.

LEGAL BASIS

The CSDP is described in the Treaty of Lisbon, also known as the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which entered into force in 2009.

More specifically, the workings of the CSDP are explained in Title V (General provisions on the Union's external action and specific provisions on the common foreign and security policy), Chapter 2 (Specific provisions on the common foreign and security policy) and Section 2 (Provisions on the common security and defence policy) of the Treaty of Lisbon. Section 2 comprises five articles: Articles 42 to 46.

The role of the European Parliament in the CFSP and the CSDP is defined in Title V, Chapter 2, Section 1 (Common provisions) and Article 36, and the funding arrangements for both policies are set out in Article 41.

The CSDP is further described in amendments to the Treaty of Lisbon, mainly Protocols No 1 (on the role of national parliaments in the European Union), 10 (on Permanent Structured Cooperation established by Article 42 TEU) and 11 (on Article 42 TEU), as well in Declarations 13 and 14 (Declarations concerning the common foreign and security policy).

ORGANISATION

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who also acts as the Vice-President of the European Commission (VP/HR), occupies the central institutional role. Since December 2019, Joseph Borrell has been the VP/HR. He chairs the Foreign Affairs Council in its Defence Ministers configuration, which is the decision-making body for the CSDP. He is in charge of presenting CSDP proposals to Member States. The VP/HR is the head of the European External Action Service and the director of the European Defence Agency (EDA).

The European Council and the Council of the European Union take decisions relating to the CSDP by unanimity (Article 42 of the TEU). Some notable exceptions are decisions relating to the EDA (Article 45 of the TEU) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO, Article 46 of the TEU), for which qualified majority voting applies.

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced a European capabilities and armaments policy (Article 42(3) of the TEU) and established that the EDA and the Commission work in



liaison when necessary (Article 45(2) of the TEU), most notably when it comes to the EU's research, industrial and space policies.

In addition, Article 21 of the TEU recalled that multilateralism is at the core of the EU's external action. Accordingly, EU partners can participate in CSDP missions and operations. The EU is committed to deeper coordination and cooperation within various multilateral frameworks, in particular with the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but also with other regional bodies such as the African Union.

EVOLUTION

Since the Treaty of Lisbon, the CSDP has evolved significantly, both politically and institutionally.

In June 2016, VP/HR Federica Mogherini presented the 'EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy' (EUGS) to the European Council, a document setting out the CSDP strategy. Five priorities were identified: the security of the Union; state and societal resilience to the East and South of the EU; the development of an integrated approach to conflicts; cooperative regional orders; and global governance for the 21st century. The implementation of the EUGS should be reviewed annually in consultation with the Council, the Commission and Parliament.

In November 2016, the VP/HR also presented to the Council an 'Implementation Plan on Security and Defence' to operationalise the EUGS's vision. The plan set out 13 proposals, including a coordinated annual review on defence (CARD) and a new single PESCO arrangement for the Member States willing to commit further on security and defence.

In parallel, Ms Mogherini presented a European defence action plan to the Member States, with key proposals relating to the creation of a European Defence Fund (EDF) that focuses on defence research and capability development. These have been implemented over the last few years.

In June 2021, the EU launched a reflection on the future of European security and defence. This process led to the creation of the Strategic Compass on Security and Defence, a policy document which lays down the EU's security and defence strategy for the next 5-10 years. The Strategic Compass provides a framework of action for the development of a shared vision in the field of security and defence. The document was developed in three steps: a threat analysis, a structured strategic dialogue, and further development and revision before adoption. Its main objective is to provide political guidance for implementing the EU's 'strategic autonomy' in four key areas: crisis management, resilience, capabilities and partnerships. The process is designed to address the growing need for the EU to be able to act as a security provider. VP/HR Borrell presented the initial version of the document to a joint session of EU Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers in November 2021.

However, in the context of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine (which began on 24 February 2022), the paper had to be significantly altered to take into account the destabilisation of the European security order and the subsequent change in the EU's stance, ambitions and tools in the realm of defence. On 24 and 25 March 2022, during the French Presidency of the Council, the European Council endorsed the final version of the Strategic Compass.



As a consequence of the war, Denmark has abolished its opt-out with regard to the EU's defence policy, which it obtained in 1992. The Danes agreed to join the CSDP via a referendum organised on 1 June 2022 (with 66.9% voting in favour). All 27 Member States therefore now contribute to the CSDP.

Crisis management missions and operations are the most visible and tangible expressions of the CSDP. The Strategic Compass addresses the EUGS's gaps in crisis management tools and institutions, for example by creating a new EU Rapid Deployment Capacity. In the 2021 report on the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament expressed support for the proposed 'rapid entry force'. The Strategic Compass also aims to provide coherent goals and objectives for other initiatives and relevant processes (such as PESCO, the EDF and CARD).

While Parliament did not have a direct role in the establishment of the Strategic Compass, it must be kept regularly informed of the level of implementation and given opportunities to express its opinions on the process, in particular during briefings to the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE). Through its own annual reports on the CSDP, the SEDE subcommittee assumes a de facto advisory role on the CSDP.

THE CSDP TOOLBOX

Since 2016, the CSDP has achieved a number of successes, including the launch of PESCO; a permanent command and control structure for planning and conducting non-executive military missions; the EDF; the Civilian CSDP Compact; a strategic review of the civilian dimension of the CSDP; and an off-budget European Peace Facility (EPF).

The first CARD report was presented to EU Defence Ministers in November 2020, with the EDA acting as the penholder. It identified 55 collaborative opportunities across the entire capability spectrum.

In December 2020, the Council reached a provisional political agreement with Parliament representatives on a regulation establishing the EDF, in the context of the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. The allocated budget for seven years is EUR 8 billion. The EDF will stimulate European defence industry cooperation. On 30 June 2022, the Commission launched the first calls for proposals for the fund.

Through the EPF, an off-budget instrument, the EU will fund the common costs of the military CSDP missions and operations, thereby enhancing burden sharing between the Member States. The EPF can also be used to finance the provision of training and military equipment (including lethal equipment) for EU partner countries' security and defence sectors. By reinforcing the capacities of peace support operations and the capacities of non-EU countries and partner organisations in military and defence matters, the EU will increase the effectiveness of its external action. By March 2023, the EU had provided around EUR 3.6 billion in military assistance to Ukraine through the EPF to help fend off the Russian invasion. The initial facility budget of EUR 5 billion for 2021-2027 was increased by EUR 2 billion in 2023 (with the possibility for a further increase of EUR 3.5 billion if needed).

On 19 July 2022, the Commission put forward a proposal for a regulation on establishing the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) after being given a mandate for this at the Versailles Summit in March 2022. The EDIRPA is a short-term joint defence procurement instrument worth EUR 500 million. It seeks to address the most urgent and critical



defence capability gaps and to incentivise Member States to procure defence products jointly. Following interinstitutional negotiations, Parliament adopted the regulation in plenary on 12 September 2023. On 3 May 2023, the Commission put forward a proposal for an act in support of ammunition production, which aims to provide Ukraine with ammunition, increase common procurement and augment production capacity. Following brief interinstitutional negotiations, Parliament adopted the act on 13 July 2023. In addition, the Commission will propose a European defence investment programme regulation, which will serve as the anchor for future joint development and procurement projects of high common interest to the security of the Member States and the Union.

CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

Since 2003 and the first intervention in the Western Balkans, the EU has launched and run 37 operations and missions on three continents. As of October 2023, there are 22 ongoing CSDP missions and operations (12 civilian missions and 9 military operations, including 2 in the maritime domain). About 4 000 EU military and civilian staff are currently deployed abroad. EU decisions to deploy missions or operations are normally taken at the request of the partner country and/or based on a UN Security Council resolution.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament is supportive of EU defence integration and cooperation. Parliament scrutinises the CSDP and can take the initiative of addressing the VP/HR and the Council (Article 36 TEU). It also exercises scrutiny over the CSDP's budget (Article 41 TEU). Twice a year, Parliament holds debates on the implementation of the CFSP and the CSDP and adopts reports: one on the progress of the CFSP, drawn up by the Committee on Foreign Affairs; and one on the progress of the CSDP, written by the SEDE subcommittee.

The [2022 annual report on the implementation of the CSDP](#) was adopted in Parliament's plenary session in January 2023. It focuses on enhancing the EU's support for Ukraine; the need for proper implementation of the Strategic Compass; the importance of coordinating investments and of increasing funding opportunities for the European defence industry; boosting the EU's security and defence capabilities, in particular through the EPF; enhancing complementarity with NATO while ensuring European strategic autonomy; improving resilience in the context of hybrid wars; and adopting a more flexible decision-making process. It calls, in particular, for the EU and the Member States 'to increase and speed up their efforts to provide Ukraine with the necessary financial, humanitarian and military aid and equipment, including lethal equipment and especially heavy weaponry' and hails the creation of the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine. Furthermore, Parliament recalls that the Strategic Compass must be 'a dynamic process' that should help the EU step up its strategic autonomy. In addition, Parliament regrets that it 'is not in a situation to exercise proper scrutiny of PESCO projects'. It calls, therefore, for the EU to 'enhance Parliament's scrutiny of the CSDP'. The annual report also stresses Parliament's willingness to be more involved in the CSDP and defence industrial policy decision-making, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Strategic Compass, the EDF, the EDIRPA, the European defence investment programme, the EPF and the various policies. In this regard, it recommends, inter alia, the creation of 'a fully-



fledged defence council', using 'the mid-term review of the EDF and the upcoming negotiations on the EDIRPA to implement efficient parliamentary scrutiny rights' and a clarification of 'Parliament's right to and access to information under Article 36 TEU'. Since 2012, on the basis of Protocol 1 to the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament and the Member States' national parliaments have organised two inter-parliamentary conferences per year to debate matters relating to the CFSP.

In general, the Treaty enables Parliament to play a full role in the development of the CSDP, thereby making it a partner in shaping the EU's external relations and addressing security challenges. In order to fulfil this role, Parliament holds regular deliberations, hearings and workshops devoted to topics such as civilian and military CSDP deployments, international crises with security and defence implications, multilateral frameworks for security, arms control and non-proliferation issues, counter-terrorism and organised crime, good practices to improve the effectiveness of security and defence, and EU legal and institutional developments in these fields.

Following the VP/HR's 2010 declaration on political accountability, Parliament has participated in joint consultation meetings organised on a regular basis to exchange information with the Council, the European External Action Service and the Commission.

Parliament also asks questions and makes oral suggestions to the European External Action Service on the CSDP, in particular during SEDE subcommittee meetings.

Oliver Krentz
10/2023



5.2. EXTERNAL TRADE RELATIONS



5.2.1. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS TRADE PARTNERS

Over the years, the EU has been moving away from the production of labour-intensive, low-value products in order to specialise in higher-value, branded goods. With its open economy, trade is essential to the EU. To overcome barriers to trade and level the playing field for its businesses, the Union negotiates a number of free trade agreements (FTAs). The EU is also a founder of and key player in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

LEGAL BASIS

Article 207 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) establishes the common commercial policy as an exclusive competence of the European Union.

THE EU'S CENTRAL POSITION

The EU, China and the United States are the world's [largest economies](#), with the EU and China each accounting for about 17% of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022 and the figure for the United States standing at around 25%. Thanks to its GDP of around EUR 16.6 trillion and the openness of its market, the EU has played a central role in shaping the global trading system, among other things, by supporting the WTO. Economic openness has brought significant advantages to the EU, given that more than 30 million jobs in the EU depend on external trade and that global economic growth is expected to be generated mainly outside Europe. New economic players and technological innovation, in particular digitalisation, have changed the structure and patterns of international trade. Today's global economy is highly integrated, and global supply chains have largely replaced the traditional trade in finished goods.

Although the 2009 global financial crisis had a negative impact on the EU's economic performance, the EU has been able to preserve a relatively strong position in trade in goods while reinforcing its leading role in trade in services. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down economic growth and trade worldwide and triggered discussion about relocating industries back to Europe (referred to as 'reshoring'). Reshoring is likely to be applied selectively in critical sectors, while global supply chains experience a degree of fragmentation because of increasingly separate providers of goods and services, which in some cases make them even longer.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

International trade was one of the first sectors in which Member States agreed to pool their sovereignty. Consequently, they mandated the Commission to handle trade matters, including negotiating international trade agreements, on their behalf. In other words, the EU, acting as a single entity, negotiates, on behalf of all its Member States, both bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. As is demonstrated by its record in the WTO dispute settlement system, the EU has been able to defend its own interests in international trade disputes. The EU has also used international trade tools to promote its own values and policies and has been trying to extend its own regulatory practices



to the rest of the world. The EU has traditionally favoured an open and fair international trading system.

The Treaty of Lisbon enhanced Parliament's role by making it a co-legislator on matters involving trade and investment on an equal footing with the Council. In addition, the Treaty conferred on Parliament a more active role in the negotiation and ratification of international trade agreements, since its consent is now mandatory. However, some elements of trade policy remain within the remit of the Member States. On 16 May 2017, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) published an opinion that gave clarity about the division between national and EU competences.

TRADE POLICY AND ORIENTATION

When the multilateral negotiations within the WTO on the Doha Development Agenda stalled in the first decade of the 21st century, the EU had to find alternative ways to guarantee better access to non-EU countries' markets. To this end, a new generation of comprehensive FTAs, which go beyond tariff cuts and trade in goods, was introduced. The first such 'new-generation' FTA was concluded with South Korea and, following ratification by Parliament, formally entered into force in December 2015. The Multiparty Trade Agreement between the EU and Peru, Colombia, and later Ecuador (since 2016), in force since 2013, the Association Agreement with the countries of Central America, the trade pillar of which has been provisionally applied since 2013 (with Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala), the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), provisionally applied since September 2017, the EU-Singapore FTA, in force since the end of 2019, and the EU-Vietnam FTA, in force since mid-2020, are all testimony to the new policy. An Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan entered into force on 1 February 2019.

Since negotiations with the United States on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) were suspended in 2016, the EU has focused on agreements with the United States in specific areas, such as tariffs on industrial goods or conformity assessment. Negotiations on a trade agreement with the founding members of Mercosur were completed in 2019, and the draft agreement is awaiting ratification. The draft agreement for a comprehensive and ambitious trade agreement with New Zealand was signed by the Council on 9 July 2023 and is awaiting approval by the European Parliament for ratification. The EU has also opened FTA negotiations with Indonesia, Tunisia, the Philippines and Australia. Negotiations were relaunched with India in 2021 and with Thailand in 2023, and negotiations with Malaysia will be resumed as soon as conditions are favourable.

The 'Trade for All' strategy of 2015 aimed at an EU trade policy that reconciles promoting growth, jobs and investment with pursuing fair trade in terms of respect for human rights and the environment. It also called for the WTO to be revitalised and reformed. In February 2021, the Commission presented its Trade Policy Review (TPR), entitled '[An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy](#)', which aims to set the course for trade policy until 2030. The TPR is the successor to the 2015 'Trade for All' strategy and reflects the geopolitical changes that have taken place since then, by introducing terms such as 'assertiveness' and 'resilience' into the trade vocabulary, in addition to the well-known concepts of 'fairness' and 'sustainability'. It intends to make trade policy meet current challenges and facilitate the green and digital transitions through 'Open Strategic Autonomy'.



MAIN EU TRADE PARTNERS

Europe is the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods and services. In 2022, the United States were the first destination for EU goods with a 20% share of the total exports, followed by the UK (13%) in second position, overtaking China which represents 9% of total EU exports. [Other important trade partners for goods](#) in 2022, in descending order, were Switzerland (7%), Türkiye (4%), Japan and Norway (3% each), South Korea (2.5%), Russia and Mexico.

As regards trade in services, in 2021, [the United States was the EU's main trading partner](#), followed by the UK and Switzerland.

The COVID-19 pandemic substantially reduced the international trade in goods in 2020 and 2021, including that of the EU with its main trading partners. Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine has impacted energy and food markets. [EU countries are closely coordinating actions](#) to tackle rising prices and scarcity of supplies.

INVESTMENT

The EU is the world's largest investor and a major recipient of other countries' foreign direct investment (FDI). The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 further extended the EU's exclusive competences in international trade matters, which now include FDI. To clarify the exact scope of its competences on investment, the Commission asked the CJEU for an opinion on the EU-Singapore FTA. The CJEU's opinion of 2017 confirmed that most aspects of FDI fall under EU competence, with some exceptions, in particular dispute settlement^[1].

Share of world FDI in 2021 (in billion USD and % of total)

	Inward stock	Outward stock
World in billion USD	47 079.311 (100%)	42 667.167 (100%)
EU	12 098.672(25.7%)	13 993.717(32.8%)
United States	13 056.382 (27.73%)	9 765.936 (22.9%)
China	3 633.317 (7.72%)	2 785.15 (6.5%)
Canada	1 442.334 (3.06%)	2 155.634 (5.05%)
Japan	241.125 (0.5%)	1 935.653 (4.5%)
UK	2 689.966(5.2%)	2 376.902(5.6%)

Source: European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union calculations based on European Commission/Eurostat figures

The EU concluded in principle the negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China in December 2020, which is awaiting ratification. Investment protection agreements with Singapore and Vietnam were ratified in 2019 and 2020 respectively. The EU also launched negotiations on investment with Myanmar and will explore the possibility of following suit with Taiwan and Hong Kong. Negotiations with Iran will be considered after the latter's accession to the WTO. In December 2020, the EU also concluded a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) with the UK, to which Parliament gave its consent in May 2021. The EU-UK agreement

[1]UNCTAD, [World Investment Report 2013](#). Outward and inward stock shown in million USD, changed in this table into billion USD and shares were calculated as: (country value/world value)*100



provides for zero tariffs on trade in goods and also covers investment and several other policy areas.

[Visit the European Parliament homepage on trade and globalisation.](#)

Wolfgang Iglar
10/2023



5.2.2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

The World Trade Organization (WTO) works to guarantee a rules-based international trading system. Despite the impasse in trade negotiations, ways to modernise WTO rules and address new global challenges are being explored. Under the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament legislates jointly with the Council, has to approve any changes or new WTO agreements and has an important scrutiny role on international trade policy.

In the early decades of the 20th century, trade issues prompted countries to engage in increasingly complex interactions, creating the need for a platform to facilitate and regulate trade relations. The resulting 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) not only provided a round-table discussion forum, creating a multilateral approach to trade, but also established a system of internationally recognised rules on trade. The underlying idea was to create a level playing field for all members through the ‘substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international commerce’^[1].

As international trade moved beyond the exchange of tangible goods to include services and ideas, the GATT was transformed and institutionalised as the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was established in 1995 as a result of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and it incorporated earlier trade agreements, such as the GATT itself, the Agreement on Agriculture and the Agreement on Textile and Clothing, as well as other general agreements. The most significant new agreements were the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). In February 2017, the Trade Facilitation Agreement – the first multilateral agreement completed since the WTO was created – entered into force. In 2022, after having been postponed twice due to the restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, an agreement on fisheries subsidies and an amendment to TRIPS for COVID-19 vaccines was reached at the 12th Ministerial Conference in Geneva. However, in order to keep up with recent developments in a rapidly changing trade environment, many members, the EU included, believe that a fundamental reform of the WTO is still needed, for example in the areas of trade and health, energy, e-commerce, facilitating investments, and industrial subsidies.

The WTO works to promote free trade, namely by ensuring that countries keep up the momentum in dismantling barriers to trade in trade talks. Currently, two thirds of the WTO’s members are developing countries, which enables transition economies and least developed countries (LDCs) to use open trade to advance their development efforts.

THE TRADE DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM

One of the WTO’s most important achievements has been to consolidate its Dispute Settlement Body, which has the power to rule on trade disputes and to enforce its decisions. This dispute settlement mechanism works on the basis of predefined rules

[1]GATT Agreement (1947), introductory paragraph.



enabling WTO members, regardless of their political weight or economic clout, to lodge complaints over alleged breaches of WTO rules and to seek reparation. This mechanism has led to a reduction in unilateral defence measures, to which countries previously resorted and which often provoked retaliation by the countries targeted, at times leading to fully fledged trade wars.

So far, the WTO dispute settlement system has served to guarantee that stronger members do not prevail over weaker ones and has provided clear rules on retaliatory measures. However, the Appellate Body is now effectively defunct as its members have reached the end of their mandates and vacant positions have not been filled. To overcome this situation, the EU and its Member States, together with 25 other WTO members, has started an initiative for an alternative mechanism called the multi-party interim appeal arrangement (MPIA), consisting of 10 arbitrators who will hear appeals of WTO panel reports under the MPIA.

Since the creation of the WTO, the EU has been one of the biggest users of its dispute settlement system. Between 1995 and 2022, the Union has been involved in 203 dispute settlement cases, 110 as complainant and 93 as defendant^[2]. In 216 other cases, it has requested third-party status, which allows WTO members to monitor disputes involving other parties. The EU, which is represented by the European Commission, has also often sought to improve and clarify WTO agreements by requesting rulings from its panels and its Appellate Body.

The European Parliament closely monitors the evolution of disputes involving the EU. Parliament's Committee on International Trade presents its views on trade disputes through reports, public hearings, and oral questions to the Commission and the Council.

THE DOHA ROUND AND BEYOND

Since 2001, the WTO's members have been engaged in a broad round of multilateral trade negotiations known as the Doha Round, or Doha Development Agenda (DDA), the main goal of which is to place development at the heart of the world trade system. The Doha talks seek to give developing countries an increasing role and to strengthen their capacity to benefit from international trade and help them combat poverty.

The DDA was based at the outset on the principle of a 'single undertaking'^[3], and is still open.

However, the talks have stalled over major issues, mainly related to market access. The most significant differences are between the positions of major emerging countries and those of industrialised countries or blocs concerning the way the international trading system should be reshaped.

The EU supported the launch of a broad and ambitious round. It saw this as the best way to deliver economic growth and development gains for all participants and to allow for the necessary trade-offs. Yet, despite the considerable efforts of a number of participants (notably the EU), the successful conclusion of the negotiations as a whole does not seem to be within reach. At the 11th Ministerial Conference in December 2017, like-minded groups of WTO members issued joint statements on advancing discussions on e-commerce, on developing a multilateral framework on investment facilitation, on launching a working group on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)

[2] Figures as of 1 October 2023. [WTO website](https://www.wto.org/).

[3] The 'single undertaking' principle essentially means that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'.



and on advancing ongoing talks on domestic regulation of trade in services. These plurilateral negotiations of the [joint statement initiative](#) are open to all WTO members.

On 17 June 2022, the 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO reached a historic agreement on ending unsustainable fisheries subsidies, after over 20 years of negotiations. This is the first ever multilateral agreement focused on sustainability and the first new WTO agreement since 2013. The agreement is a crucial step in ensuring that fisheries subsidies pursue sustainability as their core objective and avoid harming oceans and fish stocks, as these are indispensable for the livelihoods of coastal communities around the world.

In addition, specific next steps towards a reform of the WTO were agreed, including restoring a fully functioning dispute settlement role for the organisation. A [ministerial declaration on the WTO response to the pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics](#) was also adopted, together with a waiver of certain intellectual property obligations in relation to COVID-19 vaccines. In a joint response to the current dramatic food situation resulting from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, WTO members agreed to exercise restraint on export restrictions and to exempt World Food Programme humanitarian purchases from such restrictions. Finally, an agreement was reached to extend the moratorium on customs duties on e-commerce until the next WTO Ministerial Conference.

Following the EU's initiative, most members reiterated their solidarity with Ukraine. The EU also fostered further cooperation on addressing climate change. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, co-organised by the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, regularly offers an opportunity for constructive participation (see below for more information on this conference). On several occasions, Parliament has called for negotiations to resume, emphasising the importance of the Doha Round for world trade and economic development.

Parliament has also been closely associated with negotiations for more limited agreements, such as the ongoing negotiations on e-commerce. It attends the WTO Ministerial Conferences, as part of the EU Delegation. Parliament continues to follow developments in the WTO, notably the preparation for the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC 13) to be held on 26-29 February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

THE EU AND THE WTO

So far, the EU has played a central role in developing the international trading system since World War II. Currently, the EU is exploring the possibility of modernising the WTO^[4].

Like the GATT (and later the WTO), the EU was itself originally designed to remove customs barriers and promote trade between its Member States. The EU single market was partly inspired by GATT principles and practices. The Union has always been among the main promoters of effective international trade based on the rule of law. Such a system helps ensure that its businesses enjoy fair market access abroad, and thus supports economic growth, both domestically and in third countries, particularly less developed ones.

[4] Press release on the [European Commission's comprehensive approach for the modernisation of the WTO](#).



The EU's common commercial policy is one of the areas in which the Union as such has full and exclusive competency. In other words, the EU operates as a single actor at the WTO and is represented by the Commission rather than by the Member States. The Commission negotiates trade agreements and defends the EU's interests before the WTO Dispute Settlement Body on behalf of all 27 Member States. The Commission regularly consults and reports to the Council and Parliament on the content and strategy for the multilateral discussions. Under the Lisbon Treaty, the Council and Parliament are co-legislators with an equal say on international trade matters.

Through the WTO, the EU has also sought to promote a multilateral framework for trade negotiations, intended to complement bilateral negotiations. However, the stalemate in the Doha Round and the fact that other trading partners have turned to bilateral agreements have compelled the EU to partly reconsider its long-standing strategy and return to regional and bilateral negotiations.

The current impasses at the WTO are also a sign that the international trading system has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. The system has evolved, with new actors – essentially transition and developing countries – playing a central role. The liberalisation of the international trading system has benefited some developing countries, which have experienced an unprecedented phase of sustained economic growth. The EU is well aware of these new dynamics. It has pointed to the need to move beyond the negotiation approach of the past years and try innovative approaches to address the increased importance of regulatory issues, as compared to tariffs. [In February 2023, the EU proposed three key areas for focused deliberation](#)^[5] at MC 13, namely trade policy and state intervention to support industries, trade and global environmental challenges, and trade and inclusiveness.

THE PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON THE WTO

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO is jointly organised by the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and is intended to strengthen democracy internationally by bringing a parliamentary dimension to multilateral trade cooperation.

The first formal meeting of parliamentarians at the WTO dates back to the December 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference held in Seattle. In 2001, Parliament and the IPU agreed to pool their efforts and sponsor a parliamentary meeting during the WTO Conference in Doha. This meeting laid the foundations of what has become the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO.

This conference provides a forum in which parliamentarians from all over the world exchange opinions, information and experiences on international trade issues. Participants monitor WTO activities; promote the effectiveness and fairness of the WTO; advocate transparency in WTO procedures; work to improve the dialogue between governments, parliaments and civil society; influence the direction of discussions within the WTO; and build up national parliaments' capacity in international trade matters.

[5] See also European Commission: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-calls-wto-address-current-policy-challenges-through-focused-deliberation-2023-02-22_en#:~:text=A%20fully%20functioning%20WTO%20dispute,ambitious%20outcomes%20in%20ongoing%20work.



The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO meets during WTO Ministerial Conferences. However, as a result of the pandemic, it was not possible to meet in the limited framework of the 12th Ministerial Conference, but it will hopefully be possible at the upcoming MC 13.

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10/2023



5.2.3. TRADE REGIMES APPLICABLE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The EU's development policy stresses the importance of trade, and focuses on the countries most in need. The Generalised Scheme of Preferences gives some goods from developing countries preferential access to the EU market. Economic Partnership Agreements ensure preferential commercial treatment for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, while the Everything But Arms scheme applies to least developed countries. These schemes are in line with World Trade Organization rules.

LEGAL BASIS

The legal basis for the common commercial policy (CCP) is Article 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Article 188(2) of the TFEU stipulates that the ordinary legislative procedure, requiring Parliament's approval, applies to the implementation of the CCP.

Under Article 218 of the TFEU, Parliament's consent is required for the conclusion of international trade agreements such as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

EU TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

The 2012 Commission communication entitled 'Trade, growth and development: Tailoring trade and investment policy for those countries most in need'^[1] marked a significant change in the EU's 'trade and development' paradigm. Although it still put trade at the centre of development strategies, it stressed the growing need to differentiate between developing countries in order to focus on those most in need. It set out to enhance synergies between trade and development policies, such as the EU principle of policy coherence for development and the 2011 Agenda for Change communication^[2], in addition to restating the importance of respecting EU core values such as human rights.

At the multilateral level, the EU supports the World Trade Organization (WTO) Development Agenda launched in Doha in 2001. In October 2015, it ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement concluded at the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali, which is particularly important for developing and landlocked countries. At the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, the EU – together with a few other WTO members – was active in promoting other issues of interest for developing countries. However, the results from the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires (2017) and the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva (2022) did not strengthen existing special and differential treatment provisions by making them more precise, effective or operational or by creating a more balanced rules-based system.

The [Aid for Trade](#) initiative, launched at the December 2005 WTO Ministerial Conference, acts as a complement to the Doha Development Agenda and provides assistance for the building of trade capacities in order to create growth and fight poverty.

[1] [COM\(2012\)0022](#).

[2] 'Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change' ([COM\(2011\)0637](#)).



In 2007, the EU adopted a dedicated [strategy on aid for trade](#), which has been updated to comply with the [UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the [European Consensus on Development](#) and the [EU Global Strategy](#). In July 2017, the Commission issued a [report](#), which was followed by a new [communication](#) in November 2017. On 11 December 2017, the Council adopted conclusions on the communication, and Parliament organised a [hearing](#) in August 2017. The 2022 EU Aid for Trade progress report confirms the EU and its Member States as the world's leading Aid for Trade providers, having contributed EUR 23 billion in 2020, a growing figure compared to EUR 17.9 billion in 2019, benefiting about 140 countries and territories eligible for official development assistance. This represents about 38% of the global Aid for Trade funds and a 44% increase compared to 2018.

THE GENERALISED SCHEME OF PREFERENCES

The purpose of the [Generalised Scheme of Preferences](#) (GSP) is to facilitate access for developing countries and territories to the EU market by reducing tariffs on their goods. Originally, the EU granted unilateral tariff preferences to generate additional export revenue for developing countries so it could be reinvested in their own sustainable development. Under the 2012 reform^[3], the GSP scheme was more targeted towards those countries that are most in need – the least developed countries (LDCs) – while retaining the scheme's [three components](#). The first of them is the standard GSP: an autonomous trade arrangement whereby the EU offers certain foreign goods non-reciprocal preferential access to the EU market in the form of reduced or zero tariffs. The second element, GSP+, is a specific incentive arrangement offering tariff reductions to vulnerable countries that have ratified and implemented international conventions relating to human and labour rights, the environment and good governance. The third component is the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, which guarantees duty-free and quota-free access to the EU for all products except arms and ammunition for 48 LDCs.

The eligibility criteria for the standard GSP – which offers a reduction in duties for approximately 66% of all tariff lines – were tightened to include only the most vulnerable countries with low and lower-middle incomes. As a result, the group of beneficiaries was substantially reduced from 176 to 23 during the 2016-2017 period, and comprised only 15 in 2020, while countries classified by the World Bank as high-income or upper-middle-income countries were progressively taken out of the scheme.

GSP+, the special arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, still provides for zero duties on approximately 66% of all tariff lines designated under the standard GSP for developing countries considered to be vulnerable. However, it has been made conditional on the ratification and implementation of 27 international conventions relevant to sustainable development, including basic human rights conventions, labour rights conventions, certain conventions relating to environmental protection and conventions relating to the fight against illegal drug production and trafficking. Failure to comply with these requirements results in suspension of the tariff concession. The list of beneficiaries covers eight countries. These two GSP schemes were originally set to expire in December 2023, but have been extended until December 2027, as a new GSP regulation is currently under discussion between Parliament and the Council. The new regulation should continue to pursue the same

^[3]Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 732/2008, OJ L 303, 31.10.2012, p. 1.



policy of fostering the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of beneficiary countries, including respect for good governance and human rights, with the primary goal of eradicating poverty.

The EBA initiative grants duty-free and quota-free access for an unlimited period for all products, except arms and ammunition, imported from 48 LDCs. Of these, 34 are African countries, 8 are Asian countries, 5 are Pacific countries and 1 is in the Caribbean (Haiti). All the countries that have signed and ratified free trade agreements (FTAs) with the EU will automatically cease to enjoy preferential treatment, irrespective of their level of development.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

EPAs became the principal instruments for promoting trade between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions under the Cotonou Agreement of 2000. They are the building blocks of EU-ACP trade relations, one of the three pillars of the Cotonou Agreement, and are designed to be WTO-compatible. They are progressively replacing the EU's unilateral preferential trade regime.

Starting in 2002, negotiations on EPAs were expected to be concluded by 2008. As the negotiation process took much longer than anticipated, the EU adopted a market access regulation to ensure temporary market access arrangements until 2014, which was subsequently extended for two more years – pending the conclusion, signing and ratification of EPAs. The process has not delivered the intended regional dimension as on the expiry date of the market access regulation (1 October 2016, only two full regions had signed an EPA – neither of which have yet been ratified – and only one regional EPA was in force). As of 28 July 2016, the market access regulation was repealed and replaced by Regulation (EU) 2016/1076 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2016^[4]. EPAs are likely to remain even though the Cotonou Agreement expired in December 2020, and will continue to play a central role in the post-Cotonou partnership, especially since a draft agreement was approved by the Council on 20 July 2023 and is currently being reviewed by the European Parliament.

STATE OF PLAY

The first regional EPA was the [Caribbean Forum](#) (Cariforum) EPA, signed in October 2008, and approved by Parliament on 25 March 2009. It is currently in force provisionally, with the EPA joint institutions meeting regularly since 2010, and was first reviewed in 2015. Both sides are setting up a joint monitoring system to measure the implementation and impact of the EPA. Negotiations on the agreement to protect particular geographical indications are ongoing, as is an *ex post* evaluation study concerning the first 10 years of implementation.

[West Africa](#): the negotiations on a regional EPA between the EU and 16 West African countries were concluded in February 2014. All EU Member States and 15 West African countries, except for Nigeria, have signed the EPA. On 9 August 2017, Mauritania and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) signed an Association Agreement to define the country's participation in ECOWAS's trade policy, including

^[4]Regulation (EU) 2016/1076 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2016 applying the arrangements for products originating in certain states which are part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States provided for in agreements establishing, or leading to the establishment of, economic partnership agreements, OJ L 185, 8.7.2016 p.1.



the EPA. Meanwhile, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana signed bilateral 'interim' EPAs on 26 November 2008 and 28 July 2016 respectively. On 1 December 2016, Parliament gave its consent and both interim agreements have since been provisionally applied. Ghana and the EU endorsed the full market access offer and schedule proposed by Ghana. Ghana started to liberalise its market for EU products in 2020, a process due to be concluded by 2029. The parties also agreed on the final version of the Protocol on Rules of Origin.

Central Africa: Cameroon was the only country in Central Africa to sign the EPA with the EU and did so on 15 January 2009. Parliament gave its consent in June 2013. In July 2014, the Parliament of Cameroon ratified the agreement, which entered into provisional application on 4 August 2014. In the meantime, contacts are ongoing between the region and the EU on the accession of other Central African countries, but no regional EPA has yet been signed.

Eastern and Southern Africa: in 2009, four countries in the region (Mauritius, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and Madagascar) signed an EPA which has been provisionally applied since 14 May 2012. Parliament gave its consent on 17 January 2013. The agreement is open to other countries and the Comoros signed it in July 2017. Its provisional application started on 7 February 2019. Negotiations to extend the scope of the EPA, including all trade-related issues, such as the link between trade and sustainable development, and to establish consultative bodies for civil society and parliaments are ongoing, with the latest negotiation round taking place in July 2023.

East African Community: on 16 October 2014, the negotiations for the regional EPA were successfully concluded. On 1 September 2016, Kenya and Rwanda signed the EPA along with the EU Member States and the EU. Kenya has ratified the agreement, and in September 2023 the Commission submitted an interim EPA for the Council's approval. Uganda and Burundi are actively considering signing the EPA. Unfortunately, on 11 November 2016, Tanzanian members of parliament voted against ratification of the EPA.

Southern African Development Community (SADC): after 10 years of negotiations, the EPA negotiations were successfully concluded in July 2014. The agreement was signed in June 2016 by the EU and the SADC EPA group, which consists of 6 of the 15 members of the SADC (Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Eswatini and South Africa), and entered into force provisionally in October 2016 after Parliament gave its consent in September 2016. Mozambique ratified the agreement in April 2017, and it has now been provisionally applied since 4 February 2018. South Africa officially withdrew from the SADC Protocol in 2019. Angola has observer status and started negotiations on a sustainable investment facilitation agreement in 2021, and the Commission sent its proposals to the Council in June 2023.

Pacific: the EPA was signed by the EU and Papua New Guinea (PNG) in July 2009, and by Fiji in December 2009. Parliament gave its consent in January 2011. The Parliament of PNG ratified the EPA in May 2011, and in July 2014, Fiji decided to start provisionally applying the EPA. In July 2018, Tonga expressed its intention of acceding to the EPA. More recently, Samoa completed the process of accession to the EPA in December 2018, as did the Solomon Islands in May 2020.

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10/2023



5.3. DEVELOPMENT POLICY



5.3.1. A GENERAL SURVEY OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Development policy lies at the heart of the European Union's external policies. It aims to reduce and ultimately eradicate poverty and it is central to the EU's response to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda). Its objectives include fostering sustainable growth, defending human rights and democracy, achieving gender equality, promoting peace and inclusive societies and tackling environmental and climate challenges. The EU works on a global scale and is the world's largest donor of development assistance. Cooperation with EU Member States and alignment with the 2030 Agenda facilitate the efficient delivery of aid.

LEGAL BASIS

- Article 21(1) of the [Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU): Overall mandate and guiding principles in the field of EU development cooperation;
- Articles 4(4) and 208 to 211 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU);
- Articles 312 to 316 of the TFEU: Budgetary matters;
- The [Cotonou Agreement](#) (for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states^[1]), which remains valid until the entry into force of its successor agreement – [the EU/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Partnership Agreement](#), which is awaiting ratification.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The European Union supports developing countries by promoting sustainable development and stability. The long-term objective is to eradicate poverty, a goal that has been central to the EU's external policies since the establishment of the European Development Fund (EDF) under the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The EDF was set up to support a special relationship with former colonies in the ACP regions. Since 1 January 2021, EU development assistance has been delivered through the broad Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, [NDICI-Global Europe](#) (see details below). The instrument merged several former EU external financing instruments, including the EDF.

The EU and its Member States taken together are the [world's leading aid donor](#), providing EUR 70.2 billion in official development assistance in 2021. Development cooperation is a shared competence of the EU: it is able to carry out a common development policy, provided it does not prevent Member States from exercising their own competences in the matter. The level of cooperation is such that Member States' development agencies often implement EU-funded programmes.

The EU committed to policy coherence for development (PCD) in 2005, meaning that it must mainstream development goals into all of its policies that affect developing countries. In 2009, this commitment was grouped into five areas: (1) trade and finance;

[1]The group changed its name to the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States in April 2020.



(2) addressing climate change; (3) ensuring global food security; (4) making migration work for development; and (5) strengthening the links and synergies between security and development in the context of a global peacebuilding agenda. A previously biennial, now less frequent, European Commission (Commission) [report](#) tracks the EU's progress in the area of PCD; the most recent was published in January 2019. The European Parliament's Committee on Development has had a standing rapporteur for PCD since 2010. This role is currently carried out by Janina Ochojska (European People's Party, Poland). In March 2023, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on PCD that calls on the Commission, the European External Action Service and the Member States to increase their efforts on PCD. Stressing that PCD needs to remain a key part of the EU's external relations, Parliament asked the Commission to clarify the application of PCD in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Development aid is a limited resource. For this reason, the EU is committed to aid effectiveness, and promotes close relationships with partner countries in the programming and implementation of development actions. The EU's 2007 'Code of Conduct on the Division of Labour in Development Policy' and the 2011 'Operational Framework on Aid Effectiveness' were both adopted with this in mind. These efforts are consistent with international actions responding to the OECD's 2005 Paris Declaration, which promotes five key concepts for development aid: ownership of development strategies by developing countries, alignment of donor countries with locally defined strategies, harmonisation of international development aid, monitoring of results and mutual accountability of donors and partners for development results. The international framework for aid effectiveness has undergone revisions through the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2011). After the adoption of the UN SDGs, further commitments were made in the Nairobi Outcome Document (2016).

A. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The EU actively participated in drawing up the 2030 [Agenda](#), which establishes a new global paradigm to help eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, and includes the principles of 'leaving no one behind' and 'address[ing] the needs of those furthest behind first'. Approved in New York in September 2015, it follows on from the Millennium Development Goals with a new set of 17 SDGs, focused on economic, social, environmental and governance objectives to be achieved by 2030. The EU and its Member States presented a [joint synthesis report](#) to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development for the first time in 2019. The document focuses on the EU's actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda and will be issued every four years. In July 2023, the EU presented its first [voluntary review](#) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at this year's UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

B. New European Consensus on Development and the EU Agenda for Change

Following the approval of the 2030 Agenda, the EU agreed on a revised version of the 2005 [European Consensus on Development](#). The new consensus sets out the main principles of the SDGs and an approach that will guide the EU and its Member States' pursuit of them in relation to developing countries. While mainly focusing on development policy, the consensus also touches on action through other policies while applying the PCD principle. Eradicating poverty remains the primary objective of EU development policy. The consensus was signed on 7 June 2017 by the President of the European Parliament, the Prime Minister of Malta on behalf of the Council of the



EU and the Member States, the President of the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Parliament has been critical of the EU's efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030, particularly given that the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other crises have undone some of the progress made since 2015. Parliament has repeatedly called on the Commission to increase its efforts to achieve the SDGs, most recently in a 2023 [resolution](#).

The Commission [communication](#) of 2016 entitled 'Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability' integrates the SDGs into the EU's policy framework and current EU priorities. Looking beyond its borders, the EU has recommitted to the target of spending 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI) on development aid, now by 2030 and with a component for least-developed countries of 0.15-0.20 % of GNI. This reflects the commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development (which was agreed at a UN conference in 2015), and is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda. In 2021, collective EU official development assistance (from the EU and from EU Member States) stood at 0.49% of the EU's GNI.

C. Legislative and financial framework

The EU's financing approach to external action (see the table below) has changed as a result of the creation of NDICI-Global Europe. Following the Commission's proposal for a regulation establishing this instrument of 14 June 2018 and three years of subsequent negotiations with the Council and Parliament, the [regulation](#) entered into force on 14 June 2021. It applies retroactively from 1 January 2021.

A major innovation, NDICI-Global Europe is currently the main financial instrument for the EU's external action, with an overall allocation of EUR 79.5 billion for 2021-2027. The instrument simplifies the EU's external funding architecture (merging predecessor programmes including the Development Cooperation Instrument, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, the Partnership Instrument, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the European Fund for Sustainable Development and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace). It covers cooperation with all non-EU countries, with the exception of countries linked to EU pre-accession, overseas territories, and territories falling under geographic programmes.

NDICI-Global Europe is organised around three key pillars:

- a. Geographic, consisting of programmes for countries in the (eastern and southern) European neighbourhood, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Americas and the Caribbean. These programmes focus on areas of cooperation such as good governance, poverty eradication, migration, environment and climate change, growth and employment or security and peace, among other cross-cutting issues. Most of the NDICI-Global Europe funds go to this pillar;
- b. Thematic, consisting of programmes with worldwide coverage on human rights and democracy, civil society organisations, stability and peace, and global challenges;
- c. Rapid response, allowing the financing of quick capacity for crisis management, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Such actions aim, for instance, to link humanitarian and development efforts, increase the resilience of crisis-affected countries or address foreign policy priorities.



Also designed as a flexible instrument, NDICI-Global Europe includes an additional ‘cushion’ for funding emerging challenges and priorities (for example responses to unforeseen circumstances, migratory pressures, crisis/post-crisis situations or new EU/international initiatives).

D. Breakdown of NDICI-Global Europe expenditure

NDICI-Global Europe channels the biggest share of the EU’s external action funds, with an overall budget of EUR 79.5 billion (for the period 2021-2027). Geographic programmes get roughly 75% of the funds and thematic programmes 8%. In addition, 12% is reserved for the emerging challenges and priorities ‘cushion’ and 4% for ‘rapid response actions’. The remainder, about 2%, is for support expenditure.

More details can be found in the [draft budget](#) for 2023.

The financial allocations for NDICI-Global Europe’s three-pillar structure are the following. Figures are given in millions.

Geographic programmes	9 343.6
Thematic programmes	1 019.4
Rapid response actions	484.4
Emerging challenges and priorities cushion	1 538.3

NDICI-Global Europe also supports large-scale projects financed under Team Europe initiatives, which pull together financial contributions from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Launched on 8 April 2020, Team Europe assistance has helped EU partner countries to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

NDICI-Global Europe is also a central element of the EU’s new [Global Gateway](#) strategy, a key project that seeks to mobilise up to EUR 300 billion in investment for sustainable digital, energy and transport infrastructure around the world. Global Gateway is intended as both the EU’s contribution to narrowing the global investment gap and the EU’s answer to the geopolitical challenge posed by China’s global investment strategy. Investments made through Global Gateway are used to fund sustainable infrastructure to fight climate change, protect the environment and foster sustainable development around the world. A key example is the [EU-Africa Global Gateway investment package](#), which promises to mobilise EUR 150 billion in investments in Africa by 2030. These investments aim to accelerate the green and digital transitions, create sustainable growth, strengthen national health systems and improve education and training in African countries. NDICI-Global Europe will contribute to the strategy through its funds and guarantee capacities.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

- Legal framework: Article 209 TFEU states that Parliament and the Council, ‘acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall adopt the measures necessary for the implementation of development cooperation policy’.
- Parliamentary scrutiny over policy implementation: Parliament has the right to question the Commission and to object to implementing decisions whenever it finds that the Commission is exceeding its powers. Parliament also seeks to have an influence by regularly discussing policies with the Commission, in both formal and



informal settings. Under NDICI-Global Europe, Parliament engages twice per year in a geopolitical dialogue with the Commission.

- Budgetary authority: Parliament and the Council are the joint budgetary authority of the EU. For the EU's seven-year multiannual financial framework, the Council retains the primary power of decision, but Parliament's consent is required for its adoption (Article 312 TFEU). For the annual budget, Article 314 TFEU lays down a procedure that includes one reading each by Parliament and the Council. Once these readings are concluded, Parliament can approve or reject the budget. In the field of international cooperation, [Parliament's Committee on Development](#) follows budgetary deliberations and makes concrete suggestions concerning the budget lines falling within its remit.

Malte Frederik Hergaden
10/2023



5.3.2. HUMANITARIAN AID

Humanitarian aid is an area of EU external action that responds to needs in the event of man-made or natural disasters. The Commission's [Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations](#) funds relief operations and coordinates Member States' policies and activities. Parliament and the Council act as co-legislators in shaping the EU's humanitarian aid policy and take part in the global debate on more effective humanitarian action.

LEGAL BASIS

Article 21 of the [Treaty on European Union](#) (TEU) sets out the principles for all EU external action (Article 21(2)(g) covers humanitarian action).

Article 214 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU) is the legal basis for humanitarian aid.

Article 214(5) TFEU is the legal basis for the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

REGULATORY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The rules for the provision of humanitarian aid, including its financing instruments, are set out in [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1257/96](#) of 20 June 1996 (the Humanitarian Aid Regulation). This regulation was not amended when other instruments were overhauled in preparation for the 2007-2013 multiannual financial framework.

The overall policy framework for humanitarian assistance is outlined in the [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#) (2007), signed by the three main EU institutions (the Commission, the Council and Parliament). The Consensus defines the EU's common vision, policy objectives and principles on a number of topics, including international humanitarian cooperation, good donorship, risk reduction and preparedness, civil protection, and civil-military relations. The Consensus also reconfirms the four humanitarian aid principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The text provides for a more coordinated and coherent approach to aid delivery, linking humanitarian and development aid in order to enable the EU to respond more effectively to growing needs.

The 2019 [decision on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) governs EU action in this area. It modifies a 2013 decision that dealt with prevention, preparedness, response and financial provisions. [Council Regulation \(EU\) 2016/369](#) of 15 March 2016 on the provision of emergency support within the Union establishes the circumstances under which Member States may apply for EU support. It sets out the eligible actions and types of financial intervention.

The 2021 Commission communication entitled '[the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles](#)' (COM(2021)0110) aims to strengthen the EU's global humanitarian impact in order to meet the increasing demand for humanitarian aid, a problem that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



COMMISSION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS (ECHO)

A. Overview and impact

Under the multiannual-financial framework, EUR 11.6 billion were allocated to the EU's humanitarian aid instrument for the period 2021-2027. As such, the EU is the world's leading humanitarian aid donor, providing a major proportion of global funding for emergency relief to victims of man-made and natural disasters. Part of this funding comes from Member States, but a significant share derives from the EU budget.

Within the Commission, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) is responsible for humanitarian assistance and civil protection. The current Commissioner for Crisis Management is Janez Lenarčič. Under him, ECHO focuses the EU's humanitarian aid on food and nutrition, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation, and education in emergency scenarios. Having grown significantly since its creation, DG ECHO now fulfils its mandate with staff in 40 field offices around the world.

Most of the EU's humanitarian aid budget is used indirectly. ECHO does not implement humanitarian assistance programmes itself. Rather, it funds operations implemented by its [partners](#) – namely non-governmental organisations (NGOs), UN agencies and international organisations such as the International Red Cross/Red Crescent. ECHO's main tasks are to provide funds, verify that finances are managed soundly and ensure that its partners' goods and services reach the affected populations effectively and rapidly in order to respond to real needs.

Following the onset of a natural disaster or other event requiring humanitarian assistance, ECHO's humanitarian aid experts carry out an initial assessment of the situation on the ground. Funds are then rapidly disbursed on the basis of this assessment - this is the 'needs-based approach' that defines ECHO's work. Aid is channelled through more than 200 partners with which ECHO has signed *ex ante* contractual agreements. ECHO's structure ensures that funds are used transparently and that partners remain accountable. While in general, the EU's humanitarian aid will continue to be delivered by the EU's humanitarian partners, the Civil Protection Mechanism and the European Humanitarian Response Capacity allow ECHO to offer limited direct aid to countries in need after disasters when traditional humanitarian delivery mechanisms via EU partners or their capacities may be insufficient or ineffective.

For 2023, ECHO can commit EUR 1.7 billion, a sum that reflects the Commission's continuing commitment to respond to exceptionally high global needs, caused chiefly by several protracted conflicts, the impact of climate change, environmental degradation, global population growth or failed governance. In recent years, the initial humanitarian budget of the EU has regularly increased through additional transfers, with money coming primarily from the EU Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve (SEAR) and redeployment from other budget lines, as well as the European Development Fund.

In its 2021 communication, the Commission warned of a widening gap between the increasing level of humanitarian needs and the financial resources available globally (for instance, in December 2022, the UN estimated that only 47% of the estimated EUR 48 billion needed to finance its humanitarian assistance for 2023 were met). The



Commission also highlighted that humanitarian appeals have reached an all-time high, with 235 million people in need in 2021. There is also a limited donor base, and in 2020, the top 10 donors globally accounted for 83% of reported funding.

B. Policy priorities and the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic

ECHO is working to improve its response to emergencies and provides non-EU countries with assistance to strengthen their own capacities to respond to crises and contribute to long-term development. Coordinating humanitarian and development aid and breaking the vicious cycle of climate change, hunger and poverty are key objectives for the EU.

[Disaster preparedness](#) activities are also part of ECHO's emphasis on resilience. The EU is a significant actor in shaping the international community's disaster risk management efforts. The EU supports the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and issued its Sendai Action Plan for disaster risk reduction in 2016. It streamlines a disaster risk-informed approach to policy making and proposes concrete activities pertaining to risk knowledge, risk investments, disaster preparedness and resilience. The Commission issued a communication on resilience in 2012, which was revised in 2017. It aims to define a strategic approach to resilience that can increase the impact of EU external action.

Given the large number of refugees and displaced persons in situations that often become protracted, the EU agreed in 2016 to devise a stronger development-oriented approach to forced displacement. The EU puts more emphasis on supporting the socio-economic inclusion of forcibly displaced persons and addressing the root causes of long-term displacement in the framework of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework](#) and the World Bank's engagement on [displacement](#).

The EU and the Member States played an important role at the [World Humanitarian Summit](#) held in May 2016 in Istanbul. The EU itself made 100 commitments in order to contribute to the 'Agenda for Humanity', which was presented at the summit by the UN Secretary-General, and to implement the '[Grand Bargain](#)', an innovative new deal between different humanitarian actors to increase financial efficiency and effectiveness. Modified to the 'Grand Bargain 2.0' in 2021, the deal emphasises the importance of equitable and principled partnerships with local organisations and the accountability of aid to affected people.

Gender integration and the fight against gender-based violence continue to be priorities for ECHO, which has introduced a gender marker for humanitarian aid operations. In line with the need to prioritise the most vulnerable groups, supporting children's education in emergencies is another focal area.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission has steadily increased its humanitarian response, which amounted to EUR 420 million as of October 2020. This included the mobilisation of funds for the work of the World Health Organisation; the adaptation of operations in countries such as Colombia, Nigeria and Ukraine to factor in pandemic-related needs; funds to support needs identified by the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan; and additional funds to reinforce the EU's humanitarian response in different countries.

The Committee on Development has held several meetings with Commissioner Lenarčič to scrutinise the Commission's humanitarian work in fighting the impact of the



pandemic in developing countries. In 2023, the focus of the EU has shifted towards programmes to assist with the global recovery from the economic consequences of the pandemic, a key focus of this year's High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

C. Other instruments and the EU's response to the 2022 floods in Pakistan

EU assistance includes three further structures: the [European Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#), the European Solidarity Corps and a new legal framework for providing emergency support within the Union.

- Originally created in 2001, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism now involves the EU Member States plus six other participating states: North Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye. The EU mechanism builds on a series of tools: (1) the [European Civil Protection Pool](#) provides a voluntary pool of pre-committed response assets from the participating states and a structured process to identify potential capacity gaps; (2) the [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) functions as the operational core, facilitating coordination in protection interventions 24/7; (3) the Common Emergency Communication and Information System seeks to improve emergency communication through a web-based alert and notification application and (4) a network of trained experts available at short notice. The Civil Protection Mechanism was strengthened in 2019 through the creation of [rescEU](#), a new capacities reserve that was already operational during the 2019 forest fire season. It is expected to expand its scope to other fields such as medical emergencies and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents. It will be used as a last resort mechanism, employed when a Member State has exhausted its own means and cannot be helped by other Member States, because, for example, they are facing disasters of the same nature;
- The [European Humanitarian Response Capacity](#) (EHRC) is the newest tool for humanitarian aid of the EU. The EHRC, in essence, boosts the capacity of the Civil Protection Mechanism. First proposed by the Commission in 2021 and established in 2022, the EHRC is composed of a set of operational tools for swift assistance in crises when traditional humanitarian delivery mechanisms via EU partners or their capacities may be ineffective or insufficient. The EHRC has three tools: the common logistics services, pre-positioned stockpiles of humanitarian aid supplies, and health and logistics experts. They are mobilised through the coordination of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre based on a prior evaluation and assessment of the crises. Since its inception, the EHRC has responded to more than a dozen crises.
- The European Solidarity Corps (2021 to 2027) is a new programme that creates volunteering opportunities in the field of humanitarian aid. It includes the previous [EU Aid Volunteers](#) initiative launched in March 2014 (set up as a result of Article 214(5) TFEU calling for the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps). The Commission provides funding in the form of grants to organisations, who then select young people (aged 18 to 30) for volunteering opportunities through the European Solidarity Corps portal. Strengthening the EU's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises, the European Solidarity Corps allows both young people and organisations holding grants to help address societal and humanitarian challenges in Europe and beyond. The budget for the period from 2021 to 2027 is EUR 1 billion;



- The Council adopted a regulation on emergency support within the Union on 15 March 2016 with a view to responding to the difficult humanitarian situation caused by the refugee crisis. The new regulation enables the EU to help Greece and other affected Member States to address the humanitarian needs of refugees. The regulation could also be used in future to respond to other exceptional crises or disasters with severe humanitarian consequences, such as nuclear accidents or terrorist attacks. ECHO is responsible for its implementation.

The EU's response to the 2022 floods in Pakistan serves as a good example to illustrate how some of these instruments are used in cases of acute crisis. From June to October 2022, Pakistan was affected by severe flash flooding. The EU has responded in three ways:

- a. It released emergency funds, which reached a total of EUR 30 million in October 2022. These were channelled into different humanitarian programmes, providing emergency shelter, food and clean water, emergency cash transfers and basic healthcare services in affected areas.
- b. It coordinated the incoming assistance from EU Member States through the Civil Protection Mechanism, to facilitate the more efficient delivery of aid to Pakistan.
- c. It has mobilised EUR 87 million as a contribution to international efforts to rehabilitate and reconstruct Pakistan in the long term. These funds will be used to improve agricultural chains, provide access to clean energy, and strengthen green inclusive growth in Pakistan.

Another major focus of the EU's humanitarian aid has been to provide assistance to Ukraine to address some of the hardships caused by Russia's 2022 invasion. Since February 2022, the EU has allocated more than EUR 650 million to help civilians affected by the war. These funds have been spent on meeting people's food and basic needs, offering shelter, providing health services and more. The emergency assistance to Ukraine is the largest operation coordinated by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to date.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

In the field of humanitarian aid policy, Parliament acts as co-legislator with the Council. The legal basis of the humanitarian aid policy proposed by the Commission (in the form of regulations) is negotiated with - and approved (or not) by - both the Council and Parliament, in accordance with the EU's ordinary legislative procedure. The Commission's implementation measures are also submitted to Parliament, which has oversight powers. Within Parliament, humanitarian aid falls within the remit of the [Committee on Development](#) (DEVE), and civil protection within that of the [Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety](#) (ENVI).

In addition, Parliament monitors the delivery of humanitarian aid and seeks to ensure that budgetary provisions come closer to matching global humanitarian needs. Parliament has regularly highlighted the need to increase funding for humanitarian aid and has insisted on closing the widening gap between commitments and payments, most recently in [March 2023](#).

The DEVE Committee, and Parliament in general, have also sought - through opinions and resolutions, including own-initiative reports - to influence the strategic decisions



and policy orientations of the Commission, for example on the EU's contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit, education in emergencies and the response to the Ebola outbreak. Parliament reviews the Commission's annual work programme and ECHO's operational strategy. The Commissioner for Crisis Management is regularly invited to exchange views with the DEVE Committee. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid adopted in 2007 responded in no small part to the firm positions adopted by Parliament. Parliament has also been an active advocate of other policy issues, such as resilience, food security and linking humanitarian and development assistance.

To strengthen Parliament's oversight of humanitarian aid, the DEVE committee has appointed a standing rapporteur for humanitarian aid every two and a half years since 2006. The current rapporteur is Carlos Zorrinho (S&D, Portugal). His mandate includes defending humanitarian aid budget interests, monitoring humanitarian aid programmes and maintaining close contacts with the humanitarian aid community.

Malte Frederik Hergaden
04/2023



5.4. HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY



5.4.1. HUMAN RIGHTS

The European Union is committed to supporting democracy and human rights in its external relations, in accordance with its founding principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The EU seeks to mainstream human rights concerns into all its policies and programmes, and has different human rights policy instruments for specific actions — including financing specific projects through its financing instruments.

LEGAL BASIS

- Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU): EU values. The EU's founding values are 'human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities';
- Article 3 of the TEU: EU objectives. In 'its relations with the wider world', the EU contributes to the 'eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter';
- Article 6 of the TEU: the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Although the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 6(1)) only explicitly refers to the implementation of Union law, the EU's institutions and bodies and its Member States must also respect the Charter in the EU's external relations. Countries joining the EU must also comply with the Charter. Article 6(2) requires the EU to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights ([4.1.2](#));
- Article 21 of the TEU: principles inspiring the Union's external action. These principles are democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter of 1945 and international law. In Article 21, the EU endorses the principle of the 'indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms', committing itself to considering economic and social rights to be as important as civil and political rights;
- Article 205 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU): general provisions on the Union's external action. This article determines that the EU's international actions are to be guided by the principles laid down in Article 21 of the TEU.

EU HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY

In 2012, the Council adopted a [Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy](#), accompanied by an action plan to implement the framework. The framework defines the principles, objectives and priorities for improving the effectiveness and consistency of EU policy over the next 10 years. These principles include mainstreaming human rights into all EU policies (as a 'silver thread'), including when internal and external policies overlap, and adopting a more tailored approach. Following a proposal from the



European Commission and the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), in November 2020 the Council adopted the third [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#). It sets out the EU's ambitions and priorities for the period 2020-2024, structured around five main areas of action:

- Protecting and empowering individuals;
- Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies;
- Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy;
- New technologies: harnessing opportunities and addressing challenges;
- Delivering by working together.

The Council has adopted a series of thematic [guidelines on human rights](#). They provide practical instructions for EU representations around the world on:

- Action against the death penalty
- Dialogues on human rights
- The rights of the child
- Action against torture and other cruel treatment
- Protecting children in armed conflicts
- Protecting human rights defenders
- Complying with international humanitarian law
- Combating violence against women and girls
- Promoting freedom of religion and belief
- Protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people
- Promoting freedom of expression both online and offline
- Non-discrimination in external action
- Safe drinking water and sanitation.

The EU's human rights and democracy country strategies follow a bottom-up approach aimed at integrating EU human rights guidelines and priorities into a single, coherent policy document. They are adapted to each country and establish goals for a period of three years.

The EU regularly includes human rights in political dialogues with third countries or regional organisations. It also holds dialogues and consultations specifically dedicated to human rights with some 60 countries.

Bilateral trade agreements and the various association and cooperation agreements between the EU and third countries or regional organisations include a human rights clause defining respect for human rights as an 'essential element'. This clause serves as an access point for engagement and dialogue, but also as a basis for imposing appropriate measures, such as reducing or suspending cooperation, in the event of grave violations of human rights and democratic principles. Incentives for ratifying and implementing human rights and labour rights conventions are provided for in the preferential EU trade schemes for developing countries ([5.2.3](#)).



A strong conditionality mechanism has been established for enlargement countries (5.5.1). Before joining the EU these countries have to develop stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and the protection of minorities, a process actively supported by the EU. The European Neighbourhood Policy (5.5.5) is also based on common values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The EU supports partner countries in implementing reforms and applies a 'more-for-more' approach (more integration and money to reward progress).

EU election observation missions also aim to improve human rights by discouraging intimidation and violence during elections and strengthening democratic institutions.

The EU promotes human rights through its participation in multilateral forums such as the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, the UN Human Rights Council, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. The EU also actively promotes international justice, for example through the International Criminal Court.

With a budget of EUR 1.511 billion allocated for the period 2021-2027, the thematic programme on human rights and democracy under the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe](#) mainly supports and protects civil society actors that promote human rights and democracy. An important feature of this instrument is that the consent of the government of the partner country is not necessary. In addition, the EU has committed to progressively integrating a rights-based approach into all its development programmes, based on a toolbox developed by the Commission in 2014, and [updated in 2021](#).

In December 2020, the Council adopted a [regulation](#) establishing a global human rights sanction regime. It allows the EU to target individuals, entities and bodies – including state and non-state actors – responsible for, involved in or associated with serious human rights violations and abuses worldwide. As of October 2023, the Council has imposed [restrictive measures](#) (asset freezes and, where relevant, travel bans) on 67 individuals and 20 entities.

In light of increasing evidence and awareness of human rights violations occurring in global value chains, in February 2022 the Commission presented a [proposal](#) for a directive on corporate sustainability due diligence. This directive would legally require companies to identify and, where necessary, prevent, end or mitigate adverse impacts of their activities on human rights and the environment. In June 2023, Parliament adopted amendments to the Commission's proposal in plenary, while inter-institutional negotiations are ongoing.

On 14 September 2022, the Commission published a complementary [proposal](#) for a regulation which would provide for a marketing ban on the EU market for goods made using forced labour. Parliament-led committees adopted their position on [16 October 2023](#).

An [annual report on human rights and democracy in the world](#), prepared by the VP/HR and adopted by the Council, provides an overview of the human rights situation in the world, as well as of the EU's actions during the year.



ACTORS

The European Council defines the EU's strategic interests and the general guidelines of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) ([5.1.1](#)).

The Foreign Affairs Council generally deals with human rights issues related to the CFSP or the EU's trade or development policies. The Council's Human Rights Working Group (COHOM), which carries out preparatory work for high-level discussions and decisions on human rights issues, is composed of human rights experts from the Member States and representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission.

Every EU delegation has a human rights 'focal point'. The EU delegations have a key role in developing and implementing the human rights and democracy strategies for each country, preparing human rights dialogues, engaging with human rights defenders and civil society, and identifying priorities for EU financial assistance.

The Commission negotiates international agreements, oversees the enlargement process and neighbourhood policy, and manages development programmes and financing instruments (in close cooperation with the EEAS).

The role of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights is to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of EU human rights policy. The Special Representative has a broad, flexible mandate and works closely with the EEAS. The position is currently held by Eamon Gilmore, who took up his duties on 1 March 2019.

Parliament contributes to the development of the EU's policies and monitors the work of the other EU institutions.

Under Articles 207 and 218 of the TFEU, most international agreements need Parliament's consent to enter into force. For example, in 2011, Parliament blocked the textile protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Uzbekistan, mainly on the grounds of child labour issues. It only gave its consent in 2016 following significant improvements in the use of child and forced labour.

Article 36 of the TEU obliges the VP/HR to consult Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP, and to inform it on the evolution of those policies. Parliament may ask questions or make recommendations to the Council or the VP/HR.

Parliament's resolutions aim to raise awareness of human rights abuses, support human rights defenders and shape the EU's human rights policy through concrete policy proposals. Resolutions may be a part of the legislative process, an outcome of parliamentary committees' own-initiative reports, or the result of the [urgency debates](#) that usually take place on the Wednesday of each Strasbourg plenary session to highlight flagrant violations of human rights across the world. Parliament's annual resolution on [human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter](#) analyses the achievements of the EU's policy and the challenges facing it.

Parliament's [Subcommittee on Human Rights \(DROI\)](#), attached to the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), is responsible for issues concerning democracy, the rule of law, human rights — including the rights of minorities — in third countries and the principles of international law, and for ensuring coherence between all the EU's external policies and its human rights policy. The Subcommittee also handles the day-to-day management of human rights dossiers, while its delegations regularly visit relevant



countries and institutions. The Subcommittee monitors the follow-up to the Parliament's urgency resolutions and holds frequent exchanges with the EEAS about the EU's human rights dialogues.

Human rights issues in the EU's external relations are also dealt with by the following committees: the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on International Trade (INTA), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). Human rights are equally an essential element of the work of Parliament's standing delegations, which interact with non-EU parliaments bilaterally and in the context of parliamentary assemblies.

Thanks to its budgetary powers (under Article 14 of the TEU and Article 310(1) of the TFEU), Parliament has a say in the allocation of funds to Global Europe and other financing instruments used for the promotion of human rights. Furthermore, Parliament is co-legislator for the external financing instruments.

Every year, Parliament awards the [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) to human rights activists around the world. On 19 October 2023 Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran won the Sakharov Prize for 2023. The 2022 laureates were the brave people of Ukraine, represented by their president, elected leaders and civil society. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke via video link at the award ceremony on 14 December 2022 in Strasbourg. In 2021, the Sakharov Prize was awarded to Alexei Navalny, Russia's most prominent opposition figure, known for his fight against corruption and human rights abuses and, in 2020, it was awarded to the democratic opposition in Belarus. Previous laureates include Nelson Mandela, Malala Yousafzai and Raif Badawi. Parliament has created the Sakharov Prize Network to support Sakharov laureates, develop contacts between them and encourage joint activities.

Parliament promotes human rights as part of its broader democracy support activities, which include election observation, pre- and post-election actions, parliamentary capacity building, mediation and dialogue on promoting democracy ([5.4.2](#)).

The President of Parliament actively supports human rights through statements and letters and by discussing human rights issues when meeting important actors.

RASMA KASKINA
10/2023



5.4.2. PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND OBSERVING ELECTIONS

Supporting democracy worldwide is a priority for the European Union. Democracy remains the only system of governance in which people can fully realise their human rights, and is a determining factor for development and long-term stability. As the only directly elected EU institution, the European Parliament is particularly committed to promoting democracy.

LEGAL BASIS

- Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
- Article 205 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND POLICY TOOLS

The EU's approach to democracy complements its work on human rights (see fact sheet [5.4.1](#)). It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international and regional standards on human rights, democratic institutions and elections. Since 2015, the EU has also been basing its support for democracy on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 16 on accountable institutions and inclusive and participatory decision making, and Goal 10 on reducing inequality.

On 17 November 2009, the Council adopted conclusions on democracy support in the EU's external relations, which outlined a new strategy for supporting democracy by means of a country-specific approach, greater coherence and the involvement of all stakeholders. The Commission's 2011 Agenda for Change subsequently highlighted the importance of supporting human rights, democracy and good governance within the EU's development policy. In 2012, the EU agreed on a strategic framework on human rights and democracy and an action plan for its implementation. Following the Arab Uprisings of 2011, the EU updated its European neighbourhood policy to adopt a 'more for more' approach, with support being linked to democratic transition and 'deep democracy'. Incentives – including deeper economic integration, greater financial assistance, enhanced mobility of people and access to the EU's internal market – were offered to those countries willing to undertake political reforms.

In October 2019, the Council adopted conclusions on democracy, which reconfirm the principles of its 2009 conclusions, while identifying new challenges that the EU needs to counter urgently and comprehensively through external action. These include the undermining of democratic processes and institutions; low levels of trust in institutions and politicians; a shrinking democratic space for civil society; increased violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and manipulation using online technologies.

The EU's commitment to stepping up its efforts to promote democracy was reiterated in the [third EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#), adopted by the Council in November 2020. The plan, which defines priorities for the period 2020-2024, mainstreams democracy support across the five lines of action, one of which is entitled 'Building resilient, inclusive and democratic societies'.



The Council emphasised the role of civil society in its 2012 conclusions entitled ‘The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with civil society in external relations’. Its conclusions of 19 June 2017 on EU engagement with civil society in external relations reaffirmed the EU’s commitment to an empowered and resilient civil society as a crucial way of supporting good governance and the rule of law in any democracy.

Several elements of the EU’s policy, which developed over time, address both human rights and democratic principles. This includes country-specific strategies on human rights and democracy, which define priorities for action and objectives to be pursued by the EU in partner countries. It also includes the human rights and democracy clauses in international agreements, which allow the EU to suspend trade or cooperation if a country commits grave violations of human rights and democratic principles. Another element is a specific funding instrument for supporting civil society actors in the area of democracy and human rights (see below).

Election observation is a central EU tool for supporting democratic developments in non-EU countries, promoting human rights and the rule of law, and contributing to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The EU’s long-term election observation missions (EOMs) assess events that take place throughout the electoral process. The host country must extend an invitation before an EU EOM can be deployed. Long-term observers usually begin operating two months before the elections and follow the entire electoral process through to the announcement of the official results and the appeals procedure. Short-term observers monitor polling day and the tallying of votes. The chief observer is, as a rule, an MEP. After the mission, the EOM publishes a final report containing conclusions and recommendations, which give guidance for electoral reform and possible future assistance by the EU. In addition to election observation, the EU can provide technical and material electoral assistance to partner countries, enhancing the conditions for democratic elections, increasing the capacity of state and non-state actors, and supporting necessary reforms, taking into account the full electoral cycle.

In November 2021, the EU and its Member States launched the [Team Europe Democracy](#) (TED) initiative. To increase the impact of support for democratisation worldwide, TED consists of three pillars: research on democratic support best practices and policies; a TED Network (at global level); and providing expertise on democracy support at country level.

The EU and its Member States also engage in multilateral forums, such as the UN, the Council of Europe or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to promote and protect democracy. In December 2021, the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission participated in the US-led [Summit for Democracy](#) that sought to promote democratic renewal and to encourage leaders to respond together to the global trend of democratic backsliding. The Commission participated in several of the ‘democracy cohorts’ created to allow for engagement beyond the summit. The President of the European Commission also participated in the second Summit for Democracy, which took place on 28-30 March 2023.

FINANCING INSTRUMENTS

The EU’s main financing instruments to support democracy abroad are the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\) – Global Europe](#) and the [Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance \(IPA\) 2020-2027](#). The



IPA supports EU candidate countries and potential candidates in fulfilling the relevant membership criteria. The NDICI finances geographical programmes in the remaining countries not covered by the IPA, as well as thematic programmes with a global reach. Its general objectives include consolidating, supporting and promoting democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The thematic programme on human rights and democracy focuses on civil society organisations and democracy and human rights defenders. With a budget of EUR 1.511 billion it operates independently from the consent of the partner countries' governments. The programme also finances EU EOMs and complementary actions on elections, as well as cooperation with key international partners in the field of democracy and human rights.

In 2013, the [European Endowment for Democracy](#) was established. Operating autonomously as a private law foundation, it aims to support political and civil society actors striving for democratic change by providing tailored financial assistance in a quick, flexible and non-bureaucratic way, with a focus on the EU's eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Its governing board includes representatives of the EU Member States and institutions, including up to nine MEPs, and other experts.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament, the only EU institution elected directly by the citizens of the EU, is strongly committed to promoting sustainable democracies around the world. It has highlighted this commitment in a number of resolutions. Every year, Parliament adopts a resolution on human rights and democracy in the world and the EU's policy on the matter, analysing the main challenges and achievements of the EU's approach to democracy support, and making recommendations for the future. In November 2023, Parliament is set to adopt a [recommendation on strengthening the right to participate](#) in genuine elections.

Parliament has also developed a range of tools for engaging directly in [global democracy support](#). Parliament is continuously involved in election observation activities, working to strengthen the legitimacy of national electoral processes and to increase public confidence in the protection of elections and human rights. Each year, it sends several parliamentary delegations to observe elections or referendums in non-EU countries. Parliament may decide to send such delegations of MEPs on condition that the elections are held at national level, that the national authorities have invited the EU or the European Parliament, and that a long-term mission is present. Parliament delegations are always integrated into EU EOMs or the long-term missions of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The European Parliament is consulted on the identification and planning of EU EOMs and follow-up activities.

Guided by its comprehensive democracy support approach, Parliament links election observation to complementary activities including pre-election actions and election follow-up, human rights actions, and initiatives to support parliamentary work. Special focus is placed on the enlargement countries and the European Neighbourhood. The European Parliament assists parliaments beyond the EU's borders in strengthening their institutional capacity through conferences and seminars, joint training programmes and study visits for members and officials, as well as fellowships for staff of non-EU-country parliaments. It supports partner parliaments in mainstreaming human rights into legislation and connecting to civil society. Parliament facilitates capacity building for agents of democratic change, including human rights



defenders, and promotes media freedom and independent journalism. Parliament's [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) and the activities of the Sakharov Prize community of laureates are integrated into this approach.

The [Simone Veil programme](#) is specifically designed to support women politicians and parliamentarians. Parliament also provides support and expertise in the field of mediation and dialogue, through targeted activities with partner parliaments and international events focused on mediation and conflict prevention. The [Jean Monnet Dialogue for Peace and Democracy](#) is a mediation tool developed by Parliament to bring political leaders together in order to promote inter-party communication and consensus building. The [Young Political Leaders Programme](#) is one of the flagship initiatives designed to promote dialogue and understanding among future leaders outside the EU, and thus to contribute to building trust and peace. The European Parliament [resolution](#) on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and mediation adopted in March 2019 recognises the importance of mediation and dialogue processes and Parliament's role therein. As part of its [Solidarity with Parliamentarians programme](#), Parliament regularly debates the situation of human rights of parliamentarians in the world and works to protect parliamentarians at risk through twinning partnerships with MEPs.

The Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG) gives political guidance for Parliament's different activities. It consists of 16 MEPs and is co-chaired by the chairs of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and its Committee on Development. The DEG decides on European Parliament election observation missions and adopts [an annual work programme](#) for the other activities. For 2023, the DEG re-confirmed the six priority countries and regions (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Tunisia, the Western Balkans region and the Pan-African Parliament, and Belarus as an ad hoc political priority, following the political events in early summer 2020), as well as thematic areas (pre- and post-election activities, parliamentary mediation and dialogue, human rights actions, including the Sakharov Prize community and fellowship, and parliaments and democratic innovation).

RASMA KASKINA
10/2023



5.5. THE UNION'S ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD



5.5.1. THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE UNION

On 1 July 2013, Croatia became the 28th (now 27th) Member State of the European Union. Since then, no other countries have joined the EU, and the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. Accession negotiations and chapters have been opened with Montenegro, Serbia and Türkiye. Albania and North Macedonia opened accession negotiations in July 2022. In December 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina obtained candidate country status and Kosovo submitted its application for EU membership. In June 2022, the EU granted candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova. On 8 November 2023, the Commission recommended that the Council open accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine (5.5.6).

LEGAL BASIS

- Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) establishes which states may apply;
- Article 2 TEU describes the EU's founding values.

OBJECTIVES

The EU's enlargement policy aims to unite European countries in a common political and economic project. Guided by the Union's values and subject to strict conditions, enlargement has proved to be one of the most successful tools in promoting political, economic and social reforms, and in consolidating peace, stability and democracy across the continent. Enlargement policy also enhances the EU's presence on the global stage.

BACKGROUND

A. Conditions for accession

Any European state may apply to become a member of the Union if it respects its common values and is committed to promoting them (Article 49 TEU). The Copenhagen criteria, established by the European Council in 1993 in Copenhagen, are essential in any candidate or potential candidate country's EU integration process. They include:

- The stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- A functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU;
- The ability to take on the obligations of membership, including by adhering to the aims of political, economic and monetary union, and adopting the common rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the *acquis communautaire*).

In December 2006, the European Council agreed on a 'renewed consensus on enlargement', based on 'consolidation, conditionality and communication' and on the EU's capacity to integrate new members.



B. The EU's integration capacity: institutional arrangements

Successive enlargements formed a substantial part of the institutional negotiations that led to the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon. The EU had to adapt its institutions and decision-making processes to the arrival of new Member States and ensure that enlargement would not come at the expense of efficient, accountable policymaking. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced profound changes to the composition and work of the main EU institutions. Some of these changes reflected the need for a sustainable set of rules that do not require new amendments with every new enlargement.

C. Process

A country that wishes to join the EU addresses its application to the Council, which asks the Commission to submit an opinion. Parliament is notified of this application. If the Commission's opinion is favourable, the European Council may decide – by unanimity – to grant the country candidate status. Following a recommendation by the Commission, the Council decides – again by unanimity – whether negotiations should be opened. The sum of EU legislation (the *acquis communautaire*) is divided into more than 30 policy chapters. Before actual negotiations start, the Commission delivers a 'screening' report for each chapter. On the basis of the Commission's recommendation, the Council decides by unanimity whether or not to open more negotiation chapters or clusters of chapters. Whenever progress is judged satisfactory, the Commission may recommend 'provisionally closing' a chapter or cluster of chapters. The Council again decides by unanimity, taking into account the overall progress in the area of the rule of law. When negotiations on all the chapters or clusters of chapters are completed, the terms and conditions – including possible safeguard clauses and transitional arrangements – are incorporated into an accession treaty between the Member States and the acceding country. Only after Parliament's consent and the Council's unanimous approval can the accession treaty be signed. It is then submitted by all contracting states for ratification, in accordance with their constitutional requirements (i.e. ratification by parliament or referendum).

PAST ENLARGEMENTS

Country	Member since	Particularities
Belgium France Germany Italy Luxembourg The Netherlands	1958	Original signatories to the 1957 Treaty of Rome.
Denmark Ireland United Kingdom ^[1]	1973	
Greece	1981	Greece's accession consolidated democracy in the country.
Portugal Spain	1986	This enlargement consolidated democracy in Portugal and Spain.
Austria	1995	

[1]The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2020 (at 11 pm GMT).



Finland Sweden		
Cyprus Czechia Estonia Hungary Latvia Lithuania Malta Poland Slovakia Slovenia	2004	Intended to reunite the continent after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, this enlargement was launched by the European Council meeting of December 1997. Negotiations were conducted separately with each country, based on a single negotiating framework.
Bulgaria Romania	2007	The pace of reform in Bulgaria and Romania did not allow these countries to join in 2004. A 'cooperation and verification mechanism' in key areas – judicial reform, the fight against corruption and the fight against organised crime (the latter applying only to Bulgaria) – was put in place to monitor progress after accession.
Croatia	2013	The accession negotiations with Croatia were subject to the stricter conditionality established in December 2006 by the European Council's 'renewed consensus on enlargement'.

FUTURE ENLARGEMENT

A. Western Balkans

Relations with the Western Balkans fall within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process, launched in 1999. It is based on bilateral stabilisation and association agreements.

Croatia's accession to the EU on 1 July 2013 constitutes a significant incentive for other countries in the region. Building on the experience with Croatia, the Commission proposed further improvements to its negotiating approach in its 2011-2012 'Enlargement Strategy', including a stronger emphasis on rule of law issues. This means that negotiating chapters on judicial reform and fundamental rights (chapter 23) and on justice, freedom and security (chapter 24) are opened at an early stage in all future negotiations and that they are the last to be closed. This approach was reaffirmed and reinforced in the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled 'Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans', which introduced a revised methodology for enlargement to the Western Balkans. It is also part and parcel of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, which was published as part of the Commission's 2020 enlargement package. On 8 November 2023, the Commission adopted a new EUR 6 billion growth plan for the Western Balkans, based on four pillars and covering the 2024-2027 period. The plan intends to bring some of the benefits of EU membership to the region in advance of accession, with strong *ex ante* conditionality for payments.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the EU's decision of June 2022 to grant candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova have also triggered an ongoing



debate on the acceleration of the EU integration process of the Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries.

To date, all 33 screened negotiating chapters with Montenegro have been opened, but only three have been provisionally closed. Serbia has opened 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters, of which two have been provisionally closed. Despite the considerable number of opened chapters, EU integration-related reforms in both countries have largely stalled over the past years.

In March 2020, the Council finally gave the green light to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia (with a set of conditions for Albania). In July 2020, the Commission presented the draft negotiating frameworks – the first to take into account the ‘revised methodology for enlargement to the Western Balkans’ – to the Member States. Accession negotiations with both countries were formally opened in July 2022 following long delays mainly stemming from issues between North Macedonia and Bulgaria related to identity, language and history.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) entered into force on 1 June 2015. In February 2016, BiH submitted its membership application. In its opinion of May 2019, the Commission listed 14 key priorities that BiH must fulfil in order to open accession negotiations. Despite its failure to deliver on most of these priorities, BiH was granted candidate country status in December 2022. On 8 November 2023, the Commission recommended opening EU accession negotiations with BiH ‘once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved’.

The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo entered into force on 1 April 2016. In December 2022, Kosovo applied for EU membership. Following a decisive vote in Parliament in April 2023, Kosovo will benefit from visa-free travel to the Schengen area by January 2024 at the latest. Kosovo is also conducting an EU-facilitated dialogue with Serbia that should lead to a legally binding comprehensive agreement on the normalisation of their relations. Both Kosovo and Serbia have yet to start implementing their obligations, stemming from a revamped agreement of early 2023 to rekindle the stalled dialogue.

B. Türkiye

Turkey applied for EU membership in 1987 and was declared a candidate country in 1999. Negotiations were opened in October 2005. Eight chapters are blocked, and no chapter will be provisionally closed until Türkiye applies the ‘Additional Protocol to the Ankara Association Agreement’ to Cyprus. Opening other chapters has been opposed by individual Member States. After a standstill of more than three years, a new negotiating chapter was opened in November 2013. Another was opened in December 2015. On 18 March 2016, Turkey and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to implementing their joint action plan to stem the flow of irregular migrants to the EU and to re-energise the accession process. This led to the opening of an additional chapter in June 2016, bringing the total number of opened chapters to 16 out of 35, of which one has been provisionally closed. However, in the light of the dramatic deterioration of the rule of law in Türkiye, in particular in the aftermath of the July 2016 attempted coup, the accession process with Türkiye is de facto frozen. EU-Türkiye relations have further deteriorated as a result of Türkiye’s foreign policy choices, its unilateral actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and its promotion of a ‘two-states-on-one-island’ solution to the Cyprus issue.



ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Under Article 49 TEU, Parliament must give its consent to any new accession to the EU. It also has a significant say over the financial aspects of accession: its budgetary powers give it direct influence over the amounts allocated to the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance.

Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs appoints standing rapporteurs for all candidate and potential candidate countries. Parliament expresses its positions on enlargement in the form of annual resolutions responding to the Commission's latest annual 'country reports'. On 23 November 2022, it adopted recommendations on a new EU strategy for enlargement. Parliament also maintains bilateral relations with the parliaments of all enlargement countries through its delegations, which regularly discuss with their counterparts issues that are relevant to their respective EU integration paths. It has observed elections in all enlargement countries except Türkiye, which has yet to invite Parliament to do so.

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5.5.2. THE WESTERN BALKANS

The EU has developed a policy to support the gradual integration of the Western Balkan countries with the Union. On 1 July 2013, Croatia became the first of the seven countries to join, and Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have candidate country status. Accession negotiations and chapters have been opened with Montenegro and Serbia, negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia were opened in July 2022, and Kosovo submitted its application for EU membership in December 2022.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V of the Treaty on European Union (TEU): EU external action;
- Article 207 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU): international trade agreements;
- Article 49 TEU: criteria for application and membership.

OBJECTIVES

The EU aims to promote peace, stability and economic development in the Western Balkans and open up the prospect of EU integration.

BACKGROUND

In 1999, the EU launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), a framework for relations between the EU and countries in the region, and the Stability Pact, a broader initiative involving all key international players. The Stability Pact was replaced by the Regional Cooperation Council in 2008. The 2003 European Council in Thessaloniki reaffirmed that all SAP countries were potential candidates for EU membership. This 'European perspective' was reaffirmed in the Commission's February 2018 Western Balkans strategy and in the declarations following successive EU-Western Balkans Summits.

INSTRUMENTS

A. The Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP)

Launched in 1999, the SAP is the strategic framework supporting the gradual rapprochement of the Western Balkan countries with the EU. It is based on bilateral contractual relations, financial assistance, political dialogue, trade relations and regional cooperation.

Contractual relations take the form of stabilisation and association agreements (SAAs). These provide for political and economic cooperation and for the establishment of free trade areas with the countries concerned. Based on common democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law, each SAA establishes permanent cooperation structures. The Stabilisation and Association Council, which meets annually at ministerial level, oversees the application and implementation of the agreement concerned. It is assisted by the Stabilisation and Association Committee. Finally, a



Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) ensures cooperation between the Western Balkan countries' parliaments and the European Parliament.

Since the entry into force of the SAA with Kosovo in April 2016, SAAs are now in force with all Western Balkan candidate and potential candidate countries. In the case of Kosovo, the SAA is an EU-only agreement, which the Member States do not need to ratify (five Member States do not recognise Kosovo as an independent state). Trade and trade-related aspects of SAAs are included in interim agreements. They generally enter into force swiftly after they have been signed, as trade is an exclusive EU competence.

B. The accession process

Applicants for EU membership must fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria (see fact sheet on the enlargement of the Union [5.5.1](#)). Once a country has been recognised as a candidate, it moves through the various stages of the process at a rate largely dependent on its own merits and progress.

A candidate country must adopt and implement all EU legislation (the *acquis communautaire*). The Commission reports on progress in its annual country reports. Every important decision is taken by the Council, acting by unanimity, from the opening of negotiations to their closure. The accession treaty has to be endorsed by Parliament and the Council before being ratified by all contracting states.

Candidate and potential candidate countries receive financial assistance to carry out the necessary reforms. Since 2007, EU pre-accession assistance has been channelled through a single, unified instrument: the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).

Most candidate and potential candidate countries may also participate in EU programmes.

C. Regional cooperation

European integration and regional cooperation are closely intertwined. One of the key aims of the SAP is to encourage countries of the region to cooperate among themselves across a wide range of areas, including the prosecution of war crimes, border issues, refugees and the fight against organised crime. A specific component of the IPA is dedicated to regional cooperation and cross-border programmes.

The Sarajevo-based Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) operates under the guidance of the South-East European Cooperation Process. The RCC aims to support the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of its non-EU members, and to develop cooperation in such fields as economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security, building human capital, and parliamentary relations. The EU and many individual Member States support and participate in the RCC.

Another important regional initiative is the Central European Free Trade Agreement. In addition, countries of the Western Balkans participate in a number of regional frameworks.

D. Visa-free travel

Visa-free travel to the Schengen area was granted to citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now the Republic of North Macedonia), Montenegro and Serbia as of December 2009, and to citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina as of November 2010. In January 2012, a visa liberalisation dialogue was launched with



Kosovo. In July 2018, the Commission confirmed that Kosovo had fulfilled all criteria. Following protracted interinstitutional negotiations and a final European Parliament vote in April 2023, Kosovars will be able to enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen area by January 2024 at the latest.

CURRENT STATUS

A. Albania

Albania applied for EU membership on 28 April 2009. In October 2013, the Commission unequivocally recommended granting Albania the status of candidate for EU membership, which it obtained in June 2014. In light of Albania's progress, the Commission repeatedly recommended opening accession negotiations. In June 2018, the Council agreed to the possible opening of accession negotiations with Albania in June 2019, provided that the necessary conditions had been fulfilled. In March 2020, the Council finally decided to approve the opening of accession negotiations, pending the fulfilment of a set of conditions. In July 2020, the Commission presented the draft negotiating framework – the first to take into account the 'revised methodology for enlargement to the Western Balkans' that was published in February 2020 – to the Member States. Accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, treated jointly because of a shared positive recommendation from the Commission, were formally opened in July 2022 following long delays that were mainly caused by issues between North Macedonia and Bulgaria relating to identity, language and history.

B. Bosnia and Herzegovina

An SAA with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was already negotiated and signed in June 2008, but its entry into force was frozen, mainly owing to the country's failure to implement a key ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The EU's 'renewed approach' to the country, which put more focus on economic governance, allowed the long overdue entry into force of the SAA on 1 June 2015. The country submitted its membership application on 15 February 2016. In May 2019, the Commission published its opinion, including a list of 14 key priorities to be fulfilled by BiH in order for accession negotiations to be opened. These include ensuring the proper functioning of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC), the parliamentary dimension of the SAA (key priority3). On 30 and 31 October 2023, almost eight years after the first, failed meeting of the SAPC in November 2015, a fully-fledged third EU-BiH SAPC meeting was successfully held in Sarajevo. This led the Commission to conclude in its 2023 country report on BiH that key priority 3 had been delivered on. In the wake of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the EU's decision in June 2022 to grant candidate country status to Moldova and Ukraine, the European Council decided to also grant candidate country status to BiH in December 2022. On 8 November 2023 the Commission recommended the opening of EU accession negotiations with BiH 'once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved'.

C. The Republic of North Macedonia

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now the Republic of North Macedonia) applied for EU membership in March 2004 and was granted EU candidate country status in December 2005. However, the country was unable to open accession negotiations for many years, mainly owing to the dispute with Greece over its use of the name 'Macedonia'. This dispute was successfully resolved through the 'Prespa



Agreement' on the country's new name – the Republic of North Macedonia (or simply North Macedonia for short) – which entered into force in February 2019. Since 2009, the Commission, with the unwavering support of the European Parliament, had invariably recommended that accession negotiations be opened. In June 2018, the Council agreed to the possible opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia in June 2019, provided that the necessary conditions were fulfilled. In March 2020, the Council finally decided to approve the opening of accession negotiations without setting any further conditions. In July 2020, the Commission presented the draft negotiating framework – the first to take into account the 'revised methodology for enlargement to the Western Balkans' – to the Member States. Accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, treated jointly because of a shared positive recommendation from the Commission, were formally opened in July 2022 following long delays that were mainly caused by issues between North Macedonia and Bulgaria relating to identity, language and history.

D. Kosovo

Kosovo is a potential candidate for EU accession. It unilaterally declared its independence in February 2008. Five EU Member States (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) and two countries in the region (Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) have not recognised Kosovo's independence. In July 2018, six years after a visa liberalisation roadmap was issued, the Commission confirmed that Kosovo had fulfilled all the criteria. Following protracted interinstitutional negotiations and a final European Parliament vote in April 2023, Kosovars will be able to enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen area by January 2024 at the latest. After a landmark agreement on normalising relations was reached in April 2013 by Belgrade and Pristina (the 'Brussels Agreement'), the European Council decided in June 2013 to open negotiations on an SAA with Kosovo, which entered into force on 1 April 2016. Kosovo's future EU integration – like Serbia's – remains closely linked to the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, which should lead to a legally binding comprehensive agreement on the normalisation of their relations. Kosovo (like Serbia) has yet to start implementing its obligations stemming from a revamped agreement of early 2023 that is meant to rekindle the dialogue.

E. Montenegro

Montenegro, which gained independence in 2006, applied for EU membership in December 2008. It was granted candidate country status in December 2010 and accession negotiations were opened in June 2012. In line with the EU's 'new approach' to the accession process, the crucial chapters on the rule of law – Chapter 23 on judicial reform and fundamental rights and Chapter 24 on freedom, security and justice – were opened at an early stage in the negotiations, in December 2013. To date, all 33 screened negotiating chapters have been opened, of which only three have been provisionally closed. The last remaining key chapter (on competition policy) was opened in June 2020. However, political turmoil and instability in Montenegro has led to the stalling of its EU integration process in recent years.

F. Serbia

Serbia submitted its application for EU membership in December 2009 and was granted candidate country status in March 2012 after Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement on Kosovo's regional representation. Accession negotiations were formally opened on 21 January 2014. The first two chapters, including the one on



the normalisation of relations with Kosovo, were opened in December 2015. The key chapters on the rule of law, Chapters 23 and 24, were opened on 18 July 2016. To date, 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters have been opened, two of which have been provisionally closed. The four chapters that constitute 'Cluster Four' – on the green agenda and sustainable connectivity – were opened in December 2021 after a two-year period without new chapters being opened. No new chapters or clusters have been opened since then. Serbia's future EU integration – like Kosovo's – remains closely linked to the EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, which should lead to a legally binding comprehensive agreement on the normalisation of their relations. Serbia (like Kosovo) has yet to start implementing its obligations stemming from a revamped agreement of early 2023 that is meant to rekindle the dialogue.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament is fully involved in the SAP and its consent is required for the conclusion of all SAAs (Article 218(6) TFEU). It must also consent to any new accession to the EU (Article 49 TEU). In addition, through its budgetary powers, it has direct influence over the amounts allocated to the IPA. Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs appoints standing rapporteurs for all candidate and potential candidate countries. Parliament expresses its positions on enlargement in the form of annual resolutions responding to the Commission's latest annual country reports. In June 2020, following the EU-Western Balkans Zagreb Summit (held online), Parliament also issued a set of recommendations on the Western Balkans. On 23 November 2022, it adopted additional recommendations on a new EU strategy for enlargement. Parliament also has bilateral relations with the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries through its delegations, which regularly meet their Western Balkan counterparts to discuss issues relevant to the SAPs and EU accession processes, on average twice a year. When invited, Parliament observes most elections in the Western Balkans and has already done so in all Western Balkan countries. It has also developed a series of activities and programmes on parliamentary democracy and capacity-building that are tailor-made to the needs of Western Balkan partner parliaments. In North Macedonia and Serbia, Parliament has also been facilitating rapprochement between political parties.

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5.5.3. THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA (EEA), SWITZERLAND AND THE NORTH

The European Economic Area (EEA) was set up in 1994 to extend the EU's provisions on its internal market to the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) countries. The EEA's parties are Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Switzerland is a member of EFTA but not of the EEA. The EU and Nordic EEA EFTA partners (Norway and Iceland) are also linked by various 'northern policies' and forums that focus on the rapidly evolving northern reaches of Europe and the Arctic region as a whole.

LEGAL BASIS

For the EEA: Article 217 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Association Agreements).

For Switzerland: Insurance Agreement of 1989, Bilateral Agreements I of 1999, Bilateral Agreements II of 2004.

THE EEA

A. Objectives

The purpose of the European Economic Area (EEA) is to extend the EU's internal market to countries in the European Free Trade Area (EFTA). The current EFTA countries do not wish to join the EU. EU legislation relating to the internal market becomes part of the legislation of the EEA EFTA countries once they have agreed to incorporate it. The administration and management of the EEA is shared between the EU and the EEA EFTA countries in a [two-pillar structure](#). Decisions are taken by joint EEA bodies (the EEA Council, the EEA Joint Committee, the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee and the EEA Consultative Committee).

B. Background

In 1992, the then seven members of EFTA negotiated an agreement to allow them to participate in the ambitious project of the European Community's internal market, launched in 1985 and completed at the end of 1992. The EEA Agreement was signed on 2 May 1992 and entered into force on 1 January 1994.

The EEA EFTA members, however, soon saw their numbers reduced: Switzerland chose not to ratify the agreement following a negative referendum on the matter, and Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995. Only Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein remained in the EEA. The 10 new Member States that joined the EU on 1 May 2004 automatically became part of the EEA, as did Bulgaria and Romania when they acceded to the Union in 2007. The same was true for Croatia in 2013, although in this case, the agreement on its participation in the EEA has been provisionally applied since April 2014. It will formally enter into force once ratification by all the Member States has been completed.

In June 2009, Iceland applied for EU membership as a way out of the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. The Council accepted Iceland's application on 17 June 2010, and the negotiations started in June 2011. However, in March 2015, the Icelandic



Government stated in a letter to the Council of the EU that ‘Iceland should not be regarded as a candidate country for EU membership’. Although the government did not officially withdraw the application, the EU does not currently treat Iceland as a candidate country.

C. Scope of the EEA

The EEA goes beyond traditional free trade agreements (FTAs) by extending the full rights and obligations of the EU’s internal market to the EEA EFTA countries (with the exception of Switzerland). The EEA incorporates the four freedoms of the internal market (free movement of goods, persons, services and capital) and related policies (competition, transport, energy, and economic and monetary cooperation). The agreement includes horizontal policies strictly related to the four freedoms: social policies (including health and safety at work, labour law and the equal treatment of men and women); policies on consumer protection, the environment, statistics and company law; and a number of flanking policies, such as those relating to research and technological development, which are not based on the EU *acquis* or legally binding acts, but are implemented through cooperation activities.

D. The limits of the EEA

The EEA Agreement does not establish binding provisions in all sectors of the internal market or in other policies under the EU Treaties. In particular, its binding provisions do not concern:

- The common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy (although the agreement contains provisions on trade in agricultural and fishery products);
- The customs union;
- The common trade policy;
- The common foreign and security policy;
- The field of justice and home affairs (although all the EFTA countries are part of the Schengen area);
- The economic and monetary union.

E. EEA institutions and mechanisms

1. Incorporation of EU legislation

New EU internal market texts are examined by the EEA Joint Committee, composed of representatives of the EU and the three EEA EFTA states. Meeting once a month, this body decides which EU legislation and acts (actions, programmes, etc.) – should be incorporated into the EEA. Legislation is formally incorporated by including the relevant acts in lists of protocols and annexes to the EEA Agreement. Several thousand acts have been incorporated into the EEA Agreement in this way. The EEA Council, made up of representatives of the Council of the EU and the Foreign Ministers of the EEA EFTA states, meets at least twice a year to draw up political guidelines for the Joint Committee. The EEA Agreement contains provisions for facilitating input from EEA EFTA countries at various stages of the EU legislative procedure before new legislation is adopted (decision shaping).



2. Transposition

Once an EU act has been incorporated into the EEA Agreement, it must be transposed into the national legislation of the EEA EFTA countries (if this is required under that national legislation). This may simply require a governmental decision, or it may require parliamentary approval. Transposition is a formal task, and the acts can only be adjusted technically at this point.

3. Monitoring

After internal market legislation has been extended to the EEA EFTA countries, transposition and application are monitored by the EFTA Surveillance Authority and the EFTA Court. The EFTA Surveillance Authority maintains an internal market scoreboard that tracks the implementation of legislation in the EEA countries.

4. Role of the parliaments

Both the European Parliament and the national parliaments of the EEA EFTA states are closely involved in monitoring the EEA Agreement. Article 95 of the agreement establishes an EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which meets twice a year. The European Parliament and the EEA EFTA national parliaments take turns hosting this committee, whose chair alternates annually between a Member of the European Parliament and an EEA EFTA national parliamentarian. Each delegation is composed of 12 members. Parliamentarians from the Swiss Federal Assembly attend the meetings as observers. All EU legislation that applies to the EEA is scrutinised by the EEA JPC, whose members have the right to put oral and written questions to representatives of the EEA Council and the EEA Joint Committee and to express their views in reports or resolutions. The same procedure holds for scrutinising the implementation of legislation. Every year, the JPC adopts a [resolution](#) on the Joint Committee's annual report on the functioning of the EEA Agreement, stating its views on the progress made in the incorporation of EU law and the existing backlog, and making recommendations for the proper functioning of the internal market.

SWITZERLAND

As an EFTA member, Switzerland took part in the negotiations for the EEA Agreement and signed the agreement on 2 May 1992. Immediately after that, the Swiss Government submitted an application for accession to the EU on 22 May 1992. However, following a referendum held on 6 December 1992 that yielded a vote against participating in the EEA, the Swiss Federal Council stopped pursuing the country's EU and EEA membership. Since then, Switzerland has developed its relations with the EU through bilateral agreements in order to safeguard its economic integration with the EU. Bilateral relations were strained following the February 2014 anti-immigration initiative in Switzerland, the outcome of which called into question the principles of free movement and the single market that underpin those relations. On 16 December 2016, the Swiss Parliament adopted the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, implementing the result of the 2014 referendum in a manner that limited its effect, which paved the way for the beginning of the normalisation of EU-Swiss relations.

The EU and Switzerland have signed over 120 bilateral agreements, including an FTA in 1972, and two major series of sectoral bilateral agreements that aligned a large portion of Swiss law with that of the EU at the time of signing. The first set of sectoral agreements (known as Bilateral I) was signed in 1999 and entered into force



in 2002. These seven agreements (on the free movement of persons, air transport, land transport, trade in agricultural products, technical trade barriers, public procurement and research cooperation) cover the issues of free movement and mutual market opening. A further set of sectoral agreements (Bilateral II) was signed in 2004 and entered into force gradually over the 2005-2009 period. These agreements basically relate to strengthening economic cooperation and extending cooperation on asylum and free travel within the Schengen borders. They also cover Switzerland's participation in the Dublin system, the EU's MEDIA programme and the European Environment Agency, as well as the taxation of savings, processed agricultural products, statistics, combating fraud, and Swiss financial contributions to economic and social cohesion in the new EU Member States.

While the agreements deepened economic relations, they also created a complex and sometimes inconsistent network of obligations. Bilateral agreements have to be updated regularly and do not have the dynamic character of the EEA Agreement. They also lack monitoring arrangements or effective dispute settlement mechanisms. In order to resolve these problems, EU-Swiss negotiations for an Institutional Framework Agreement (IFA) were launched on 22 May 2014. The negotiations sought to solve several difficult issues, ranging from conditions for EU service providers in Switzerland to the role of the Court of Justice in dispute settlement. Negotiations for the IFA concluded at political level on 23 November 2018. Nevertheless, the Swiss Federal Council could not agree on the final text owing to Swiss concerns that the 'flanking measures'^[1] and the incorporation of the EU *acquis* on the free movement of persons had not been adequately reflected. It then launched a broad internal consultation with the relevant Swiss Federal Assembly committees, parties, cantons, social partners and academics/the research community, which will serve as the basis for making a decision about whether or not to submit the agreement for approval to the Swiss Federal Assembly. During the consultation, which concluded in April 2019, a number of issues were raised on which the Swiss side required further clarification.

During the consultation, concerns were raised as regards the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the EU. On 27 September 2020, Switzerland held a popular vote, sponsored by the Swiss People's Party (SVP), on the termination of the agreement with the EU on the free movement of persons. Nearly 62% of voters rejected the SVP's initiative.

After the popular vote and once the COVID-19 related conditions allowed, discussions on the IFA clarifications resumed in January 2021. However, on 26 May 2021, the Swiss Federal Council informed the European Commission of its decision to terminate the negotiations. The Commission issued a [statement](#) of regret concerning the decision taken by the Swiss Federal Council, insisting that without this agreement, the modernisation of the bilateral relationship would not be possible, and that the existing bilateral agreements would erode over time.

On 23 February 2022, the Swiss Federal Council adopted a set of guidelines for its negotiating package with the EU. The chief negotiators of the European Commission and the Swiss Federal Council have met several times since March 2022 in order to

[1]'Flanking measures': a number of measures introduced unilaterally by Switzerland in 2006 to protect its labour market. They include notification requirements for EU service providers, contributions by EU operators to cover the costs of Swiss tripartite commissions, the obligation for EU businesses to provide deposit guarantees and certain sanctions. The EU considers these measures incompatible with the free movement of persons and a barrier to trade and services.



clarify the scope of the new proposals. Since then, a number of meetings have been held at political and technical level in order to clarify the scope of the new proposals.

On 21 June 2023, the Swiss Federal Council approved the parameters for a negotiating mandate with the EU. Discussions will continue on this basis, at political and technical level, with a view to resolving the outstanding issues.

NORTHERN POLICIES

The EU is actively involved in a number of policies and forums that focus on the rapidly evolving northern reaches of Europe and on the Arctic region as a whole. Notably, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, all cooperation with Russia in this regard was halted. The EU is active in the following forums:

- The Northern Dimension, which has served since 2007 as a common policy for the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. This policy has led to effective sector partnerships for cooperation in the Baltic and Barents regions. The Northern Dimension includes a parliamentary body – the Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum – of which the European Parliament is a founding member;
- The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), launched in 1992 by the EU and the riparian states following the dissolution of the USSR. All CBSS member states participate in the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, of which the European Parliament is also a member;
- Cooperation in the Barents region, which brings together the northern regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden and the north-west regions of Russia. It is conducted through the sub-state Barents Regional Council, the interstate Barents Euro-Arctic Council (of which the EU is a member), and a parliamentary conference (of which the European Parliament is a member);
- Circumpolar Arctic affairs: the EU's Arctic policy is based on Commission/ European External Action Service (EEAS) communications (2008, 2012, 2016 and 2021), Council conclusions (2009, 2014, 2016 and 2019) and European Parliament resolutions (2011, 2014, 2017 and 2021). On 16 March 2017, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on an integrated EU policy for the Arctic, while its most recent resolution in this area, entitled 'The Arctic: opportunities, concerns and security challenges', was adopted in plenary on 7 October 2021;
- On 13 October 2021, the European Commission and the EEAS unveiled the new EU policy for the Arctic. Since 2013, the EU has been attending meetings of the Arctic Council, which, however, has still not decided on the EU's 2008 request for formal observer status. The European Parliament is a member of the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians;
- The European Parliament is regularly invited to, and participates in, the annual sessions of the Nordic Council. On 6 October 2020, Parliament's Conference of Presidents approved the request from the Nordic Council to start more formal relations between the two institutions; EU-Nordic Council interparliamentary meetings are held annually. In addition to this, delegations from the European Parliament and the West Nordic Council (made up of parliamentarians from the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland) meet once a year.





5.5.4. THE UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom (UK) joined the European Union in 1973, having maintained a long-standing relationship with the bloc since its founding. In 2016, following a referendum, it became the first Member State to end its EU membership. The UK's exit from the EU was governed by a withdrawal agreement signed on 17 October 2019. The trade and cooperation agreement signed on 30 December 2020 defines the framework for the future relationship.

On 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum in which 51.9% of voters opted to leave the EU. In March 2017, the British Government notified the President of the European Council of its intention to withdraw from the EU, thereby triggering the withdrawal procedure set out in Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

The UK formally left the EU on 1 February 2020, but remained in the EU's single market and customs union until 31 December 2020. The withdrawal agreement signed on 17 October 2019 set out the rules for the UK's orderly departure from the EU. In particular, it covered:

- Citizens' rights;
- The financial settlement;
- The governance structure of the withdrawal agreement;
- A protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland to avoid the reintroduction of a hard border on the island of Ireland, protecting the all-island economy and the Good Friday Agreement while also safeguarding the integrity of the EU's single market;
- Specific arrangements for Gibraltar.

The withdrawal agreement came into force on 1 February 2020.

On 1 January 2021, the UK left the EU's single market and customs union. On the same date, a trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) governing the new relationship between the EU and the UK took effect provisionally until 1 May 2021, when the TCA formally came into force after receiving the European Parliament's approval.

The withdrawal agreement and the TCA are two distinct agreements, negotiated separately and governing different areas, although there is a degree of interdependence.

The TCA provides a comprehensive framework for the future relationship between the EU and the UK and rests on four main pillars:

- A free trade agreement (with zero tariffs and zero quotas on all goods that comply with the relevant rules of origin);
- Cooperation on other economic issues, such as investments, competition, State aid, tax transparency, air and road transport, energy and sustainability, social security coordination and fisheries;
- A new partnership for citizens' security through police and judicial cooperation, including data protection and data exchange;
- A comprehensive governance system.



Central to the governance of the TCA is a 'partnership council', co-chaired by a representative of the European Commission and a representative of the UK Government. The partnership council oversees the implementation of the TCA and is supported by 19 specialised committees.

The TCA also gives civil society a say in the implementation of the agreement through domestic advisory groups, which play a key role in providing direct feedback from citizens and stakeholders.

The TCA provides an institutional framework for future agreements, as these two agreements do not cover some trade-relevant areas (such as standards for financial services or adequate levels of data protection). Since the UK is now a third country, it is subject to third-country equivalence approvals in certain specific domains.

The agreements provide a solid framework for cooperation, and give legal certainty in an unprecedented situation. Nevertheless, implementation challenges have arisen, particularly concerning the implementation of the Ireland and Northern Ireland Protocol.

THE PROTOCOL ON IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

Although under the Protocol Northern Ireland is part of the customs territory of the UK, goods circulating freely in Northern Ireland can enter the EU's single market without restrictions or checks. Ultimately, the aim of the Protocol is to avoid border controls on the island of Ireland and to safeguard the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. In order to preserve the EU's single market, goods from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are subject to EU border checks when they cross the Irish Sea, because the EU's [Union Customs Code](#) continues to apply to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Protocol therefore eliminates the need for customs checks on the island of Ireland, but lays down rules for goods going from Great Britain into Northern Ireland. In other words, under EU law, all goods entering Northern Ireland from outside the EU, including those from Great Britain, are subject to customs declarations.

The implementation of the Protocol has been extremely challenging since its entry into force. The UK has taken unilateral measures to disapply parts of the Protocol several times, culminating in the tabling of the [Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#) on 14 June 2022.

On 27 February 2023, after months of intense negotiations, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, presented a political agreement on the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, referred to as the Windsor Framework.

The Windsor Framework encompasses a comprehensive set of joint solutions to address the challenges and concerns of all the communities in Northern Ireland regarding the implementation of the Protocol, while safeguarding the integrity of the EU's Single Market. These solutions are within the framework of the withdrawal Agreement, of which the Protocol is an integral part.

The joint solutions include new arrangements on customs/free movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, agri-foods, medicines, VAT and excise, tariff rate quotas for certain categories of steel, and conditions ensuring UK State aid does not affect trade between Northern Ireland and the EU, among others.

These solutions are accompanied by measures enabling the EU to analyse and assess the risk of goods not staying in Northern Ireland, given the absence of a physical



border. If, in practice, goods are found to be crossing into Ireland, structural safeguards are available to remedy this situation. In its resolution of 15 March 2023, on the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, the European Parliament welcomed the Windsor Framework.

On 22 March 2023, the House of Commons voted in favour of one of the elements of the Windsor Framework, the so-called Stormont brake, although the vote has been perceived as a vote on the framework as a whole. The vote passed by 515 votes to 29. During the debate at the House of Commons, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stated the government's intention to drop the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTNERSHIP ASSEMBLY

Article 11 of the TCA provides for the possibility of establishing a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) and the two parliaments agreed to set up this body.

The PPA meets twice a year, alternating between the European Parliament, in one of its usual places of work, and the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It is a forum for an exchange of views on issues arising out of the TCA, including supplementing agreements, and any other matters of mutual interest. The first meeting of the PPA took place from 12-13 May 2022 in Brussels.

María Álvarez López
04/2024



5.5.5. THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

The European neighbourhood policy (ENP) applies to Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine. It aims to strengthen the prosperity, stability and security of all. It is based on democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and is a bilateral policy between the EU and each partner country, with regional cooperation initiatives: the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Union for the Mediterranean^[1].

LEGAL BASIS

- Article 8 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
- Title V of the TEU (external action);
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

Through the ENP, the EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building on a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). The ENP includes political coordination and deeper economic integration, increased mobility and people-to-people contacts. The level of ambition of the relationship depends on the extent to which these values are shared. The ENP remains distinct from the process of enlargement, although this does not prejudice how relations between neighbouring countries and the EU may develop in the future. In 2011, the EU reviewed the ENP and, responding to developments in Arab countries, strengthened its focus on promoting deep and sustainable democracy and inclusive economic development. Deep and sustainable democracy includes in particular free and fair elections, efforts to combat corruption, judicial independence, democratic control over the armed forces, and the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. The EU also stressed the role that civil society plays in the democratic process and introduced the 'more for more' principle, under which the EU develops stronger partnerships with those neighbours that make greater progress towards democratic reform. In March 2015, the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) launched a consultation process for a new review of the ENP. One of its main aims was to adapt the policy's tools to take better account of the specific aspirations of partner countries. In this context, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 9 July 2015 underlining the need for a more strategic, focused, flexible and coherent ENP. A [communication](#) from the EEAS and the Commission along these lines and based on the results of the consultation was published on 18 November 2015.

On 18 May 2017, the EEAS and the Commission published a [report on the implementation of the ENP](#) review. The report highlighted the more flexible and

[1]For information about bilateral relations between the EU and the eastern partners and Mediterranean partners, please refer to the fact sheets on those topics ([5.5.6](#); [5.5.7](#) and [5.5.8](#)).



sensitive approach demonstrated by the EU in its cooperation with the ENP partners and the more efficient use of resources. On 27 March 2019, Parliament passed a [resolution on the post-Arab Spring and the way forward for the MENA region](#), which acknowledged some democratic gains in the region but also called for further economic, democratic and social reforms. On 19 June 2020, Parliament adopted a [recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy \(VP/HR\) on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit](#), which called for ‘a continuous impetus towards effective cooperation, intense dialogue and close partnership within the [Eastern Partnership]’.

The [joint communication](#) entitled ‘Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean’ and the ‘Accompanying Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours’, published on 9 February 2021 by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and adopted by the European Council on 19 April 2021, aims at setting out a renewed agenda for the relaunching and strengthening of the strategic partnership between the EU and its Southern Neighbourhood partners.

A [joint statement](#) issued on 24 February 2021 by the Chairs of all the European Parliament Delegations dealing with the Southern Neighbourhood countries suggests holding a summit between the EU and all its southern neighbours, to which civil society representatives and national parliaments should be invited, in order to collectively define the best ways to implement this agenda in a spirit of genuine partnership and shared ownership.

INSTRUMENTS

The ENP builds upon the legal agreements in place between the EU and its partners – Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and, more recently, Association Agreements.

Central to the ENP are the bilateral action plans and partnership priorities that have been drawn up between the EU and most of the partner countries. These establish political and economic reform agendas with short- and medium-term priorities (three to five years). ENP action plans and partnership priorities reflect the needs, interests and capacities of the EU and each partner. They seek to develop democratic, socially equitable and inclusive societies, to promote economic integration and to improve the movement of people across borders.

The EU supports the fulfilment of the ENP objectives through financial support as well as political and technical cooperation. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was the key EU financing instrument for bilateral cooperation between 2014 and 2020, with an allocation of EUR 15.4 billion for that period. The new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – ‘Global Europe’ will frame the EU’s cooperation for the period 2021-2027. The instrument’s approach includes grant funding, as well as blending grants with loans from European and international financing institutions. With an overall allocation of EUR 79.5 billion, the new instrument will cover EU cooperation with EU neighbourhood countries and other countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, the Pacific and the Caribbean. In addition to a focus on sustainable development, Global Europe will advance key thematic aspects of EU external policy, including programmes promoting human rights, democracy and civil society. Funding from the instrument will also go towards global challenges, including



climate change, migration, peace and stability, as well as cooperation with strategic partners and the promotion of the EU's own foreign policy initiatives. Parliament gave its final approval for the establishment of the new Global Europe instrument on [9 June 2021](#), following two and a half years of negotiations. Parliament secured increased involvement in defining the main strategic objectives of the instrument, as well as an enhanced role in scrutinising the instrument's implementation through a high-level geopolitical dialogue with the Commission.

In addition, tools have been developed under the ENP to advance market access, in particular through the negotiation of deep and comprehensive free trade areas, and to enhance mobility and the management of migration. As such, mobility partnerships and visa facilitation and/or liberalisation have been offered and concluded with some partners, while a dedicated financial instrument – the [Mobility Partnership Facility](#) – was launched in 2016. In the southern region, a number of regional and bilateral initiatives on migration and mobility are being funded under the North of Africa window of the [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#).

While the ENP has been designed as a common policy toolbox, it also allows the EU to adapt and differentiate its policy according to the specificities of each partner.

REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

A. Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was formed to upgrade the EU's relations with most of its eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP was agreed in 2008 and inaugurated in 2009, and builds on the ENP.

1. Objectives

The main goal of the EaP is to 'accelerate political association and deepen economic integration' between the EU and its eastern neighbours. The level of integration and cooperation reflects each partner country's commitment to European values, standards and structures and its progress towards them. The EaP aims to promote democracy and good governance, strengthen energy security, encourage sectoral reforms (including environmental protection), encourage people-to-people contacts, support economic and social development and offer additional funding for projects to reduce socioeconomic imbalances and increase stability^[2].

2. Structures

EaP summits are held every two years, with the participation of EU and partner countries' heads of state or government and representatives of Parliament, the Commission and the EEAS.

Flagship initiatives have also been launched and include: an integrated border management programme; a facility for small and medium-sized enterprises; regional electricity markets; and efforts to improve energy efficiency, increase the use of renewable energy sources, promote good environmental governance and prevent, prepare for and respond to natural and human-induced disasters.

As 2019 marked the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, the Commission carried out a broad and extensive consultation with all interested stakeholders to define

[2]For more information, please refer to the section of the [EEAS website](#) on the EaP.



the future priorities of this policy and thereby ensure that it continues to deliver tangible benefits to people across Europe.

On 18 March 2020, the Commission and the VP/HR released a [joint communication](#) entitled 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all'. This document highlights five long-term policy objectives for future cooperation:

- A partnership that creates: the EU and the partner countries will work together towards resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- A partnership that protects: the EU and partner countries will renew their commitment to the fundamentals of the partnership, in particular to accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- A partnership that greens: the EU and partner countries will work together towards a resilient and sustainable future;
- A partnership that connects: the EU will invest further in the digital transformation of partner countries and will aim to extend the benefits of the digital single market;
- A partnership that empowers: the EU and partner countries will work together towards resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

This document served as a basis for discussions at the [18 June 2020 Video Teleconference of the Leaders of the Eastern Partnership](#). Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and its heavy socioeconomic fallout across the entire continent, the leaders acknowledged the strategic importance of this partnership and underlined the need to continue building an area of shared democracy, prosperity and stability, anchored in their shared values, through a rules-based international order and international law.

Following this, [post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities](#) were announced in July 2021. The EaP policy will continue to be flexible and allow for substantial differentiation, tailor-made approaches and incentive-based enhanced cooperation that benefits the countries most engaged in reforms. In this respect, it will emphasise:

- Together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- Together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- Together for environmental and climate resilience;
- Together for a resilient digital transformation;
- Together for resilient, gender-equal, fair and inclusive societies; and
- An overarching objective that reinforces strategic communication.

Accordingly, during the programming period 2021-2027, the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law will continue to be supported.

Established in 2011, [the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly](#) is the parliamentary component of the EaP and is responsible for the consultation, supervision and monitoring of the partnership. Its main goal is to bring together the parliaments of the EaP countries and the European Parliament and to enhance people-to-people contacts, promote the active participation of civil society and engage more actively in cultural dialogue. It is rooted in mutual interests and commitments, and in the principles of differentiation, shared ownership and responsibility. One of its roles is to scrutinise



the EU's support for EaP countries, and it can also issue recommendations to the intergovernmental structures of the EaP with a view to fostering deeper political and economic integration of these countries with the EU.

The assembly has held ten ordinary sessions to date, the last one on 19-21 February 2023 in Chişinău. One highlight of the agenda was a key debate entitled 'What future for the Eastern Partnership policy in the aftermath of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine? New regional security context, challenges and opportunities'.

The assembly comprises 60 Members of the European Parliament and 10 members from each partner country's parliament. However, as the European Parliament does not recognise the Belarusian National Assembly as a democratically elected institution, no Belarusian 'parliamentarians' currently participate in Euronest. However, owing to exceptional circumstances, representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces were invited to attend the ninth and tenth ordinary sessions. The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly has four standing committees, namely the Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy, the Committee on Economic Integration, Legal Approximation and Convergence with EU Policies, the Committee on Energy Security and the Committee on Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Culture and Civil Society. It also comprises a Working Group on the Rules of Procedure, a Working Group on Association Agreements, a Working Group on Belarus, as well as an informal Women's Forum.

In addition, an EaP Civil Society Forum^[3] issues recommendations 'to influence EU institutions and EaP national governments'.

B. Union for the Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) includes the 27 EU Member States, the European Union and 15 Mediterranean countries (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Montenegro, Monaco, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (whose membership has been suspended because of the civil war), Tunisia and Turkey). The League of Arab States has participated in all meetings since 2008 and Libya has observer status.

1. Objectives

The UfM is an intergovernmental partnership, a multilateral framework for political, economic and social relations between the EU and the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. It was launched in 2008 at the [Paris Summit](#) as a continuation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership also known as the Barcelona Process. The UfM is inspired by the goals set out in the Barcelona Declaration of 1995, namely to create an area of peace, stability, security and shared economic prosperity, with full respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, while promoting understanding between cultures and civilisations in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

2. Structures

The UfM is chaired by a co-presidency, highlighting the co-ownership that characterises the group. Since 2012, the EU has assumed the northern co-presidency and Jordan the southern co-presidency. The main governing body of the UfM is the Senior Officials' Meeting, which oversees and coordinates the UfM's work. The Senior Officials'

[3]For more information about the civil society forum, please refer to the [CSF website](#).



Meeting also approves the budget and the work programme of the Secretariat, prepares meetings of foreign ministers and other ministerial configurations, and appoints the Secretary-General and the six Deputy Secretaries-General. The meeting also discusses the project proposals submitted by the Secretariat for approval and endorsement. The UfM Secretariat's role consists of, above all, identifying, processing, promoting and coordinating technical projects in sectors such as transport, energy, water, environmental protection, higher education and mobility, research, social affairs, the empowerment of women, employment and business development, all of which enhance cooperation and directly affect the livelihoods of people living in the UfM countries. The EU is the largest contributor to the UfM Secretariat's budget.

The [Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM](#) (PA-UfM) builds on the work of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and comprises 280 members: 132 EU members (83 members from the EU national parliaments and 49 members from the European Parliament), eight members from European Mediterranean partner countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monaco and Montenegro), 130 members from the 10 countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (currently suspended), Tunisia and Turkey), and 10 members from Mauritania.

The PA-UfM holds one plenary session per year; the most recent was in Strasbourg on 13 and 14 February 2019. The 2020 plenary session, initially scheduled to take place in Antalya (Turkey) on 7 and 8 March, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Presidency of the PA-UfM is currently held by Morocco (2022-2023). Spain is due to take it over in 2023. The PA-UfM adopts resolutions or recommendations on all aspects of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation that concern the executive organs of the UfM, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the national governments of partner countries.

The PA-UfM has five standing committees, each consisting of 56 members:

- Political Affairs, Security and Human Rights;
- Economic and Financial Affairs, Social Affairs and Education;
- Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges Between Civil Societies and Culture;
- Energy, Environment and Water;
- Women's Rights in Euro-Mediterranean Countries.

Florian Carmona / Christos Trapouzanlis / Kirsten Jongberg
10/2023



5.5.6. THREE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP NEIGHBOURS: UKRAINE, MOLDOVA AND BELARUS

The EU's Eastern Partnership policy, established in 2009, covers six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It was created to support political, social and economic reform efforts in these countries with the aim of increasing democratisation and good governance, energy security, environmental protection, and economic and social development. All the members except Belarus participate in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

UKRAINE

Over the past decade, Ukraine has been a key partner for the EU, with enormous geopolitical significance and an unprecedented impact on EU policies. The European Parliament has been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's European path and has built strong, close ties with its Ukrainian counterpart, the Verkhovna Rada.

The events that have taken place in Ukraine since November 2013 largely stemmed from the pro-EU protest against then-President Viktor Yanukovich's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. The Euromaidan movement eventually led to a change of government and to parliamentary elections in October 2014, which brought pro-European and pro-reform parties to power.

In March 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea, and the eastern part of Ukraine plunged into an armed conflict spurred on by Russian-backed separatists.

Despite the Minsk agreements brokered in 2015, and the establishment of negotiating formats such as the Trilateral Contact Group (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Russia and Ukraine) and the Normandy format (Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France), periodic outbreaks of fighting called into question the sustainability of the truce. The EU's economic sanctions against Russia were linked to Moscow's full compliance with the Minsk agreements and were renewed periodically.

In June 2017, visa-free travel to the EU for up to 90 days came into force for Ukrainian citizens with biometric passports, as the benchmarks of the action plan for visa liberalisation had been fulfilled.

The EU-Ukraine [Association Agreement](#) entered into force on 1 September 2017, having been provisionally and partially applied since 1 November 2014. One of the agreement's cornerstones, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), became fully operational on 1 January 2016.

In addition to political support, between 2014 and February 2022 the EU and its financial institutions allocated [over EUR 17 billion in grants and loans](#) to support the reform process in Ukraine. Under a jointly established reform agenda, the EU has been closely monitoring progress in a series of priority areas: the fight against corruption, reform of the judiciary, constitutional and electoral reforms, energy efficiency, reform of public administration, and improvement of the business environment.

In the April 2019 presidential elections, President Petro Poroshenko was defeated by newcomer Volodymyr Zelenskyy. President Zelenskyy dissolved the parliament and called snap elections in July 2019, in which his party, 'Servant of the People', won an



absolute majority of seats. As a consequence, members of the party filled the posts of both Speaker of Parliament and Prime Minister. In March 2020, President Zelenskyy undertook a major government reshuffle in which Denys Shmyhal took over as Prime Minister.

In 2021, President Zelenskyy launched a series of further government reshuffles and strengthened the role of Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council. At the same time, Speaker Дмитро Разумков was replaced by Ruslan Stefanchuk following the controversy around the adoption of the 'de-oligarchisation bill', which the President eventually signed into law at the beginning of November 2021.

On 21 February 2022, the State Duma of Russia officially recognised the independence of the self-proclaimed 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk. Three days later, following months of intense military build-up along Ukraine's borders, Russian troops invaded Ukraine on several fronts. Between 24 February 2022 – the first day of the full-scale armed attack by the Russian Federation – and October 2023, the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) recorded 27 768 verified civilian casualties in the country: 9 806 killed and 17 962 injured. However, the real numbers are likely to be substantially higher.

Since the start of the invasion, the EU has condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. On 23 February 2022, the Council of the EU adopted a new sanctions package in response to Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities and the ordering of Russian armed forces into those areas. Since 24 February 2022, the EU has greatly expanded restrictive measures in various sectors by adopting successive sanctions packages ([11 sanctions packages](#) by October 2023). It has also added a significant number of persons and entities to the sanctions list. The overall aim of these measures is to ramp up the pressure on Russia to end the war.

Ukraine handed in its official application for EU membership on 28 February 2022 and was [granted candidate status](#) on 23 June 2022 following a unanimous decision by the leaders of the 27 EU Member States. This historic decision was based on the [European Commission recommendation](#) published on 17 June 2022, which advised granting Ukraine candidate status on the understanding that it would carry out seven specific reforms. The European Commission is monitoring Ukraine's progress on meeting the conditions laid down in its opinion on the membership application and provided an interim oral [update](#) on progress in June 2023. On 8 November 2023, the Commission issued its [report](#) to the European Council, which is part of its regular enlargement package. In light of the results achieved by Ukraine on the seven specific recommendations, the Commission recommended that the Council open accession negotiations. The Commission recommended that the Council adopt the negotiating frameworks once Ukraine had adopted certain key measures in four specific areas. The Commission stands ready to report to the Council by March 2024 on the progress relating to these measures.

The Council of the European Union [activated](#) the Temporary Protection Directive on 4 March 2022 in order to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine and guarantee that Ukrainian refugees would enjoy the same standards and rights in all EU Member States, including the right to accommodation, medical care, work and education. This measure was extended by a year on the basis of a proposal formally [introduced by the Commission on 19 September 2023](#) and [subsequently](#)



[approved by the Member States](#) on 28 September 2023. In May 2022, the EU-Ukraine [Solidarity Lanes](#) initiative was launched to enable Ukraine to export agricultural products and import the goods it needs. Moreover, the EU and the European Parliament consistently supported the UN-brokered [Black Sea Grain Initiative](#), allowing significant volumes of grain and food stocks from three key Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea to reach world markets through an agreed Black Sea corridor. The Russian Federation, however, refused to renew the agreement in July 2023.

Since the Russian aggression started, the EU and its Member States have been supporting Ukraine on an unprecedented scale, providing EUR 82.6 billion (October 2023) in financial, humanitarian, economic, military and refugee support. The Commission's proposal for the Ukraine Facility, amounting to EUR 50 billion in grants and loans for 2024-2027, should ensure stable and sustainable financing to Ukraine over the next four years. Parliament [adopted its position](#) on the draft regulation on 17 October 2023, aiming to make the Facility more democratically accountable under effective oversight, encouraging the consolidation of Ukraine's institutions and advocating both resilience and alignment with the requirements for EU accession.

In January 2023, the EU launched a Multi-agency Donor Coordination Platform to ensure that international donors coordinate closely and that support for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction process is provided in a coherent, transparent and accountable manner.

On 16 March 2022, the Ukrainian and Moldovan electricity grids were synchronised with the Continental European Grid. The EU has taken a number of steps to help ensure that Ukraine has a stable energy supply. For instance, it has enabled gas to be delivered to Ukraine through physical reverse flow capacity and has allowed Ukraine to benefit from the EU's joint purchasing of gas, liquefied natural gas and hydrogen.

Since 24 February 2022, the EU and its Member States have provided over EUR 40 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in the form of arms and equipment, including EUR 4.6 billion mobilised under the [European Peace Facility](#). As of October 2023, the EU's contribution is similar in size to that of the United States. Moreover, the European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine ([EUMAM Ukraine](#)) was established on 17 October 2022 to enhance the military capability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the training of 40 000 military personnel. On 20 March 2023, the Council of the European Union approved a three-track plan aimed at urgently providing Ukraine with ammunition and, if requested, missiles, either from existing national stocks or from the joint procurement of newly produced munitions. Member States also held several rounds of discussions on the proposal by Commission Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell to provide up to EUR 5 billion a year to Ukraine for the next four years under the European Peace Facility.

The [European Union Advisory Mission \(EUAM\) Ukraine](#) began working in the country in December 2014 and coordinates international support for the civilian security sector. In addition to its operational activities, it provides strategic advice, including training, to the Ukrainian authorities on how to develop sustainable, accountable and efficient security services that strengthen the rule of law. Following Russia's invasion, the European Council modified the EUAM's mandate to allow it to support Ukraine in investigating and prosecuting international crimes.



A. The European Parliament's position

In the course of 2021, the European Parliament adopted resolutions on the Russian military build-up along Ukraine's border (one in [April](#) and one in [December](#) 2021). It also sent a delegation of members of its Foreign Affairs Committee and Security and Defence Subcommittee to visit Ukraine at the end of January 2022.

Following the start of the full-scale Russian war of aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the European Parliament held an extraordinary plenary session on 1 March 2022 and adopted a key [resolution](#) setting out its position:

- Condemning in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against and invasion of Ukraine, as well as the involvement of Belarus in this aggression;
- Demanding that the Russian Federation immediately terminate all military activities in Ukraine, unconditionally withdraw all military and paramilitary forces and military equipment from the entire internationally recognised territory of Ukraine, and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders;
- Underlining that the military aggression and invasion constitute a serious violation of international law, and in particular the UN Charter, and calling on the Russian Federation to return to fulfilling the responsibilities of a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining peace and security and to respecting its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Memorandum;
- Considering the Russian invasion in Ukraine an attack not only against a sovereign country but also against the principles and mechanism of cooperation and security in Europe and the rules-based international order, as defined by the UN Charter;
- Calling for the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Ukraine, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and on the basis of merit, and, in the meantime, to continue to work towards its integration into the EU single market along the lines of the Association Agreement;
- Welcoming the swift adoption of sanctions by the Council, but insisting on the need to adopt additional severe sanctions.

The European Parliament has followed the situation in Ukraine closely and took a political stance in a series of resolutions, in particular in a [resolution](#) adopted on 7 April 2022, in which it called, among other things, for:

- Additional punitive measures, including an immediate full embargo on Russian imports of oil, coal, nuclear fuel and gas, accompanied by a plan to ensure the EU's security of energy supply and the complete abandonment of the Nordstream 1 and 2 gas pipelines;
- Russia's exclusion from the G20 and other multilateral organisations such as the UN Human Rights Council, Interpol, the World Trade Organization, UNESCO and others;
- The exclusion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system and a ban on Russian vessels entering EU territorial waters and docking in EU ports;



- The termination of collaboration with Russian companies on existing and new nuclear projects and an end to scientific cooperation with Russian energy companies.

Further relevant European Parliament resolutions include:

- The resolutions of 5 May 2022 on [the impact of the war against Ukraine on women](#) and on the [impact of the Russian illegal war of aggression against Ukraine on the EU transport and tourism sectors](#);
- The resolutions of 19 May 2022 on [the social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine – reinforcing the EU's capacity to act](#), on the proposal for a regulation on [temporary trade liberalisation supplementing trade concessions applicable to Ukrainian products under the Association Agreement](#) and on the proposal for a [regulation as regards the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes at Eurojust](#);
- The [recommendation to the Council of 8 June 2022](#), in which the European Parliament repeated its call to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine, and the resolution of 23 June 2022 [on the candidate status](#) of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, in which Parliament reiterated this call;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 September 2022 on human rights violations in the context of forced deportation of Ukrainian civilians to and forced adoption of Ukrainian children in Russia;
- The [resolution](#) of 6 October 2022 on Russia's escalation of its war of aggression against Ukraine;
- The [resolution](#) of 23 November 2022 on recognising Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism – shortly after adopting this resolution, the European Parliament was targeted by a sophisticated [cyberattack](#), with a pro-Kremlin group claiming responsibility;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 December 2022 recognising the Holodomor of 1932-1933 as genocide of the Ukrainian people;
- The [resolution](#) of 19 January 2023 calling for the establishment of a special tribunal to punish Russian crimes in Ukraine and hold the Russian and Belarusian military and political leadership to account;
- The [resolution](#) of 2 February 2023 on the preparation of the EU-Ukraine Summit, in which Parliament called for both the EU institutions and the Ukrainian authorities to work towards the start of accession negotiations and to support a roadmap outlining the next steps to enable Ukraine's accession to the EU single market, focusing on providing tangible benefits for Ukrainian society and citizens from the start of the process;
- The [resolution](#) of 16 February 2023 marking one year since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the start of its war of aggression – in this resolution, the European Parliament stressed that Ukraine should be provided with military aid for as long as necessary, called for the EU and its Member States to take further action to continue the international isolation of the Russian Federation, including with regard to Russia's membership of international organisations and bodies such as the



United Nations Security Council, and urged Ukraine, the Commission and the Council to work towards beginning accession negotiations that year;

- The [resolution](#) of 15 June 2023 on the sustainable reconstruction and integration of Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic community, in which Parliament expressed its determination to continue supporting Ukraine until the full restoration and control of its internationally recognised borders and throughout the process of Ukraine's sustainable recovery and reconstruction, and condemned the destruction by Russia of the Kakhovka dam, which constitutes a war crime. The resolution underlined that the peace brought by Ukraine's victory had to be secured by integrating Ukraine into the EU and NATO and called on the Council and the Commission to set out a clear pathway for the start of EU accession negotiations and to support Ukraine so that the accession talks could start in 2023;
- The [resolution](#) of 15 June 2023 on the torture and criminal prosecution of Ukrainian minors Tihran Ohannisian and Mykyta Khanhanov by the Russian Federation;

The leaders of the European Parliament's political groups (the Conference of Presidents) adopted a [statement on 9 June 2022](#) in which they strongly appealed to the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine.

Following on from the award of the European Parliament's prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to the Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov in 2018, in 2022 the Prize was awarded 'to the brave people of Ukraine, represented by their president, elected representatives and civil society'.

The European Parliament has provided technical and in-kind assistance to Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, in particular in the fields of IT, communication, legal assistance and translation. It has also developed a number of communication tools, such as the [Stand with Ukraine website](#), which is available in English and Ukrainian.

Parliament has also taken a series of concrete actions to reach out to and support Ukraine's civil society and population. For example, it opened a Ukrainian civil society hub in the Station Europe building in Brussels and launched an initiative called [Generators of Hope](#), under which it [donated](#) of a generator on 8 December 2022 and shipped seven generators directly to the Verkhovna Rada.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

The outbreak of full-scale war and the granting of official EU candidate status to Ukraine has led to greater dialogue and more personal visits at all levels, including between the two parliaments' leaders, political groups, parliamentary committees and other relevant bodies, and within the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee.

On 1 April 2022, European Parliament President Roberta Metsola became the first EU leader to travel to Ukraine since the Russian invasion. She visited Kyiv, where she [addressed](#) the Verkhovna Rada and met President Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and representatives of the Verkhovna Rada's political groups. To mark the Day of Ukrainian Statehood on 28 July 2022, President Metsola addressed the Verkhovna Rada with a video [message](#) in which she reaffirmed the commitments made by the EU to aid Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. On 5 September 2022, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal [visited](#) the European Parliament and met with President Metsola and the leaders of the political groups, while on 14 September 2022, President



Zelenskyy's wife Olena Zelenska attended the debate on the State of the Union address during the European Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg.

The European Parliament's Secretary-General Klaus Welle [visited](#) Ukraine from 19 to 22 September 2022 at the invitation of his counterpart in the Verkhovna Rada. While there, he [met](#) with figures including First Deputy Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Oleksandr Korniyenko to discuss European Parliament support to the Rada.

President Zelenskyy [addressed](#) the European Parliament's plenary session during the Sakharov Prize award ceremony on 14 December 2022, while on the same day, President Metsola [spoke](#) to the Verkhovna Rada about Ukraine's progress as an EU candidate country. On 9 February 2023, Parliament held an [extraordinary plenary session](#) (formal sitting) that was attended by President Zelenskyy in person. On 4 March 2023, President Metsola [participated in the United for Justice conference](#) in Lviv and met with figures including President Zelenskyy, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Ruslan Stefanchuk and Ukraine's Prosecutor-General Andriy Kostin.

On 2 December 2022, a delegation of members of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and its Subcommittee for Security and Defence [visited](#) Kyiv to meet key Ukrainian officials and members of the Verkhovna Rada. On 20 February 2023, six members of the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the EU, including Disinformation, and the Strengthening of Integrity, Transparency and Accountability in the European Parliament (ING2) [visited Kyiv](#). They had an intensive programme of meetings focused on foreign interference, disinformation and EU support to Ukraine in the context of Russia's war of aggression and Ukraine's EU candidate status. On 22 and 23 October 2023, a delegation from the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) [visited](#) the Chernihiv region and Kyiv to engage in discussions on justice and accountability and the shared human rights agenda with local communities, including victims and witnesses, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Office of the President, the General Prosecutor, and representatives of civil society. Members of the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) [visited Ukraine](#) from 30 October to 1 November 2023 to discuss Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction, its path to EU accession and the associated reforms.

The [EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee](#) has met regularly since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion. The 13th meeting of the PAC – an extraordinary meeting – was held on 24 March 2022, with Ukrainian MPs attending remotely, and a [joint statement](#) was adopted. Ordinary EU-Ukraine PAC meetings were held in Strasbourg in June 2022 (see [joint statement](#)) and July 2023 (see [joint statement](#)). Several ad hoc delegations from the Verkhovna Rada have visited the European Parliament, while the PAC Bureau, which consists of the PAC's co-chairs and vice chairs, has also met regularly.

At the initiative of President Metsola and Speaker Stefanchuk, the two parliaments held their first ever inter-committee meeting on 12 April 2023 to strengthen contact between parliamentary committees in connection with Ukraine's chosen path of European integration and its legislative harmonisation agenda.

The legal framework for the European Parliament's support and capacity-building activities is provided by the Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed with the Verkhovna Rada on 3 July 2015 and renewed for the new parliamentary term, and the Administrative Cooperation Agreement, which was signed by the Secretaries-General of the two legislatures in March 2016.



As part of its democracy support activities in Ukraine, the European Parliament is implementing a far-reaching capacity-building programme for the Verkhovna Rada. These efforts build on the recommendations drawn up between September 2016 and February 2017 during the needs assessment mission conducted by Pat Cox, a former President of the European Parliament who is still closely involved in the recommendations' implementation and follow-up.

In 2017, the European Parliament launched a political dialogue and mediation process called the Jean Monnet Dialogue. The Jean Monnet Dialogue with Ukraine regularly involves the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada and the leaders of the political groups in discussions related to the implementation of these recommendations, as well as the internal reform of the Verkhovna Rada.

Anticipating the Verkhovna Rada's ambition of moving towards a pre-accession agenda, the European Parliament recently launched a series of online seminars for Ukrainian MPs. These focus on legal harmonisation, best practices in legislative processes, and ethics and conflict of interest. The two parliaments are also cooperating more closely on the digitalisation agenda, strategic foresight capacity and translation services. The European Parliament is developing an important parliamentary mechanism that will be embedded in the Verkhovna Rada's control and oversight competencies and will aim to scrutinise the external funds received by Ukraine. Work in this area is being overseen by a designated lead MEP for democracy support, Michael Gahler. Programmes on empowering women parliamentarians and tackling disinformation are also being prepared.

C. Election observation

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of a consolidated democracy. The European Parliament sent observation missions to Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 for the presidential, parliamentary and local elections, and in 2019 for the presidential and parliamentary elections.

The EU and the European Parliament have paid careful attention to elections in the illegally occupied territories, in particular the elections to the Russian Duma in September 2021 that involved occupied Crimea. In his [declaration of 20 September 2021, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative](#) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stressed that the EU does not recognise the so-called elections held in the occupied Crimean peninsula.

According to Ukraine's Constitution, ordinary parliamentary elections are due to be conducted in autumn 2023, presidential elections in spring 2024 and local elections in autumn 2025. However, elections cannot take place while martial law is in place. The first post-war elections will pose unprecedented challenges, as a significant share of the electoral infrastructure has been damaged and millions of voters have been displaced within or outside the country.

Work has already begun to assess the war's effects on Ukraine's electorate and electoral infrastructure and prepare for the new electoral landscape. The Ukrainian electoral authorities are receiving assistance from the international community with organising out-of-country voting. The European Parliament held a parliamentary electoral dialogue on this topic at the end of May 2023, in cooperation with International IDEA and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, which is providing large-



scale electoral assistance to Ukraine and helping the country to determine the best model for out-of-country voting, with a focus on Ukrainian refugees abroad.

MOLDOVA

On 27 June 2014, the EU and Moldova signed an [Association Agreement](#), including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which entered into force in July 2016. The agreement strengthened Moldova's political and economic ties with the EU. It set out a reform plan in areas vital for good governance and economic development and reinforced cooperation in several sectors. By signing the agreement, Moldova committed to reforming its domestic policies on the basis of EU laws and practice. The roadmap for the implementation of the Association Agreement is defined in the Association Agenda, the latest version of which – the [revised 2021-2027 Association Agenda](#) – was agreed in August 2022. The EU is by far Moldova's main trading partner and accounts for 52% of its total trade. It is also the largest investor in the country.

Since the entry into force of visa liberalisation for short-term stays in April 2014, more than 2.5 million Moldovan citizens with a biometric passport have travelled to the Schengen Area without a visa, which has fostered tourism, business relations and people-to-people contacts.

On 2 June 2021, the Commission published the EU Economy Recovery Plan for Moldova, which earmarks EUR 600 million to support the country's post-COVID-19 socio-economic recovery, foster the green and digital transition and unleash the country's untapped economic potential.

Pro-EU President Maia Sandu's Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) won a resounding victory in the early parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021. The PAS-dominated parliament approved Natalia Gavriluța's appointment as Prime Minister and endorsed her ambitious programme to pull the post-Soviet country out of a protracted political and economic crisis and bring it closer to the EU – its number one foreign policy priority – by fully implementing the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. On 10 February 2023, Prime Minister Gavriluța stepped down and Dorin Recean, a former advisor to President Sandu, was approved as the new Prime Minister. The government was reshuffled too. The current government is continuing to pursue a pro-EU agenda, with a new focus on national security and on accelerating the implementation of reforms as part of the process of joining the EU.

Moldova's proximity to Ukraine has made it particularly vulnerable to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This has severely affected the country. Against this backdrop, Moldova took the historic step of formally applying for EU membership on 3 March 2022. It was granted candidate status at the European Council meeting of 23 June 2022, opening a new strategic phase in EU-Moldova relations.

In the face of the war in Ukraine, the EU has been standing in solidarity with Moldova. Since October 2021, it has provided the country with over [EUR 1.2 billion in support](#), in the form of grants and loans. The EU is seeking to strengthen Moldova's resilience, security, stability, economy and energy security, enhance cooperation on security and defence, and support Moldova's efforts to implement reforms and join the EU. In January 2022, the Commission proposed a EUR 150 million macro-financial assistance package for Moldova (two tranches of which were disbursed in 2022-2023), while on 24 January 2023, it proposed increasing this by up to EUR 145 million. The



European Parliament adopted this proposal on 9 May 2023, followed by the Council on 30 May 2023. Payment of the macro-financial assistance will be conditional on the implementation of both the IMF programme and policy measures agreed in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#).

Ahead of the European Political Community summit in Moldova on 1 June 2023, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [announced](#) that the Commission was stepping up its support to Moldova and would now leverage up to EUR 1.6 billion in investment through the Economic and Investment Plan for Moldova.

At a meeting of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on 28 June 2023, [Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi announced a support package for Moldova](#), which has five priorities:

- Economic development and connectivity,
- Supporting reforms and building administrative capacity on Moldova's EU path;
- Energy;
- Security;
- Countering disinformation and strategic communication.

In this regard, the Commission has proposed beefing up its assistance to Moldova through the mid-term review of the multiannual financial framework, with EUR 600 million under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) to be redeployed to programmes to increase support for other countries in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, including Moldova, between 2024 and 2027.

The Moldovan authorities are now increasing their reform efforts to implement the nine conditions set out in the [Commission's opinion](#) on Moldova's application for EU membership and meet the objectives outlined in the EU-Moldova Association Agenda, which continues to be a driver for reforms and alignment with the EU acquis. The recommendations contained in the [Commission's February 2023 analytical report](#) also guide the country's reform and approximation efforts.

The [7th meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council](#) took place on 7 February 2023 in Brussels. During this meeting, the EU and Moldova reiterated their commitment to strengthening their political association and deepening their economic integration. In its [oral update](#) on 22 June 2023, the Commission outlined the progress that had been made. It concluded that Moldova had met three of the nine conditions set out in its opinion and that the implementation of the other steps was on track, as good progress had been made in another three areas.

The Commission officially reported on the progress made by Moldova on 8 November 2023, as part of its enlargement package. It [recommended](#) that the Council open accession negotiations with Moldova and that the Council adopt the negotiating frameworks once Moldova has adopted certain key measures. The Commission found that six of the nine conditions had been met, namely reforms to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, increased involvement of civil society, preparation for public administration reform and legal reforms, and progress on the fights against corruption and organised crime. The key measures that must be taken are to advance in the fight against corruption, to continue implementing the 'de-oligarchisation' action plan and to progress towards a comprehensive justice reform. The European Council is set



to decide whether to open accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova (and Ukraine) at its meeting of 14 and 15 December 2023.

Since February 2023, Russia has stepped up its hybrid warfare against Moldova and is now openly attempting to destabilise Moldova's pro-EU government through proxies by carrying out cyberattacks, spreading disinformation, sowing social unrest and issuing bogus bomb threats. In addition, the pro-Russian Șor party orchestrated illegally-funded protests throughout 2022 and 2023. Despite being sentenced to 15 years in prison, fugitive oligarch Ilan Șor still maintains a significant level of influence in Moldova and continues his efforts to destabilise both the country and its pro-European government. President Sandu publicly confirmed that there had been a plot for a Russian-backed armed coup aiming to topple her and her government. In response to these attempts, the EU has increased its cooperation with Moldova on security and defence, notably by deploying an EU partnership mission (EUPM Moldova), by doubling its assistance under the [European Peace Facility](#) and [by sanctioning](#) individuals destabilising the country.

On 1 June 2023, the Moldovan authorities hosted the second summit of the European Political Community in Bulboacă. The meeting [boosted Moldova's international recognition and raised its profile as a reliable partner](#). It was also an opportunity for the EU to send a strong signal of support to the country, to Ukraine and to the wider European community, and to show unity in support of peace. Hosting the meeting was a huge challenge for a country that has limited administrative capacities and is directly threatened by Russia.

The breakaway region of Transnistria, which unilaterally declared independence in 1990, remains a major challenge for Moldova. It has become an even greater challenge in the context of the war in Ukraine, due to the presence of Russian troops and Moldova's dependence on electricity from Transnistria. The EU participates as an observer in the 5+2 negotiation process on the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. Although the negotiation process has been *de facto* frozen since 2022, the EU continues to support a comprehensive, peaceful settlement based on Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity, with a special status for Transnistria. In addition, the already tense relations between the Gagauzia autonomous region and the central government in Chișinău have become even more strained with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and will continue to pose challenges.

A. The European Parliament's position

The European Parliament's [resolution of 20 October 2020](#) acknowledged the improvements made in Moldova in promoting democratic standards and fighting corruption, while repeating its call for an independent, impartial judiciary. A month after Moldova submitted its application for EU membership, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution on 5 May 2022](#) in which it called for the EU institutions to grant EU candidate status to Moldova and to integrate the country into the EU single market. Parliament also asked the Commission to further increase financial and technical assistance for Moldova, including through a new macro-financial assistance proposal, transport and trade liberalisation measures, and continued support for refugee management and humanitarian work.

Upon the adoption of its [report on the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement](#) on 19 May 2022, the European Parliament called once more for Moldova to be granted candidate country status. In the report, it underlined that some important



steps to implement the reforms had been taken, but that a lot more work had to be done, in particular to strengthen key state institutions. This call was repeated in Parliament's [resolution of 23 June 2022](#) on the candidate status of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Following the increase in hybrid threats faced by Moldova in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the European Parliament adopted [a resolution on 19 April 2023](#) in which it reiterated its unwavering support for the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in these particularly challenging times.

Ahead of the presentation of the Commission's enlargement package and the December European Council meeting, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution on 5 October 2023](#) in which it reaffirmed its commitment to Moldova's future membership of the EU and asked that accession negotiations with Moldova begin before the end of the year.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the European Parliament has shown unwavering support and solidarity with Moldova. On 18 May 2022, at the invitation of President Metsola, [President Sandu addressed the European Parliament's plenary session in Brussels](#) in the midst of the war in Ukraine. This was a strong sign of support for the country, which has been disproportionately affected by the war. President Metsola visited Moldova on 11 November 2022 to meet President Sandu, former Prime Minister Gavrilița and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu, and to address the Moldovan Parliament. During her visit, she strongly reiterated the European Parliament's support for Moldova's EU membership. On the sidelines of the 7th EU-Moldova Association Council meeting, President Metsola met with former Prime Minister Gavrilița (6 February 2023). On 21 May 2023, President Metsola met Prime Minister Recean, for the first time, and Speaker Grosu when she visited Chișinău in the context of the citizens' gathering 'the European Moldova National Assembly', which was convened by President Sandu. At the European Political Community meeting in Bulboacă on 1 June 2023, President Metsola called for the EU to start accession negotiations with Moldova by the end of 2023, while President Sandu used the summit to express her country's European aspirations and reiterate Moldova's self-set objective of joining the EU by 2030.

President Metsola met Speaker Grosu again at the European Parliament in Brussels on 5 July 2023, when a delegation from the Moldovan Parliament came on a study visit about the EU accession process. The visit was organised by the European Parliament's Democracy Support and Electoral Coordination Group and was attended by 20 Members of the Moldovan Parliament.

The European Parliament's committees have devoted a great deal of attention to the situation in Moldova, with several delegations travelling to the country in 2022 and 2023. In May 2023, a delegation from the Subcommittee on Security and Defence went to Moldova and Romania to visit the European Border Assistance Mission to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine and the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova. In February 2023, members of the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Budget met with their Moldovan counterparts to discuss EU-Moldova trade relations and budget support in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In the same week, the Euronest Assembly took place in Chișinău and was attended by a large European Parliament delegation.



In March and April 2022, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence sent their first delegation to Moldova since the outbreak of war, as a sign of the EU's unanimous solidarity and support for Moldova. In June 2023, members of the Committee on Development also went to Moldova to examine the situation of Ukrainian refugees hosted there.

The EU-Moldova Association Agreement established a Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) in its Article 440. The first PAC meeting was held on 16 October 2014 and the 13th meeting was held in Brussels on 23 March 2023. The PAC has vocally supported Moldova's EU integration path since the country applied for EU membership in March 2023. In April 2023, it called on the EU institutions to grant Moldova EU candidate status. The last two PAC meetings adopted strong statements [calling for the EU institutions to open accession negotiations by the end of 2023](#), once Moldova has implemented the Commission's nine recommendations, and [urging them to gradually integrate Moldova into the single market](#).

The European Parliament has identified Moldova as a priority country for its democracy support work and is implementing a wide spectrum of activities with the Parliament of Moldova, at both political and administrative levels. The framework for these activities is provided in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by European Parliament President David Sassoli and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Igor Grosu in November 2021. This Memorandum of Understanding is complemented by a roadmap.

A number of the European Parliament's activities in Moldova focus on assistance for measures to counter disinformation and foreign interference in democratic processes (the Triangle for Democracy Programme), on the promotion of a culture of dialogue and political debate in the Moldovan Parliament (Jean Monnet Dialogue), and on capacity-building at both political and administrative levels.

C. Election observation

The European Parliament sent a delegation to the International Election Observation Mission, led by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE-ODIHR), to monitor the Moldovan parliamentary elections of 11 July 2021. The observers noted that these elections were overall well administered, free and competitive, despite some remaining shortcomings that need to be addressed for future elections.

In December 2022, the Moldovan Parliament adopted a new Electoral Code addressing key recommendations issued by international and local expert organisations, including the Venice Commission. This new code entered into force on 1 January 2023. It covers the recommendations made by the European Parliament's Election Observation Delegation, which was headed by the Chair of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, David McAllister.

The European Parliament sent an Election Observation Delegation to the International Election Observation Mission (I-EOM) led by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE-ODIHR), in order to observe the regional elections held on 5 and 19 November 2023. This was an opportunity to assess the Electoral Code's effectiveness and enforcement, as these local elections were the first to take place under the new rules. Despite the tense campaign and the exceptional circumstances created by Russia's hybrid warfare and repeated interference in Moldova's electoral process, the I-EOM delegation stated that the elections had



been peaceful and managed efficiently, that the election administration had worked transparently and professionally and that candidates, for the most part, had been able to campaign freely and had provided voters with distinct alternatives. The head of the European Parliament's Election Observation Delegation, José Ramón Bauzá Díaz, recommended that last-minute decisions to exclude candidates, such as that taken in respect of the Șansă party (which is associated with fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor), should not set a lasting precedent and should only be motivated by serious concerns regarding threats to national security. He also expressed support, on behalf of the Delegation, for the Republic of Moldova in implementing democratic reforms despite the state of emergency caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the hybrid war aimed at destabilising Moldova's democratic institutions.

BELARUS

In recent decades, the EU's relations with Belarus have been difficult at times, owing to constant human and civil rights violations in the country. Between 2014 and 2020, however, Belarus did seemingly display a more open attitude towards the EU and the Eastern Partnership policy. Its relations with Western countries had somehow improved and it played an important role as host of the EU-mediated talks on the Ukraine crisis. In response, the EU committed itself to a policy of 'critical engagement' with Belarus, as outlined in the Council [conclusions](#) of 15 February 2016, according to which tangible steps taken by Belarus to enshrine fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, human rights – including the freedoms of speech, expression and media – and labour rights, will remain essential criteria for shaping the EU's future policy towards this country. Negotiations on a mobility partnership were concluded in 2017, and visa facilitation and readmission agreements entered into force on 1 July 2020 with the objective of fostering people-to-people contacts.

Very regrettably, despite the resumption of the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue, the establishment of an EU-Belarus Coordination Group composed of senior experts level in 2016 and the adoption of a human rights action plan for 2016-2019, and notwithstanding its active participation in bilateral and multilateral Eastern Partnership meetings, Belarus has not lived up to its commitment when it comes to human rights. It remains the sole country on the European continent that still carries out capital punishment, which excludes it *de jure* from the Council of Europe. Debates on a moratorium on the death penalty with a view to its possible abolition are regularly evoked but seem to be a smokescreen, as no concrete action has been taken so far.

The EU strongly condemned the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in February and March 2017. The early parliamentary elections of 18 November 2019 were marred by a number of malpractices and shortcomings, as a result of which the opposition was deprived of any parliamentary representation. The presidential election of 9 August 2020 was deemed neither free nor fair by the international community and was preceded by systematic persecution of opposition members, then followed by a brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters, opposition representatives and journalists of unprecedented proportions in the country's history. As a consequence, the EU imposed [new rounds of sanctions](#) (the latest in August 2023) against 233 individuals and 37 entities responsible for or complicit in the electoral fraud and violent repression, as well as in the facilitation of Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, and stated its readiness to take further restrictive measures against the regime's entities and high-ranking officials. Furthermore, the EU has scaled down



bilateral cooperation with the Belarusian authorities at central level to a strict minimum, increased its support for the Belarusian people and civil society, and recalibrated its bilateral financial assistance accordingly.

In reprisal, the Belarusian regime has formally suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership policy, as well as in existing structures such as the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Belarus Coordination Group, and it has asked the EU Ambassador to Belarus to leave the country.

A. The European Parliament's position

Even before the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, the European Parliament had adopted a number of resolutions criticising Belarus on account of its political prisoners, its constraints on media freedom and civil society, its failure to respect human rights, including its retention of the death penalty, and its flawed parliamentary elections. In its [resolution of 19 April 2018](#), the European Parliament expressed support for the EU's critical engagement with Belarus, as long as this is conditioned on concrete steps being made towards democratisation and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights. In particular, it called on Belarus to join a global moratorium on the death penalty as a first step towards its permanent abolition. In its [resolution of 4 October 2018](#), the European Parliament condemned once again the harassment and detention of journalists and independent media outlets and reiterated calls to strengthen respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, and human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In response to the fraudulent presidential election of 9 August 2020, and the subsequent brutal crackdown on democratic forces, civil society activists, free trade unions, independent media and peaceful protesters, the European Parliament adopted resolutions on the situation in Belarus on [17 September 2020](#) and again on [26 November 2020](#). In these resolutions, the Members took note that the election was conducted in flagrant violation of all internationally recognised standards and that a majority of Belarusians considered the united opposition candidate, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to be Belarus' real President-elect. They called for prompt EU sanctions against the officials responsible for electoral fraud and repression, including former President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. They expressed their support for the Coordination Council established by Ms Tsikhanouskaya as an interim representation of the people demanding democratic change. The Members reiterated these principled positions in their recommendation of 21 October 2020 on relations with Belarus.

In addition, the Chair of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Belarus (D-BY) and the Standing Rapporteur on Belarus have issued a number of joint statements in which they deplored the continued worsening of the human rights situation in the country and criticised Lukashenka's continued usurpation of power. In December 2020, the European Parliament conducted a fact-finding mission on Belarus in order to assess the needs of the Belarusian democratic forces and evaluate how the European Parliament could support them, at both administrative and political level. This mission coincided symbolically with the 2020 Sakharov Prize Week, which honoured the democratic opposition of Belarus. As a consequence, the European Parliament has launched a platform against impunity for human rights violations in Belarus under the aegis of its Subcommittee on Human Rights and in cooperation with its Committee on Foreign Affairs and the D-BY. In addition, the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group has proposed a wide range of democracy-support activities tailored



for Belarusian democratic activists. Also, in its [resolution of 10 June 2021](#) on the systematic repression in Belarus and its consequences for EU security following the abduction of an EU civilian plane intercepted by Belarusian authorities, the European Parliament denounced the widespread human rights violations in Belarus and the outrageous instrumentalisation of illegal migration by Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime in order to destabilise the EU. These principled positions were reaffirmed in the European Parliament's [resolution of 7 October 2021](#) on the situation in Belarus after one year of protests and their violent repression and, following a new wave of arrests, in its [resolution of 19 May 2022](#) on the prosecution of opposition and detention of trade union leaders in Belarus, its [resolution](#) of 24 November 2022 on the continuing repression of the democratic opposition and civil society in Belarus, its [resolution](#) of 15 March 2023 on further repression against the people of Belarus, in particular the cases of Andrzej Poczobut and Ales Bialiatski, and its [resolution](#) of 11 May 2023 on the inhumane treatment and hospitalisation of prominent opposition leader Viktor Babaryka. In its [resolution](#) of 13 September 2023 on relations with Belarus, the European Parliament called on the International Criminal Court to issue a warrant for the arrest of Lukashenka, given his regime's role in the illegal deportation and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.

B. Interparliamentary cooperation

The European Parliament does not have official relations with the Parliament of Belarus, due to the country's repeated failure to conduct free and fair elections and to fulfil international standards for democracy and the rule of law, as illustrated by the new waves of protests and all-out repression following the fraudulent parliamentary elections of 18 November 2019 and the presidential elections of 9 August 2020. Likewise, Members of the Parliament of Belarus have not yet been invited to sit in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, as meeting OSCE election standards is a precondition for admission. That said, representatives of the Belarusian democratic forces have regularly been invited to attend the proceedings of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

In addition, the European Parliament maintains, through the D-BY, an active and close dialogue with representatives of the country's democratic forces, independent non-governmental organisations and civil society actors, including members of the Coordination Council and the United Transitional Cabinet established by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Regular meetings of the D-BY are held in Brussels and Strasbourg to discuss the evolution of EU-Belarus relations and to assess the political and economic situation in the country, as well as the latest developments regarding democracy, human rights violations and the rule of law. The D-BY also travelled to Minsk in June 2015 and July 2017, as did its Bureau in October 2018 and February 2020. In June 2022, the D-BY sent an ad hoc mission to Vilnius to meet with representatives of democratic forces and civil society in exile and evaluate the situation on the EU-Belarus border.

C. Election observation

Belarus has not invited the European Parliament to observe elections since 2001. As is customary in such cases, the European Parliament relies on the evaluation carried out in the country by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the OSCE ODIHR Parliamentary Assembly. Regrettably, these international observers were not invited to observe the presidential election of 9 August 2020 either, despite the Belarusian regime's prior commitment to invite them.



Vanessa Cuevas Herman / Florian Carmona / Levente Csaszi
02/2024



5.5.7. THREE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP NEIGHBOURS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

The EU's Eastern Partnership policy, initiated in 2009, covers six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It was created to support political, social and economic reform efforts in these countries with the aim of increasing democratisation and good governance, energy security, environmental protection, and economic and social development. All the participating countries (except Belarus whose membership is suspended) send delegations to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

In addition to the work of the competent committees on foreign affairs and international trade, the European Parliament has a standing delegation for relations with the South Caucasus ([DSCA](#)), which oversees EU relations with the three South Caucasus states under the frameworks of the Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC) with Georgia, the Parliamentary Partnership Committee (PPC) with Armenia and the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) with Azerbaijan, and monitors the work of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

GEORGIA

The [EU-Georgia Association Agreement](#), including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), entered into force in July 2016. Georgia has made significant efforts in terms of aligning its legislation with EU standards, which has led, inter alia, to visa waivers for short stays in the Schengen area as of March 2017. The EU is Georgia's top trading partner, representing some [21%](#) of its total trade (2021). The EU provides over EUR 100 million to Georgia each year in technical and financial support, focusing on economic development, good governance, movement of people and education.

As part of Team Europe's efforts to help partner countries cope with the socio-economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, a EUR 183-million, tailor-made response package has been offered to Georgia, mobilising a mix of existing and new funds to deliver concrete support to people and strengthen Georgia's macro-financial stability.

Georgia's political and media landscapes are characterised by sharp polarisation. What is more, a series of questionable developments over the past couple of years have pointed to a sharp democratic backsliding and a continued undermining of civil liberties. These include, notably, widespread impunity for high-level corruption, instances of police violence, a chronic lack of independence and transparency in the judiciary, restrictions on media freedom (epitomised by the sentencing of Nika Gvaramia, the founder of the opposition-leaning Mtavari Channel, to 3.5 years in prison on flimsy charges in May 2022 – Mr Gvaramia was finally pardoned by the President of Georgia in June 2023), verbal and physical attacks against journalists and opposition-leaning media workers, and the continued stigmatisation of and discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community, as tragically exemplified by the violent attacks on and subsequent forced cancellation of the March for Dignity on 5 July 2021. Moreover, a number of shortcomings and malpractices were observed during the 2018 presidential election, the 2020 parliamentary elections and the 2021 municipal elections. In this difficult context, the European Parliament has adopted two



critical resolutions: on [violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia](#) (9 June 2022) and on [the situation of the former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili](#) (15 February 2023). In July 2021, the leaders of the ruling Georgian Dream party unilaterally withdrew from the political agreement brokered by European Council President Charles Michel (the 19 April agreement). The document comprehensively addressed the issues of politicised justice, improvement to the electoral framework and judicial reform. Members of the European Parliament still consider that the 19 April agreement underpins Georgia's democratic development.

Following Ukraine's urgent plea to join the European Union as it battled Russia's invasion, Georgia (alongside the Republic of Moldova) submitted its own application for candidate status on 3 March 2022 under an accelerated procedure. In line with the opinions issued by the European Commission and taking into account the worrying democratic backsliding observed in the past few years, on 23 June, the European Council [decided](#) only to recognise Georgia's 'European perspective', while Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova were granted candidate status.

The Georgian Parliament has established thematic working groups to address the 12 key priorities identified by the European Commission, thus setting the process of tackling these issues in motion. However, at the [seventh meeting of the EU-Georgia Association Council](#) held on 6 September 2022 in Brussels, the EU expressed its grave concerns over the lack of substantial progress and further negative developments in Georgia with respect to democratic standards and the rule of law.

Faced with Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgians have pinned their hopes on moving closer to the EU and NATO. The EU has repeatedly underlined its unwavering support for Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, as underlined in the European Parliament [resolution of 14 June 2018](#) on Georgian occupied territories 10 years after the Russian invasion. The EU supports the conflict resolution efforts made through the work of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, the EU Monitoring Mission and the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, thus complementing the Geneva International Discussions. The annual EU-Georgia Strategic Security Dialogue is a sign of trust in relations between the two sides. Georgia has also made significant contributions to several EU common security and defence policy operations, based on a framework agreement for Georgia's participation, which entered into force in 2014. On the downside, the Georgian authorities have increasingly accommodated the Kremlin in recent years, as illustrated by their refusal to align with EU-led sanctions against Russia and the resumption of direct flights between Georgia and Russia.

A. The European Parliament's position and interparliamentary cooperation

On 9 June 2022, the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents issued an appeal to the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and to 'work towards granting the same status' to Georgia. Based on the three opinions released by the European Commission on 17 June, the European Council, on 23 June, only recognised Georgia's 'European perspective', while it granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova.

Additionally on 9 June 2022, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia. In this document, Members denounced state capture by the Georgian Dream party and its founder,



oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, and deplored the significant deterioration of the media situation in the country.

The twelfth meeting of the [EU-Georgia PAC](#) took place on 8 June 2023. The participants acknowledged progress on harmonisation in technical areas, but Members of the European Parliament deplored the backsliding trend with respect to the rule of law, the independence and efficiency of the judiciary, labour law and non-discrimination. They called on their Georgian counterparts to work together, with civil society stakeholders, in order to tackle the 12 key priorities identified by the European Commission. They also took note of the further deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied regions.

On 14 December 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution [on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia](#) based on a report drafted by the standing rapporteur, MEP Sven Mikser (S&D, Estonia). While taking note of Georgia's continued reforms despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Members called for the more systematic involvement of civil society actors in decision-making and deplored the backsliding trends with respect to the rule of law, in particular the cases of politicised justice.

B. Election observation

Georgia has hosted missions from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), monitoring the country's parliamentary, presidential and local elections since 1995. As usual in the OSCE area, European Parliament observers have been embedded in the OSCE ODIHR missions. The 2016 parliamentary elections were assessed as broadly democratic and fair, despite some procedural irregularities and allegations of intimidation. The Georgian Dream coalition won, securing the 'constitutional majority' (75% of MPs) required to pass constitutional amendments. The 2018 presidential elections received [criticism](#) from the OSCE and the EU for the misuse of administrative resources, the severe polarisation of the private media and negative campaigning, but the overall assessment was positive. Owing to the COVID-19 crisis and related public health and travel restrictions, the European Parliament did not send short-term observers to monitor the 2020 parliamentary elections. The OSCE ODIHR deployed a limited election observation mission, comprising a core team of experts and long-term observers. On election day, the ODIHR joined efforts with short-term observers sent by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and with the European Diplomatic Watch, deployed at the initiative of the EU Delegation in Georgia. These elections again saw an outright victory for the ruling Georgian Dream coalition. The international observers [found](#) them to be competitive and deemed that freedoms were, overall, respected. This certainly constitutes a [positive development](#) for the country, despite some isolated incidents and cases of pressure being put on voters and a blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state throughout the campaign and on election day. Municipal elections were held in Georgia in October 2021 and the European Parliament participated in the international election observation mission led by the OSCE ODIHR.



ARMENIA

Armenia's relations with the EU are based on the [Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement \(CEPA\)](#), which was signed in November 2017 and fully entered into force on 1 March 2021. The CEPA, which replaced the previous Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1999, deepens bilateral relations in a range of areas, while ensuring compatibility with Armenia's membership of the Eurasian Economic Union. Accounting for about [16%](#) of Armenia's total trade (2022), the EU-27 is the country's second-biggest trading partner after Russia.

The political situation in Armenia changed radically in May 2018, when peaceful street protests brought the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan to power (the 'Velvet Revolution') and the new government embarked on an ambitious reform agenda, including in the areas of the rule of law, transparency and the fight against corruption. The early parliamentary elections of June 2021 reconfirmed this course, with the ruling Civil Contract party garnering 54% of the vote, despite the domestic political backlash and significant humanitarian challenges stemming from the country's defeat in the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020.

The six-week war, triggered by Azerbaijan, was the greatest eruption of violence in the protracted conflict since the 1994 ceasefire. Ending with a Russia-mediated ceasefire on 9 November 2020, it saw Armenians lose control over a part of Nagorno-Karabakh – a formerly autonomous entity within Soviet Azerbaijan, with an ethnic Armenian population and an unrecognised de facto state since the dissolution of the Soviet Union – and the adjacent Azerbaijani districts that they had occupied for 26 years. Tensions reached a new peak following Azerbaijani attacks on targets within the Republic of Armenia's territory (i.e. not Nagorno-Karabakh) in September 2022. On 19 September 2023, after blockading Nagorno-Karabakh for nine months, leading to a dire humanitarian situation, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive against the region, leaving hundreds of dead and resulting in the defeat of the de facto state and its eventual dismantling. The entire local population of over 100 000 Karabakh Armenians fled to Armenia within a few days.

The EU has been steadily increasing its engagement with Armenia and has stepped up assistance to help the country deal, in particular, with the numerous conflict-related challenges, including the refugee situation. EU support to Armenia is mainly provided under the 'Global Europe' instrument, with about EUR 180 million allocated for the 2021-2024 period. This has a particular focus on building resilience, as well as on continued support to aid the country's reforms in order to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Part of this funding contributes to the EU's Economic and Investment Plan for Armenia, which includes a package of grants, loans and guarantees with the potential to mobilise some EUR 2.6 billion in public and private investments.

Through mediation by the President of the European Council, the EU has been actively involved in efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. It also underlines the need to ensure that the rights and security of the Karabakh Armenians are protected, in order to enable their return. Since February 2023, based on Armenia's invitation, EU civilian observers have been deployed along the border with Azerbaijan as part of the [EU Mission in Armenia](#). The EU has stressed its unwavering support for Armenia's sovereignty, territorial integrity and democracy.



A. The European Parliament's position and interparliamentary cooperation

The European Parliament has stood firmly on the side of Armenian democracy and a peaceful resolution to the long-standing conflict with Azerbaijan. In [March 2023](#), Parliament adopted a comprehensive resolution on EU-Armenia relations, sending a strong message of support for the democratic reforms in the country, the deepening of bilateral relations and increased EU engagement in security, in particular through the EU Mission in Armenia and mediation efforts. In [October 2023](#), Parliament 'condemned in the strongest terms the pre-planned and unjustified military attack by Azerbaijan' against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and called for a substantial increase in EU assistance to Armenia in response to the influx of refugees, Azerbaijan's threats and Russia's destabilisation attempts. It also demanded a resolute EU response to Azerbaijan's actions, including targeted sanctions and a comprehensive review of relations. In earlier resolutions, in [January 2023](#), Parliament strongly condemned the 'military aggression by Azerbaijan' of September 2022, as well as 'Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor', [deploring](#) its humanitarian consequences. In a [March 2022](#) resolution, Parliament 'strongly condemned Azerbaijan's continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh'. In [May 2021](#), Parliament adopted a resolution calling, in particular, for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war and other captives still detained by Azerbaijan. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, Parliament passed a resolution in [January 2021](#) in which it expressed its regret that 'changes to the status quo were made through military force' and stressed that 'a lasting settlement still remains to be found'. It also reiterated that negotiations for a lasting solution should be based on the principles of the non-use of force, territorial integrity and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples, which underpin the OSCE Minsk Group basic principles. In [2015](#), the European Parliament passed a resolution on the centenary of the Armenian genocide.

Bilateral inter-parliamentary relations are developed in the context of the [Parliamentary Partnership Committee](#), which held its latest meeting in [March 2023](#). Leading MEPs following the situation in Armenia have released a series of [statements](#), insisting, in particular, on the need for a negotiated comprehensive settlement of the conflict and raising concerns over issues such as the Lachin corridor blockade, border incidents and attacks, Armenian captives, landmines, inflammatory rhetoric, humanitarian access and the protection of cultural heritage.

B. Election observation

Armenia has hosted Members of the European Parliament – as part of OSCE ODIHR election observation missions – on a number of occasions, including the country's snap parliamentary elections in 2018. The 2018 elections were judged positively, as being well-organised and with minimal irregularities, and the European Parliament delegation [observed](#) a major drop in electoral malpractice. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Parliament was not able to observe the June 2021 elections, but MEPs [noted](#) the generally positive assessment by the OSCE ODIHR.

AZERBAIJAN

The EU and Azerbaijan have had a [Partnership and Cooperation Agreement](#) since 1999. Negotiations for an enhanced agreement were launched in February 2017, but have so far been inconclusive. The EU is Azerbaijan's key trade partner,



representing about [52%](#) of the country's total trade (2022), mainly due to oil and gas exports to the EU (accounting for about [4.1%](#) and [3.7%](#) of the EU's oil and gas imports in 2022 respectively by net mass). Azerbaijan's natural gas exports to the EU started in December 2020, following the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor project. In July 2022, the EU and Azerbaijan declared the intention to double the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor by 2027.

Azerbaijan ranked [134th](#) out of 167 countries in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2022 Democracy Index and was classified as 'not free' in the 2023 'Freedom in the World' report. President Ilham Aliyev, currently serving his fourth term, succeeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, in 2003. In 2017, he appointed his wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, to the newly created post of First Vice-President. According to the latest EU Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World published in [July 2023](#), 'the state of play regarding safeguarding of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the respect of the rule of law in Azerbaijan continues to be of concern', in particular as regards the lack of independence of the judiciary, the restrictions on basic freedoms, including the freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as intimidation, arrests, detentions and court cases against human rights defenders, civic activists, journalists and political opposition activists. A new law on political parties has further limited political pluralism.

Azerbaijan's victory in the six-week Nagorno-Karabakh war with Armenia, which it launched in September 2020, has further strengthened the position of President Aliyev. As a result of the ceasefire of 9 November 2020, Azerbaijan regained control of the districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh that had been occupied by Armenian forces for over 26 years, opening the possibility for a future return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons. It also took control of part of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, a formerly autonomous region that is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but inhabited by ethnic Armenians. In September 2023, after blockading the residual Nagorno-Karabakh for nine months, which led to a dire humanitarian situation, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive against the region, resulting in the defeat of the Armenians' de facto state and its eventual dismantling. The entire local population of over 100 000 Karabakh Armenians fled to Armenia within a few days. In September 2022, Azerbaijan had launched attacks on the territory of Armenia proper in a dangerous escalation, raising fears of further advances beyond Nagorno-Karabakh.

The EU has been actively involved in efforts to reach a negotiated solution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, in particular through mediation by the President of the European Council. It underlines the need to ensure mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, to proceed with the delimitation of the inter-state border and to ensure the protection of the rights and security of the Karabakh Armenians in order to enable their return. European observers have been deployed in Armenia since February 2023 to contribute to regional security. However, Azerbaijan has not agreed to the deployment of EU monitors on its side of the border.

A. The European Parliament's position and interparliamentary cooperation

In [March 2023](#), the European Parliament adopted a [comprehensive](#) resolution on EU-Azerbaijan relations, in which it expressed 'deep concern that violations of fundamental human rights in Azerbaijan follow a systemic and widespread pattern and affect citizens' rights to liberty and security'. It stressed that further cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan should be conditional on the country's effective and tangible



progress towards respect for international standards and international commitments and that the release of all political prisoners is an indispensable condition for a new partnership agreement. At the same time, Parliament welcomed Azerbaijan's humanitarian aid to Ukraine and recognised the role played by Azerbaijan as a provider of fossil fuel energy to the EU. The resolution also strongly condemned Azerbaijan's September 2022 aggression against Armenia and the blockade of the Lachin corridor, calling on Azerbaijan, in particular, to respect the ruling of the International Court of Justice regarding the blockade and to allow the presence of EU observers deployed in Armenia on the Azerbaijani side of their border.

In [October 2023](#), Parliament 'condemned in the strongest terms the pre-planned and unjustified military attack by Azerbaijan' against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and demanded a resolute EU response to Azerbaijan's actions, including targeted sanctions, the suspension of negotiations on an enhanced EU-Azerbaijan partnership agreement, the suspension of the Memorandum of Understanding on energy and a comprehensive review of relations. In earlier resolutions, in [January 2023](#), Parliament already strongly condemned the 'military aggression by Azerbaijan' of September 2022, as well as 'Azerbaijan's illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor', [deploring](#) its humanitarian consequences. In a [March 2022](#) resolution, Parliament 'strongly condemned Azerbaijan's continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno-Karabakh'. In [May 2021](#), Parliament adopted a resolution calling, in particular, for the immediate and unconditional release of all Armenian prisoners of war and other captives still detained by Azerbaijan.

In a [September 2023](#) resolution, the European Parliament raised the case of political prisoner Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu and urged the Azerbaijani authorities to 'release all political prisoners, independent journalists and human rights defenders, drop all politically motivated charges against them and stop extraterritorial repression'. In [2019](#), Parliament passed a resolution calling for the immediate release of Mehman Huseynov, an anti-corruption blogger, and other political prisoners. In [2017](#), following the 'Azerbaijani Laundromat' revelations, it denounced 'attempts by Azerbaijan and other autocratic regimes in third countries to influence European decision-makers through illicit means'.

Official inter-parliamentary relations were resumed in 2016 after a four-year break and the last [Parliamentary Cooperation Committee](#) meeting took place in December 2021. Leading MEPs following the situation in Azerbaijan have released a series of [statements](#), in particular insisting on the need for a negotiated comprehensive settlement of the conflict and raising concerns over issues such as the Lachin corridor blockade, border incidents and attacks, Armenian captives, landmines, inflammatory rhetoric, humanitarian access and the protection of cultural heritage.

B. Election observation

Azerbaijan has hosted Members of the European Parliament as part of OSCE ODIHR electoral missions. However, in view of the fact that all the country's elections observed by those missions were deemed to fall short of international requirements, and recommendations still have to be implemented, Parliament decided not to send observers to the 2015 parliamentary elections or the 2018 presidential elections, and it was not invited to observe the 2020 parliamentary elections. The ODIHR mission to the 2020 parliamentary elections [stated](#) that 'the restrictive legislation and political environment prevented genuine competition', 'voters were not provided with a



meaningful choice due to a lack of real political discussion', 'instances of pressure on voters, candidates and their representatives were observed' and 'significant procedural violations during counting and the tabulation raised concerns whether the results were established honestly'.

Florian Carmona / Michal Jiráček
10/2023



5.5.8. SOUTHERN PARTNERS

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) covers Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. It consists of bilateral policies between the EU and the 10 individual partner countries, plus a regional cooperation framework, the Union for the Mediterranean. The EU boosted support for democratic transformation under the ENP in 2011, in response to the uprisings in its southern neighbourhood. It further reviewed the ENP in 2015.

LEGAL BASIS

- Article 8 of the [Treaty on European Union](#);
- Title V of the Treaty on European Union: the EU's 'external action';
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#).

INSTRUMENTS

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is implemented through bilateral (tailor-made for each country), regional, neighbourhood-wide and cross-border cooperation programmes (between EU countries and neighbourhood countries sharing a land border or sea crossing). Association agreements provide the legal basis for the EU's bilateral relations with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority and Tunisia. The association agreement initialled with Syria before the Syrian Government's violent crackdown on public protests in 2011 was never signed. The negotiations for an EU-Libya framework agreement were suspended in February 2011 and have yet to be resumed.

In the framework of the ENP, the EU and its southern partners (except Libya and Syria) have adopted bilateral action plans, partnership priorities or association agendas. These establish agendas for political and economic reform with short- and medium-term priorities of between three and five years. Reflecting the needs, interests and capacities of the EU and each partner, ENP action plans are aimed, in particular, at developing democratic, socially equitable and inclusive societies, promoting economic integration and education, developing small and medium-sized enterprises and agriculture, and facilitating the movement of people across borders.

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was the key EU financing instrument for bilateral cooperation with the southern partners for the 2014-2020 period. The new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – 'Global Europe' – will frame the EU's cooperation with these countries for the period 2021-2027. Under the new 'Global Europe' NDICI, an increased emphasis on blending EU grants with loans from European and international financing institutions will allow partner countries to unlock substantial levels of concessional funding for investments. The new system of guarantees provided for under the 'Global Europe' NDICI will give access to additional funds from the crowding-in of both public and private investors.

On 9 February 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy adopted a joint communication proposing



an ambitious and innovative [new Agenda for the Mediterranean](#) to relaunch and strengthen the strategic partnership between the European Union and its Southern Neighbourhood partners. This new agenda focuses on five policy areas: a) human development, good governance and the rule of law, b) resilience, prosperity and digital transition, c) peace and security, d) migration and mobility, and e) green transition: climate resilience, energy and the environment. At the same time, a dedicated Economic Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours aims to aid the economic recovery and improve the quality of life of people in the region, including following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EU is also seeking to advance market access and cooperation on migration and mobility issues with its southern partners. Negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) are in progress with Morocco and with Tunisia. Mobility partnerships have been concluded with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, and negotiations are ongoing with Lebanon. A number of projects have been implemented within these frameworks, in particular under the [Mobility Partnership Facility](#), launched in 2016. In addition, regional and bilateral initiatives on migration and mobility are being funded under the [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#), the North Africa window, in Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The [EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis](#), the 'Madad Fund', has provided support to Syrian refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. The Madad Fund officially expired in December 2021, though projects funded by it will run until June 2025.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), launched in 2008 to revive the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, provides a regional framework for cooperation between the EU Member States and 15 Mediterranean countries, including the 10 southern partners.

CURRENT STATUS

A. Algeria

As a major regional player and an important energy producer, Algeria is a key EU partner in the southern neighbourhood. An association agreement entered into force in 2005. The EU and Algeria have not yet adopted [partnership priorities](#) for 2021-2027, so work is continuing on the basis of those adopted at the Association Council of March 2017. The partnership priorities set up a renewed framework for political engagement and enhanced cooperation, with a focus on: (i) governance and fundamental rights; (ii) socio-economic development and trade; (iii) energy, environment and climate change; (iv) strategic and security dialogue; and (v) the human dimension, migration and mobility.

B. Egypt

Relations between the European Union and Egypt are governed by an association agreement, which has been in force since 2004. In June 2022, the ninth EU-Egypt Association Council confirmed that the two parties had an effective and multifaceted partnership by adopting new [Partnership Priorities](#) to guide the relationship until 2027. These are in line with the new EU Agenda for the Mediterranean, its Economic and Investment Plan and Egypt's Sustainable Development Strategy Vision 2030. The EU and Egypt decided to further deepen dialogue and cooperation around three main



priorities: (i) sustainable modern economy and social development; (ii) partnering in foreign policy; (iii) enhancing stability.

C. Israel

EU-Israel relations are extensive, underpinned by strong economic and trade relations and technical cooperation. Based on the 2000 association agreement, the relationship developed dynamically in subsequent years, with a substantial expansion across many sectors. The EU-Israel action plan, agreed in 2005, is based on shared common values of democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and basic freedoms, and it promotes the integration of Israel into European policies and programmes. In 2009, the EU decided that, in order for relations to be upgraded to 'advanced' status, there would have to be progress in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). Cooperation continues on the basis of the [2005 ENP action plan](#), whose validity was further extended to January 2025.

D. Jordan

The EU considers Jordan an important partner that plays a stabilising role in the Middle East. The EU-Jordan association agreement, in force since May 2002, provides the legal basis for this bilateral relationship. Jordan was the first Mediterranean partner country to conclude technical negotiations leading to an 'advanced status' with the EU in 2010. An ENP action plan was adopted in 2012 and new [EU-Jordan Partnership Priorities](#) were agreed in June 2022 to guide the relationship until 2027, in line with the new EU Agenda for the Mediterranean and its Economic and Investment Plan. The EU and Jordan will further deepen their dialogue and collaboration around three objectives: (i) strengthening cooperation on regional stability and security; (ii) promoting sustainable economic stability; (iii) strengthening good governance and respect for human rights.

In October 2014, the EU and Jordan launched a Mobility Partnership to manage mobility and migration. In addition, Jordan has benefited from EUR 1.08 billion in macro-financial assistance from the EU since 2013. The last loan programme of EUR 700 million was adopted in 2020. This will help Jordan to support economic stabilisation, enhance public debt sustainability, expedite economic reforms and limit the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Jordan also receives funding under the 'Madad Fund', the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.

E. Lebanon

Relations are based on the EU-Lebanon association agreement, in force since 2006, the 2016 [EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities](#) and the EU-Lebanon Compact, addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The validity of the existing partnership priorities has been extended until new priorities can be agreed under the 'Global Europe' NDICI. The partnership priorities focus on (i) promoting growth and job creation; (ii) fostering local governance and socio-economic development; and (iii) promoting the rule of law and enhancing security. EU-Lebanon cooperation includes specific support for capacity development and institution building, as well as measures to benefit civil society. The EU-Lebanon Association Council, held in July 2017, agreed to pursue discussions with a view to the signature of a Mobility Partnership. A country of 4.4 million inhabitants, Lebanon currently hosts around one million registered Syrian refugees. Lebanon receives funding under the 'Madad Fund', the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis. In December 2020, the EU announced that it would launch, together with the UN and the World Bank, a ['Reform, Recovery and](#)



[Reconstruction Framework](#)’ to ‘build back a better Lebanon’ guided by the principles of transparency, inclusion and accountability. However, in addition to a people-centred recovery, substantial EU assistance for the reconstruction of a democratic, transparent, inclusive and prosperous Lebanon will continue to be conditional on tangible progress on the necessary reforms.

F. Libya

Since the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Libya has been sliding into civil war, against the background of complex political, territorial, social and tribal divisions. Libya is also known as a Sahelian transit route for human trafficking and contraband. In this context, the EU is seeking to assist Libyans in establishing a stable and inclusive state. The EU supports the UN’s mediation efforts to bring an end to hostilities, and makes diplomatic approaches to Libyan and regional stakeholders. Libya does not have an association agreement or other contractual agreement with the EU, but the country is eligible for funding under the NDICI and other financial instruments. Local and regional instability have turned Libya from a destination country for migration into a transit country, requiring an immediate EU response to tackle the most urgent needs. Libya has therefore received funding through the North Africa window of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which tackles the root causes of irregular migration and provides support to protection and migration management.

G. Morocco

Of the southern partners, Morocco has one of the most developed relationships with the EU. An association agreement has been in force since 2000 and a new ENP action plan was adopted in 2013. The country was granted ENP ‘advanced status’ in 2008, reflecting the ambition to strengthen EU-Morocco cooperation and to further support economic and political reforms. The EU-Morocco mobility partnership was launched in June 2013. Negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements and a DCFTA are ongoing. In addition, a renewed fisheries agreement entered into force in 2014. According to two rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union, the EU can implement its agreements with Morocco, but these agreements do not apply to Western Sahara. Further court rulings are expected in 2023.

H. Palestine

The EU is the leading financial supporter of the Palestinian Authority (PA), with an indicative annual bilateral allocation of around EUR 300 million. The overall objective of EU support is to help build the capacities of a future viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state, coexisting in peace and security with Israel and other neighbours. The legal basis for the EU’s relations with the PA is the [Interim Association Agreement on Trade and Cooperation](#), concluded in 1997. The EU and the PA have signed an ENP action plan, which entered into force in 2013. That same year, the EU offered Israel and the future state of Palestine ‘Special Privileged Partnerships’ providing an unprecedented package of political, economic and security support subject to the conclusion of a future final status agreement. The EU is active in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and is a member of the Middle East Quartet, working towards a two-state solution based on the 2003 Roadmap for Peace. In June 2022, the European Commission approved a new bilateral allocation to Palestine worth EUR 224.8 million. This new assistance package is earmarked to support the Palestinian Authority and crucial projects in the occupied Palestinian territory. Following the terrorist attacks of Hamas in Israel, the Commission announced the launching of an urgent review of the



EU's assistance for Palestine. This review does not concern, humanitarian assistance provided under ECHO. Commission has announced it triples the humanitarian aid foreseen for Gaza, by an immediate increase with 50 million euros, which brings the total to over EUR 75 million.

I. Syria

The EU suspended all its bilateral cooperation with the Government of Syria in May 2011, following the escalation of violence and unacceptable human rights situation. In parallel, the EU adopted various restrictive measures in the form of sanctions. In line with the [EU Strategy on Syria](#) of 3 April 2017, the EU supports inclusive peace talks towards a Syrian-led political transition. The EU is the leading donor in the response to the Syrian crisis, and the EU and its Member States have collectively provided more than [EUR 24.9 billion](#) for humanitarian, development, economic and stabilisation assistance since 2011. Since 2017, the EU has organised yearly Brussels Conferences, co-chaired with the UN, on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region'. The overarching objective of these conferences has been to support the Syrian people and mobilise the international community in the search for a lasting political solution to the Syria crisis in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2254. All Brussels Conferences to date have addressed the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues affecting Syrians and communities hosting Syrian refugees, both in Syria and the neighbouring region.

J. Tunisia

Following the 2011 Tunisian revolution, the EU provided political, financial and technical support for the country's democratic transition. The legal basis of the bilateral relationship remains the association agreement, which has been in force since 1998. In 2012, taking account of the progress achieved, the EU and Tunisia agreed to establish a 'privileged partnership' with a detailed [action plan](#) for 2013-2017. Tunisia and the EU launched a mobility partnership in March 2014, which led to the opening of negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements. [Negotiations on a DCFTA](#) were approved in October 2015. However, political developments in the country since July 2021 have affected EU support for Tunisia. The European Union is ready to support any efforts by Tunisia to undertake urgent structural reforms and will also continue to support the Tunisian people as they respond to the major socio-economic and financial challenges facing the country.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament is fully involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy. Through its Committee on Foreign Affairs, it monitors the implementation of the ENP, with particular regard to annual progress reports and reviews. The committee follows the political situation in partner countries through regular exchanges of views with high-level government officials, experts and civil society stakeholders. Budgetary powers give Parliament a direct influence on the amounts allocated to the relevant financial instruments. Parliament's consent is required for the conclusion of all association agreements with southern ENP partners. Parliament must also consent to any new trade agreement, including future DCFTAs with Morocco and Tunisia.

Regular bilateral relations with the parliaments of southern partner countries are maintained through [standing delegations](#). Relations with the Moroccan Parliament were thus upgraded with the creation of a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) in 2010. JPCs



were further established with Tunisia in 2016 and with Algeria in 2018. Parliamentary relations with Syria have been suspended due to the civil war, and the current context in Libya is also preventing inter-parliamentary relations. Parliament has taken part in several EU Election Observation Missions in southern partner countries and provides assistance to Tunisia under its democracy support programme. At regional level, Parliament participates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, which holds one plenary session and several committee meetings per year. The Moroccan Parliament currently holds the rotating presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Kirsten Jongberg / Christos Trapouzanlis / Camelia Oaida
10/2023



5.6. RELATIONS BEYOND THE NEIGHBOURHOOD



5.6.1. TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE US AND CANADA

The EU, the US and Canada share the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and economic and political freedom, and have common foreign policy and security concerns. Close cooperation and strategic relations with the US and Canada remain a priority for the EU.

EU-US POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The close cooperation and strategic relations between the European Union and its Member States and the United States are built on common history and a shared set of democratic values. These are key to both partners' security and prosperity. The EU and the US closely cooperate in a number of foreign policy areas and geographical contexts, such as security, energy and technology cooperation, Russia, Ukraine, the Western Balkans, counter-terrorism and the Middle East.

Joe Biden's inauguration as the US President on 20 January 2021 brought impetus to the EU-US relationship, which had deteriorated during President Trump's term. The EU-US summit in Washington DC on 20 October 2023 was an opportunity to review the transatlantic partnership, including the shared commitment to support Ukraine. The leaders also stressed the importance of trade and investment and discussed how to resolve outstanding issues. At the end of the summit, they adopted a [joint statement](#).

The fourth meeting of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) – established during the EU-US [summit](#) in June 2021 – took place in Sweden in May 2023. The TTC serves as a forum for the two partners to coordinate their approaches to key global trade, economic and technology issues. On 10 March 2023, President Biden and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen signed a [joint statement](#) addressing the joint efforts to end the Russian war against Ukraine and cooperation on building the clean economies of the future.

In October 2021, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution on EU-US relations](#), which called for both sides to strengthen multilateralism and work together on shared foreign policy, security and economic objectives, including the pandemic, human rights and global tax reform..

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE – THE TRANSATLANTIC LEGISLATORS' DIALOGUE PROCESS

The relationship between Parliament and the US Congress, which dates back to 1972, was upgraded and institutionalised with the establishment of the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD) in 1999. The dialogue brings together Members of the European Parliament and Members of the US House of Representatives at biannual interparliamentary meetings (IPMs) that alternate between the US and Europe. Legislators attending these meetings exchange views on key political issues of mutual concern, such as trade and economic cooperation, foreign policy challenges and security and defence, among others. The importance of transatlantic political dialogue is substantial given Congress's legislative responsibility and power to authorise



US intervention in global crises and shape US participation in global governance institutions. The 86th EU-US IPM/TLD was held in Stockholm, Sweden in June 2023. The topics discussed included transatlantic support to Ukraine, sanctions, security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, the EU and US policy towards China, trade and technology, NATO enlargement and EU-NATO cooperation. A [joint statement](#) was signed at the end of the meeting.

EU-US ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The EU and the US are the world's major global [traders and investors](#). In 2022, the US was the largest economy in the world, with 25% of global GDP and 8% of the world's merchandise exports. The EU was the third largest economy in the world, representing 25% of global GDP and 28.5% of trade in goods.

The EU is working with the US to solve bilateral trade irritants, including those that arose during the previous administration, notably through the TTC. With the inaugural event of the TTC in September 2021, the US and the EU embarked on a series of specific dialogues to address the responsibility of online platforms and big tech, including artificial intelligence and data flows, to work together on fair taxation and market distortions, and to develop a common approach to protecting critical technologies. The [Clean Energy Incentives Dialogue](#) was launched in March 2023 to coordinate EU and US incentive programmes. It aims to make these programmes mutually reinforcing and will also become part of the TTC.

Since October 2022, an EU-US Task Force on the Inflation Reduction Act has also been working to identify the challenges in aligning the approaches on strengthening and securing supply chains, manufacturing and innovation on both sides of the Atlantic. As a result, negotiations have begun on a targeted critical minerals agreement to enable relevant critical minerals extracted or processed in the EU to count towards requirements for the clean vehicles tax credit under the US Inflation Reduction Act.

On another impasse resulting from the imposition of tariffs by the US on imports of steel and aluminium under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act (imports threatening national security), the EU and the US have agreed on the temporary removal of the Section 232 tariffs on historic volumes of EU exports of steel and aluminium. The two blocks also agreed to seek an arrangement to facilitate the decarbonising of the steel and aluminium industries, as well as addressing the issue of overcapacity in these industries caused by non-market practices in some economies. At the EU-US summit on 20 October 2023, both sides stated that substantial progress had been made to identify the sources of non-market excess capacity and that they looked forward to continuing to make progress over the next two months.

The US was the EU's primary export destination in 2022, absorbing 19.8% of total EU [goods](#) exports (compared with China's 9%). The US ranked second among the EU's import partners and supplied 11.9% of the EU's imported goods. In 2022, EU exports to the US increased by 27.5%, reaching a record high of EUR 509.4 billion, while imports from the US rose by 53.4% equalling to EUR 358.7 billion. The EU trade surplus with the US fell by EUR 15.3 billion to 2019/2020 levels.

The US is the EU's main partner for international [trade in services](#). Taken together, the economies of both territories amount to more than 40% of global GDP and more than 40% of global trade in goods and services. However, since 2016, the balance



of trade has shifted to a trade deficit for the EU in services, which amounted to EUR 87.9 billion in 2021.

The EU and the US are each other's largest investors, with total US investment in the EU being four times higher than in the Asia-Pacific region. EU investment in the US is around ten times higher than EU investment in India and China combined. In recent years, however, there have been some drawbacks, with negative investment flows both from the US into the EU and from the EU into the US in 2018. This resulted in a rebalancing of the foreign direct investment (FDI) stocks balance, which amounted to an EU deficit of EUR 16.4 billion in 2021 compared to an EU surplus of EUR 284.5 billion in 2018. In 2021, the total volume of EU FDI stocks in the US was again higher (by EUR 47.2 billion) than US FDI stocks in the EU. It could be argued that bilateral direct investment – which is, by nature, a long-term commitment – is the driving force behind transatlantic commercial relations. This is reinforced by the fact that trade between parent companies and affiliates in the EU and the US accounts for more than one third of all transatlantic trade. Estimates indicate that EU and US companies operating on one another's territory provide jobs for more than 14 million people.

EU-CANADA POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Canada is one of the EU's oldest and closest partners. The collaboration between the EU and Canada, based on shared values, a long history of close cooperation and strong people-to-people ties, has been considerably strengthened in the last few years.

Bilateral relations started in the 1950s on an economic basis and have since evolved into a close strategic partnership. The EU and Canada work closely together on global challenges such as the environment, climate change, energy security and regional stability, and are close partners in the G7 and G20 context.

The EU and Canada responded decisively to Russia's unprovoked and brutal military aggression against Ukraine through coordinated sanctions and by providing comprehensive – security, financial, material and humanitarian – support to Ukraine.

In the field of energy, Canada has helped to enhance the security of EU energy supplies and end the EU's dependence on Russian energy. With regard to COVID-19, the EU played a vital role in ensuring a consistent and steady supply of vaccines to Canada. In the early stages of the vaccination rollouts, most of the vaccines distributed in Canada came from EU-based plants.

Canada is a regular contributor to the EU's [Common Security and Defence Policy missions](#) and has participated in 24 of the EU's [election observation missions](#) since 2005. Canada was officially [invited to participate](#) in the [Permanent Structured Cooperation](#) projects on Military Mobility (December 2021) and on the '[Network of Logistic Hubs in Europe and Support to Operations](#)' project. The [EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement](#) (SPA), which replaced the [1976 Framework Agreement](#), is a comprehensive political agreement aimed at strengthening [bilateral cooperation in a number of foreign policy and sectoral fields](#), including international peace and security, counter-terrorism, crisis management, maritime security, global governance, energy, transport, research and development, health, the environment and climate change, and the Arctic.

The SPA was signed by Canada and the EU on 30 October 2016 at the EU-Canada summit and received Parliament's backing in February 2017. Large parts of the



agreement have been in force provisionally since 1 April 2017. The agreement needs to be ratified in all Member States ([currently](#) waiting for Italy, France and Ireland) before it will be fully applied. In order to facilitate cooperation in this framework, a number of joint institutions have been set up and an intensive dialogue has been taking place at civil servant and ministerial levels. On 16 May 2022, the third meeting of the EU-Canada Joint Ministerial Committee took place in Brussels and was chaired by VP/HR Josep Borrell and Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly (see [joint statement](#)). The most recent [EU-Canada summit](#) between the Canadian Prime Minister and the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission took place in person in Brussels on 14 June 2021 (see [joint statement](#) and [press conference](#)). From 6 to 8 March 2023, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen visited Canada. She [addressed](#) a joint session of the Canadian Parliament and met Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Their [joint statement](#) focused on topics including Ukraine, disinformation, climate, sustainable energy and raw materials, economy and technology, and research and gender equality.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DIALOGUE

For more than 40 years, Members of the European Parliament and their Canadian counterparts have been meeting annually in [IPMs](#), alternating between venues in the EU and Canada, to discuss political developments in Canada and the EU and exchange views on issues of mutual concern such as trade, climate change and migration.

Building on the SPA, the 38th IPM adopted a [joint statement](#) in which both parliaments undertook to transform the IPM into a continuous dialogue through regular additional meetings and agreed that it would act as a counterpart to the other bodies set up under the SPA. The [42nd IPM](#), which took place in Brussels in June 2023, dealt with trade and EU-Canada cooperation in the areas of AI regulation, energy, foreign interference and security and defence (see [joint statement](#)). D-CA members meet stakeholders regularly throughout the year to prepare for the IPMs. Recent meetings have been dedicated to the five-year implementation of CETA, security of supply of critical minerals and Canada-US relations.

EU-CANADA ECONOMIC RELATIONS

[CETA](#) has considerably improved the [economic, trade and investment relationship](#) between the EU and Canada, opening up the markets to one another's [goods, services and investments](#), including public procurement. CETA has also created opportunities for sustainable growth and reflected shared values through its Trade and Sustainable Development Chapter and its [broad range of dialogues](#), including its regular civil society forum. It is the first of the EU's bilateral economic agreements to incorporate a special investment court system for the settlement of investment disputes between investors and states.

The text was signed at the EU-Canada summit on 30 October 2016 and Parliament gave its consent on 15 February 2017. Provisional application of the parts falling within the EU's competence began on 21 September 2017. CETA needs to be ratified by all Member States and is [currently](#) awaiting ratification by 10 Member States before it can be fully applied. .

During the [third](#) CETA Joint Committee, held in Ottawa on 2 December 2022, both sides underscored that the positive economic performance under CETA is crucial in the current global context of rising geopolitical tensions and the Russian war against



Ukraine, supply chain disruptions, food insecurity, the global energy crisis and the emerging economic recession.

Building on the closer relationship brought about by CETA, the EU and Canada also signed the [EU-Canada strategic partnership on raw materials](#) on 21 June 2021 to further advance the integration of raw material value chains and enhance collaboration on science, technology and innovation, as well as environmental, social and governance criteria, and standards between the parties. In March 2022, Canada and the EU concluded negotiations on a [Mutual Recognition Agreement](#) on the professional qualifications of architects, the EU's first ever agreement with a non-EU country on professional qualifications. In late 2022, negotiations began on Canada joining the EU research programme [Horizon Europe](#).

Both Canada and the EU were hit by the US tariffs on steel and aluminium, and shared the view that they were neither justified economically nor compatible with World Trade Organization rules. As a consequence, the EU and Canada, together with other defenders of the rules-based trade order, have intensified their dialogue on trade issues.

Trade in goods between the EU and Canada increased by 66% between 2016 and 2022, while EU-Canada trade in services increased by 46%, outperforming other trade with non-EU partners.

In 2022, the EU was Canada's [second-largest trading partner](#) after the US, accounting for 8.2% of Canada's total combined exports and imports of goods. In 2022, the EU exported goods worth EUR 47.4 billion to Canada and absorbed Canadian goods valued at EUR 29.7 billion. Canada ranked 12th among the EU's international trading partners in 2021. Machinery, mineral products, transport equipment and chemicals are among the main goods traded between the two partners.

Trade in services is an important part of the EU-Canada trade relationship. In 2021, the value of EU exports of services to Canada increased to EUR 17.4 billion, while the EU's imports of services from Canada rose to EUR 13.7 billion. Transport, travel, insurance and communications are some examples of services traded frequently between the EU and Canada. In 2020, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, trade in services from Canada to the EU and from the EU to Canada shrunk by 21% and 33% respectively.

In terms of FDI, the EU and Canada invested almost equal amounts in each other's economies in 2018. The EU is Canada's second largest partner for two-way direct investment after the US. In 2019 and 2020, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian stocks in the EU were valued 30% lower at EUR 257.7 billion, while EU stocks in Canada contracted by 22% in 2020. In 2021, the opposite happened. While Canadian FDI stocks in the EU grew by 6% in 2021, EU stocks in Canada contracted by a further 4%.

Leon Peijnenburg / Tuula Turunen
10/2023



5.6.2. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The European Union's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean are multifaceted and conducted at different levels. Guided by the New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, the EU seeks to strengthen and modernise the bi-regional strategic partnership. The EU interacts with the entire region through summits with the heads of state and government and through parliamentary diplomacy while agreements and political dialogue bind the EU and the Caribbean, Central America, the Andean Community, Mercosur and individual countries.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (EU external action) of the Treaty on European Union;
- Titles I-III and V (common commercial policy; development cooperation and humanitarian aid; international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

REGION-TO-REGION RELATIONS

The EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are natural partners, linked by deep political, economic, and cultural ties. The EU has an extensive network of agreements with 27 of the 33 countries in the region. Economic ties are also strong: the EU is the top investor in the region, its third largest trading partner and the leading contributor to development cooperation.

On 7 June 2023, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission adopted a [joint communication](#) setting out 'A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean', with the goal of strengthening relations and renewing the EU-LAC partnership. It focuses on six key areas: a renewed political partnership; strengthening a common trade agenda; the Global Gateway investment strategy to accelerate a fair, green and digital transition and tackle inequalities; joining forces for justice, citizen security and the fight against transnational organised crime; working together to promote peace and security, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and humanitarian aid; and building a vibrant people-to-people partnership.

The communication recognises parliamentary diplomacy as a key component of the bi-regional relationship, and mentions, in particular, the role of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat).

A. The summits

The first summit between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1999 and established a bi-regional strategic partnership. The sixth and last EU-LAC Summit took place in Madrid in 2010, where the EU-LAC foundation was established with the mission of strengthening and promoting the bi-regional strategic partnership.

Launched in 2010, the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) is a regional bloc of the 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Regional summits



between the EU and CELAC are now the main forum for dialogue and cooperation to jointly tackle global challenges. The third EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State or Government took place in Brussels on 17 and 18 July 2023, eight years after the last summit. EU and CELAC leaders committed to renewing and institutionalising their long-standing partnership. The summit was held under the theme 'Renewing the bi-regional partnership to strengthen peace and sustainable development' and a broad range of issues were discussed, including enhanced cooperation in multilateral forums, global peace and security, trade and investment, combating climate change, justice and security. Together, countries in the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean make up more than a third of the membership of the United Nations (UN) and are a force for a strong rules-based multilateral system. A [declaration](#) was adopted at the end of the summit and was endorsed by all EU-CELAC countries except one. The leaders reaffirmed that the basis of the EU-CELAC partnership was a shared commitment to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, inclusive multilateralism and international cooperation, in line with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and international law. The [2023-2025 EU-CELAC roadmap](#) was also published during the event and leaders agreed to host future summits every two years, with the next one expected to be in Colombia in 2025. The EU and CELAC also meet at ministerial level; the last EU-CELAC Ministerial Meeting took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 2022.

B. The parliamentary dimension

For the EU and LAC, parliamentary diplomacy is a key channel for dialogue, the exchange of ideas and the sharing of best practices. Regular contact between members of the European Parliament and Latin American members of parliament started in 1974 with the first of 17 biennial inter-parliamentary conferences.

In 2006, the joint Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, or [EuroLat](#), was established as the parliamentary institution for the bi-regional strategic partnership. It serves as a forum to debate, monitor and review all questions relating to the partnership.

EuroLat has 150 members: 75 from the European Parliament and 75 from Latin American sub-regional parliaments, including the Latin American Parliament, the Andean Parliament, the Central American Parliament, the Mercosur Parliament and the Congresses of Chile and Mexico.

Since 2006, EuroLat has held 15 plenary sessions, with the most recent one in [July 2023 in Madrid, Spain](#). Some of the discussed topics included the fight against hate speech, the regulation of digital platforms, the education and health challenges posed by COVID-19, access to water and the fight against organised crime.

RELATIONS WITH SUB-REGIONS

A. Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru)

In December 2003, the EU and the Andean region concluded a political dialogue and cooperation agreement (PDCA), which further broadened the scope of their cooperation, but it has not yet entered into force. Negotiations on an Association Agreement started in June 2007 and finally led to a [multi-party trade agreement](#) with Peru and Colombia in March 2010. The trade agreement, signed in June 2012 and ratified by the European Parliament in December 2012, entered into force with Peru



on 1 March 2013 and with Colombia on 1 August 2013. The agreement provides for the total liberalisation of trade in industrial products and fisheries over 10 years (with most tariffs eliminated upon its entry into force) and increases market access for agricultural products. The agreement covers public procurement, investment, human rights, and labour and environmental standards. Ecuador joined the trade agreement on 1 January 2017. The full implementation of the agreement is subject to ratification by the Member States.

B. The Caribbean

EU-Caribbean relations are shaped by various overlapping institutional frameworks, including the Post-Cotonou Agreement, which includes 16 Caribbean states^[1], and the joint EU-Caribbean partnership strategy, which provides a structured framework for broader and deeper dialogue and cooperation. The EU is the Caribbean's largest trading partner. The key regional partner for economic dialogue with the EU is the Caribbean Forum (Cariforum). It includes members from the Caribbean Community, plus the Dominican Republic and Cuba. In 2008, they signed the [EU-Cariforum Economic Partnership Agreement](#), a comprehensive free trade and economic agreement.

Negotiations on concluding a PDCA with Cuba began in April 2014 and were successfully completed in March 2016. The agreement has been provisionally applied since 1 November 2017. It can enter fully into force once it has been ratified by all EU Member States. The PDCA includes three main chapters on political dialogue, cooperation and sector policy dialogue, and trade.

C. Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama)

An Association Agreement with Central America, the first region-to-region agreement of this type concluded by the EU, was signed in June 2012 and ratified by the European Parliament in December 2012. It consists of three pillars – political dialogue, cooperation and trade – and establishes the goal of developing a privileged political partnership based on values, principles and common objectives. It also aims to improve human rights, reduce poverty, fight inequality, prevent conflict and encourage good governance, security, regional integration and sustainable development. The Association Agreement also liberalises trade in industrial products and fisheries, and eliminates most tariffs on agricultural trade. Since 2013, only the agreement's trade chapter has been provisionally applied. The implementation of the full agreement is pending due to the lack of ratification by one EU Member State. Negotiations are ongoing to establish an Association Parliamentary Committee to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

D. Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay)

Negotiations on an Association Agreement with Mercosur, including political dialogue, cooperation and free trade, started in 1999. After 20 years of negotiations (except between 2004 and 2010, when they were suspended), the EU and Mercosur reached a political agreement on the trade chapter of the Association Agreement in June 2019 and on the last outstanding issues in the political and cooperation chapters in June 2020. The EU's request to its Mercosur partners to agree on additional commitments

[1] Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.



on environmental issues to be attached to the agreement halted the adoption process, although hopefully it will resume soon. If the agreement enters into force, EU exports to Mercosur would benefit from the removal of customs on 91% of goods and lower duties on various products. The EU would remove tariffs on 92% of goods imported from Mercosur, but would keep tariff-rate quotas on sensitive agricultural goods.

RELATIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES

A. Brazil

In 2007, the EU and Brazil established a strategic partnership. Within this partnership, the EU and Brazil pursue cooperation and policy dialogues in more than 30 areas of mutual interest, including international peace and security, human rights, public sector governance, economic and financial issues, innovation, social policies, education, the environment and regional integration. The EU-Brazil strategic partnership also includes a [regular dialogue](#) between Brazil's National Congress and the European Parliament. The election of Lula da Silva as President of Brazil in 2022 led to a strong revival of EU-Brazil relations after he took office in January 2023, including a series of high-level visits by both sides. In 2023, no fewer than four European Parliament delegations^[2] visited Brazil. An EU-Brazil summit is planned for 2024.

B. Chile

The EU concluded an Association Agreement with Chile in 2002. The agreement comprises three strands: a chapter on political dialogue, a cooperation chapter and the creation of a free trade area in goods and services. The [EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee](#) has monitored the implementation of the Association Agreement since 2003.

Negotiations to modernise the Association Agreement and replace it with an [Advanced Framework Agreement](#) began in November 2017 and concluded in December 2022. The modernised agreement enhances EU-Chile trade and investment relations, contains commitments on trade and sustainable development and facilitates access to mineral resources and renewable energy. It is currently pending ratification.

C. Mexico

Mexico is the only country with which the EU has both an Association Agreement and a strategic partnership. The Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Cooperation Agreement, also known as the Global Agreement, entered into force in 2000. It institutionalised political dialogue, broadened areas of cooperation, including democracy and human rights, and created an EU-Mexico free trade area. Negotiations with Mexico to modernise the Global Agreement began in May 2016. In April 2018, the parties reached an 'agreement in principle' on the trade chapters, and achieved a consensus on the last outstanding aspects in April 2020. It is currently pending ratification.

The strategic partnership was established in 2009 with a double goal: enhancing EU-Mexico cooperation and coordination at multilateral level on global issues and adding political impetus to bilateral relations and initiatives. Three EU-Mexico summits have taken place under the strategic partnership, with the latest in June 2015. There are regular high-level dialogues between the EU and Mexico on many issues, including

^[2]The Delegation for relations with the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.



human rights, security and law enforcement, economic issues and the environment and climate change. The [EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee](#) has monitored the implementation of the Global Agreement since 2005. The Joint Parliamentary Committee usually meets twice a year and is a fundamental forum for exchanges. Its work has been of vital importance in the implementation of the Global Agreement.

Clotilde Chantal Claudie SEBAG / Jonas Kraft
10/2023



5.6.3. RUSSIA

EU-Russia relations have been strained since 2014 because of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, support for separatist groups in eastern Ukraine, destabilisation policies in the neighbourhood, disinformation and interference campaigns and internal human rights violations. After Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the remaining political, cultural and scientific cooperation was suspended.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V of the [Treaty on European Union](#): 'external action';
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and Articles 216-219 (international agreements) of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#);
- Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) (bilateral relations).

EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Until the Maidan movement protests in Ukraine in November 2013, the EU and Russia had been building a strategic partnership, covering, among other areas, trade, the economy, energy, climate change, research, education, culture and security, including counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation and conflict resolution in the Middle East. The EU was a staunch supporter of Russia's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession (completed in 2012). The illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014, the evidence that Russia was supporting separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine and its attempts to disrupt access to the Sea of Azov triggered the start of a major review of EU policy towards Russia.

Since March 2014 the EU, like the US, Canada, Australia and other Western countries, has progressively imposed restrictive measures against Russia. Initially, the 2014 EU sanctions against Russia included individual restrictive measures such as asset freezes and visa bans targeted at members of the Russian elite, Ukrainian separatists and the organisations associated with them, along with diplomatic sanctions, entailing the formal suspension of EU-Russia summits and the negotiations on the new EU-Russia cooperation agreement, as well as the suspension of Russia from the G8. Broader economic sanctions against Russia followed later, with the initial restrictions on trade with Crimea, and sectoral sanctions concerning the arms trade, energy and financial cooperation with Russia. In response, in August 2014 Russia adopted [counter-sanctions](#), banning numerous EU agrifood products (representing 43 % of total EU agrifood exports to Russia and 4.2 % of total EU agrifood exports to the world in 2013). In spite of the sanctions and counter-sanctions, the EU remained Russia's biggest trading partner, while Russia was the EU's fifth biggest trading partner until 2021.

Furthermore, the EU reassessed its relations with Russia through the 2016 EU global security strategy defining them as 'a key strategic challenge'. In March 2016, the Council established five guiding principles to be applied to the EU's relations with Russia: (1) implementation of the Minsk agreements on the eastern Ukraine conflict as the key condition for any substantial change in the EU's stance towards Russia;



(2) strengthened relations with the EU's Eastern Partners and other neighbours, including Central Asia; (3) strengthening the resilience of the EU (e.g. energy security, hybrid threats or strategic communication); (4) selective engagement with Russia on issues of interest to the EU; (5) the need to engage in people-to-people contacts and support Russian civil society.

Since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has been considered as an aggressor against Ukraine and the EU has reoriented its strategy towards the Russian Federation.

In March 2022, the EU adopted its [Strategic compass for security and defence](#), acknowledging that Russia represented 'a long-term and direct threat for European security', thereby marking a major shift in EU-Russia's relations since 2016. This approach was further underpinned in the NATO Strategic Concept, adopted in June 2022, which states 'the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area'.

Consequently, since 2022 EU policies towards Russia have been designed with the following guiding principles: (1) Russia must be isolated internationally and sanctions imposed on it in order to prevent it waging war; (2) the international community must ensure accountability by holding Russia, individual perpetrators and accomplices responsible for violations of international law and war crimes committed in Ukraine; (3) the EU's neighbours must be supported, including through EU's enlargement policies, and partners worldwide helped to address the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; (4) close cooperation with NATO and partners worldwide should be supported to defend the rules-based international order; (5) the EU's resilience must be enhanced, in particular in energy security and critical infrastructure, and Russia's cyber and hybrid threats, information manipulation and interference countered; (6) civil society, human rights defenders and independent media must be supported inside and outside Russia, while addressing threats to security and public order in the EU.

After obtaining his fourth presidential term in 2018, Vladimir Putin orchestrated constitutional amendments, adopted in 2020, that will allow him to stay in power beyond 2024, the end of his current mandate (theoretically until 2036).

Under Vladimir Putin, particularly from 2012 onwards, the space for individual and collective action has diminished gradually but systematically, through legislative restrictions and targeted intimidation of critics. Over the years, the Russian authorities have introduced sweeping legal restrictions on 'foreign agents' and 'undesirable' and 'extremist' organisations, targeting hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), while censorship of the media, the internet and social media has increased significantly. An increasing number of civil society actors, human rights defenders and independent journalists have been designated as 'foreign agents', harassed and imprisoned, human rights organisations have been shut down and the freedoms of expression, of peaceful assembly and of association have been curtailed. Investigative and data-driven journalism have also been targeted, while the state-controlled media has relentlessly promoted an image of a 'besieged fortress' under attack from 'the collective West'. In addition, the 2016 and 2021 parliamentary elections and the September 2022 regional and local elections were held in a restrictive political and media environment, resulting in a significant victory for Putin's United Russia party. Election observers and the independent media found that elections continued to fall



short of international standards and were marred by fraud, workplace mobilisation, systematic exclusion of the opposition and other irregularities. [Experts noted](#) that the regional elections that took place in September 2023 were [even less fair and free](#) than the previous elections. Russian citizens' voting rights have deteriorated to the point where these elections can be considered devoid of any genuine democratic principles. Russia will hold its next presidential elections in March 2024.

In October 2020, based on a specific EU legal basis – the chemical weapons sanctions regime – six Russian individuals and one entity were added to the relevant travel ban and asset freeze list as a result of the August 2020 assassination attempt on opposition politician and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny using a military-grade toxic nerve agent. This is the same legal instrument that was used to sanction those responsible for the Skripal case in Salisbury (UK) in March 2018.

In March 2021, the Council made use of the newly adopted EU global human rights sanctions regime to sanction four Russian nationals over their roles in the arbitrary arrest, prosecution and sentencing of Navalny, as well as the repression of peaceful protests in connection with his unlawful treatment.

Russia has been retaliating against the EU sanctions since August 2014 by imposing counter-sanctions on agricultural goods, raw materials and food, alleging violations of food security standards. This has reinforced Russia's import substitution policy in the agricultural sector. Russia also applies a 'stop list' to EU and US nationals who have criticised its actions, denying them the right to enter Russian territory. This list is not officially published, which rules out any possible avenue for a legal appeal, as opposed to the EU's travel ban. The list included several MEPs and, as of 30 April 2021, the late European Parliament President David Sassoli's name also featured alongside that of European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency Věra Jourová, and six EU Member State officials.

On 21 February 2022, the State Duma of the Russian Federation officially recognised the independence of the self-proclaimed 'People's Republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk. On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Since the start of the invasion, the EU has condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine and its attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and has called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian troops from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. It has pointed out that this war of aggression constitutes a blatant and flagrant violation of the UN Charter and of the fundamental principles of international law, and that the Russian Federation bears full responsibility for it. European Council President Charles Michel has also highlighted its repercussions on the world order, declaring on 1 March 2022: 'It is not only Ukraine that is under attack. International law, rules-based international order, democracy and human dignity are also under attack. This is geopolitical terrorism, pure and simple.' In addition, EU leaders have underlined that Russia, Belarus and all those responsible for war crimes and the other most serious crimes will be held to account for their actions in accordance with international law. The EU has also condemned Russia's weaponisation of food in the war against Ukraine and the global food security crisis Russia has thereby triggered. The EU also considered the sham referendums of September 2022 and the so-called 'elections' held in September 2023



by Russia in the occupied territories of Ukraine as illegal and illegitimate and strongly rejected this attempt by Russia to legitimise or normalise its illegal military control and attempted annexation of parts of Ukrainian territories.

In response to Russia's invasion, the EU Member States swiftly adopted unprecedentedly tough sanctions in close cooperation with partners, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Japan. Since 24 February 2022, the EU has massively expanded the restrictive sectoral measures through [11 successive sanctions packages](#) (up to June 2023) and added a significant number of persons and entities to the sanctions list with the aim of further stepping up the pressure on Russia to end the war. The restrictive measures are intended to weaken Russia's economic foundation, depriving it of essential technologies and markets and greatly reducing its capacity to wage war.

The rapid succession of 11 packages of [EU sanctions](#), in what has already been labelled a 'sanctions revolution', has resulted in an unparalleled set of measures targeting the key sectors of the Russian economy and the country's political elites. Each package has incrementally amended and broadened the scope of the sanctions regimes adopted from 2014 onwards, with the addition of a new regime banning imports of goods originating in the illegally annexed territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia to the EU. The sanctions packages are intended to be hard-hitting and have wide-ranging effects across the financial, energy transport, technology, consulting, broadcasting as well as the metal, luxury and other goods sectors.

In addition to the individual and economic sanctions, a number of subsequent diplomatic sanctions have been imposed, including the suspension of visa facilitation between the EU and Russia. Together with other World Trade Organization (WTO) members, the EU agreed to deny most-favoured-nation treatment for Russian products and services on EU markets.

As of the end of June 2023, the sanctions listings cover [1 572 individuals and 244 entities](#). The sanctioned individuals include the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, Russia's Foreign Affairs Minister, Sergey Lavrov, the 351 Members of the State Duma who endorsed the recognition of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, high-ranking officials and military personnel, disinformation actors, those responsible for missile strikes against civilians, critical civilian infrastructure and for the kidnappings and subsequent illegal adoptions of Ukrainian children, and many others. Several high-ranking members of the Wagner Group mercenary organisation were included on the sanction list, including its then leader Yevgeny Prigozhin. All sanction packages have been renewed in September by the Council until March 2024.

The 11th sanctions package focuses on stepping up the fight against the circumvention of restrictions on Russia through imports via third countries or shadow entities and includes an anti-circumvention tool specifically designed to curb sanctions circumvention through third countries. The individual sanctions (travel bans and asset freezes) target the people responsible for supporting, financing or implementing actions that undermine the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine or who benefit from these actions. In this context, after adding the violation of restrictive measures to the list of 'EU crimes', the Council agreed, on 9 June 2023, to introduce criminal offences and penalties for the violation of EU sanctions and to make it easier



to investigate, prosecute and punish the breaking of sanction measures throughout the EU.

In retaliation for the EU and international sanctions imposed against Russia after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian Government published a list of 'unfriendly' foreign countries, which includes EU Member States, the UK, the US and other nations with a sanctions scheme against Russia. People from these nations are now subject to a progressively more intricate system of retaliatory counter-sanctions, which affect various business and financial deals with a Russian connection. On 31 March 2022, the Russian authorities also decided to expand their 'stop list' significantly to encompass 'the top leadership of the EU, a number of European commissioners and heads of EU military bodies, as well as the overwhelming majority of members of the European Parliament'. The Russian blacklist also includes high-level officials from some EU Member States' governments and members of national parliaments, public and media figures.

The European Commission, while continuing to support the work of the International Criminal Court, indicated its readiness to work with the international community on setting up an ad hoc international tribunal or a specialised 'hybrid' tribunal to investigate and prosecute Russia's crimes of aggression against Ukraine, perpetrated by the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation and its allies, in particular Belarus. As of 30 May 2023, Eurojust has been equipped with new powers to preserve, analyse and store evidence in order to facilitate the further investigation of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of Ukraine. It is supporting the EU Joint Investigation Team set up with Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Following a decade of a shrinking public sphere under Vladimir Putin, a new spiral of domestic political repression commenced after Alexei Navalny's return to Russia in January 2021, and has increased dramatically since the outset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Any dissent or deviation from the official version of events is subject to sanctions and critical voices in society have been further marginalised.

Since 24 February 2022, 20 000 anti-war protestors have been detained in Russia. The EU has condemned the systematic crackdown on NGOs, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and independent journalists both within and outside of Russia and continues to support Russians who have been speaking out or protesting against the war in Ukraine. On 5 June 2023 the Council [sanctioned nine individuals](#) for sentencing the Russian opposition politician, democracy activist and Kremlin critic Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years' imprisonment on the basis of politically motivated charges and false allegations. The EU has repeatedly reaffirmed its solidarity with Vladimir Kara-Murza, Alexei Navalny, Ilya Yashin and all Russians who have been prosecuted, imprisoned or intimidated for continuing to fight for human rights and speaking the truth about the regime's illegal actions.

While on 12 September 2022, the EU Member States fully [suspended](#) the 2007 EU-Russia visa facilitation agreement, the Commission has adopted [guidelines](#) to ensure this suspension does not negatively impact those in need of protection and people travelling to the EU for essential purposes, such as journalists, dissidents and civil society representatives.



AGREEMENTS IN FORCE

The legal basis for EU-Russia relations is the June 1994 PCA. Initially valid for 10 years, it has been renewed automatically every year. It sets the principal common objectives and establishes the institutional framework for bilateral contacts – including regular consultations on human rights and twice-yearly presidential summits – which are currently frozen.

At the 2003 St Petersburg summit, the EU and Russia reinforced their cooperation by creating four ‘Common Spaces’: an economic space; a freedom, security and justice space; an external security space; and a research, education and culture space. At regional level, the EU and Russia, along with Norway and Iceland, set up the new Northern Dimension policy in 2007, focusing on cross-border cooperation in the Baltic and Barents regions. In July 2008, negotiations were initiated for a new EU-Russia agreement to include ‘legally binding commitments’ in areas such as political dialogue, justice, liberty, security, economic cooperation, research, education, culture, trade, investment and energy. A ‘Partnership for Modernisation’ was launched in 2010. Negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement were concluded in 2011. However, Russia’s intervention in Crimea led to the suspension of all these talks and processes. In 2014, the European Council froze cooperation with Russia (except on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contacts), as well as new EU financing for the benefit of the country through international financing institutions. Relations between the EU and Russia have been strained since the illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by Russia in 2014 and its destabilising actions in eastern Ukraine. After Russia began its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the remaining political, cultural and scientific cooperation was suspended.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament endorsed the PCA in 1997 under the ‘assent procedure’.

Parliament has adopted a series of resolutions on Ukraine condemning Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and its role in destabilising eastern Ukraine. Parliament adopted resolutions on the state of EU-Russia relations in June 2015 and March 2019, backing the EU sanctions and emphasising the need to provide more ambitious EU financial assistance to Russian civil society and to promote people-to-people contacts despite difficult relations. The 2019 resolution expresses great concern over Russia’s international behaviour, particularly in the Eastern Partnership countries. The resolution also criticises the deterioration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia and proposes that Russia no longer be considered a ‘strategic partner’ of the EU. In September 2021, Parliament adopted a [recommendation](#) on the direction of EU-Russia political relations requiring the EU to ‘ensure that any further engagement with the Kremlin will depend on the latter’s promise to end its domestic aggression against its own people, to stop systemic repressions of the opposition and ... political prisoners, civil society organisations, to repeal or amend all laws that are incompatible with international standards, such as the ones on “foreign agents” ... and to end its external aggression against neighbouring countries’. It calls for the EU to have clearly defined red lines and must refrain from pursuing cooperation with Russia only for the sake of maintaining dialogue channels open. It also calls for a vision and a strategy on the future of EU relations with a free, prosperous, peaceful and democratic Russia.



Before 2014, Parliament had favoured a new comprehensive agreement with Russia based on common values and interests. However, Parliament has repeatedly expressed strong concerns about respect for human rights, the rule of law and the state of democracy in Russia, for example concerning the laws against LGBTI ‘propaganda’, decriminalising non-aggravated domestic violence, the crackdown on independent NGOs or those receiving funding from outside Russia, etc. Parliament has particularly condemned the unprecedented levels of human rights abuses perpetrated against residents of Crimea, most notably Tatars. In 2018, it demanded the release of Ukrainian film director Oleg Sentsov, who opposed the illegal annexation of Crimea, and awarded him the Sakharov Prize. Sentsov was released in 2019 as part of an exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine. Parliament strongly condemned the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny in 2020.

Since the start of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, Parliament has adopted [numerous resolutions](#) condemning Russia’s aggression and the crimes perpetrated in its wake and expressed its staunch support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

Over the last year and a half, [Parliament has been a staunch supporter of strong and effective EU sanctions](#) as a key instrument against the Russian Federation, Belarus and allies of the Russian Federation. It has called for the confiscation of Russian assets frozen by the EU and for their use to address the reconstruction of Ukraine and compensation for the victims of Russia’s aggression. As regards the cooperation on sanctions across the world, the European Parliament has called on partners to align with these sanctions and is concerned that several third countries are collaborating with Russia to help it circumvent sanctions.

In its [resolution of 23 November 2022](#), Parliament recognised Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and as a state that uses means of terrorism, calling on the international community to be united in establishing accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. In several resolutions, Parliament has called for President Putin, other Russian leaders and their Belarusian allies to be held accountable for the crime of aggression they have committed. In this context, Parliament supports the creation of a special international tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression against Ukraine perpetrated by the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation and its allies, in particular Belarus. It also fully supports the ongoing investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) into the situation in Ukraine and alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. In March 2023, when it was announced that ICC arrest warrants had been issued for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, the Children’s Rights Commissioner for the President of Russia, due to the unlawful deportations of Ukrainian children to Russian territory, the European Parliament welcomed the decision during a plenary debate.

In [its recommendation of 8 June 2022 on ‘The EU’s Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine’](#), Parliament urged the Vice-President of the Commission and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell to pursue a holistic approach towards the Russian Federation and abandon any selective engagement with Moscow in the face of the atrocities and war crimes orchestrated by Russian political elites and committed by Russian troops, their proxies and mercenaries in Ukraine and elsewhere.



In its [resolution of 16 February 2023](#), Parliament acknowledged that the Russian war of aggression had fundamentally changed the geopolitical situation in Europe, and therefore called for the EU to take bold, brave and comprehensive political, security and financial decisions and continue the international isolation of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, Parliament also believes that the Commission, the European External Action Service and the Member States should start reflecting on how to engage with Russia in the future and how to assist it with a successful transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic country that renounces revisionist and imperialistic policies, as stated in its [resolution of 6 October 2022](#).

Before the war of aggression began, Parliament had already for years been condemning the Russian regime's domestic repression and the increasing deterioration of the human rights situation. When Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine, Parliament reiterated its strongest condemnation, in particular of the severe restrictions placed on the freedom of opinion and expression, the right to peaceful assembly and association, and the systematic crackdowns on civil society organisations, human rights defenders, the independent media, lawyers and the political opposition. Parliament has also deplored the sweeping repressive Russian legislation, including on 'foreign agents' and 'undesirable organisations', the changes to the Criminal Code and the Mass Media Law, which are used to engage in judicial harassment against dissenting voices in the country and abroad and to undermine the independent media. It has furthermore denounced the continuous and increasing censorship in Russia.

In particular, Parliament has repeatedly condemned Russia for the sentencing of Alexei Navalny who was awarded the [European Parliament Sakharov Prize](#) in 2021. As more activists were arrested and jailed, Parliament adopted two resolutions – on [7 April 2022](#) and [20 April 2023](#) respectively – condemning the increasing repression in Russia, in particular the cases of Vladimir Kara-Murza and Alexei Navalny. As part of the 'Free Navalny Campaign', on 26 to 30 June 2023 Parliament installed a full-size replica of the punishment cell (Shizo) where Alexei Navalny is serving his 9.5 years sentence in front of the Parliament building in Brussels. The event, organised in the framework of activities of the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group, meant to draw attention to the plight of Alexei Navalny and to inform the public about repression against political opposition in Russia. On September 2023, in a joint statement by the Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the chair of the Delegation for relations with Russia and the European Parliament's Standing Rapporteur on Russia expressed their concern for Vladimir Kara-Murza, who had been transferred to solitary confinement in a maximum security prison in Siberia.

In its resolution of [5 October 2023](#), [Parliament expressed concern for Zarema Musaeva](#), a human rights defender from Chechnya. Human rights violations in Chechnya have been consistently and strongly condemned by Parliament.

Parliament has expressed its solidarity and support for the people in Russia and Belarus protesting against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and has demanded that Member States protect and grant asylum to Russians and Belarusians being persecuted for speaking out against the war, as well as Russian and Belarusian deserters and conscientious objectors. It has also called for the EU institutions to engage with Russian democratic leaders and civil society and supports the creation of a democracy hub for Russia, hosted by the European Parliament. The President of the



European Parliament met with some representatives of the Russian opposition in 2022, the subcommittee on Human Rights is holding regular exchanges of views with Russian independent journalists, civil society and opposition representatives. Individual MEPs also organised a roundtable on the future of a democratic Russia on 5 and 6 June 2023 gathering representatives of the EU Institutions, MEPs and prominent representatives of all streams of the Russian free media and political opposition.

Relations with Russian legislators were mostly developed in the Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC), an inter-parliamentary forum established by the EU-Russia PCA. Between 1997 and 2014, the PCC served as a stable platform for developing cooperation and dialogue between delegations from Parliament and the Russian Federal Assembly. Since March 2014, however, Parliament has discontinued these inter-parliamentary meetings in accordance with the EU's restrictive measures taken in response to the Ukrainian crisis. Nevertheless, Parliament's Delegation to the EU-Russia PCC continues to meet regularly to analyse and hold debates on the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine on the world and domestically, and in particular on the escalating crackdown on Russian civil society by the Russian authorities. In this context, the delegation holds regular exchanges of views with representatives of the Russian opposition, human rights defenders, civil society, non-governmental organisations and independent journalists, as well as with international experts.

Parliament has not been invited by Russia to observe elections since 1999.

Vanessa Cuevas Herman

11/2023



5.6.4. CENTRAL ASIA

The EU recognises the strategic importance of Central Asia, which links the huge Asian continent with Europe. In 2019, the EU updated its Central Asia strategy to focus on resilience (covering areas such as human rights, border security and the environment), prosperity (with a strong emphasis on connectivity) and regional cooperation. Parliament highlights the importance of human rights, good governance and social development, underlining the role of parliamentary diplomacy. Parliament strongly supports democracy and the rule of law with concrete initiatives such as democratisation in Central Asia. In the light of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, Central Asia has become crucial for security and stability. While Tajikistan has expressed reservations, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have recently begun engagement cooperation with the Taliban. The January 2022 riots in Kazakhstan (which ended after the Collective Security Treaty Organization sent Russian-led troops) and the current clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan show the risk of instability in a region under Russia's influence. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the concentration of troops at the front, Moscow's influence in Central Asia is weakening. However, Russia remains a key security provider in the region, with facilities in three of the five Central Asian countries, and it controls two thirds of arms' imports and supports the region's governments.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V of the Treaty on European Union (TEU): 'external action';
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and Articles 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
- Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) covering bilateral relations, with the exception of Turkmenistan for which an interim trade agreement is in place. The new Enhanced PCA (EPCA) with Kazakhstan fully entered into force on 1 March 2020. The EPCA with Kyrgyzstan was initialled in July 2019 and negotiations with Uzbekistan are under way. Tajikistan has also expressed an interest in an EPCA.

THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES AND EU-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS

For years, relations between Central Asian countries were generally poor, owing to border and resource disputes. Nevertheless, the situation has changed rapidly following the change of leadership in Uzbekistan in 2016, opening up new possibilities for regional cooperation. The first Central Asian leaders' summit on regional cooperation since the 1990s was held in Astana in March 2018 and a second summit took place in November 2019 in Tashkent. Renewable energy sources are another focus of attention in view of the enormous potential for regional cooperation and investment. The regional economy strongly declined in 2020, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, then expanded in 2021 with growth of 3.9%, and the current outlook is



uncertain due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, global inflation and the rise of commodity prices.

All the Central Asian countries follow multi-vector foreign policies, seeking to balance ties with Russia, China, the EU and the US in particular. Relations with Turkey and Iran are also important. Turkmenistan has been largely closed to the outside world, and its 'permanent neutrality' status is even recognised by the UN. EU trade, mainly in mineral resources, is noteworthy with Kazakhstan, and is rising with Uzbekistan, not least following the adoption of the EU-Uzbekistan Textiles Protocol, to which Parliament consented in 2016. The EU has also welcomed the accession of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Eurasian Economic Union.

In [2016](#), Parliament supported the EU's Central Asia strategy, calling for it to be more focused. The [EU Central Asia strategy](#) was endorsed by the Council in [June 2019](#). The scope of the EU's relations is linked to the readiness of individual Central Asian countries to undertake reforms and strengthen democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, as well as to modernise and diversify the economy, including by supporting the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, in a free market economy.

The importance of a regional approach and regional cooperation has also been stressed at the EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meetings. The 17th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting took place in November 2021 to support a green and sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery and to encourage collaboration to tackle some of the challenges emerging from developments in Afghanistan.

Parliament's activities with Central Asia are conducted mainly by the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Committee on International Trade (INTA), the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE); the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the Delegation for Relations with Central Asia (D-CAS), and through the Parliamentary Cooperation Committees (PCCs) and the Delegation for relations with Afghanistan (D-AF), among other bodies. PCCs with the majority of Central Asian countries meet every year. MEPs oversee the implementation of the agreements and focus on human rights issues, the political situation, economic and development cooperation and electoral processes.

EU-Central Asia high-level political and security dialogues have taken place regularly since 2013 on high-level political matters and security involving the EU and Central Asian countries. These dialogues have led to discussions around the EU Central Asia strategy priorities, as well as the promotion of EU-Asia connectivity.

There are EU delegations in all Central Asian countries, since the Delegation to Turkmenistan was opened in July 2019. The EU Delegation to Mongolia was opened in 2017.

In 2020, two-way trade in goods amounted to EUR 22.3 billion with a EUR 4.1 billion trade surplus in favour of Central Asia. Central Asian countries received EUR 1.02 billion in funding for 2014-2020 from the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), which included both bilateral assistance and regional programmes (EUR 360 million). The assistance focused on education, regional security, sustainable management of natural resources and socio-economic development. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are no longer eligible for the bilateral parts of the instrument since they have gained upper-middle-income-country status, but they continue to have access



to the regional programmes. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) operates in all the Central Asian states except for Turkmenistan, where civil society organisations are too few in number, too poorly organised and too strictly controlled. Horizon Europe is the EU's new key funding programme for research and innovation, with a budget of EUR 95.5 billion worldwide available over a period of seven years under the 2021-2027 multiannual indicative programme.

The EU has been upgrading the older PCAs with the Central Asian partners.

The 10th meeting of the EU-Central Asia Working Group on Environment and Climate Change(WGECC) took place on 4 and 5 October 2021. The EU-Central Asia Civil Society Forum was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 6 October 2021, centring on the theme 'Building a Better Future: Involvement in Sustainable Post-COVID Recovery'.

Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the situation in Afghanistan has become not only a global issue but also the leading concern of Central Asian governments. The entire Central Asian region has become a crucial area for containing religious extremism and terror networks, together with drug trafficking within its borders. Individual Central Asian republics (and notably Tajikistan) remain reluctant to pursue any substantial engagement with the Taliban in spite of the fact that the Taliban appear to have simultaneously launched a diplomatic offensive aimed at reassuring Central Asian neighbours. Because of the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, Central Asia has become a destination for large numbers of Afghan refugees, who are therefore potential recipients of additional EU support, with bilateral and regional programmes as part of the 2021-2027 EU multiannual indicative programme.

A. Kazakhstan

On Kazakhstan, Parliament gave its consent to the EPCA in [2017](#), stressing the importance of the 'more for more' principle to stimulate political and socio-economic reforms.

Former President Nursultan Nazarbayev resigned in March 2019 after three decades in power, but as 'Supreme Leader' and 'Father of the Nation' maintained significant influence and formal powers under the new President Tokayev, including serving as chair of the National Security Council. Kazakhstan held parliamentary elections in January 2021 to elect the 107-seat Mazhilis. The ruling Nur-Otan party retained its majority while the opposition party All-National Social Democratic Party (OSDP) boycotted the election, claiming fraud by the political elite.

Parliament adopted a [resolution on the situation in Kazakhstan in January 2022](#), after protests broke out there following an unexpected spike in liquefied gas prices, which had been price-fixed by the Kazakh Government. The protests escalated after violent actions were provoked by unknown, well-trained and organised armed persons. President Tokayev ordered urgent measures to be passed and declared a state of emergency. In response to President Tokayev's request, the [Collective Security Treaty Organization \(CSTO\)](#), a military alliance led by Russia, agreed to send soldiers ('peacekeeping forces') to Kazakhstan from Russia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

President Tokayev has used the crisis to blame the previous administration, consolidate his power and end the dual-power arrangement forced on him by Nazarbayev. Tokayev assumed the office of the Chair of the Security Council and appointed a new Prime Minister. Key important members of Nazarbayev's family lost their positions of



influence. In September 2022, [Kazakhstan's Parliament renamed the nation's capital from Nur-Sultan to Astana](#), the latest move to distance the country from the former Soviet republic's first president Nursultan Nazarbayev.

On 11 January 2022, President Tokayev announced a package of substantial reforms. Kazakhstan has recorded high economic growth in the past, becoming an upper-middle-income country in 2006. This economic progress was challenged by the heavy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and by its growing political and economic dependence on China. In April 2021, Kazakhstan announced its own COVID-19 vaccine, QazVac, and prepared to increase productivity to make it available to all citizens. GDP growth is expected to decline in 2022, owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The year 2022 will also mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Kazakhstan-China diplomatic relations, while Kazakhs have recently protested against China's increasing influence and economic power.

In January 2021, Kazakhstan abolished the death penalty after ratifying the UN's Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in so doing became the 88th signatory to the covenant. The European External Action Service (EEAS) lauded the step in a [statement](#). In 2020, Kazakhstan joined the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a multilateral treaty that is included in the International Bill of Human Rights.

On 5 June 2022, Kazakhstan held a constitutional referendum that introduced substantial changes to the existing institutional balance of power, including by decreasing the power of the president and strengthening the role of the parliament. Official turnout was high (68%) and 77.1% of those who cast ballots voted in favour of the changes.

The [19th EU-Kazakhstan Cooperation Council](#) took place in June 2022 to review the progress made in implementing the EU-Kazakhstan EPCA. During the meeting, the EU welcomed the advanced level of economic relations that had developed between the EU and Kazakhstan. The EU is Kazakhstan's largest trade partner and foreign investor, and Kazakhstan remains the EU's main trade partner in Central Asia. In 2021, the trade balance reached EUR 12 billion in favour of Kazakhstan. The EU also welcomed the successful cooperation under the EU-Kazakhstan High-Level Business Platform launched in 2019, and in particular the constructive spirit shown by Kazakhstan in addressing concerns shared by EU investors.

Parliament has not observed elections in Kazakhstan since 2005. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/OIDHR) has sent election observers to Kazakhstan. OSCE/OIDHR found shortcomings in the January 2021 parliamentary elections, including a lack of genuine opposition to the Nur-Otan party and as non-compliance with OSCE/OIDHR recommendations relating to fundamental freedoms, impartiality of election administration and eligibility, among others. The EEAS also noted that while Kazakhstan had undergone important political reforms, the elections were a missed opportunity to show their effective implementation.

Parliament's resolution of 11 February 2021 on the alarming human rights situation in Kazakhstan called for respect for the legal framework for holding elections. Parliament underlined the OSCE recommendations guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, ending the arbitrary detention of human rights activists and members of political opposition movements, ensuring the rights of LGBTI people and ensuring the safety of Kazakhs



and other ethnic minority groups. Moreover, it called for possible individual sanctions against Kazakhstan's officials who are directly responsible for human rights abuses.

B. Kyrgyzstan

An EPCA with Kyrgyzstan was signed in July 2019. The EU is one of the main sponsors of sustainable development and reforms in Kyrgyzstan. Between 2014 and 2020, the EU allocated EUR 174 million in grant-based development assistance directed at three main sectors and support measures: the rule of law, integrated rural development and education. Additionally, the EU also supports a democratic transition and democratic elections via a rule-of-law programme and has committed EUR 20 million towards stabilisation and democratisation support. [The 2021-2027 multiannual indicative programme](#) responds to the Kyrgyz national development strategy for 2040, which sets out a long-term roadmap to emerge as a strong, self-sufficient and prosperous country by 2040.

The OSCE/ODIHR regularly observes parliamentary elections and presidential elections. The most recent parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan in October 2020 and were subsequently invalidated following mass protests against irregularities and vote buying. Kyrgyzstan's President, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, resigned in October 2020 and the country held presidential elections in January 2021, after which Sadyr Japarov took office as Kyrgyzstan's sixth president. The EU noted low voter turnout, the lack of a level playing field for candidates, violations regarding campaigning procedures and an abuse of administrative resources, as reported by the OSCE/ODIHR. The EU also called on the president to commit to the universal obligations on fundamental freedoms and human rights and urged respect for the constitution and for parliamentary elections in cooperation with the OSCE/ODIHR. The parliamentary elections took place in November 2021. The European Parliament Delegation for relations with Central Asia (D-CAS) visited the country.

In a referendum held on 11 April 2021, voters approved a new constitution to reduce the size of the parliament by 25% to 90 seats. It also gave the president the power to appoint judges and the leaders of law enforcement bodies and replaced the law allowing the president one term in office in favour of re-election for a second term. The EU [issued a statement](#) on the constitutional reform in Kyrgyzstan in April 2021, expressing its regret at the lack of inclusive dialogue involving civil society. However, the EU insisted that it would continue its support in advancing the reform agenda.

In June 2021, the [EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Peter Burian, arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic](#) to hold bilateral meetings with President Japarov and other relevant leaders, to discuss bilateral cooperation, the state of play as regards human rights issues and challenges in the implementation of the EU strategy for Central Asia.

The 18th EU-Kyrgyz Republic Cooperation Council of 4 June 2021 discussed the strengthening of the rule of law, progress in judiciary and electoral reforms, good governance, cooperation with civil society and human rights. The 11th EU-Kyrgyz Republic annual Human Rights Dialogue took place on 6 September 2021 in Brussels. The EU expressed its concern about the COVID-19 restrictions resulting in an increase in gender-based violence, restrictions on independent media and controversial legislative initiatives. Kyrgyzstan hosted the first EU-Central Asia Economic Forum on 5 November 2021 in Bishkek.

On Kyrgyzstan, Parliament expressed concern at the LGBTI 'propaganda' draft laws in [2015](#). In [January 2019](#), it issued recommendations for the negotiation of a new



bilateral agreement. Following clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in April 2021, Chair of Parliament's AFET committee David McAllister and D-CAS Chair Fulvio Martusciello [issued a statement](#) on 3 May 2021 welcoming the ceasefire and called on both sides to hold diplomatic discussions instead of engaging in military clashes. The ceasefire has not been respected and the ongoing border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has killed and injured hundreds of people, and has displaced thousands. The conflict intensified further in September 2022.

Parliament is deeply concerned about human rights in Kyrgyzstan. An investigation into the death in custody of human rights defender Azimjon Askarov in July 2020 was closed and then re-opened. Several foreign human rights activists and foreign media correspondents remain banned from Kyrgyzstan. Domestic violence remains widespread.

C. Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan became the ninth beneficiary country when it joined the EU's sustainable development and good governance (GSP+) arrangement in April 2021. By joining this scheme, Uzbekistan receives additional economic benefits due to the cancellation of tariffs for two thirds of the product lines covered by the GSP+. The instrument is a boost to the country's exports and its ability to attract foreign investment. In turn, Uzbekistan is expected to implement 27 core international conventions on good governance, human and labour rights and environmental and climate protection.

In its recommendation of March 2019 [on the new comprehensive agreement between the EU and Uzbekistan](#), Parliament asked to be allowed to exercise proper scrutiny over the negotiating process.

On 6 July 2022, the EU and Uzbekistan initialled the new EPCA, which will provide a new, modern and ambitious framework to step up the EU-Uzbekistan partnership. In addition, the EU and Uzbekistan held their 18th annual Cooperation Committee meeting. The two sides reviewed developments in their bilateral relations over the past year, and their prospects for the coming year. The EU raised the recent violent events in Karakalpakstan and called for an independent investigation to take place into the circumstances around the protests as soon as possible. The EU stressed the importance of defending the right to peaceful demonstration.

The 18th annual Cooperation Committee meeting provided an opportunity to discuss trade and economic relations, including Uzbekistan's membership of the EU's GSP + scheme. The discussion also covered technical cooperation; the EU's support for Uzbekistan's development strategy; cooperation in the energy sector, with an emphasis on sustainability and the green transition; human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially with regard to constitutional reform and the reform of Uzbekistan's criminal code; and the regional situation in Central Asia, including the situation in Afghanistan. The two sides looked ahead to the EU-Central Asia Sustainable Connectivity Conference to be held in November 2022 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Since Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev took office in 2016, wide-ranging and rapid democratic changes have been ongoing, including several ambitious reforms and internal changes, such as the release of a number of political prisoners, which reflect some positive developments. The foundations for these changes were laid down in Uzbekistan's 2017-2021 national development strategy.



In February 2021, Mirziyoev signed a law to move presidential elections to October 2021. The OSCE/ODIHR reiterated its recommendations on political parties' financing, expediting vote-counting and cutting state resources for electoral campaigns. There were concerns in the run-up to the October 2021 elections that there would be no genuine opposition. Uzbek authorities denied the registration of a new party, Haqiqat va Taraqqiyo (Truth and Progress Social Democratic Party) on the grounds that many signatures collected by the opposition politician Khidirnazar Allaqulov were invalid.

In May 2021, an Uzbek court sentenced blogger Otabek Sattoriy to 6 years' imprisonment on libel and extortion charges. Sattoriy's videos often criticised top government officials in his province of Termez, and highlighted corruption cases. Rights and journalist advocacy groups called the sentencing an attempt by the leadership to frighten the press ahead of the elections.

Uzbekistan has recently begun engagement cooperation with the Taliban. In October 2021, Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister met with Taliban delegates in the Uzbek border town of Termez to discuss trade issues and economic interaction, ensuring border security and cooperation in energy, transportation and international cargo, as well as the railway project connecting Termez to the Pakistani city of Peshawar via Afghanistan's Mazar and Kabul.

Parliament approved the EU-Uzbekistan Textile Protocol in December 2016 following an effective commitment by the country, in close cooperation with the International Labour Organization, to eradicate the use of child labour during the annual cotton harvest. In [March 2019](#), it issued recommendations for the negotiation of the EPCA.

Parliament was invited to observe legislative elections in Uzbekistan for the first time in December 2019, but these elections were only monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR. Parliament refused to observe the elections on the grounds that they were neither free nor fair, pointing to the fact that members of the Uzbek Parliament came from pro-regime parties only.

However, Parliament accepted the invitation to monitor the 24 October 2021 presidential election even though the five candidates accepted and registered by the Central Election Commission were allegedly pro-government, while two credible opposition candidates from the Liberal Democratic Party and the Truth and Progress Social Democratic Party had been denied registration.

Relations between Uzbekistan and Russia have been strengthened under President Mirziyoyev. The two countries signed an agreement on the extension of military-technical collaboration with a commitment to jointly procuring military goods, military equipment, research and assistance and to renewing outdated weapons. Russia is one of Uzbekistan's biggest trading partners and Russian investors are particularly interested in Uzbekistan's oil and gas sector. Russia's Gazprom cooperates with hydrocarbons producer Uzbekneftegaz on gas production in Uzbek gas fields, and it also purchases Uzbek gas. On 15 September 2022, Uzbekistan hosted the bilateral meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand.

D. Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan remains a repressive country under the authoritarian rule of President Berdymukhamedov. Recent developments show that democratic development has not progressed and the human rights situation has not improved. In 2021, Turkmenistan



introduced some constitutional reforms, including the creation of an Upper House. However, the role of the Turkmen Parliament is still extremely limited.

Formal EU-Turkmenistan relations emerged in 1997, and the two parties signed a PCA in 1998. Although, since 2004, all EU Member States and Turkmenistan have already ratified the PCA, ratification by the European Parliament is the final remaining requirement to finalise it. Parliament has repeatedly refused to give its consent to ratify the EU-Turkmenistan PCA because of its deep concern over the short-term benchmarks for Turkmenistan's progress on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, EU-Turkmenistan bilateral relations are currently governed by the 2010 [Interim Trade Agreement](#).

Apart from the EU-Central Asia regional frameworks, the EU and Turkmenistan maintain annual bilateral dialogues: the EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue and the EU-Turkmenistan Joint Committee. The 20th Joint Committee was held in October 2021 to further develop partnership and cooperation, in particular on economic development, trade and investment as well as to develop joint projects on environment, agriculture, education and health protection.

The EU has reaffirmed that the rule of law and respect for human rights are essential aspects of the EU-Turkmenistan relationship.

The 13th annual EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue took place on 6 July 2021. Discussions centred on Turkmenistan's fulfilment of its international legal obligations, in particular respect for human rights, socio-economic issues and cooperation on multilateral platforms. Parliament has consistently expressed concerns about Turkmenistan's poor human rights record and, accordingly, has blocked the entry into force of the PCA so far. In [March 2019](#), it set out recommendations to be addressed before it would consider giving its consent. Parliament has never been invited to observe elections in Turkmenistan. The sixth EU-Turkmenistan Interparliamentary Meeting is set to be held in December 2022.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, EU countries are trying to increase Turkmenistan's gas resources to ensure their energy security. As a result, Turkmenistan and the EU are currently working on a gas deal, as Turkmenistan wants to diversify its energy exports, while the EU wants to diversify its energy imports. In November 2014, Turkmenistan signed a framework agreement with Türkiye to supply its gas through the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline, which now receives gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field in the Caspian Sea. In 2021, Trans Caspian Resources presented its project for the Trans-Caspian Interconnector, a smaller gas pipeline (compared to the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline) from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan. Once completed, it will supply between 10 and 12 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year.

E. Tajikistan

The EU's engagement with Tajikistan has developed significantly since the country's independence from the USSR in 1992. The current legal framework for EU-Tajikistan relations is the [PCA](#) that was signed in October 2004 and into force in January 2010. Parliament consented to the conclusion of the PCA in 2009, but called for improvements in human rights, corruption, health and education. The PCA contributed to the enhancement of bilateral cooperation and raised the EU's profile in Tajikistan, setting out a platform for political dialogue and aiming to promote bilateral trade and economic



relations. It also includes articles on cooperation on migration and on the fight against money laundering, drugs and terrorism.

Tajikistan is an important EU partner that is currently facing several challenges, such as the impact of international sanctions and the return of many Tajik migrants from Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, the critical human rights situation and a strong interest in joining the GSP+ trade preferential scheme. Following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Tajikistan has been hosting thousands of Afghan refugees. The country is committed to fighting against the spreading of extremism and radicalism in Central Asia.

[The ninth meeting of the EU-Tajikistan Cooperation Council](#), held in February 2021 under the EU-Tajikistan PCA, discussed ways to upgrade relations. Since then, contacts have been initiated to begin negotiations for an EPCA, following the example of other Central Asian countries. Along with discussions on the impact of COVID-19, the EU encouraged Tajikistan to improve its record as regards fundamental freedoms and respect for human rights. The 12th Human Rights Dialogue took place in November 2020 and concerns were expressed regarding human rights violations.

In March 2020, parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. The ruling People's Democratic Party won by overwhelming majority. The presidential election was held in October 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As expected, Emomali Rakhmonov (Rahmon) easily won the election, securing him another seven years as President.

In June 2016, the European Parliament adopted a very critical [resolution on the situation of prisoners of conscience](#) in Tajikistan, expressing deep concerns about the deterioration of human rights, the increased number of detentions and arrests of human rights activists, political opponents and their family members and severe restrictions on independent media.

Parliament has repeatedly expressed concern about the clashes at the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and welcomed the ceasefire agreement reached in April 2021. However, in September 2022, violence increased between border guards along various sites at the border. Such escalation is detrimental to regional stability.

F. Mongolia

Mongolia, though not covered by the EU's Central Asian strategy, is classified by Parliament as part of the region within the framework of its standing delegations. Mongolia shares many cultural, historic and economic aspects with the former USSR republics of Central Asia. During the last three decades, Mongolia has distinguished itself as an 'oasis of democracy' with solid economic growth, even though developments in 2019 raised concerns about democratic erosion. In [2017](#), Parliament gave its consent to the EU-Mongolia PCA.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mongolia still held its regular parliamentary elections and saw Ukhnaa Khürelsükh elected President. As the new, amended constitution requires the President not to be affiliated to a political party, in June 2021, Ukhnaa was replaced as leader of the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) by incumbent Mongolian Prime Minister Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene. Mongolian politics are currently dominated by the consolidation of the MPP party with a supermajority in the Mongolian Parliament and presidential control.

The EU- Mongolia annual Joint Committee meeting was held in June 2022 to reaffirm the partnership based on shared values such as democracy, human rights, the rule



of law and respect of the principles of the UN Charter. Mongolia and the EU agreed on the need to combat climate change and protect the environment, fully supporting the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The EU congratulated Mongolia on being among the five priority countries with whom the EU is currently setting up a forest partnership, as Mongolia and the EU share a common interest in promoting sustainable green development, a key objective under the 2021-2027 multiannual indicative programme. Previously, the EU-Mongolia Working Group on Development Cooperation met in March 2022 to discuss development and investment priorities, as well as the 2021-2027 multiannual indicative programme. The EU-Mongolia Subcommittee on trade and investment was held in March 2022, identifying potential areas of cooperation, the start of negotiations for an agreement on the protection of geographical indications and opportunities in the field of renewable energy and geology.

Parliament's statements on Mongolia have largely been related to economic issues, but also to the country's development and humanitarian needs, linked to extreme weather conditions. A Parliament delegation observed Mongolia's 2017 presidential elections and 2016 parliamentary elections and noted that the country is developing a solid democracy. However, Parliament did not observe the June 2020 parliamentary election because of the COVID-19 pandemic, nor the June 2021 presidential election.

The 15th EU-Mongolia Interparliamentary Meeting took place in June 2022 in Brussels.

Jorge Soutullo / Niccolò Rinaldi
10/2022



5.6.5. GULF COUNTRIES, IRAN, IRAQ AND YEMEN

The EU has cooperation agreements with the Gulf Cooperation Council (a regional organisation grouping Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and with Yemen, and a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Iraq. Currently, the EU has no contractual relations with Iran and there is no EU Delegation in Tehran. Current EU-Iran relations are based on the preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or Iran nuclear agreement), signed in Vienna in July 2015.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (external action) of the Treaty on European Union;
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

A. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The GCC was established in May 1981. Today, the group – still comprising the original members, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – serves as the main conduit for the EU's relations with the six countries. On a number of occasions, the EU and the GCC have taken joint positions on problems in the Middle East.

The oil-rich Gulf countries are undergoing considerable socioeconomic and political changes, although the progress of reform is uneven. The effect of the Arab uprisings on the monarchies of the Gulf has been subdued by preventive policies – subsidies and an expansion of public-sector employment – and by repressive measures, notably in Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province. The GCC countries have maintained active roles in Middle Eastern diplomacy, sometimes in rivalry with each other. This has contributed to the ongoing diplomatic crisis between Qatar and some of the other GCC countries, which accuse Qatar of supporting terrorist and sectarian groups (including the Muslim Brotherhood), financing groups associated with Iran, infringing its neighbours' sovereignty and instigating political dissent in neighbouring countries.

While the EU hopes to develop its political relations in the region, including through human rights dialogues, EU-GCC relations have largely been defined by economic and trade ties. Trade volumes between the two sides have grown steadily over the years, with the EU registering a significant trade surplus.

The EU and the GCC signed a Cooperation Agreement in 1988. The agreement aims to strengthen stability in a region of strategic importance, facilitate political and economic relations, broaden economic and technical cooperation, and deepen cooperation on energy, industry, trade and services, agriculture, fisheries, investment, science, technology and the environment. The agreement provides for annual joint councils/ministerial meetings, and for joint cooperation committees at the level of senior officials. It makes no provision for a parliamentary body. In April 2016, the EU-GCC Joint Cooperation Committee agreed to establish a more structured informal dialogue on trade and investment. This was followed in July 2016 by an EU-GCC joint council



and ministerial meeting. The diplomatic crisis that erupted in June 2017 between Qatar and the other Gulf countries has prevented new meetings from being convened.

The EU and the GCC agreed on a Joint Action Programme for 2010-2013, setting out a roadmap for closer cooperation in areas such as information and communications technology, nuclear safety, clean energy, research and economic dialogue. The renewal of this programme has, however, been delayed, mainly because of the lack of progress over trade matters. Negotiations on a free trade agreement were started in 1990 but have been stalled since 2008, with the question of export duties remaining a source of disagreement. Since 1 January 2007, funds from the Partnership Instrument (as from its predecessor, the instrument for cooperation with industrialised and other high-income countries and territories) have been available to finance measures for implementing the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement. The GCC countries also benefit from the Erasmus Mundus programme.

Role of the European Parliament

Parliament adopted a resolution on EU relations with the GCC on 24 March 2011^[1] calling for a strategic partnership with the GCC and its member states. This position was reiterated in Parliament's resolution of 9 July 2015 on the security challenges in the Middle East and North Africa region and the prospects for political stability^[2].

Parliament's Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula holds regular inter-parliamentary meetings with the consultative councils in the region and monitors the development of relations between the EU and the GCC.

In recent years, Parliament has adopted resolutions expressing specific concerns about the human rights situation in some GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia^[3] and Bahrain^[4], and the return to the practice of capital punishment in Kuwait and Bahrain^[5]. Following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Parliament adopted a resolution^[6] condemning the murder, calling for an international, independent and impartial investigation into his disappearance and extrajudicial killing, and urging the Saudi authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders.

Parliament has called several times for an EU arms embargo against Saudi Arabia, given the serious allegations of breaches of international humanitarian law by Saudi Arabia in Yemen^[7].

Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought for 2015 was awarded to Saudi blogger Raif Badawi.

B. Yemen

EU-Yemen relations are based on the 1997 Cooperation Agreement, covering trade, development cooperation, culture, communications and information, the environment and management of natural resources, and political dialogue. In March 2015, an international military coalition led by Saudi Arabia launched a campaign against rebels

[1] [OJ C 247 E, 17.8.2012, p. 1.](#)

[2] [OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 98.](#)

[3] [OJ C 449, 23.12.2020, p. 133](#); [OJ C 76, 9.3.2020, p. 142](#); and [OJ C 310, 25.8.2016, p. 29.](#)

[4] [OJ C 101, 16.3.2018, p. 130](#); [OJ C 35, 31.1.2018, p. 42](#); [OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 151](#); and [OJ C 316, 30.8.2016, p. 178.](#)

[5] [OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 192.](#)

[6] [OJ C 345, 16.10.2020, p. 67.](#)

[7] [OJ C 363, 28.10.2020, p. 36](#); [OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 63.](#)



who had ousted the incumbent president. The EU supports the mediation conducted by the UN with a view to finding a political solution to the conflict.

On 18 February 2019, the Council of the European Union adopted [conclusions on Yemen](#), reaffirming its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen. The EU supports the Stockholm Agreement reached between representatives of the Yemeni parties under the auspices of the UN in December 2018, and the UN-led political process, with a view to ending the conflict and fostering an improved regional environment.

The EU has stepped up its assistance to address the dramatic situation in the country, where more than 80% of the population are in need of humanitarian assistance. The EU has committed a total of EUR 554 million in humanitarian aid to Yemen since 2015. This is in addition to the EUR 318 million in long-term assistance that the EU has provided so far. The EU's overall contribution to Yemen across all areas of support has exceeded EUR 1 billion since 2015. As concerns grew over the COVID-19 outbreak in the war-torn country, the EU also funded emergency measures aimed at reducing the impact of the pandemic in Yemen, with the total reaching EUR 70 million (9 September 2020).

The EU Delegation to the Republic of Yemen is currently operating from Amman, Jordan.

Role of the European Parliament

Parliament adopted resolutions on Yemen on 9 July 2015, 25 February 2016, 15 June 2017, 30 November 2017 and 4 October 2018^[8] expressing serious concern about the alarming humanitarian and security situation and calling for the effective implementation of a ceasefire. On 13 September 2017, Parliament adopted a resolution on arms exports^[9], which deplored the fact that military technology exported by Member States was being used in the conflict in Yemen.

Parliament's Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula is responsible for relations with Yemen and for monitoring the situation in the country.

C. Iraq

The EU has been a key provider of assistance to Iraq since the 2003 war. A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed between the EU and Iraq in May 2012. It provides a framework for dialogue and cooperation in a number of areas, including political issues, counterterrorism, trade, human rights, health, education and the environment. Under the PCA, the first ever Cooperation Council meeting between the EU and Iraq was held in January 2014, and a second meeting took place on 18 October 2016. For the 2014-2020 period, the Commission pledged to provide Iraq with EUR 75 million for cooperation in the areas of human rights and the rule of law, education and sustainable energy.

The EU adopted a new [strategy for Iraq](#) in January 2018. The strategy focuses on delivering continued EU humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people and facilitating the stabilisation of areas liberated from the Islamic State (IS) group, with 3 million displaced Iraqis still unable to return home. It also seeks to address the reform, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts in the longer term that Iraq needs to pursue in order to consolidate

^[8][OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 93; OJ C 35, 31.1.2018, p. 142; OJ C 331, 18.9.2018, p. 146; OJ C 356, 4.10.2018, p. 104 and OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 44.](#)

^[9][OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 63.](#)



peace and build a united, democratic country in which all citizens can fully enjoy their rights in greater prosperity.

Since 2014, the EU has provided over EUR 1 billion to Iraq, including EUR 469 million in humanitarian aid to displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees inside Iraq. Additional funds were allocated in 2020 to help the local healthcare system cope with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Role of the European Parliament

In recent years, Parliament has adopted various resolutions on the situation in Iraq^[10], including on the offensive by IS, on gender violence, on the persecution of minorities, on the situation in northern Iraq/Mosul, on mass graves, on education, on the destruction of cultural sites by IS and on arms exports.

Parliament's Delegation for relations with Iraq holds inter-parliamentary meetings with Iraq's Council of Representatives. Parliament's Sakharov Prize for 2016 was awarded to Nadia Murad Basee Taha and Lamiya Aji Bashar, who are survivors of sexual enslavement by IS in Iraq and have become spokespersons for women afflicted by IS's campaign of sexual violence. They are public advocates for the Yazidi community in Iraq, a religious minority that has been subjected to a genocidal campaign by IS militants.

D. Iran

The main priority for the EU in its current relations with Iran is the preservation of the JCPOA, or Iran nuclear agreement, signed in Vienna in July 2015. The JCPOA is a key component of the international nuclear non-proliferation system. It gives power to the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which carries out the strictest inspections in the history of nuclear non-proliferation. The IAEA assumes full responsibility for monitoring whether Iran continues to adhere to the JCPOA's mandated obligations. In return for Iran's commitments, the JCPOA re-integrates Iran into the global system.

The withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA in 2018 and its adoption of a policy of maximum pressure has led Iran to scale down its commitments under the agreement, which establishes a comprehensive and strict system of inspections and monitoring to be carried out by the IAEA. The EU, together with the E3 (Germany, France and the UK), Russia and China, are working to preserve the JCPOA, and thus Iran's commitments.

In line with the JCPOA, the Iran arms embargo expired on 18 October 2020. While the EU expressed reservations about its expiry, it rejected the US threat to reinstate all UN sanctions ('snapback'). The EU will keep its own arms embargo in place until 2023. The EU sanctions are not related to the JCPOA and are linked to human rights violations, hostile activities against the EU and the launching of ballistic and cruise missiles.

The Iranian population has yet to see the economic benefits that relief from sanctions might have brought in exchange for respecting the JCPOA. The EU's instrument to facilitate trade with Iran, INSTEX, has not been able to compensate for the harsh impact of US sanctions, which was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak, strengthening hardliners.

^[10]OJ C 310, 25.8.2016, p. 35; OJ C 224, 21.6.2016, p. 25; OJ C 234, 28.6.2016, p. 25; OJ C 334, 19.9.2018, p. 69; OJ C 289, 9.8.2016, p. 46; OJ C 35, 31.1.2018, p. 77; OJ C 316, 30.8.2016, p. 113; OJ C 215, 19.6.2018, p. 194; OJ C 238, 6.7.2018, p. 117; OJ C 366, 27.10.2017, p. 151; OJ C 346, 21.9.2016, p. 55 and OJ C 337, 20.9.2018, p. 63.



The E3 have been meeting since April 2021 as Iran and the US refuse to talk directly. The JCPOA negotiations in Vienna were interrupted following the June 2021 presidential election of Ebrahim Raisi. In July 2021, the IAEA warned that Tehran intended on using uranium enriched up to 20% U-235 in the manufacture of fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor.

Since Iran is not a member of the World Trade Organization and there is no bilateral agreement between the EU and Iran, trade between the two is subject to the EU's general import regime. The EU is Iran's second-largest trading partner, representing 12.3% of its total trade in goods in 2020. Before the current sanctions regime, the EU was Iran's largest trading partner.

In 2020, the EU allocated EUR 20 million in humanitarian aid to Iran as a COVID-19 relief measure. In July 2021, the EU allocated a further EUR 15 million to the most vulnerable groups in Iran, bringing the overall EU humanitarian support to Iran since 2016 to over EUR 76 million.

Legislative elections to the Majlis (the Council of Representatives) were held on 21 February 2020. Hardliners won the elections, and the dire economic situation in Iran and the lack of dividends emanating from the JCPOA had an impact on the presidential election that took place on 18 June 2021, which was won by Ebrahim Raisi, a conservative cleric and former head of the judiciary. The current cabinet, endorsed by the Iranian Parliament at the end of August 2021, includes a number of ministers targeted by international sanctions.

The EU has remained fully committed to the JCPOA and still plays an important role in connecting all parties and encouraging them to comply with the agreement. The VP/HR hosted a meeting in October 2021 to discuss with Iran the return of the Vienna negotiations.

In April 2021, in response to the EU's assertive position on human rights, Iran announced the suspension of all human rights talks and cooperation with the EU in the areas of terrorism, drugs and refugees. In January 2022, an Iranian Court sentenced Iranian human rights defender Narges Mohammadi to eight years in prison with 70 lashes. In January 2022, following this case, the EU called on Iran to comply with international law.

Current negotiations in Vienna, based on the return of the US to the JCPOA and the return of Iran to its commitments under the nuclear agreement, which have been ongoing for months, have slowed down because of tensions with the West, and the US in particular, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. By September 2022, negotiations appeared to have reached a stalemate.

Role of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has very much been involved in relations with Iran. The Delegation for relations with Iran (D-IR) was established in 2004 with a view to having a direct channel with the Majlis. Since 2015, D-IR has played a crucial role in the JCPOA and in bringing the EU and Iran together. Seven inter-parliamentary meetings have taken place since 2005, the last was held in Brussels in September 2018. The European Parliament has always supported the EU's commitment to a diplomatic solution to Iran's nuclear programme. While being a strong advocate of the JCPOA and the EU's recent relationship with Iran, the European Parliament actively monitors the situation regarding political opponents, religious minorities, human rights defenders, women and the LGBTI



community in Iran. Moreover, it firmly opposes capital punishment, torture, arbitrary trials, police brutality and the detention of political opponents.

The European Parliament strongly regrets the death of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman who died in police custody on 16 September 2022 after being arrested for supposedly not wearing her hijab correctly. Riots and protests took place across the country, resulting in at least 50 reported deaths and the arrest of hundreds of protesters (Iran's internet blackouts makes it difficult to confirm these figures).

The relevant actions and resolutions of the European Parliament on Iran since 2019:

- 17 February 2022: [Parliament's resolution on the death penalty in Iran](#), reiterating the EU's strong opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances and calling on the Government of Iran to introduce an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty;
- 9 August 2021: Nine MEPs co-wrote an open letter and sent it to the VP/HR about the EU's decision to join the inauguration of the then incoming hardline Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, expressing their concern and regret that the European External Action Service attended the inauguration;
- 8 July 2021: [Parliament's resolution on the detention of Swedish-Iranian doctor Ahmadreza Djalali](#), calling on the new Iranian administration to halt his imminent execution for alleged espionage;
- 17 December 2020: [Parliament's resolution on the case of Sakharov Prize Laureate Nasrin Sotoudeh](#), a lawyer and human rights activist imprisoned for representing women and opposition activists who had been prosecuted for removing their headscarves. Parliament had [passed a similar resolution](#) on 13 December 2018 demanding her release;
- 19 December 2019: [Parliament's resolution on the violent crackdown on the protests in Iran](#) after the authorities had hiked fuel prices to offset the effects of the US sanctions on the economy. Several civilians and security personnel were killed. Parliament called on the authorities to release human rights activists and condemned Iran's internet shutdown;
- 19 September 2019: [Parliament's resolution on women's rights defenders and imprisoned EU dual nationals](#). Parliament had [passed a similar resolution](#) concerning the imprisonment of EU-Iranian dual nationals on 31 May 2018;
- 14 March 2019: [Parliament's resolution on the case of human rights defenders](#), journalists and prisoners of conscience who had been detained or sentenced for exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly when the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and other forces severely clamped down on civil society.

Jorge Soutullo / Walter Masur / Roberto Bendini
10/2022



5.6.6. AFRICA

EU Cooperation with African countries and the African Union (AU) is based on two distinct frameworks: namely (a) the Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and (b) the Joint Africa-EU strategy. The Partnership Agreement, which was signed in Cotonou (Benin) in 2000 between the EU and the ACP States and which has formed the legal foundation of the political, economic and development dimensions of the partnership for over 20 years, is in the process of being replaced by a completely new agreement that was signed in Samoa on 15 November 2023. Originally, the Cotonou Agreement was due to expire at the end of 2020, but it has been extended, most recently until December 2023, as the signature of a new agreement, negotiated to modernise and upgrade the partnership was blocked in the Council of the EU for several years.

The Joint Africa-EU strategy has been implemented through multiannual roadmaps and action plans adopted at each Africa-EU summit. At the last [EU-AU summit](#) held in February 2022 in Brussels, EU and African leaders agreed on a joint vision for a renewed partnership based on solidarity, security, peace, sustainable development and shared prosperity.

The EU is Africa's biggest donor of development assistance, which is provided through the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\) – Global Europe](#).

In her State of the Union speech in September 2023, Commission President von der Leyen announced that the EU should develop a 'mutually beneficial partnership which focuses on common issues for Europe and Africa' and work on a new strategic approach with Africa.

LEGAL BASIS

- Articles 217 and 218 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU);
- The Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the ACP States and the European Community and its Member States (Cotonou Agreement) – to be replaced by the Samoa Partnership Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), of the other part from January 2024 onwards;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

THE ACP-EU PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa have been underpinned in particular by the Cotonou Agreement, which set out the basis for relations between the EU and the 79 countries forming the OACPS.

The Cotonou Agreement was signed in 2000 and was due to expire in 2020, but it has been extended several times, with the latest extension running until 31 December 2023. The Cotonou Agreement's key objective was to contribute to the eradication of poverty and to promote the integration of ACP countries into the world economy. The agreement



was structured in three pillars (political, development, economic and trade cooperation) and was implemented by joint ACP-EU institutions, including a Council of Ministers, a Committee of Ambassadors and a Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

The negotiations on the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and the OACPS were concluded in December 2020, but signature of the new agreement only took place in November 2023, due to internal EU disagreements on the nature of the new agreement and reservations from two EU Member States. The new Partnership Agreement sets out strategic priority areas for cooperation, including human rights, democracy and governance; peace and security; human and social development; environmental sustainability and climate change; inclusive sustainable economic growth and development; and migration and mobility. The new agreement, often referred to as the 'post-Cotonou agreement', also stresses the relevance of cooperation in international forums, and of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Cooperation is structured in three regional protocols reflecting the different priorities of the ACP regions. The EU-Africa Protocol has become the key legal framework for relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa. The protocol also assigns a greater role to dialogue and cooperation with the AU. The regional priority areas encompass inclusive and sustainable economic growth; human and social development; the environment and natural resources; peace and security; the rule of law, justice, democracy and governance; human rights and gender equality; and migration and mobility.

The new Samoa Partnership Agreement provides for joint institutions, in particular an OACPS-EU Council of Ministers and four inter-parliamentary assemblies, comprising an umbrella OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and three regional parliamentary assemblies (Africa-EU, Caribbean-EU and Pacific-EU) (see the briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service entitled '[After Cotonou: towards a new agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states](#)'). As of November 2023, the constitutive meetings of the four assemblies are planned to take place in February 2024 in Luanda, Angola. Each of the four assemblies will hold one ordinary annual meeting, which will rotate between an EU and an ACP venue. The regional assemblies may also hold additional meetings in conjunction with the annual OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

THE JOINT AFRICA-EU STRATEGY

The initial Joint Africa-EU strategy was adopted by European and African leaders at the second EU-Africa summit (in Lisbon in 2007) and defined the political vision for the Africa-EU partnership. Its goals are:

- To move beyond donor-recipient cooperation, opening Africa-EU relations to issues of joint political concern;
- To expand cooperation by addressing global common challenges such as migration, climate change, peace and security and to reinforce cooperation in international forums;
- To support Africa's aspirations to encourage trans-regional and continental responses to these significant challenges;



- To work towards a people-centred partnership, ensuring better participation of African and European citizens.

Ahead of the most recent (sixth) EU-AU summit, the Commission and the European External Action Service issued a communication entitled '[Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#)'. It proposes enhanced cooperation revolving around five pillars: the green transition and energy access; the digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. On 25 March 2021, Parliament adopted a '[resolution](#) on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development'. Parliament's resolution echoed and reinforced parts of the proposed strategy, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, while calling for increased focus on others, such as human development, social inclusion, human rights, the empowerment of women and young people, and resilient agriculture. On migration, the resolution considered that the success of the partnership would depend on significant improvements in mobility opportunities and called for legal migration channels to be further developed.

At the sixth EU-AU summit (Brussels, 17-18 February 2022) EU and AU heads of state and government agreed on a '[joint vision for a renewed partnership](#)' 'promoting our common priorities, shared values, international law, and preserving together our interests and common public goods. This includes inter alia: the security and prosperity of our citizens, the protection of human rights for all, gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life, respect for democratic principles, good governance and the rule of law, actions to preserve the climate, environment and biodiversity, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the fight against inequalities, support for children's rights, and the inclusion of women, young people and the most disadvantaged'. At the summit, an Africa-Europe Investment Package of EUR 150 billion was agreed on with the aim of promoting diversified, sustainable and resilient economies.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The EU and its Member States remain Africa's most significant donor of official development assistance.

As a result of the negotiations on the new 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (see separate fact sheet [1.4.3](#) 'Multiannual financial framework'), development cooperation is covered by the comprehensive NDICI – Global Europe, fully incorporated into the EU budget. Previously, most of development assistance to African countries was provided from the European Development Fund, which was separate from the EU budget.

The NDICI – Global Europe brings together 10 separate instruments and funds from the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, as well as the European Development Fund. It has an overall budget of EUR 79.5 billion (in 2020 prices) and is made up of three main components: geographical, thematic and rapid response. The largest share, reserved for the geographical component, is worth EUR 60.4 billion and almost half of it is earmarked for Africa.

TRADE RELATIONS

The Cotonou Agreement allowed the EU and ACP countries to negotiate development-oriented free trade agreements called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).



Trade between the EU and African countries – together with regional and continental economic integration – is considered a fundamental element to promote sustainable development in Africa. In addition, unilateral schemes allow preferential market access to the EU for most sub-Saharan countries (see separate fact sheet [5.2.3](#) ‘Trade regimes applicable to developing countries’). The principal instruments promoting trade between the EU and African regions are the EPAs, which are considered to be fully compatible with World Trade Organization rules. However, the negotiation of these EPAs, which started in 2002, has proven more difficult than expected and has been met with considerable resistance from some African governments, local civil society representatives and trade unions. Therefore several EPAs, which were meant to cover entire African regions, are only being provisionally applied with countries willing to do so, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, and Kenya (for more information, see the European Parliamentary Research Service briefing entitled [‘EU economic partnership agreements with ACP countries’](#)).

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The conclusion of the Samoa Agreement legally requires the consent of Parliament (Article 218 TFEU), although the agreement can be partially and provisionally applied before consent is given and before the Member States have ratified it. Parliament’s consent is also required for any EPA concluded with ACP countries. In addition, Parliament has actively contributed to shaping the new NDICI – Global Europe financial instrument and is overseeing its implementation.

Parliament has several standing inter-parliamentary delegations for relations with African countries and institutions. The principal body in which Parliament cooperates on such matters has been the [ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly](#), composed of Members of the European Parliament and members of parliament from the ACP States, which plays a fundamental role in strengthening parliamentary relations between the EU and its ACP partners under Article 14 of the Cotonou Agreement. Besides the new regional parliamentary assemblies, one of Parliament’s key demands during the negotiations was maintaining a Joint Parliamentary Assembly in the new agreement, which it considered to be a *conditio sine qua non* for its consent.

Parliament has also developed forms of parliamentary cooperation with the AU through its [Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament](#), established in 2009. Parliamentary summits typically accompany the intergovernmental ones, with parliamentary summits issuing a joint declaration directly to the heads of state or government at the beginning of each intergovernmental summit.

The EU also has privileged parliamentary relations with [South Africa](#), which were strengthened in 2007 by the [EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership](#) - the EU’s only bilateral strategic partnership with an African country. This is also reflected by Parliament’s dedicated standing [Delegation for relations with South Africa](#).

Christian Meseth
10/2023



5.6.7. SOUTH ASIA

The Indo-Pacific is rapidly evolving and becoming the most important geo-strategic region, being home to more than 50% of the global population. Two-thirds of the world's container trade passes through the Indo-Pacific and its sea lanes are the main routes for trade and energy supplies. The [EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) was adopted in September 2021 to increase the EU's presence in the region, to build partnerships, reinforce the rules-based international order and address global challenges. The EU is adapting its current instruments as part of its [strategic autonomy](#). The [EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#), formally approved by the Council in March 2022, promotes an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. The EU is forging closer ties with countries in South Asia, as a strong economic player and a major development and aid donor. The EU is working to foster institution-building, democracy, good governance and human rights, while it also has security concerns, such as the Kashmir conflict and Afghanistan. The European Parliament has supported the EU's assistance for addressing the COVID-19 crisis and its impact in the region, with targeted support for the most vulnerable population groups.

This Fact Sheet describes the South Asia region. See also the Fact Sheets on East Asia ([5.6.8](#)) and Southeast Asia ([5.6.9](#)).

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (EU external action) of the Treaty on European Union;
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (bilateral relations).

SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

The EU encourages regional integration and supports the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The member countries of the SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The EU, China, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar and the US have observer status. Due to internal disagreements, in particular between India and Pakistan, the work of SAARC has stalled.

Development cooperation between the EU and the countries of South Asia covers financial and technical aid as well as economic cooperation. Priorities include regional stability, poverty alleviation, human rights, sustainable development, good governance and labour rights. EU-SAARC cooperation seeks to promote the harmonisation of standards and the facilitation of trade, and to raise awareness of the benefits of regional cooperation.



INDIA

The EU-India strategic partnership, established in 2004, promotes political dialogue and cooperation, the development of economic relations, trade and investment, as well as the strengthening of people-to-people exchanges. The Council of the EU adopted [conclusions on 10 December 2018](#) seeking a deeper and broader engagement with India through the promotion of peace and security over the coming years.

The EU is India's third-largest trading partner, accounting for EUR 88 billion worth of trade in goods in 2021 (10.8% of total Indian trade), with a trade balance of around EUR 4.3 billion in India's favour. The EU is the biggest foreign investor in India, with foreign investment flows into the country rising from 8% to 18% over the past decade. EU foreign direct investment stocks in India amounted to around EUR 80 billion in 2021. Some 6 000 European companies are present in India, providing 1.7 million jobs directly and 5 million jobs indirectly in a broad range of sectors. India currently benefits from unilateral preferential tariffs under the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), which links unilateral trade preferences to respect for human and labour rights.

In recent years, [India has become increasingly active on the international stage](#). It has a growing interest in improving its trade relationship with the EU, which currently mainly follows World Trade Organization rules. For the EU the improvement of India-EU bilateral trade and investment relations is strategically important, as is strengthening economic and geopolitical ties in the context of the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region. The areas currently relevant for the EU-India trade relations are agriculture, services, digital trade, patent protection, environment and labour rights.

The [16th EU-India summit was held in May 2021](#). The key outcome was the commitment to resuming talks on a previously stalled free trade agreement (FTA) and launching negotiations on an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications. A first meeting took place between chief negotiators on 16 March 2022. Both sides agreed to aim beyond their current WTO commitments on trade in goods and services. The Commission has also indicated that the overall aim on trade in goods should be to achieve liberalisation beyond 94% within seven years from the FTA entering into force.

The EU-India Connectivity Partnership was also launched in May 2021 with a view to supporting resilient and sustainable connectivity. These steps are significant against the backdrop of tensions with China. India is also in the process of overhauling its data protection legislation after a Supreme Court ruling, in order to bring it closer to EU regulation. The EU and India published their Indo-Pacific strategy days ahead of the 16th EU-India summit, emphasising a multilateral rules-based international order in the region, notably as a show of strength to China. India has committed to ensuring a safe cyberspace and enhancing maritime security to protect vital sea lanes.

As part of efforts to align on strategic aspects, in May 2021 the EU and India [released a joint statement](#) reaffirming their joint commitments. In September 2021, the EU announced its strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, in which India would play a key role, including advancing the implementation of the connectivity partnership and assisting India in establishing an appropriate regulatory environment and facilitating the mobilisation of the necessary funding to improve connectivity on the ground between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.



President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi [launched the EU-India Trade and Technology Council at their meeting in April 2022](#). This is a strategic coordination mechanism aimed at facilitating cooperation in trade, trusted technology and security.

A delegation of Parliament's Committee on International Trade travelled to India in April 2022 to take stock of the FTA negotiations.

[In June 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific](#) welcoming the commitments for increased cooperation between EU and India in security and defence and underlining that India is a key partner for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. In the same resolution, Parliament regretted the fact that India had not openly condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

[In July 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on future EU-India trade and investment cooperation](#), welcoming the commitment to work towards concluding an ambitious, values-based, balanced, comprehensive and mutually beneficial EU-India trade agreement.

India-EU cooperation in science, technology and innovation is also being strengthened as part of Horizon Europe (2021-2027). The current Indian education policy aims at developing more international partnerships with European universities to work together on Horizon programmes.

The EU has expressed solidarity with India's COVID-19 health crisis and has disbursed EUR 100 billion, together with essential drugs and medical equipment under its civil protection mechanism.

Over 900 million people were eligible to vote in India's seven-phase general election in May 2019. Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 303 of the 545 seats in the Lok Sabha with the best result in its history, defeating the Indian National Congress Party and its allies. In July 2022, Droupadi Murmu, a BJP candidate, was elected President of India through an indirect election. The next general elections are scheduled for 2024. The BJP has expanded its appeal beyond its traditional north Indian core of support, making gains in the northeast states and taking seats in West Bengal. The BJP's gains in the historically less supportive territories in the south have been less spectacular. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP-led government was re-elected with a reduced majority.

India is carrying out political and economic reforms focused on modernising the administration, good governance, fighting corruption with demonetisation and transparency programmes, tackling social problems, developing the economy with the 'Make in India' and 'Invest India' initiatives, and imposing a nationwide goods and services tax.

India is a nuclear power, like its neighbours Pakistan and China, and is faced with security problems, terrorism and armed border clashes, particularly with Pakistan in the autonomous state of Jammu and Kashmir and, to a lesser extent, with China. In August 2019, the Indian Government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. This decision resulted in violent protests and jeopardised political stability in the region. India's caste system is one of the world's oldest forms of social class organisation, which raises concerns about continued discrimination on grounds of caste. The country is also an ethnic and linguistic mosaic, with tensions in a number



of states and reports of human rights abuses and violations of women's and children's rights.

Human rights issues in India remain a matter of concern. On 29 April 2021, the European Parliament adopted a [recommendation](#) on EU-India relations, which referred to the right to freedom of assembly in the light of vehement protests by farmers that have been ongoing since late 2020.

According to the [International Labor Organization \(ILO\)](#), [child labour](#) is widespread in India, despite PM Modi approving a series of measures prohibiting children under the age of 14 from performing hazardous tasks, with tough penalties for employers who break the law. The estimated number in 2020 of child labourers in India is 33 million, and 56% of working teenagers are no longer in education.

In 2020, the northern Indian province of Uttar Pradesh adopted an anti-conversion law against forced and fraudulent religious conversions, carrying prison sentences. Critics have denounced it as a conspiracy by hard-line Hindu groups to clamp down on religious minorities. There have already been arrests made under the law.

PAKISTAN

EU-Pakistan relations date back to 1962 and are currently based on the 2004 Cooperation Agreement. The EU, as a major development and aid donor, supports the promotion of democracy and institution-building in Pakistan.

Pakistan is a major beneficiary of the EU's unilateral trade preferences under the GSP + scheme, reinstated in 2014. As part of the process, Parliament's Committee on International Trade monitors compliance with the GSP+ requirements. Pakistan's GSP + status could be reviewed as it comes with obligations such as guaranteeing human rights and religious freedom.

The EU is Pakistan's second most important trading partner after China, accounting for 14.3% of Pakistan's total trade in 2020 and raking in 28% of Pakistan's total exports. In 2020, Pakistan was the EU's 42nd-largest trading partner in goods, accounting for 0.3% of EU trade. In 2020, two-way trade in goods between the partners amounted to EUR 9.3 billion. Pakistan enjoyed a EUR 1.7 billion trade surplus with the EU.

The EU is a significant donor of development assistance and humanitarian aid to Pakistan. Funding under the Development Cooperation Instrument for 2014-2020 amounted to EUR 653 million. Pakistan has been strongly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU has granted EUR 150 million to address the health emergency. EUR 265 million has been earmarked under the [Multi-annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027](#) for Pakistan with three priority areas: green inclusive growth, human capital and governance/rule of law. Although this amounts to less than during the previous period, it remains a significant contribution. The funding will probably be granted in the form of budget support. The EU has acknowledged the challenges Pakistan faces in hosting over three million refugees and is ready to consider providing additional support, including for the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan.

The [16th EU-Pakistan Joint Commission was held on 16 June 2021](#). They discussed the full and effective implementation of the 2019 EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and Pakistan's efforts towards achieving sustainable economic recovery. They also exchanged views on climate change, connectivity and digitalisation, and cooperation in education, culture,



science and technology. The EU appreciated Pakistan's hosting of millions of Afghan refugees over the past two decades. The EU assured Pakistan of its cooperation and ongoing work towards a durable solution, including through assisting and promoting the safe and dignified return of Afghan refugees to their homeland.

In its resolution of 27 April 2021, Parliament called on the Commission to reassess Pakistan's eligibility for the GSP+ programme given the deteriorating human rights situation. Parliament is monitoring the steps taken by the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to put pressure on PM Shehbaz Sharif's government to address the human rights issues, including the blasphemy laws, which carry harsh sentences including the death penalty. The Pakistani authorities have undertaken reforms to improve good governance and freedoms, and they have put forward proposals to strengthen the country's criminal justice system, with military courts in Pakistan no longer having jurisdiction over civilians since March 2019.

The [13th EU-Pakistan inter-parliamentary meeting \(IPM\)](#) took place in March 2022. Discussions focused on political developments in Pakistan, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, trade, GSP+ and human rights. The IPM considered it essential that parliamentarians on both sides assess progress and provide parliamentary scrutiny and guidance in bilateral relations.

[In June 2022 the EU monitoring mission assessed the effective implementation of 27 international conventions](#), a mandatory requirement for maintaining the GSP+ status, which has been very beneficial for Pakistan. Businesses have increased exports to the EU market by 65% since the country joined GSP+ in 2014. The European Single Market, with over 440 million consumers, is Pakistan's most important market. The findings of the mission will be part of the next GSP report, which is to be presented to Parliament and the Council at the end of 2022.

Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process was critical in helping to secure the February 2020 US-Taliban deal, under which Washington agreed to recall all US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. Pakistan's geo-strategic role in the Indo-Pacific region is set to grow, especially after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021. A stable, democratic and prosperous Pakistan is crucial for the EU and, as a major interlocutor with the Taliban and the main destination for Afghan refugees, the country is rebranding its image internationally. Pakistani politics are in constant turmoil. The army is still involved in internal and foreign politics, with a broad mandate for security and counter-terrorism issues. A new government was formed in April 2022, following a vote of no confidence in March 2022, which led to the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan. The leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) – PML-N, Shahbaz Sharif, brother of the longest-serving former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was elected as the new Prime Minister. The next general elections are due to be held by mid-2023.

The Islamabad High Court indicted the outgoing PM Imran Khan in September 2022 on corruption charges after judges rejected his explanations. Khan is also due in the separate Anti-Terrorism Court as the charges against him are related to what police said was a threat to the Islamabad police chief and a female judge. Khan also faces sedition charges for allegedly inciting mutiny in the military. Since being ousted from power, Khan has been a vocal critic of the government and the country's army and continues to count on the support of many Pakistani voters.



AFGHANISTAN

The EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development was signed on 18 February 2017 and approved by the European Parliament on 13 March 2019. Relations with the EU were adapted to the war and post-war situation. Thanks to substantial input from the European Parliament, Afghanistan was partially and gradually being involved in the EU Strategy for Central Asia. Afghanistan has been the largest recipient of EU development funding in Asia and has also benefited from the EU's most favourable trading regime, the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme. The EU allocated EUR 1.4 billion to Afghanistan for the 2014-2020 period. At the Afghanistan Conference on Peace, Prosperity and Self-Reliance, held in Geneva in November 2020, the EU pledged EUR 1.2 billion in long-term and emergency assistance for 2021-2025.

The latest presidential elections took place in September 2019, with Ashraf Ghani securing the majority of votes (50.64%) to beat Abdullah Abdullah (39.52%). On 29 February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed in Doha the Afghanistan-US Joint Statement for Peace, a bilateral [peace agreement](#) that did not involve the Afghan government. The US and NATO committed to a phased withdrawal of their troops and to the release of prisoners. The US also committed to starting diplomatic engagement with other members of the UN Security Council and Afghanistan to remove members of the Taliban from the UN sanctions list.

Peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban began in Doha in September 2020 aimed at establishing the conditions for a comprehensive ceasefire and political settlement. Several peace conferences took place in Doha, Moscow and Istanbul in 2021, but with no positive outcomes. The talks reached a stalemate and the situation was exacerbated by internal divisions within the government, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a deteriorating humanitarian situation.

From May 2021, the Taliban quickly seized control over more and more territories. The negligible [resistance](#) from Afghan security forces allowed the Taliban to gain control over the country in less than four months. On 15 August 2021, hours after President Ghani fled the country in exile to Dubai, the Taliban claimed victory over Kabul. On 7 September 2021, the Taliban announced an all-male Taliban caretaker government, contrary to earlier promises that the new government would be inclusive. Since then, the Taliban has been continuously perpetrating severe human rights violations, in particular against women, girls and minorities.

On 30 August 2021, The US and NATO completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan sooner than expected under the principle of 'in together, out together', marking the end of the 2001-2021 War in Afghanistan, but leaving the country in humanitarian chaos. Afghanistan's security concerns deteriorated with the withdrawal of US and NATO troops.

The Taliban's links with Al-Qaida and the so-called Islamic State are ambiguous and the country is divided between urban and rural communities. Afghanistan's young urban population would prefer to continue to live in the relatively open society with which they are familiar and the ethnic minority Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras do not wish to be governed by the Taliban.



Following the Taliban takeover and deeply concerned about reprisals against Afghan security personnel and people working for EU embassies, the EU set up a dedicated crisis cell with more than 100 staff members. In August 2021, the cell provided support for the evacuation of more than 17 500 people from Kabul, including 4 100 EU nationals and 13 400 Afghan nationals. The EU delegation was able to evacuate its entire staff.

As one of the most aid-dependent countries, Afghanistan is facing an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe leaving half of its population without basic needs, such as food, water and medicines. With over three million internally displaced people and more than two million refugees and asylum seekers in Pakistan and Iran, the humanitarian situation has worsened. The UN Conference on Afghanistan, held in Geneva on 13 September 2021, pledged USD 1.2 billion, USD 677 million of which was pledged by the EU and its Member States. At the G20 summit on 12 October 2021, Commission President von der Leyen announced an Afghan support package of EUR 1 billion. The situation remains dramatic and it has been aggravated by the recent earthquakes and floods in 2022, following which the European Commission allocated EUR 1 million in humanitarian funding to address the most urgent needs. The EU engages with the Taliban on practical matters like evacuations and humanitarian operations, coordinating its contacts through a delegation in Kabul managed by the EEAS.

The EU is deeply concerned by the re-establishment of an Islamic emirate with a radical sharia legal system. It raises serious questions about the EU's future engagement with Afghanistan, which depends on how the achievements of the past 20 years can be preserved. Particular attention must be paid to the potential increase in international terrorism and migration and to the increase in drug trafficking.

On 3 September 2021 EU foreign affairs ministers agreed that the EU would not recognise the Taliban but that it would engage with it. The degree of that engagement will depend on the behaviour of the new Afghan government, the commitment that Afghanistan would not serve as a base for terrorism, respect for human rights, in particular women's rights, the rule of law and freedom of the media. Engagement will also depend on the establishment of an inclusive and transitional government, free access for humanitarian aid workers and the Taliban's commitment to letting foreign nationals and Afghans leave the country.

Since the takeover of power by the Taliban, a series of restrictions were re-imposed at the end of 2021 and in 2022 on women in Afghanistan. Regulations have been enforced on clothing and laws introduced forbidding women access to public areas without a male guardian. Although some public universities re-opened for both men and women in February 2022 and schools re-opened for a new academic year in March 2022, the Taliban reversed an earlier promise to allow girls to attend secondary school. This has affected an estimated 1.1 million pupils. According to the World Bank, women's participation in the labour force has increased from 15% to 22% in the past decade. However, it has dropped since the takeover, with the Taliban imposing more restrictions on women's movements outside the home since their return to power.

Parliament has supported inclusive intra-Afghan negotiations as a precondition for an end to four decades of death and destruction, and insists on involving all political factions and civil society. Since autumn 2020, Parliament has repeatedly condemned the eruptions of violence and, in a [resolution of June 2021 on the situation in Afghanistan](#), it expressed concern over the consequences of the withdrawal of troops and called for the adoption of a comprehensive strategy for future EU



cooperation with Afghanistan. In July 2021, one month before the Taliban takeover, the European Parliament Delegation for relations with Afghanistan (D-AF) held the 6th EU-Afghanistan inter-parliamentary meeting with representatives of the National Assembly of Afghanistan. The meeting including two panel debates – one on the peace process and the situation in Afghanistan after the foreign troop withdrawal and the other on the role of women in the peace process and future engagements with the EU.

[In September 2021, Parliament passed a resolution on the situation in Afghanistan](#), in which it deplored the violent takeover by the Taliban. Parliament expressed strong concerns for the future and endorsed the EU's decision not to recognise the Taliban government. It also acknowledged that operational engagement with the Taliban government would be necessary for logistical, operational and humanitarian purposes, and called for the facilitation of the further evacuation of EU citizens and Afghans at risk and for a further increase in humanitarian aid. Parliament, in particular its Delegation for relations with Afghanistan, has voiced concerns about the humanitarian, economic and refugee crisis, which requires humanitarian corridors and a strategic approach for the whole region, including Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia.

Parliament organised a series of events as part of the high-level 'Afghan Women Days' conference in February 2022. On 10 March 2022, the Afghan Women Leaders Forum was launched through a virtual meeting with almost 50 Afghan women leaders joining from Afghanistan and other parts of the world.

The EU has issued many declarations in favour of women rights, such as one by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, in March 2022 calling for the immediate reopening of secondary schools for girls. This call was echoed in the G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement. In [April 2022, Parliament adopted a resolution on the situation on the rights of Afghan women](#). It condemned the Taliban's decision to extend the ban on girls' schooling from year seven and deplored its persistent desire to erase women from public life and remove their most fundamental rights, including access to education, work, freedom of movement and health care.

The EU continues to engage with the Taliban, as underlined by the [EEAS statement in August 2022](#) on the situation one year after the Taliban takeover, which emphasises the EU's commitment to Afghan people.

BANGLADESH

EU-Bangladesh relations date back to 1973. The 2001 Cooperation Agreement covers trade, economic development, human rights, good governance and the environment. As a Least Developed Country (LDC), Bangladesh benefits from the EU's EBA scheme, the most favourable trading regime available under the EU's GSP. Bangladesh is expected to graduate from LDC status by 2026. After a transitional period, the country would then cease to have access to the EBA scheme.

The EU has committed up to EUR 690 million under the 2014-2020 Multiannual Indicative Programme. It has stressed Bangladesh's need for policy reforms in order to improve its business environment and attract more trade and investment. In July 2019, the EU launched two programmes in Bangladesh targeting public financial management and national social security reforms. As part of the Team Europe response to COVID-19, the EU allocated EUR 113 million to protect the livelihoods of workers in the garment and leather export-oriented industries in Bangladesh. The EU



programming for the 2021-2027 period is aligned with the 8th Five Year Plan (FYP) covering 2020-2025.

Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy in which power alternates between two parties, the Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The AL prevailed in the elections in December 2018. Bangladesh is among the few countries to have achieved the Millennium Development Goals. However, labour rights and working conditions continue to be a serious issue, especially in industrial garment factory areas around Dhaka. The COVID-19 outbreak has had a considerable impact on economic and political stability. The AL won a third consecutive term of office, which will expire in 2023. Bangladesh's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to fall in 2022 due to the crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the rise in price of commodities and inflation. The country has therefore requested financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Bangladesh's garment exports have multiplied over recent years. Accidents and fires within factories and other workplaces are common in Bangladesh, killing as many as 1 310 workers and injuring 3 883 in the last decade.

Since August 2017, over 800 000 Rohingya refugees have fled from persecution in Myanmar to Bangladesh. The EU has been closely monitoring the Rohingya refugee crisis, disbursing more than half of the EUR 280 million raised after the UN Pledging Conference in October 2017. The EU initially allocated over EUR 150 million in humanitarian aid, followed by EUR 41 million in 2018, EUR 35 million in 2019 and EUR 31 million in 2020, mainly to support Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. The EU announced a further [allocation of EUR 39 million in humanitarian aid](#) to Bangladesh and Myanmar on 23 February 2021. The funds are aimed at addressing the needs of conflict-affected and displaced communities, especially the Rohingya, whose situation has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of developments in Myanmar, it looks unlikely that Rohingya refugees will be willing to return of their own accord. The Rohingya crisis is an important domestic issue in the run-up to the 2023 elections in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government is making an effort to repatriate the Rohingya, but their return is still being hampered by conditions in Myanmar.

SRI LANKA

EU-Sri Lanka relations date back to the 1975 Cooperation Agreement, upgraded in 1995 by a Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development. Sri Lanka was granted access to the EU for its exports under GSP+ in May 2017 as an incentive for political reforms and compliance with international conventions on human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and good governance.

The European Parliament is closely monitoring Sri Lanka's progress in complying effectively with the GSP+ criteria. The perspectives for transitional justice and national reconciliation, two fundamental conditions for the European Parliament as regards Sri Lanka's eligibility for benefitting from GSP+, have been significantly undermined. .

The EU has provided Sri Lanka with EUR 760 million in development assistance over the past decade. The EU is Sri Lanka's second-largest trading partner after China and its second main export destination, with two-way trade in goods worth EUR 3 billion in 2020 and a EUR 1.2 billion trade balance in favour of Sri Lanka.

The EU and Sri Lanka held their [24th meeting of the Joint Commission in February 2022](#) in Brussels. Sri Lanka gave an update on progress in reconciliation and its independent



institutions, in particular the Office of Missing Persons, the Office for Reparations, the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation and the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka. The EU strongly encouraged Sri Lanka to continue cooperating and engaging with the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms. The Joint Commission took stock of the conclusions of the Working Group on Trade and Economic Cooperation held in January 2022. Sri Lanka appreciated the valued contribution of the GSP+ regime to the country's sustainable development. The two sides reviewed Sri Lanka's compliance with 27 international conventions related to human rights, labour rights, protection of the environment and good governance covered by the GSP+ scheme. The Joint Commission also discussed the conclusions of the Working Group on Development Cooperation, which met on 2 February 2022 to discuss the priorities of the EU Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for 2021-2027.

Sri Lanka suffered a civil war from 1983 to 2009 between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Gotabaya Rajapaksa won the presidential elections in November 2019 and appointed his brother, the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, as the new prime minister. The president's party alliance, the Sri Lanka People's Freedom Alliance, won a landslide victory at the parliamentary elections held in August 2020. Mahinda Rajapaksa was sworn in by his brother, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In September 2020, the controversial 20th amendment bill was introduced, bolstering the executive powers of the president and weakening the roles of the prime minister and the parliament.

The most serious economic crisis the country has ever suffered led to massive demonstrations in 2022. High commodity prices and shortages of basic commodities and energy triggered unprecedented riots. Protests began in April 2022, when hundreds of thousands of people took part in the largely peaceful protests demanding the resignation of President Rajapaksa. In July 2022, thousands of people stormed his official residence, and the president then fled on a military plane first to the Maldives and then to Singapore. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa both resigned.

Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected as the new president on 20 July 2022. He appointed Dinesh Gunawardena on 22 July 2022 as his new prime minister. Since Wickremesinghe became president, human rights groups have accused the government of cracking down on protesters. Police have detained dozens of protesters in recent weeks and most have since been released on bail.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its debt for the first time in its history and agreed a new programme to support macro-economic stability and debt sustainability with the IMF. Former president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, returned to the country. Sri Lankans blame his government for the island's worst economic crisis in history. A collapse in foreign currency reserves led to dire shortages of food and fuel. In September 2022, the Sri Lankan government reached a preliminary agreement with the IMF for a USD 2.9 billion loan. This would be dependent on lots of conditions, including fiscal reforms and the restructuring of Sri Lanka's USD 51 billion debt with its creditors. The government also faces challenges in convincing people about privatising key public sector services as part of its efforts to boost revenue.



NEPAL

EU-Nepal relations date back to 1973 and are based on the 1996 Cooperation Agreement. With nearly a quarter of the population living on less than two USD a day, Nepal depends on external aid for 25% of its budget. The EU is one of Nepal's biggest development aid donors and tripled its development assistance to EUR 360 million for 2014-2020. The EU has also reiterated the importance of Nepal taking greater advantage of the trade preferences it is accorded under the EBA scheme.

The [EU-Nepal Joint Commission last met in November 2021](#). At this meeting its Sub-Commission on Development Cooperation, Nepal and the EU their ongoing cooperation. Together with Nepal's [National Development Plan \(NDP\) 2019-2024](#), the EU currently supports Nepal under the new MIP 2021-2027, outlining three priority areas of cooperation: inclusive green growth, human capital development and good governance. These priority areas are also aligned with the EU's global strategies, such as the [strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#), the [Global Recovery Initiative](#) and the Action Plan on [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 \(GAP III\)](#). A total amount of EUR 209 million has been allocated for 2021-2024.

In April 2020, the EU prepared a EUR 75 million support package for Nepal designed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and stimulate the Nepalese economy and labour demand, thereby supporting individual income in a country characterised by substantial inequality between the upper and lower castes, as well as marginalised communities such as the Madhesi.

On 23 January 2020 Nepal held elections to the National Assembly. The ruling Nepal Communist Party secured 16 seats and the Rastriya Janata Party (RJP-N) won two. Nepal has been beset by political volatility since December 2020, when the president, following a recommendation from the prime minister, dissolved parliament to call early elections. The Supreme Court reinstated parliament in February 2021, but the government lost a motion of no confidence in May 2021. The political turmoil continued and a period of high political instability followed in 2022 when parliament was dissolved and then reinstated again by the Supreme Court. General elections were scheduled to take place on 20 November 2022.

The high global oil and commodities prices in 2022 have affected consumer prices in Nepal, posing a risk to political stability, as this could lead to unrest and protests, including demands for the restoration of the Hindu monarchy. This has been called for by the Hindu Prajatantra Party, which might improve its electoral prospects in the November 2022 general elections. Nepal's mixed electoral system combining 'first past the post' and proportional representation makes it difficult to secure a majority mandate. Political parties will therefore probably have to forge a coalition with power-sharing agreements, as is customary in Nepal.

China and India are competing for influence in the country. The main challenges are achieving a peaceful solution to the political deadlock via reform of the constitution, which needs to be amended to accommodate the interests of Dalits and ethnic minorities, notably the Madhesi in Terai, and guaranteeing the rights of migrant Nepali citizens abroad.

The government failed to deliver transitional justice for the victims of human rights abuses during the civil war. In April 2020, the Supreme Court recommended that the



mandate of the Nepalese Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be amended in order to prevent impunity. The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#), established by a legislative act in 2014, has failed so far, so there is a continuing climate of impunity. Amnesty has been granted for crimes such as torture and acts of sexual violence and ill-treatment. In 2014, the government also established the [Commission of Enforced Disappeared Persons](#) with the objective of investigating the enforced disappearance of people during the armed conflict and informing the public about what occurred in the spirit of the peace agreement. In February 2015, the Supreme Court ordered an amendment to the act, but the government petitioned to overturn this ruling. On 26 April 2020, the Supreme Court rejected this petition, thus reaffirming the importance of fair transitional justice mechanisms. Human rights organisations welcomed Nepal's Supreme Court's decision of April 2020 on the need to amend the transitional justice law. In July 2022 [the government presented a bill to amend existing laws](#), but Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch do not believe that the proposed bill is in line with the Supreme Court's decision and would still make it difficult or impossible to prosecute offenders.

Parliament's Delegation for Relations with South Asia visited Bhutan in September 2022 to assess Nepalese relations with the EU, which is the main cooperation donor. As Nepal may graduate from LDC status by 2026, Parliament welcomed the fact that Nepal has already ratified most of the 27 core conventions required to apply for GSP+.

BHUTAN

Isolated from the outside world for centuries, Bhutan is adapting to globalisation and strengthening its economy, while at the same time preserving its ancient traditions. It made a peaceful transition to parliamentary democracy under the constitution adopted in 2008, guaranteeing the separation of powers under a constitutional monarchy. The EU supports Bhutan's full autonomy from its powerful neighbours – India and China – and retains the conviction that the country should be able to formulate its own security and foreign policy, recognising ongoing concerns over loss of sovereignty on account of Bhutan's geographical location.

The EU Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 allocated EUR 49.3 million in assistance for Bhutan. The EU has had a strong presence in Bhutan since 1982, working to reduce poverty, promote democratisation and good governance and support sustainable agriculture and renewable natural resources. A new EU-Bhutan Trade Support Project was launched on 24 May 2018 with the aim of improving value addition, market linkages and the trade and investment regulatory framework.

Between 2017 and 2022, approximately EUR 21.5 million has been set aside to support sustainable agriculture, forestry and climate change. Moreover, in response to the needs that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU allocated an additional EUR 4.5 million in 2020.

The current MIP 2021-2027 continues to support Bhutan and is aligned with the 12th FYP 2018-2023, focusing on three priority areas: climate change and green growth for a resilient Bhutan; good governance for inclusive socio-economic development; and digital transition, a driver for change in education and public services. A total amount of EUR 31 million has been allocated for the initial period of 2021-2024.



The [EU and Bhutan held their 10th formal consultations in Brussels in February 2022](#), reviewing their ongoing cooperation. Bhutan presented key activities it was pursuing to ensure a smooth and successful graduation from the LDC category, scheduled to take place in 2023. The EU and Bhutan expressed satisfaction with the ratification of the framework agreement between Bhutan and the European Investment Bank (EIB) to pave the way for concessional financing from the EIB for development projects in Bhutan. The EU reiterated its support for Bhutan's development plans and offered to grant Bhutan greater preferential access to EU markets under GSP+ once Bhutan fulfils the necessary conditions. The EU presented the Global Gateway, the new EU plan for major investment in infrastructure development around the world, which was launched in December 2021 and updates the 2018 EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy. This has global geographical coverage and sets a target of EUR 300 billion of investment by 2027. The EU praised the Himalayan country for its actions towards ensuring sustainable, low-carbon and climate-resilient development. The EU also noted that Bhutan has taken significant steps to protect the rights of children and women and foster gender equality. Most notably, the Bhutanese Parliament decriminalised homosexuality in December 2020.

Bhutan is a new democracy, headed by a royal family, where the democratic process needs to be consolidated. Bhutan's isolation and sense of vulnerability have helped to form a distinctive national identity based on preserving its religion, environment and culture. Protecting the country's culture is perceived as essential. Bhutan's cultural heritage is expressed through Gross National Happiness (GNH), in line with its Buddhist spiritual culture. GNH promotes the values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance. Enshrined in the 2008 Constitution, GNH is a development philosophy that uses an index to measure the country's level of economic development together with the level of wellbeing and happiness of the population. [The GNH was recognised in a UN resolution in 2011](#) and consists of several domains: psychological wellbeing, standard of living, good governance, health, education, community vitality, cultural diversity, time use, ecological diversity and resilience. Parliament supports Bhutan's environmental policy, which seeks to preserve the country's biodiversity, which is highly vulnerable to climate change, and prevent all forms of ecological degradation in line with the concept of GNH.

Parliament's Delegation for Relations with South Asia visited Bhutan in September 2022 to assess the socio-economic development of the country, which will graduate from LDC status by December 2023. This means that Bhutan will no longer be able to benefit from the EU's EBA scheme. Bhutan is considering applying for GSP +, but it appears unlikely that Bhutan will be able to sign and ratify all 27 required core international conventions on time.

THE MALDIVES

Although there is still no formal cooperation agreement with the Maldives, the EU provides cooperation support for rural communities, tourism and climate change mitigation. In July 2018, the EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted a framework for targeted restrictive measures against persons and entities responsible for undermining the rule of law or obstructing an inclusive political solution in the Maldives, as well as for those responsible for serious human rights violations. The EU Council decided in April 2021 to launch negotiations on an EU-Maldives Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, an important milestone in bilateral relations with the Maldives.



In September 2021, the second EU-Maldives Senior Officials Meeting was held in Brussels to reinforce their relationship, including cooperating in the Indo-Pacific.

The Maldives is vulnerable to climate change and is exposed to rising sea levels and coastal erosion, which pose a serious threat to the viability of the country. The Maldives' Parliament is planning to establish its first ever Climate Act, which will set limits on pollution, and to adopt measures to protect and help regenerate the environment. Records from the past 20 years have shown an increase in sea levels of nearly four millimetres per year in the capital Malé and a projected increase of some 40-50 centimetres by 2100. This means beach erosion, flooding, increased groundwater salination and unpredictable weather, which is already causing flooding and droughts. Given that 80% of Maldivians live within 100 metres of the sea, the physical impact of these changes represents an existential threat.

The country also suffers from high youth unemployment, gang violence and drug addiction. There has been increasing political and social unrest since opposition leader Mohamed Solih defeated former President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom in September 2018. Parliamentary elections were held in the Maldives in April 2019. The result was a landslide victory for Mohamed Solih's Maldivian Democratic Party, which won 65 of the 87 seats in the People's Majlis. In May 2021, the former President Mohammed Nasheed, a close friend of President Solih and speaker of parliament, was severely wounded in a bomb attack. Parliament has been supportive of the Maldivian process of democratic consolidation. President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih will stand for election in 2023 on a platform with two distinct factions in the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party. The government's efforts currently focus on bolstering the economy, especially the tourism sector, and improving relations with India on infrastructure and financial support.

The Maldives graduated from the LDC category in 2011 and attained upper-middle income status in 2013. The economy is based mainly on tourism and fisheries. The EU is the Maldives' fourth largest trading partner, accounting for around 10% of total trade in goods in 2019.

With tourism comprising 70% of GDP, the Maldives' economy has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU made EUR 3 million available in April 2020 to support measures to mitigate the severe impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector. The EIB announced a EUR 20 million loan to support recovery measures.

In August 2021, the EU agreed to provide EUR 2 million in free aid to develop the guesthouse and liveaboard industry in the Maldives under the project 'EU Support for a Resilient Recovery of SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) Tourism Industry in the Maldives'. This aid is being provided to help the Maldives' SMEs in the tourism industry to build a resilient economy after the pitfalls it faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jorge Soutullo / Stefania Gazzina / Walter Masur / Cristina Stanculescu
10/2022



5.6.8. EAST ASIA

The Indo-Pacific is undergoing rapid change, and as home to more than 50% of the world's population it is becoming a key geo-strategic region. Two thirds of the world's container trade passes through the Indo-Pacific and its sea lanes are the main routes for trade and energy supplies. The [EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) was adopted in September 2021 to increase the EU's engagement, build partnerships and reinforce the rules-based international order and address global challenges. The Union is adapting its current instruments to support the EU's [strategic autonomy](#). Its [Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#), formally approved by the Council in March 2022, promotes an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure maritime routes, capacity-building and an enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. East Asia faces security concerns such as the nuclear challenge in North Korea, the maritime disputes in the East and the South China Seas, and the Taiwan issue. The EU is a strong economic player in East Asia and is working to foster fair trade, multilateralism, institution building, democracy, good governance and human rights.

This fact sheet describes the East Asia region. See also the fact sheets on South Asia ([5.6.7](#)) and Southeast Asia ([5.6.9](#)).

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (EU external action) of the Treaty on European Union;
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and Articles 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (bilateral relations).

EAST ASIA

A. China

The EU and China established formal diplomatic ties in 1975. Relations were suspended following the violent crushing of the Tiananmen Square protests by military forces in 1989. The EU only resumed relations in 1994, but its arms embargo imposed in 1989 remains in place.

Under President Xi Jinping, China's political situation has changed considerably since 2012. In 2018, a revision of the constitution was adopted allowing Xi Jinping to hold the position indefinitely, with no term limit on the post of general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, head of state and of the army. China's foreign policy has taken a more aggressive and coercive approach, having the world's largest pool of available active military personnel. China was the world's second-largest military spender in 2021, after the United States, accounting for about 14% of the world total, with an estimated budget of USD 293 billion. On 17 June 2022, China officially launched its third aircraft carrier, the Fujian (named after the province opposite Taiwan), as part of an ongoing effort to build a fully modern force rivalling the US military by 2027. A fourth carrier is also under construction in China, and it is reported that it might be nuclear powered. China's naval forces are building warships at a faster rate than all



other powers combined. China is expanding and multiplying its military presence in the South China Sea, in the Taiwan Strait and in the Strait of Malacca, which is vital for international trade and especially for Chinese trade.

The growing economic and geopolitical interdependence of the EU and China is reflected in the [joint EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation](#), which has deepened and broadened cooperation in a wide range of areas, such as foreign and security policy; economic development; global governance and multilateral cooperation in trade and investment; social and environmental areas; and other areas including people-to-people contacts. However, EU-China bilateral relations have deteriorated in 2022, notably as a result of China's stance on the Russian aggression in Ukraine, on its counter-measures to EU sanctions on human rights, and recently on its economic coercion and aggression in the Taiwan Strait.

China's position on the Russian aggression against Ukraine has created further tensions between the Western allies and China. While China has not approved the war as such, its 'neutrality' towards Russia sets an example for other Asian countries. China has not joined the sanctions against Russia and China-Russia military cooperation has deepened since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as China has decided to tacitly support Putin. Although China and Russia have no formal military agreement, the two countries have increased arms sales and joint military exercises. In September 2022, China participated in the 'Vostok 22' drills on the east coast of Russia, involving around 50 000 troops and 5 000 pieces of military equipment.

For the first time NATO has considered China a challenge in its [10-year strategic concept, which was adopted in Madrid in June 2022](#). The strategic concept recognises the rising threat China poses, given its growing economic and military influence and increasing belligerence in the Indo-Pacific, including the use of malicious hybrid and cyber operations, as well as confrontational rhetoric, and the fact that it is spreading disinformation to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains.

China has been violating Taiwanese waters and air space (stepped up in the summer of 2022), and constructing artificial land and building military facilities in the South China Sea. The EU promotes global governance and a multilateral cooperation approach towards the South China Sea dispute, not interfering in territorial claims, considering freedom of navigation and overflight as a major concern. The EU encourages the parties in the dispute to seek peaceful, negotiated solutions and to abide by international law, in line with the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#). The South China Sea is of huge economic and strategic importance: it is crossed by about one third of the world's shipping traffic and contains rich fishing and energy resources. China claims roughly 90% of the South China Sea under the 'nine-dash line'.

China is an economic competitor of the EU and even a systemic rival with its rising political influence reshaping international governance structures. China's Belt and Road initiative is reaching every corner of the globe, promoting globalisation with Chinese characteristics such as non-transparent contracting, and Chinese labour standards and debt policies. China aims to become the world leader in high-tech industries and digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and 5G. China has been systematically developing influence strategies using disinformation campaigns.



The EU-China leaders' meeting on 30 December 2020 focused on concluding negotiations for a comprehensive agreement on investment (CAI). The EU took a critical view of the negotiation process, and the existing imbalances and lack of reciprocity in many fields, in particular in the trade and investment relationship. The CAI needs to be ratified by Parliament, which has so far withheld its approval on account of China's stance on the Russian aggression of Ukraine, its belligerence against Taiwan and the sanctions it imposed in March 2021 on five MEPs and four European entities in retaliation for the Council's sanctions on China in response to the widespread arbitrary detention of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

The 23rd EU-China Summit took place in April 2022. The EU and China extensively discussed Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The EU called on China to support efforts to bring about an immediate end to the bloodshed in Ukraine, consistent with China's role in the world as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and its uniquely close relations with Russia. Another point of discussion was the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a shared priority. The EU confirmed its commitment to work with China and other member states of the World Health Organization on a new agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Climate change and economic cooperation were also discussed. The EU reaffirmed its commitment to its One-China policy, while raising concerns about increased cross-strait tensions.

The ninth EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue took place in July 2022, focusing on global economic challenges, disruptions of supply chains caused by COVID-19 and the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, such as on food, energy and financial markets.

The EU and China are major trading partners. In 2021, China was the third most important destination for EU goods exports (10.2%) and the main source of EU goods imports (22.4%). EU imports from China totalled EUR 363 billion in 2019 and EUR 472 billion in 2021. EU exports to China came to EUR 198 billion in 2019 and EUR 223 billion in 2021. This is approximately EUR 1.3 billion per day of imports and EUR 600 million per day of exports, making trade between the EU and China worth a total of EUR 1.9 billion every day.

Parliament is deeply concerned by the human rights situation in China and has drawn attention to China's human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, labour camps and the death penalty. Parliament has passed resolutions condemning China's suppression of political opposition and pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong, expressing concern about the national security law for Hong Kong and calling for the EU to defend Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy.

Parliament has also raised concerns about Xinjiang and the situation of the Uyghurs, condemning forced labour and the exploitation of Uyghur minorities. Parliament has also adopted resolutions on Tibet, more specifically on the situation of religious and ethnic minorities.

The most recent Parliament resolutions on China were:

- [Resolution of 20 May 2021 on Chinese countersanctions on EU entities and MEPs and MPs](#);
- [Resolution of 16 September 2021 on a new EU-China strategy](#);



- [Resolution of 20 January 2022 on violations of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong](#);
- [Resolution of 5 May 2022 on the reports of continued organ harvesting in China](#);
- [Resolution of 9 June 2022 on the human rights situation in Xinjiang, including the Xinjiang police files](#);
- [Resolution of 7 July 2022 on the arrest of Cardinal Zen and the trustees of the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund in Hong Kong](#).

B. Taiwan

The EU is committed to the 'One-China policy', referring to Taiwan as a separate customs territory and not as a sovereign state, recognising Taiwan as an economic and commercial entity and supporting Taiwan's participation in multilateral forums. The EU supports peaceful conflict resolution between Taiwan and China and opposes the use or threat of force. The EU has developed a well-structured dialogue on economic and trade matters with Taiwan in sectors such as the car industry, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and medical devices. In 2021, Taiwan was the EU's 12th-largest trading partner, while the EU was Taiwan's fifth-largest trading partner, after China, the United States, Hong Kong and Japan. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was also a top trading partner of Taiwan. The total trade in goods between the EU and Taiwan in 2021 stood at around EUR 64 billion, with a trade deficit of EUR 7.1 billion on the EU side. EU-Taiwan bilateral trade grew by 17.8% from 2020 to 2021. The EU's exports to Taiwan in 2021 amounted to EUR 28.41 billion, while the EU's imports from Taiwan amounted to EUR 35.57 billion.

The EU and Taiwan also hold annual consultations on various non-trade matters. The third Taiwan-EU Labor Consultation and the fourth Taiwan-EU Human Rights Consultation took place in February and July 2021, respectively. Both parties are committed to promoting and protecting human rights and democratic principles, as well as the rule of law. A broad range of topics are also discussed in the annual consultations such as migrant workers' rights, particularly for domestic workers and in the fishing industry; the death penalty; gender equality and fair treatment for LGBTQIA+ people. In addition, the inaugural EU-Taiwan Occupational Safety and Health Cooperation Meeting was held in May 2021, and the second in May 2022, in which both parties discussed managing the risk of carcinogens in the workplace and safety management for Industry 4.0.

Taiwan held presidential elections in January 2020, with Tsai Ing-wen, the leader of the Democratic Progressive Party, returning for a second term with 57.1% of the votes, ahead of Han Kuo-yu of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) who obtained 38.6%. Independence from mainland China is the main subject of Taiwanese politics, while China is putting diplomatic, economic, military and psychological pressure on Taiwan.

Cross-strait tensions have escalated since the Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen won the elections in 2016. China has taken aggressive actions, increasing the frequency and scale of patrols by bombers, fighter jets, and surveillance aircraft around Taiwan. As of 31 May 2022, Taiwan had reported 465 incursions, a near 50% increase compared to 2021. In addition, in 2022 Taiwan is reporting around five million cyberattacks a day from China, targeting its government agencies, semiconductor companies and financial institutions. Parliament has repeatedly encouraged closer bilateral EU-Taiwan



cooperation in areas such as trade, research, culture, education, climate change and environmental protection, expressing its support for the launch of negotiations for an EU-Taiwan bilateral investment agreement. Parliament adopted a [resolution in September 2021](#) calling for progress on an EU investment agreement with Taiwan. Parliament has equally supported Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organisations such as the World Health Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization. Parliament has also repeatedly urged China to refrain from acts of military provocation towards Taiwan, emphasising that all cross-strait disputes should be settled by peaceful means based on international law.

Taiwan is crucial for the EU as a global supplier of key high-tech sectors, notably semiconductors. On the initiative of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Parliament adopted a specific [recommendation on EU relations with Taiwan in October 2021](#), calling for an urgent start to work on a bilateral investment agreement with the Taiwanese authorities to deepen bilateral economic ties. Parliament supports the inclusion of Taiwan in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and encourages dialogue and cooperation with Taiwan in all industrial sectors and supply chains, in particular strategically important industries such as semiconductor technologies (Taiwan produces two thirds of the world's semiconductors and 90% of its high quality semiconductors).

[The Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes \(INGE\) visited Taipei from 3-5 November 2021](#), in Parliament's first official visit to Taiwan. INGE aimed to study Taiwanese experiences in addressing interference and manipulation campaigns and discussed Taiwan's innovative system to combat disinformation campaigns and other types of hybrid attacks.

US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022 was the highest-level US government visit to Taiwan in 25 years. Many other high-level Western visits followed. China considered these foreign visits to the island to be interference in its affairs and a de facto recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty. Beijing responded by holding unprecedentedly extended military exercises in seven designated areas surrounding Taiwan, using up to 11 ballistic missiles, of which at least five flew over Taiwan and therefore constituted a virtual blockade of Taiwan's sea and air space. Five of China's ballistic missiles landed in the Japanese exclusive economic zone and the full-scale military exercises were coupled with intense cyberattacks against Taiwan.

The Commission spokesperson stated that the EU is interested in preserving peace and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Tensions should be resolved through dialogue and appropriate channels of communication should be maintained to reduce the risks of miscalculation,

Parliament adopted a resolution in September 2022 on [the situation in the Strait of Taiwan](#), criticising China's military escalation and rejecting China's economic coercion. Parliament welcomed the plan by Lithuania to open a trade representative office in Taipei and called on other Member States to follow this example and strengthen their relations with Taiwan.

C. Hong Kong

The EU attaches great importance to Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, which must be preserved in line with the Basic Law and international commitments. Continued respect for fundamental rights and freedoms and the independence of the judiciary remain essential for the development of Hong Kong. EU-Hong Kong



relations cover trade, economic development, customs cooperation, innovation and technology, competition, food safety, the environment and education. The EU is Hong Kong's second-largest trading partner after mainland China. In 2021, at least 1 614 EU companies were present in Hong Kong, and many of them were using Hong Kong as a regional headquarters. Bilateral trade in goods totalled EUR 30.5 billion, an increase of 2.5% compared to 2020. EU exports of goods to Hong Kong amounted to EUR 23.5 billion, while imports from Hong Kong totalled EUR 7 billion, resulting in a trade surplus of EUR 16.5 billion. The EU was Hong Kong's third-largest trading partner in goods in 2021, after mainland China and Taiwan.

The EU removed Hong Kong from the watch list of [non-cooperative tax jurisdictions](#) in March 2019, following improvements in good governance. The EU is seriously concerned about the National Security Law (NSL) imposed by China on 30 June 2020. The Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) expressed concerns about the conformity of the NSL with the Hong Kong Basic Law, the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and China's international commitments. The NSL has been used to suppress Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, as any expression of views perceived to be in conflict with the government's line can lead to arrests and imprisonments. A further worrying aspect is its extraterritorial application.

In July 2020, the EU and its Member States reiterated their support for Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' principle, while setting out a coordinated package of measures in fields such as asylum, migration, visa and residence policy, in particular Member States' extradition arrangements. The package included exports of specific sensitive equipment and technologies for end use in Hong Kong, scholarships and academic exchanges involving Hong Kong students, as well as support to civil society. The government postponed the 2020 elections for the seventh term of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, using the spread of COVID-19 to justify its decision. Elections took place in December 2021 and, unsurprisingly, pro-China candidates won. The VP/HR Josep Borrell stated that the EU sees this election, in combination with the ongoing pressure on civil society, as yet another step in the dismantling of the 'one country, two systems' principle. In addition, in May 2022, the 1 500 members of the Election Committee voted for a single nominee, John Lee Ka-chiu, as the new Chief Executive. The voter support for Lee was 99% compared to 66% for his predecessor, Carrie Lam, who had led Hong Kong from 2017.

Parliament's [recommendation of December 2017](#), 20 years after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, stressed that respect for the Basic Law was of key importance for further strengthening of relations with the EU. Parliament condemned China's interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs, which may put the long-term viability of the 'one country, two systems' model at risk. In a [resolution in June 2020](#), Parliament called the unilateral introduction of national security legislation a comprehensive assault on Hong Kong's autonomy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. China is bound by the Joint Declaration, which was registered with the UN as a legally binding treaty, to uphold Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and its rights and freedoms.

In a [resolution in January 2021](#), on the crackdown on the democratic opposition in Hong Kong, Parliament called for the immediate and unconditional release of those arrested in Hong Kong in the first two weeks of 2021, and of all those previously arrested on charges under the NSL. Parliament urged the authorities to respect Hong Kong's



rule of law, human rights, democratic principles and high degree of autonomy, and to immediately refrain from making further use of the NSL to suppress the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

In July 2021 Parliament passed [a resolution on Hong Kong, notably the case of Apple Daily](#), condemning restrictions on the freedom of expression, and urging the Hong Kong authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all journalists and other activists arrested under the NSL and drop all charges against them.

In January 2022, Parliament passed another [resolution on violations of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong](#), strongly condemning the targeted attacks against the opposition at large, whether NGOs, media outlets or civilians. The resolution proposed the creation of academic opportunities on humanitarian grounds for people in Hong Kong who are suffering as a result of China's coercive position.

D. Japan

Having been strategic partners since 2003, the EU and Japan share fundamental values such as respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as a strong commitment to sustainable development, multilateralism and a rules-based World Trade Organization (WTO) system. Japan is committed to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and to other multilateral environmental agreements. However, there are some issues that cause concern for the EU: Japan's application of the death penalty, whaling and parental abductions of EU children in Japan.

The EU and Japan upgraded their bilateral strategic relationship in February 2019 with the provisional implementation of the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the entry into force of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The EPA is the most important bilateral trade agreement ever concluded by the EU, as it covers nearly one third of global gross domestic product (GDP), almost 40% of world trade and over 600 million people. The EPA also contains commitments on trade in both goods and services, and provides a framework that promotes bilateral investment. It also sets ambitious targets for sustainable development and includes, for the first time, a specific commitment to the Paris climate agreement. The EU and Japan signed an [agreement on civil aviation safety](#) on 22 June 2020. Reciprocity of visa-free travel for EU citizens to Japan remains an issue in bilateral relations, as Japanese nationals enjoy visa-free access to the EU.

Japan is the EU's second-largest trading partner in Asia, after China, with total trade amounting to EUR 109 billion in 2020. EU exports to Japan amounted to EUR 54.9 billion in 2020. The EU had a trade surplus in goods of EUR 0.5 billion. As for trade in services, in 2018 the EU exported EUR 35 billion in services to Japan and imported EUR 18 billion from it, leaving the EU with a surplus of EUR 16.3 billion in trade in services.

The two parties remain committed to enhancing investment relations by concluding a separate investment agreement in the future that would include investor/investment protection standards and a dispute-resolution mechanism. The EU and Japan concluded negotiations on an adequate level of data protection in July 2018 and adopted decisions in January 2019 to recognise each other's data protection systems as 'equivalent', creating the world's largest area of secure data flows.



As a result of COVID-19, the 2020 EU-Japan Summit in Tokyo was transformed into the EU-Japan Leaders' meeting on 26 May 2020. The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to pooling efforts to tackle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and working together on the development of vaccines. In the framework of the G7, the EU and Japan have also committed themselves to pursuing an acceleration of the global economic recovery. They also undertook to cooperate on climate change and research, viewing the Green Deal and the Digital Agenda as means of further strengthening cooperation. The EU and Japan re-confirmed their cooperation on peace and security as well as on fighting against disinformation campaigns.

On 25 January 2021, the Council of the European Union held a discussion with the Foreign Minister of Japan, Toshimitsu Motegi, on their respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific, agreeing that enhanced EU engagement in the region, as well as enhanced cooperation with Japan and other like-minded partners, would be beneficial. There was mutual interest in advancing cooperation on connectivity, maritime security, environment and climate change, trade and investment, digital issues, promoting multilateralism and upholding the international rules-based order.

The 28th EU-Japan Summit was held in Tokyo in May 2022 to reaffirm the parties' commitments under the EU-Japan EPA and Strategic Partnership Agreement, grounded in common interests and the shared values of freedom, respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, open, free and fair trade, effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order. EU-Japan leaders demanded that Russia immediately stop its military aggression against Ukraine, and unconditionally withdraw all its forces and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence within its internationally recognised borders. Leaders supported Ukraine in cooperation with the G7 and other like-minded countries with further sanctions against Russia. European Council President Charles Michel said that Japan is the EU's closest strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region and that Russia's war against Ukraine has shown that deeper cooperation is a vital necessity. The EU and Japan also adopted a joint statement and launched the digital partnership to promote cooperation and to help ensure a successful digital transformation that delivers solidarity, prosperity and sustainability. Leaders also discussed how to cooperate to keep global energy markets stable and help ensure diversification of energy supply sources and security of supply. On security and defence, the EU and Japan pledged to further enhance their close consultations, including on non-proliferation and disarmament and on countering hybrid threats. The EU and Japan will continue to implement the EU-Japan Green Alliance, launched at the 2021 summit. They reaffirmed the importance of cooperation in areas such as cleaner hydrogen, nuclear safety, renewable energy and carbon recycling.

As an integral part of the upgrading of the EU-Japan bilateral strategic relationship, the European Parliament and the Japanese Diet are strengthening their interparliamentary dialogue. This led to Parliament passing two resolutions in December 2018: an [accompanying resolution to the conclusion of the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership](#) and an [accompanying resolution to the conclusion of the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement](#). In July 2020, Parliament passed a [resolution](#) on the international and domestic parental abduction of EU children in Japan highlighting the situation of children affected by parental child abduction in Japan, underlining the fact that relevant laws and judicial decisions are not being enforced. Other important resolutions for relations with Japan adopted recently are the resolutions of 21 January 2021 on



[connectivity and EU-Asia relations](#), of 7 June 2022 on [the EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific](#) and of 5 July 2022 on the [Indo-Pacific strategy in the area of trade and investment](#).

Following the resignation of Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, the new Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga, took office in September 2020, and was succeeded by Fumio Kishida in early October 2021. General elections were held in Japan on 31 October 2021 to elect members to the House of Representatives for four years. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) maintained a comfortable majority, albeit losing some seats.

Japan and the world were deeply shocked by the murder of the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 8 July 2022 in Nara, where he was campaigning for the 2022 Japanese House of Councillors election. The elections were held only two days later on 10 July 2022 to elect half of the upper house for six years. The LDP modestly increased its seats and a new record was set with 28% of seats being won by female candidates.

E. South Korea (Republic of Korea)

EU-South Korea relations date back to the 1997 Agreement on cooperation and mutual administrative assistance in customs matters.

South Korea is one of the EU's top 10 strategic partners, and the EU-South Korea strategic partnership is built on three main pillars, underpinned by three key agreements:

- The [EU-South Korea Framework Agreement](#), in force since June 2014, providing the overall structure for the strategic partnership and comprehensive bilateral cooperation. The Joint Committee ensures and monitors its implementation.
- The [EU-South Korea Free Trade Agreement \(FTA\)](#), ratified in December 2015. South Korea was the first Asian country to sign an FTA with the EU, and this FTA is the one of the EU's most ambitious trade deals, going further than any previous agreements. The FTA aims at removing barriers to bilateral trade, creating an expanded and secure market for goods and services, and creating a stable environment for investment.
- The [EU-South Korea Crisis Management Framework Participation Agreement \(FPA\)](#), in force since 2016, which reinforces the strategic partnership for security issues by allowing South Korea to take part in EU crisis management operations of a civilian and military character. The FPA also facilitates South Korean involvement in the EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations to improve the effectiveness of crisis response.

The 18th meeting of the EU-South Korea Joint Committee was held in Seoul in June 2022. The committee condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and concurred that Russia must respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders. The EU and South Korea also pledged to join forces in strengthening the implementation of the Paris Agreement, including in the run-up to COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, and to foster the adoption of a highly ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework in the run-up to COP15 in Montreal, supported by a transition to a circular economy and clean energy. They also explored the prospects for establishing an EU-Republic of Korea Green Partnership.



In May 2021, South Korea hosted the 2021 P4G Seoul (environmental) Summit, which issued the Seoul Declaration advocating keeping the rise in global temperature from pre-industrial levels at below 2 °C, instead of 1.5 °C. Leaders encouraged increased national spending on cutting greenhouse gases, accelerating efforts to transition away from non-renewable energy sources and cooperating on resolving the issue of plastic waste in marine ecosystems.

Since 2011 bilateral trade has continued to grow, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it reached almost EUR 90 billion in 2020. Total trade in goods grew by 45.9% between 2010 and 2020. In 2020, the EU was South Korea's third-largest source of imports (11.8%) and the fourth-largest destination of exports (9.3%). However, in some areas, challenges remain and the EU is calling on South Korea to remove persistent obstacles to imports of EU animal products, and for ratification of the pending International Labour Organization (ILO) convention (No 105) on forced labour.

South Korea's science and technology sector is one of the most advanced in the world. It seeks to focus on innovation and has an impressive record in robotics and artificial intelligence, opening up new opportunities to step up scientific and technological cooperation with the EU. Closer cooperation has already been established in the field of cyber threats, as South Korea has a highly digitalised economy and is developing a national cybersecurity strategy, following hacks and attacks affecting millions of people and official websites. North Korea (DPRK) has been accused of plotting most of the major cyberattacks. In November 2020, the EU and South Korea held their sixth cyber dialogue, which led to joint support for the establishment of a programme of action. The programme will help disseminate responsible behaviour in cyberspace and address cyber issues in the context of international security within the United Nations. The presidential elections held in March 2022 were won by conservative Yoon Suk-yeol, following a tightly contested race. President Yoon secured a narrow victory over the Democratic Party's Lee Jae-myung based on promises to tackle class inequality. The eighth local elections were held in June 2022 and coincided with the by-elections for the vacant seats in the National Assembly. It was the first nationwide election under President Yoon Suk-yeol after he took office on 10 May 2022. President Yoon Suk-yeol's governing party won 12 of the 17 races for big-city mayors and provincial governors, further expanding Yoon's conservative influence less than three months after he won the presidential election.

In April 2021, South Korea completed the ratification of three major ILO conventions: the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention and the Forced Labour Convention, but the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention has still to be ratified.

South Korea claims that Japan still owes the country reparations from the Second World War. Relations remain strained despite efforts to restore ties under a treaty in 1965. A particularly contentious issue is that of 'comfort women' (women who were sex slaves between 1932 and 1945). South Korea has also raised concerns over Japan's plans to release contaminated water from its Fukushima power station back into the Pacific Ocean, which will adversely affect marine life and consequently the fishing industry. President Yoon Suk-yeol's foreign policy approach has involved a rapprochement with Japan in order to solve current disputes and trade barriers. After years on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea and the United States resumed their joint military drills in August 2022, following President Yoon Suk-yeol's decision to boost



deterrence. Previously, the United States, South Korea and Japan participated in a ballistic missile defence exercise off Hawaii's coast in spring 2022, demonstrating the improved relations between Seoul and Tokyo.

Parliament is extremely concerned about inter-Korean relations. Three inter-Korean summits to seek denuclearisation took place between April and September 2018, but dialogue and cooperation stalled following the 2019 US-DPRK Hanoi summit and worsened again in August 2019 following a joint US-South Korea military drill. Tensions came to a head with North Korea's launch of short-range missiles in March 2020 and with the explosion in June 2020 at the inter-Korean liaison office in Kaesong and the death of a South Korean citizen in North Korean territory. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol announced on 15 August 2022 that he would offer a large-scale aid package to Pyongyang in exchange for denuclearisation, which would significantly improve North Korea's economy if the country embarks on a genuine and substantial process of denuclearisation. The EU supports a diplomatic solution to the Korean nuclear crisis and intends to continue its strategy of critical engagement. Parliament is the only EU institution that has formal diplomatic relations with North Korea.

F. North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)

The EU has a policy of 'critical engagement' towards North Korea, which combines pressure in the form of sanctions and other measures with open communication channels. Bilateral relations are limited and no bilateral political or commercial treaties are in force. Excluding humanitarian assistance, the EU's development cooperation is mainly related to food security and is subject to political considerations, UN sanctions and other constraints. The EU does not have a bilateral development assistance programme with North Korea. Six EU Member States maintain embassies in Pyongyang, alongside the French Cultural Cooperation Office. A significant number of EU Member States have accredited their ambassadors resident in Seoul to North Korea. The closure of the borders by North Korea in January 2020 has led to difficulties rotating staff in and out of the country and the diplomatic presence has been reduced.

The EU's sanctions against North Korea, which were adopted in response to the country's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development activities, are the toughest against any country. The EU has implemented all relevant UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and has put its own autonomous sanctions regime in place, which complements and reinforces the UN sanctions. In September 2020, the EU conducted a fourth round of approaches to non-EU countries encouraging them to fully implement the UNSC resolutions. On 22 March 2021, the [EU announced human rights-related sanctions on North Korea](#) for the first time under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions regime. The list includes two ministers as well as the Central Public Prosecutor's Office for aiding repressive activities.

North Korea stepped up its nuclear programme in 2017, heightening tensions with the United States and South Korea. Although US policy has been to apply maximum pressure, former South Korean President Moon Jae-in engaged in de-escalation and met North Korean leader Kim Jong-un three times in 2018. However, after the failed 2019 Summit in Hanoi between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, tensions and mistrust increased. Since July 2021, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported increasing nuclear activity at the Yongbyon Nuclear Research Centre, with a five-megawatt experimental reactor. While denouncing the United States and South Korea in August 2021 for their joint military drills, North Korea announced that it would



extend its nuclear programme if the United States does not stop its policy of sanctions. Since September 2021, North Korea has conducted tests with new long-range cruise missiles that can fly lower and with very flat trajectories, which makes them difficult to intercept. It conducted its biggest ballistic missile tests in 2022, showing that its intercontinental missiles could reach the United States. Tensions were heightened in March 2022 by North Korea's launching of a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Hwasong-17, its biggest missile to date, whose altitude surpasses that of any previous ICBM tested, reaching 6 000 km. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un gave a speech suggesting that more nuclear tests will take place over the course of 2022. South Korea is strengthening its defensive capabilities and military cooperation with the United States, including by taking part in large-scale joint military exercises and deploying additional US air missile defence systems. North Korea's strategy is to force the United States to reopen negotiations about sanctions and humanitarian relief. Tensions have affected inter-Korean relations and increased regional security risks. North Korea's return to missile tests in 2022, along with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, marks a great challenge to South Korean President Yoon Seok-yeol, who is adopting a hardline approach.

The EU has condemned the missile launches, calling on North Korea to comply with its obligations under UNSC resolutions and to refrain from all actions that undermine the environment for pursuing diplomacy and dialogue. The EU is committed to denuclearisation. Until North Korea complies with its obligations under UNSC resolutions, the EU will continue to implement sanctions strictly while encouraging the international community to do the same. Parliament has passed several resolutions condemning North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes and has expressed grave concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

In September 2022, North Korea's Supreme People's Assembly passed a law which makes the country's nuclear status irreversible and allows for pre-emptive nuclear strikes if an imminent attack is detected.

Jorge Soutullo / Samuel Cantell / Stefania Gazzina / Airis Meier
10/2022



5.6.9. SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Indo-Pacific is undergoing rapid change, and as home to more than 50% of the world's population, it is becoming a key geo-strategic region. Two thirds of the world's container trade passes through the Indo-Pacific and its sea lanes are important routes for trade and energy supplies. The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific was adopted in September 2021 to increase the EU's engagement and build partnerships to reinforce the rules-based international order and address global challenges. The Union is adapting its current instruments to support the [EU's strategic autonomy. Its Strategic Compass for Security and Defence](#), formally approved by the Council in March 2022, promotes an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure maritime routes, capacity-building and an enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific.

The EU is forging closer ties with Southeast Asian countries and is promoting regional integration with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The region has geo-strategic concerns, such as the South China Sea dispute and the Taiwan issue, and environmental concerns, especially in the Mekong sub-region. The EU is a strong economic player in Southeast Asia and a major development aid donor, working to foster institution-building, democracy, good governance and human rights. The EU has mobilised a package of over EUR 800 million to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and to mitigate its socio-economic impact.

This fact sheet describes the Southeast Asia region. See also the fact sheets on South Asia ([5.6.7](#)) and East Asia ([5.6.8](#)).

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (EU external action) of the Treaty on European Union;
- Articles 206-207 (trade) and 216-219 (international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- Partnership and cooperation agreements (bilateral relations).

A. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The first ASEAN summit, held in Bali in February 1976, brought together Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar joined the association later. ASEAN follows a strict policy of non-interference in its members' domestic affairs.

The EU and ASEAN are like-minded partners in a challenging geopolitical context, both believing in rules-based multilateralism. Over the course of [45 years of cooperation](#), ASEAN and the EU have built a strong relationship, mainly in trade and economic relations, and are currently strategic partners. The EU is ASEAN's second-largest partner, with a 13% share of ASEAN's total trade with the rest of the world. ASEAN is the EU's third-largest partner outside Europe (after the United States and China). The ultimate goal remains the conclusion of an EU-ASEAN region-to-region free trade agreement (FTA).



The most recent EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting in July 2021 was concluded with an agreement to develop the strategic partnership agreed in December 2020. The two blocs now commit to regular summits at leaders' level to enhance their economic and security cooperation, as well as to improve relations in areas such as connectivity and development. The EU and ASEAN are committed to stepping up efforts to create a practical framework for a region-to-region FTA. Both parties are exploring a potential connectivity partnership, taking into account the EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025. Both sides also agreed to launch a joint working group to address the challenges involved in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals in the vegetable oil sector, notably for palm oil. The 29th Meeting of the EU-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee was held in February 2022. Both sides underlined the significant role played by ASEAN and the EU in regional and global affairs, reviewed the fourth year of implementation of the EU-ASEAN Plan of Action 2018-2022, with over 88% of action lines either achieved or currently being addressed, and looked forward to the timely conclusion of the next Plan of Action (2023-2027).

The 17th ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM)–EU Trade Commissioner Consultations were held on 14 September 2021. The two parties endorsed the ASEAN-EU Trade and Investment Programme 2021-2022 and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening economic cooperation and formulating the parameters of the future ASEAN-EU FTA.

With the new EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, the EU aims to continue promoting the parliamentary dimension of relations, such as by supporting more structural exchanges and promoting a joint parliamentary assembly between the European Parliament and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) to provide democratic accountability and a forum for multilateral exchanges to address global issues. On 14 June 2021, the ASEAN Delegation held a meeting to exchange views with the ASEAN countries and the European External Action Service on the EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership and the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. On 22 June 2021, the inaugural Inter-Regional EP-AIPA Parliamentary Dialogue was held to discuss the future of EU-ASEAN trade relations and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#) (RCEP), signed in November 2020, entered into force in January 2022. The RCEP, which involves the 10 ASEAN states and five of the bloc's Asia-Pacific partners, is the world's largest FTA, covering more than half of global exports and almost one third of global gross domestic product (GDP). The FTA covers most economic sectors, with about 90% of goods expected to be traded tariff free. Most of these goods are already subject to this benefit under the existing deals between members. Pending tariff reductions could take up to 20 years to take effect. Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar have longer transition periods. Sensitive sectors such as agriculture are mostly excluded from tariff cuts. RCEP Members should benefit from common rules of origin, the removal of export quotas, simplified customs procedures and easier cross-border access to trade zones. Raw materials, machinery, motor vehicles and consumer products are likely to be key growth areas.

B. Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP)

ASEM aims to strengthen economic cooperation, political dialogue and the promotion of people-to-people links between the EU and Asia. The partners have recently



highlighted the need for effective and swift action on climate change, security cooperation, trade and human rights.

In November 2021, Cambodia assumed the role of host of the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) and the 11th Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP-11). ASEM13 aimed to strengthen multilateralism to share growth, with the emphasis on tackling global challenges, such as climate change, sustainable development and terrorism, as well as improving the multilateral trading system. In keeping with this overall theme, ASEP-11 was held as one of the side events of ASEM13, with the theme of strengthening the parliamentary partnership for peace and sustainable development in the post-COVID-19 era.

C. Indonesia

Indonesia is becoming an increasingly key partner for the EU as a member of the G20, the world's third-largest democracy and its largest Muslim-majority country. EU-Indonesia cooperation is based on the 2014 partnership and cooperation agreement. The EU-Indonesia Joint Committee meeting in June 2021 represented a step forward in the ongoing bilateral cooperation under the partnership and cooperation agreement. Leaders highlighted the importance of strengthening and implementing the international community's global agendas in Indo-Pacific cooperation, emphasising their commitment to combating climate change and to working towards a joint green agenda.

[Indonesia and the EU held their sixth Joint Committee in July 2022](#) in Bali to review bilateral relations. They welcomed the mutual recognition of their respective COVID-19 vaccine certificates since May 2022. Previously, the [Sixth Security Policy Dialogue was held in November 2021](#) and the Sixth Political Dialogue was held in March 2022. Indonesia expressed interest in improved mobility when entering the EU through Schengen visa liberalisation for Indonesia's business and tourist visits. Indonesia and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, deploring the aggression by Russia. Both commended the visit of President Joko Widodo to Kyiv and Moscow, and supported the [Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grains and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian Ports](#) agreed between Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye and the UN in July 2022. They renewed their commitment to strengthening the spirit of multilateralism and adherence to international law in order to promote peace and stability. The two parties agreed to pursue a partnership of mutual benefits in security cooperation, including maritime security, peacekeeping operations, cyber security and counterterrorism.

Indonesia encouraged further exchanges of knowledge and consultations on security and defence cooperation through the EU programmes Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA), and Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO). Both welcomed the planning for a future joint naval exercise and the fact that the Indonesian Defense University had joined the EU Defence and Security College Network as an Associate Member. The July 2022 Joint Committee also took note of the meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Investment held in April 2022, which addressed bilateral trade and investment, and confirmed the commitment to expedite work on the [ongoing negotiations for an Indonesia-EU Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement](#).

In June 2021, the World Trade Organization (WTO) [issued a document](#) on the biofuels dispute over palm oil between the EU and Indonesia. Indonesia filed a lawsuit at the



WTO against the EU in December 2019, on certain measures concerning palm oil and oil palm crop-based biofuels, arguing that the EU's restrictions on palm oil-based biofuels were unfair and discriminatory, and requesting WTO dispute consultations. The consultations on the measures were held on 19 February 2020, but since they failed to settle the dispute, in March 2020 Indonesia asked the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body to set up a panel to examine the matter. The WTO decision is pending and it is speculated that a decision will be reached by the end of 2022. Nevertheless, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused the global edible oil shortage, which might help Indonesia regain palm oil market share in the EU. Regardless of the results of the WTO decision, the EU is keen on boosting its reputation and signing new deals, also as a result of [the energy crisis caused by the Ukraine war](#) and there is speculation that there could be a surge in EU imports of palm oil in the coming years.

The EU is Indonesia's third-largest trading partner, with total trade in goods worth EUR 20.6 billion in 2020 and a surplus of EUR 6.2 billion in favour of Indonesia. The EU's FDI stocks in Indonesia amounted to EUR 25.8 billion.

Indonesia held its presidential, parliamentary and regional elections simultaneously in April 2020. Joko Widodo (Jokowi, Indonesian Democratic Party) returned for a second term, and his leadership and broad popularity were challenged by the COVID-19 crisis. The administration has prioritised infrastructure development, with the assistance of foreign and private investment. However, policymaking has focused on the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next presidential election is due in 2024. President Jokowi is very likely to run for a third term. There have been several cabinet reshuffles over the past year.

When President Joko Widodo announced his plans to construct a new capital city, he promised a gleaming, green, high-tech metropolis. The future of the EUR 30 billion project will depend on the February 2024 elections. The construction of Nusantara is expected to continue up to 2045, coinciding with the centenary of Indonesia's independence. Located in Borneo, it has a significant environmental cost in a region known for its vast rainforest and wildlife, including orangutans and long-nosed monkeys. The government has promised to redistribute wealth and promote development in other parts of Indonesia.

Indonesia holds the Presidency of the G20 this year. Much attention is being paid to the split between G20 countries over the issue of Russia's right to have a seat at the G20 table. Russia was invited to the Bali summit in November 2022, as was Ukraine. However, President Putin did not attend and President Zelenskyy attended by video link.

In [October 2019, Parliament adopted a resolution on the proposed criminal code in Indonesia](#), expressing concerns about its provisions on blasphemy and adultery, as well as worries that the new code would be used against minorities and would allow discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion and sexual orientation. The proposed new code triggered demonstrations in the country. Parliament welcomed President Widodo's decision to delay its adoption following large-scale protests attended by thousands of people across Indonesia.

D. Myanmar

The EU has been an active partner in Myanmar's democratic transition and at the forefront of the international community's re-engagement since the country began to



re-establish democracy and open up to the world in 2015. There is no formal framework agreement because of decades of international isolation and sanctions.

Myanmar's Constitution, written by the military government and adopted by referendum in 2008, restricts civilian government actions and grants exceptional power to the military, such as allocating it 25% of seats in parliament and control over the main ministries responsible for security and territorial administration. Myanmar is still engaged in a civil war that began in 1948. A ceasefire was agreed in October 2015, but several ethnic insurgent groups have not signed it. Democratic reforms progressed following the 2015 elections, when Aung San Suu Kyi assumed the posts of state counsellor, foreign minister and minister of the Office of the Presidency. The most recent general elections took place on 8 November 2020. Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) won enough seats in parliament to form a government.

However, in February 2021, the military seized power in a coup and detained Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint and other senior NLD figures in response to alleged election fraud. Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing was appointed as leader of the military junta. Charges have been filed against Aung San Suu Kyi and other top NLD leaders. The events have led to pro-democracy protests, and clashes with the army have led to deaths and severe injuries.

The EU, along with other international actors, has issued numerous statements on Myanmar and imposed sanctions on the junta and entities owned by the military. In February 2021, the [Council adopted conclusions](#) condemning the military coup and calling for a de-escalation of the crisis, an end to the state of emergency, the restoration of the legitimate government and the immediate release of those detained or arrested in connection with the coup. In March, April and June 2021, the Council imposed sanctions on the individuals responsible for the military coup and extended the sanctions to military-controlled companies and entities.

In April 2021, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) [issued a declaration](#) on [the five-point consensus](#) reached at the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting held in Indonesia, supporting the ASEAN Special Envoy. In October 2021, the VP/HR called on Myanmar to engage constructively with ASEAN. However, Myanmar issued a press release rejecting the ASEAN Special Envoy's request to meet Aung San Suu Kyi. In February 2022, the Council endorsed [a fourth package of sanctions](#) targeting high-ranking Tatmadaw (military) members and entities, including the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise.

Total trade between the two partners amounted to EUR 3.1 billion in 2020. As a least developed country (LDC), Myanmar benefits from the Everything But Arms (EBA) trade initiative under the generalised scheme of preferences (GSP). Myanmar is currently subject to a procedure called enhanced engagement that ensures its compliance with the basic requirements of the GSP Regulation. The EU allocated EUR 688 million to Myanmar for the 2014-2020 period. Despite the recent coup, the Commission has so far been reluctant to introduce trade restrictions because of the fallout for Myanmar's population and the limited impact on the military. The [EU's 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme](#) is based on specific priorities for Myanmar: governance, the rule of law, sustainable growth, assistance to displaced people, the Green Deal and the digital agenda.

The country has seen [an alarming increase](#) in the number of death sentences recorded since the February 2021 military coup, but no executions are thought to have been



carried out until July 2022, when Myanmar's military junta reported the execution of four men indicted under Myanmar's 2014 Counterterrorism Law.

According to the [UN figures, from May 2022](#), the number of people internally displaced inside Myanmar has reached one million. More than 1 900 people are thought to have been killed by the military since the coup, according to the latest figures.

Myanmar is having to contend with an escalation of inter-communal tensions. In August 2020, the fourth meeting of the Union Peace Conference or '21st Century Panglong' resumed. The conference was designed to resolve conflicts between the military and ethnic insurgent groups by transforming a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement into a lasting settlement.

[The 2021 Democracy Index](#) ranked Myanmar 166th out of 167 countries. There are major human rights issues, foremost among which is the persecution of the Rohingya people in the Rakhine state. Since August 2017, over 800 000 Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar. In August 2019, thousands of refugees refused attempts by Bangladesh, Myanmar and the UN to repatriate them on account of security concerns. [Parliament condemned the human rights violations against the Rohingya in its September 2019 resolution](#). In February 2021, Parliament [adopted a resolution](#) strongly condemning the military takeover and abuse of human rights, and calling on the junta to restore the civilian government and for an immediate release of all those detained.

In October 2021, Parliament [adopted a resolution](#) condemning the human rights violations, the ongoing discrimination against ethnic minorities and the use of violence by the junta against its citizens, as well as the military attack on medical professionals and facilities. Parliament also urged Myanmar to cooperate with the ASEAN Special Envoy and called on the Council to continue to impose targeted sanctions against those responsible for the February 2021 military coup.

In March 2022, Parliament passed a [resolution on Myanmar, one year after the coup](#), reaffirming its position on Myanmar. The EU provided an additional EUR 1 million to the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, a group set by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 to collect evidence on human rights violations.

E. The Philippines

The Philippines-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed in 2011 and entered into force in March 2018. The [first joint committee](#) met in Brussels on 28 January 2020 and established specialised subcommittees, thereby allowing the Philippines and the EU to develop the full potential for cooperation with a view to raising the bilateral relationship to a higher level and strengthening ties. Furthermore, in August 2021, the Philippines assumed the role of ASEAN coordinator for dialogue relations with the EU until 2024.

The second joint committee meeting took place in April 2022 to review the ongoing bilateral cooperation under the PCA. On the issue of regional security developments such as the South China Sea dispute, the EU and the Philippines agreed on the need to find peaceful and inclusive solutions to conflicts, while respecting the principles of international law and the UN Charter. Both delegations discussed the adoption of the relevant resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly Emergency Special Session on Ukraine and the Human Rights Council, which condemned the Russian aggression against Ukraine.



The EU is a significant donor to the Philippines, having provided EUR 325 million for the period 2014-2020. The rule of law and inclusive growth are focus areas. The EU's [2021-2027 Multi-annual Indicative Programme](#) will continue the overall EU cooperation. EU-Philippines bilateral trade in goods amounted to EUR 12.3 billion in 2020, and the EU ranks as the Philippines' fourth-largest trading partner, accounting for 8.4% of the country's total trade in 2020. Negotiations on an EU-Philippines FTA were launched in December 2015, and a first round took place in May 2016. The negotiations covered a broad range of issues, including tariffs, non-tariff barriers to trade, trade in services and investment, as well as trade aspects of public procurement, intellectual property, competition and sustainable development.

In May 2016, Rodrigo Duterte won the presidential election and adopted controversial measures against drug trafficking with 'shoot to kill' orders that led to human rights violations. Duterte changed the direction of the Philippines' foreign policy, building a new alliance with Russia and China, despite the controversy over the South China Sea, the Philippines being one of the claimant ASEAN states in this dispute. The EU supported the Mindanao Peace Process and welcomed the peaceful conduct of the referendum in early 2019.

The EU has become increasingly concerned about human rights violations, particularly the extrajudicial killings related to the 'war on drugs' and the Anti-terror Bill passed in July 2020. As the Philippines has benefited from the EU's GSP+ trade preferences scheme since December 2014, the EU has reminded the country of its commitment to ratify and implement 27 international core conventions on human and labour rights, as stated in the GSP+ Agreement.

In a September 2020 resolution, Parliament urged the EU and Member States to immediately initiate procedural steps, potentially resulting in the temporary withdrawal of GSP+ preferences. For the time being, there has been no further follow-up on this request.

In May 2022 the presidential elections took place. The Philippines' new president is Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos and its vice-president, Sara Duterte, is the daughter of the outgoing leader. In his inauguration address on 30 June 2022, President Ferdinand Marcos promised to prioritise near-term policy goals on agriculture, infrastructure and investment. At the same time, competition between Japan and China to support the ambitious plans for new railways is likely to intensify. Unlike Duterte, Marcos intends to pursue more balanced diplomacy between Beijing and Washington. President Ferdinand Marcos is expected to participate in the EU-ASEAN summit in Brussels in December 2022.

[Parliament adopted a resolution in February 2022](#), strongly condemning the thousands of extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations related to President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs. Members also condemned all intimidation and violence against those seeking to expose allegations of such abuses in the country. [ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights](#) also called for the immediate and unconditional release of Filipina Senator Leila De Lima, one of former President Duterte's staunchest critics.

F. Vietnam

EU-Vietnam relations are based on the partnership and cooperation agreement adopted in 2016. A total of EUR 400 million was allocated for the 2014-2020 period,



with a focus on good governance, energy and climate change, especially in the Mekong Delta. The [EU's 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme](#) for Vietnam addresses crucial issues and key areas for the country.

The EU and Vietnam signed an FTA and an investment protection agreement (IPA) in June 2019. Parliament subsequently gave its consent to the two agreements in February 2020 and the FTA came into force in August 2020. The FTA involves the immediate elimination of 65% of tariffs on EU exports to Vietnam and 71% of such duties on imports from Vietnam. The European Parliament's Committee on International Trade follows the implementation of the FTA. The IPA will enter into force when it is ratified by all EU Member States.

EU-Vietnam trade in goods amounted to EUR 43.2 billion in 2020 and the stock of EU FDI in Vietnam reached EUR 6.1 billion in 2019.

In October 2019, the EU and Vietnam signed a Framework Participation Agreement to set a legal basis for Vietnam's participation in EU crisis management operations.

The overall human rights situation in Vietnam has been deteriorating, a trend worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The same is true of freedom of expression in the country, with crackdowns on dissent intensifying and the number arrests for 'anti-state' activities increasing. In 2020, dozens were prosecuted for activism, journalists were arrested and jail sentences under the national security laws were increased. Vietnam is a one-party communist state with no political freedom. In May 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the country held legislative elections to the 15th National Assembly and the local-level People's Councils. The Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) won the elections, maintaining full control over the media and the electoral process, with no independent agency overseeing the polls. The entirely state-controlled electoral process eliminated 64 out of 75 self-nominated candidates and saw two independent candidates arrested.

Vietnam is one of the most successful examples of a country that has transitioned from a failed communist economic system to an open and market-oriented economy. It is one of the fastest growing countries in the ASEAN region, having recorded average GDP growth of almost 7% between 2010 and 2020.

In January 2021, [Parliament adopted a resolution](#) on Vietnam calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders and journalists, and condemning the abuse of repressive legal provisions that restrict fundamental rights and freedoms. It also called on the government to allow independent media outlets to function and appealed for the establishment of an independent mechanism to monitor human rights. In 2021, Vietnam ranked 175th out of 180 countries on the [World Press Freedom Index](#).

In office for over a decade, Vietnam's Communist Party leader Nguyễn Phú Trọng has developed a strict anti-corruption policy. In June 2022, the country's health minister Nguyễn Thanh Long and Hanoi Mayor Chu Ngọc Anh were dismissed and arrested on allegations of a EUR 169 million fraud involving COVID-19 test kits. Other high-ranking officials were also arrested. Vietnam's position has improved by more than 30 places on the Transparency International [2021 Corruption Perceptions Index](#), where it ranks 87th out of 180 countries.



G. Thailand

The EU-Thailand partnership is based on the 1980 framework agreement and EU-Thai cooperation is based on the 1980 EU-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement. The parties completed negotiations for a partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) in March 2013, but it was halted following the military coup in 2014.

On 2 September 2022, the EU and Thailand finalised the text of the EU-Thailand PCA, closing the negotiation process. The PCA will enhance the political dialogue and cooperation in a wide number of policy areas, including the environment, energy, climate change, transport, science and technology, trade, employment and social affairs, human rights, education, agriculture, non-proliferation, counterterrorism, the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as migration and culture.

Steps are also being taken towards the resumption of negotiations on an ambitious and comprehensive EU-Thailand FTA. Negotiations resumed in August 2021, after talks collapsed in 2014, following the military coup. The EU is one of Thailand's largest export markets, and Thailand is one of the EU's main trade partners in the ASEAN region. In 2020, bilateral trade amounted to EUR 29 billion. Thailand's Minister for Trade Minister and EU counterparts resumed trade talks in June 2021.

Since 2014, the military has suppressed opposition by imposing martial law, and human rights abuses have been reported. King Maha Vajiralongkorn was crowned in May 2019. The pro-military party won the general election in March 2019, amid claims of manipulation. Prayuth Chan-ocha, already prime minister (PM) from 2014 to 2019 under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), was appointed PM in June 2019. Although rule by the junta officially ended in July 2019, the military still has influence over the government.

The Thai [Constitutional Court](#) had previously decided to suspend PM Prayuth Chan-ocha from office, as he had supposedly overstayed the limits of his term, eight years after coming to power in a coup in 2014. However, the [final decision on 30 September 2022 by the Constitutional Court](#) ruled that PM Prayuth Chan-ocha had not exhausted a term limit of eight years in office.

Thai protests against the military government have included demands for the reform of the Thai monarchy. In February 2020, the first wave of protests was triggered by the Constitutional Court's decision to disband the Future Forward Party, an opposition party popular among young people, with the third-largest number of seats in the House of Representatives following elections in March 2019. The Thai Government declared a state of emergency in October 2020, reserving the right to impose a curfew and martial law. In September 2021, the Thai Government extended the state of emergency, for the fourteenth consecutive time, until the end of November 2021. Despite the high number of COVID-19 infections, the Thai PM announced plans on 11 October 2021 to reopen the country in November 2021 to vaccinated visitors from specific countries. Although the extension of the state of emergency and the rising number of *lèse-majesté* prosecutions against protesters has slowed down protests, the student-led movement continues to mobilise periodically.

In January 2020 in Kuala Lumpur, Thailand officially launched a peace process with insurgent groups in the southern Muslim-majority provinces. The negotiations were mediated by Malaysia. Despite the declaration of a ceasefire in April 2020, some bombings have still occurred in 2021 and 2022.



In September 2021, the Thai Parliament gave initial approval to a bill on protection and the suppression of torture and enforced disappearance, having delayed the introduction of the law for 14 years following Thailand's signature, in 2007, of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Parliament has adopted several resolutions on human rights, migrant workers and labour rights in Thailand.

H. Cambodia

The EU's relations with Cambodia date back to the 1977 Cooperation Agreement. The EU is the country's biggest donor, having allocated EUR 410 million for the 2014-2020 period for improving governance and the rule of law, as well as for the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. [The EU's 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for Cambodia](#) provides for USD 510 million in aid for Cambodia to help the country boost its economic development. In 2020, total trade in goods between the two partners amounted to EUR 4.3 billion. The EU is Cambodia's third-largest trade partner, after China and the US, accounting for 10.6% of the country's total trade.

Years of civil war left Cambodia one of the poorest states in Southeast Asia. After the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, Cambodia adopted a constitution in 1993, laying the foundations for a liberal, multi-party democratic state. In February 2018, the Council adopted conclusions on Cambodia in the light of political developments and the continuing deterioration of democracy.

PM Hun Sen and his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) won the general election in July 2018, but the opposition claimed that the electoral process had been neither free nor fair. The leader of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), Kem Sokha, was arrested in September 2017 and former CNRP leader Sam Rainsy has been in self-imposed exile since 2015. The CNRP was dissolved in November 2017. In March 2021, a Phnom Penh Municipal Court sentenced Sam Rainsy to 25 years in jail over an alleged plot to overthrow PM Hun Sen's government. It also disallowed him from voting and standing for election. Eight other ex-CNRP politicians were given lengthy prison terms *in absentia*.

In February 2020, the Commission decided to withdraw part of the tariff preferences granted to Cambodia under the EBA trade scheme on account of the serious and systematic violations of the human rights principles enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The relevant regulation came into effect in August 2020. Cambodia's economy is dependent on international aid and garment exports, and is highly sensitive to labour costs. The withdrawal of tariff preferences, and their replacement with the EU's standard tariffs, mainly affect garment and footwear products. The withdrawal amounts to around one fifth or EUR 1 billion of Cambodia's yearly exports to the EU.

In [September 2017, Parliament adopted a resolution](#) calling on the Cambodian Government to end Kem Sokha's politically motivated prosecution. In [September 2018, it adopted a second resolution](#) calling for all charges against Kem Sokha to be dropped.

In March 2021, Parliament adopted [a resolution](#) condemning the escalating violations of human rights in Cambodia and the repression carried out under the guise of COVID-19 protection. It called on the security forces to refrain from unnecessary and excessive force against peaceful protesters and to cease all forms of harassment, including judicial harassment.



In February 2022, the government postponed the entry into force of a controversial 'national internet gateway', which would have routed all internet traffic in the country through a Chinese-style firewall. The government blamed the postponement on pandemic-related delays and denied it had been influenced by severe criticism from free speech advocates.

A Cambodian court convicted 20 opposition politicians and activists in a trial [described by Human Rights Watch](#) as 'a witch hunt'. Those convicted in the March 2022 sentencing include exiled opposition leaders Sam Rainsy, Eng Chai Eang, Mu Sochua and others. The [European Parliament has called for the charges to be unconditionally annulled](#). Parliament passed a [resolution in May 2022 on the continuous crackdown of political opposition in Cambodia](#).

I. Singapore

The EU and Singapore cooperate very closely in business, science and technology. In February 2019, the EU and Singapore ratified three 'new generation' agreements: the EU-Singapore Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EUSPCA), the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) and the EU-Singapore IPA (EUSIPA). The FTA with Singapore entered into force in November 2019. These agreements are designed to boost political, economic and trade ties, and will significantly reduce customs duties. Technical and non-tariff barriers to trade in goods are being removed across a wide range of sectors.

In 2021, EU-Singapore trade in goods reached EUR 42.9 billion, an increase of 4.5% from 2020. EU exports to Singapore amounted to EUR 27.3 billion, while imports from Singapore totalled EUR 15.6 billion. Singapore ranked globally as the EU's 20th-largest merchandise trade partner in 2021. EU-Singapore trade in services amounted to EUR 50.3 billion in 2020, ranking Singapore as the EU's fifth-largest partner for trade in services. Total EU-Singapore trade, including both goods and services, reached EUR 91 billion in 2020, ranking Singapore as the EU's largest trade partner in ASEAN and its 11th-largest trade partner in the world.

Singapore remains an important destination for FDI from the EU. At the end of 2020, EU FDI stocks held in Singapore reached EUR 255.6 billion, an increase of 15.4% since 2019. Singapore ranked globally as the EU's seventh-largest destination for FDI stocks and the largest investment destination in ASEAN. Conversely, FDI stocks held by Singapore in the EU amounted to EUR 150 billion in 2020, a significant 26.6% increase compared to 2019. In early December 2021, the EU and Singapore held talks on strengthening bilateral digital trade, including advancing a comprehensive EU-Singapore digital partnership and enhancing cooperation on artificial intelligence and data governance.

Singapore held general elections in July 2020. Lee Hsien Loong, of the People's Action Party (PAP), won 83 out of 93 seats in Parliament, while the biggest opposition group, the Workers' Party, had its best result to date, winning 10 seats. The PAP has never lost an election and has governed the city-state since 1959. PM Lee Hsien Loong had long said he would hand over power before he turns 70 in 2022. In April 2021, Deputy PM Heng Swee Keat, who was designated Lee Hsien Loong's successor, announced his decision to step aside. Lawrence Wong became the new head of the ruling PAP and consequently the deputy PM, and is supposed to succeed PM Lee Hsien Loong at the next general election scheduled for 2025.



PM Lee Hsien Loong's priority has been to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, its economic challenges and the country's recovery. In October 2021, the government announced that Singapore would be open from that month onward for quarantine-free travel for fully vaccinated people from eight countries, including some EU countries.

Also in October 2021, the Parliament of Singapore passed the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act, aiming to tackle foreign meddling in domestic politics. While supporting the work of civil society, the European Parliament has called for the abolition of the death penalty.

In June 2022, Finance Minister and Deputy PM Lawrence Wong announced a USD 1.1 billion support package to mitigate cost of living pressures. Wong stated that the move had been especially designed to help low-income groups, as Singapore is suffering from high inflation. Key factors behind the surge in prices include disruption to global supply chains, high commodity prices and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Singapore has tightened its monetary policy three times since October 2021.

J. Brunei

The Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah, rules the state while Prince Billah Bolkiah is taking on responsibilities. Political liberalisation is non-existent. The penal code was reformed in 2014 to incorporate a Sharia-based approach. In April 2019, a penal code was enacted to impose new forms of punishment that include death by stoning for gay sex and adultery, and the amputation of limbs for theft. Following an international outcry, Brunei extended a moratorium on the death penalty.

The EU is actively enhancing its relations with Brunei, but there is no framework agreement. An EU-Brunei Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) is in the process of being negotiated and will cover a range of political and economic areas. In 2020, the total trade in goods between Brunei and the EU stood at EUR 153 million, with a surplus of EUR 142 million in favour of the EU. Trade between the EU and Brunei is mainly in machinery, motor vehicles and chemicals.

EU-Brunei relations are mainly handled through ASEAN, of which Brunei assumed the role of chair in 2021 with the theme 'We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper'. In August 2021, Deputy Foreign Minister of Brunei Erywan Yusof was appointed ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar to act as a mediator with Myanmar's junta.

Parliament [passed a resolution in April 2019 strongly condemning the entry into force of the Sharia Penal Code](#). It reiterated its condemnation of the death penalty and underlined that the provisions of the Sharia Penal Code violate Brunei's obligations under international human rights law.

Tensions between China and the Southeast Asian claimants in the South China Sea territorial disputes have been increasing in 2022. Although Brunei has been silent so far, it made its first ever unilateral statement on the South China Sea in July 2022, as a country with competing claims. However, Brunei's policy avoids a confrontational approach with China over the South China Sea dispute, afraid of damaging bilateral economic ties.

The Sultan of Brunei announced an early reshuffle of ministers in June 2022. The Sultan retains the post of prime minister, along with the defence, foreign affairs, and finance and economy portfolios. For the first time, a woman was appointed as minister (for education).



K. Laos

EU-Laos relations are based on the 1997 Cooperation Agreement. The EU provided over EUR 500 million for the 2016-2020 period, supporting the Lao Eighth National Socio-Economic Development Plan, which focused on achieving high economic growth with an overall target of graduating from least developed country status by 2020. In March 2021, the EU, in partnership with the World Health Organization, provided EUR 2.8 million for Laos' health system to strengthen its capacity for preparedness and to respond to COVID-19 and other pandemics.

In October 2021, the country launched its first national digital teaching and learning platform, thanks to the support of the EU, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education to facilitate distance learning for students and teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. [The EU's 2021-2027 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for Laos](#) provides for a total indicative allocation for the first phase 2021-2024 of EUR 83 million.

The EU is Laos' fourth-largest trade partner (after Thailand, China and Vietnam), accounting for 3.6% of the country's total trade. EU-Laos total trade amounted to EUR 436 million in 2020. Despite economic reforms, the country is still poor and dependent on international aid. As a least developed country, it benefits from the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) trade scheme.

Laos is a one-party state. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), in power since the end of the civil war in 1975, rules the country with an iron grip, allowing no opposition to challenge it. Laos held parliamentary elections in February 2021 for its ninth National Assembly, consisting of 164 seats, of which 158 went to the ruling LPRP and six were claimed by independent candidates. In March 2021, during the opening of the National Assembly, Laos elected its President, Thongloun Sisoulith, the Secretary-General of the ruling LPRP, who had earlier served as PM from April 2016.

Laos is deepening its relations with China and ASEAN, seeking to attract greater investment. Economic reforms have led to sustained economic growth of over 7% since 2014. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed challenges to this agenda, severely affecting economic growth, which declined to an estimated range of between -0.6 and -2.4% in 2020.

The EU attaches particular importance to the human rights situation, including the plight of people displaced by huge dam constructions on the Mekong River. Costing nearly one third of Laos' annual GDP, a new 414-kilometre railway linking China with the capital Vientiane was opened in early December 2021 as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

At the International Labour Organization Conferences in Geneva, the EU has called on Laos to address the issue of the sexual exploitation of children. In July 2022, the EU raised concerns over the lack of progress on addressing long-standing human rights violations in Laos and urged the authorities to comply with the country's human rights obligations under the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organisation Lao Movement. The two organisations released a briefing paper providing a summary of human rights developments in Laos. The most recent [EU-Laos human rights dialogue](#) was held in July 2022.

L. Malaysia

The EU and Malaysia concluded negotiations on a partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) in December 2015. The negotiations on an EU-Malaysia FTA were



put on hold at Malaysia's request in April 2012, after seven rounds. In March 2017, the Council asked the Commission and the High Representative to revise the proposed agreement and change it to a 'mixed' agreement. The EU and Malaysia discussed the insertion of new provisions and agreed on them in principle, such that signature of the agreement is expected shortly. Two agreements are under negotiation, an FTA and a voluntary partnership agreement in relation to Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. In May 2022, the Commission published the [final report](#) of the sustainability impact assessment, supporting the FTA negotiations.

The EU is an important trading partner and a big investor in Malaysia, whose emerging economy offers the EU attractive opportunities for trade. EU-Malaysia trade is expanding, having grown by over 50% since 2010. In 2020 Malaysia ranked as the EU's 20th-largest trading partner, while the EU was Malaysia's fifth-largest trading partner. Malaysia is the EU's third-largest ASEAN market after Singapore and Vietnam.

The EU represented 8.1% of Malaysia's total trade in 2021. EU imports from Malaysia have gradually increased, standing at EUR 29.2 billion in 2021, while EU exports to Malaysia stood at EUR 11.8 billion. Malaysia's overall trade surplus with the EU has grown steadily over the years, reaching EUR 17.4 billion in 2021. As a result of Malaysia's liberalisation policies and prospects for an FTA, EU FDI in Malaysia increased to EUR 27.8 billion in 2020. EU-Malaysia bilateral trade is dominated by industrial products, accounting for more than 90% of trade. In March 2019, the Commission announced that the use of palm oil in transport fuel should be phased out based on the Renewable Energy Directive, which sets a sustainable bioenergy target of 32%. Indonesia and Malaysia protested and lodged complaints with the World Trade Organization (WTO). In January 2021, Malaysia, the world's second-largest producer of palm oil, followed Indonesia's example by filing a complaint with the WTO over the EU's rules on biofuels. In January 2021, the Malaysian Government announced that it was taking legal action against EU Member States France and Lithuania for curbing palm oil-based biofuels. Despite the EU's rejection of Malaysia's request to establish a panel for the dispute over biofuels in April 2021, the WTO finally approved Malaysia's request in May 2021 to establish a panel to examine EU law. In October 2021, the EU Council adopted [conclusions](#) on the revised EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes. For the first time, Malaysia was added to the Annex II grey list. Although palm oil is considered a major issue in the EU-Malaysia FTA talks, palm oil in fact accounts for less than 5% of EU imports from Malaysia, and statistics from the Malaysian Palm Oil Council in 2019 also indicated that the EU's restriction on palm oil will only impact 0.04% of Malaysia's annual production. Nevertheless, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused a global shortage of edible oil, which might help Malaysia regain palm oil market share in the EU. As the Malaysian Minister for Plantation Industries and Commodities pointed out in May 2022, the EU's demand for global edible oil is expected to increase in the near future owing to tight sunflower and soy oil supplies.

Malaysia's Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, which includes the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), was defeated for the first time ever in the May 2018 general election. PM Mahathir Mohamad, leader of the Alliance of Hope, replaced Najib Razak, who faced 12 years in jail pending appeal. In November 2019, the opposition BN coalition won a by-election and PM Mahathir Mohamad's administration collapsed. With the backing of UMNO, in March 2020 King Abdullah swore in Muhyiddin Yassin, president of the United Indigenous Party (PPBM), as PM leading a new Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition. However, in October 2020, the leader of the opposition, Anwar



Ibrahim, met King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah in a bid to prove he has a convincing parliamentary majority and called on PM Muhyiddin Yassin to resign.

The king rejected Mr Ibrahim's proposal but, amid a deep political crisis, PM Muhyiddin Yassin decided to resign in August 2021 after losing majority support in the parliament. The king stepped in to arrange for the PM's succession and, once again, wielded his constitutional power. In August 2021, he named Ismail Sabri Malaysia's ninth PM and the third PM of the current five-year election term. The next Malaysian general election will be held in 2023.

In its resolutions, Parliament has condemned the death penalty, the lack of respect for LGBTI rights and the silencing of public discontent, as well as the lack of peaceful expression, including public debate.

In June 2022, the Malaysian Government announced that it will abolish its mandatory death penalty. This is step forward and an exemplary decision in the region. The EU has encouraged the country's authorities to take concrete steps to swiftly pass the agreement into law.

Jorge Soutullo / Samuel Cantell / Cristina Stanculescu / Airis Meier
10/2022



5.6.10. PACIFIC

The EU's relationship with the Pacific region has political, economic and development dimensions. The EU is the Pacific region's second largest trading partner.

Australia and New Zealand are the EU's like-minded partners, facing common geo-strategic challenges and promoting multilateralism and a global rules-based order. In June 2018, negotiations were launched for a comprehensive EU-Australia free trade agreement (FTA) and the fifteenth round of negotiations took place in April 2023. The EU signed an FTA with New Zealand in July 2023.

The EU has a partnership with the 15 Pacific Independent Island Countries that centres on development, fisheries and climate change, as well as partnerships with the three Pacific Overseas Countries and Territories and the Pacific Islands Forum.

LEGAL BASIS

- Title V (EU external action) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
- Titles I-III and V (common commercial policy; development cooperation and humanitarian aid; international agreements) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
- European Union-Australia Framework Agreement;
- European Union-New Zealand Partnership Agreement on Relations and Cooperation (PARC);
- Partnership Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, and the European Community and its Member States.

THE EU AND THE PACIFIC REGION

The EU and the Pacific region retain a long-standing relationship, shared values and strong economic and trade links. The EU has developed partnerships in the region with Australia, New Zealand, the 15 Pacific Independent Island Countries (PICs), the three Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

The EU, Australia and New Zealand are like-minded partners with common values and interests. The EU has developed close government and private-sector relations with both countries across a broad spectrum of issues, such as climate change and disaster risk reduction, rules-based world trade, security and development, technological research and human rights.

The EU's relationship with the Pacific Islands has traditionally been based on development cooperation in the framework of the partnership between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. In recent years, this relationship has extended to other sectors such as the environment, good governance, energy, climate change, fisheries and human rights.



A. Australia and New Zealand

1. Australia

The EU and Australia have a long-established partnership that dates back to the 1960s. The basis of the current relationship is the 2017 [EU-Australia Framework Agreement](#), focused on political dialogue, security issues, international cooperation, economy and trade, justice, culture and education, energy and the environment. The Agreement entered into force in October 2022.

Australia is an important trading partner for the EU. In 2022, the EU was Australia's [third largest two-way trading partner in goods](#), accounting for a total of EUR 56.4 billion. Australia is the EU's eighteenth biggest trading partner and the EU's main export categories are machinery and chemicals. Australia's main exports to the EU are minerals, crude materials and manufactured objects.

Since 2018, the EU and Australia have been negotiating a comprehensive FTA, which would facilitate commercial exchanges between the two parties. The fifteenth and most recent round of negotiations took place in April 2023 in Brussels. The [Australia-EU Leaders' meeting took place in November 2022](#), focused on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the changing strategic outlook in the Indo-Pacific, the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and a rules-based multilateral order, climate change, the environment and biodiversity, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, human and labour rights, energy, digital transformation and other bilateral items.

2. New Zealand

EU-New Zealand relations are currently governed by the [Partnership Agreement on Relations and Cooperation](#) (PARC), which was signed in October 2016 and [became effective in July 2022](#). The PARC facilitates bilateral engagement by strengthening political dialogue and improving cooperation on economic and trade matters and in a wide range of other areas, from innovation, education and culture to migration, counter-terrorism, the fight against organised crime and cybercrime, and judicial cooperation. The first [Joint Committee](#) following the PARC's entry into force took place in February 2023, focused on foreign policy, especially in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and China's expansion, security, trade, research and innovation, sustainable development, human rights and justice matters. Leaders welcomed the conclusion of negotiations for the FTA and New Zealand's association to the Horizon Europe research programme and the signature of an agreement to exchange personal data. New Zealand and the EU agreed to deepen their cooperation on climate change, including through a High-Level Dialogue on climate and agriculture, within the International Strategic Agriculture Dialogue.

The EU is New Zealand's third largest trading partner, after China and Australia. In 2022, [two-way trade in goods between the EU and New Zealand](#) amounted to EUR 9.1 billion. New Zealand's main exports to the EU consisted of food and crude materials, while the EU's principal exports to New Zealand were machinery and transport equipment.

After a 12-round negotiation process, initiated in 2018, [the EU signed an ambitious FTA with New Zealand in July 2023](#). The agreement, set to create economic opportunities and uphold climate and labour standards, is awaiting Parliament's approval. The [Committee on International Trade \(INTA\) endorsed Parliament's consent](#)



[in October 2023](#), and the final Parliament Plenary decision will be in November 2023 in Strasbourg.

B. Other Pacific countries

The 15 Pacific Independent Island Countries (PICs)^[1] have a combined area of 528 000 km² and are part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP). The EU's relations with the PICs are focused on development cooperation, fisheries and climate change.

The EU's strategy vis-à-vis the PICs is set out in the 2012 joint communication entitled '[Towards a renewed EU-Pacific development partnership](#)' and was updated by the [EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) in 2021. It builds on the framework of the [Cotonou Agreement](#) with the ACP countries. In December 2020, the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), replacing the ACP Group of States, reached a political deal on the text for a new [Partnership Agreement](#) that will succeed the Cotonou Agreement. Key aspects of the new agreement will be cooperation on trade and investment, development and regionalisation. It will cover a large number of areas such as sustainable development and growth, human rights and peace and security with the aim of promoting regional integration. Once it has been ratified by all parties concerned, the agreement will serve as the new legal framework and govern political, economic and cooperation relations between the EU and 79 members of the OACPS for the next 20 years.

The signature is expected to take place in Samoa on 15 November 2023, in the presence of Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen.

The new Partnership Agreement is built on a common foundation, which sets out the values and principles that bring both parties together. In addition, it introduces three specific regional protocols for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific with the aim of promoting regional integration. The regional protocols allow for the establishment of autonomous structures that will independently pursue relations with the EU and the three different regions involved. The agreement also envisages a strong parliamentary dimension with a permanent Joint Parliamentary Assembly fulfilling a clear consultative role. In addition, to reflect the strong regional dimension of the new agreement, it also includes three regional parliamentary assemblies, which will operate autonomously and have a clear consultative role. The position of the European Parliament has been expressed in three resolutions ([4 October 2016](#); [14 June 2018](#) and [28 November 2019](#)). Parliament welcomes the proposed overall architecture for future cooperation between the ACP and the EU and has reiterated the importance of strengthening the partnership's parliamentary dimension. The EU-27 is the ACP-Pacific region's [fifth largest trading partner](#), with trade worth EUR 4 billion in 2022. The EU-Pacific [EPA](#) was ratified by Parliament in January 2011 and by Papua New Guinea in May 2011. The Government of Fiji started applying the agreement in July 2014. Samoa acceded to the agreement in December 2018 and has been applying it since then. Solomon Islands also acceded to, and started applying, the agreement in May 2020. Tonga declared its intention of acceding to the EPA in 2018. The negotiations are still ongoing.

[1]The 15 PICs are: Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, which together account for 90% of the region's landmass and population, and 12 Small Island Developing States: the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.



The EU is the third largest donor of [development assistance](#) to the ACP-Pacific countries after Australia and Japan. The EU's development assistance for the Pacific for the years 2021-2027 amounts to around EUR 750 million (including the OCTs).

The new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (Global Europe) has become the main funding instrument for EU cooperation and development with partner countries under the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021 to 2027. It has integrated, inter alia, the EDF, which was previously outside of the EU budget. The EDF's integration into the Union budget enhances the scrutiny powers of Parliament and helps strengthen the public legitimacy and political visibility of the EU's external assistance as a whole.

The PICs face major development and climatic challenges. As regards climate change, the EU and the Pacific Small Island Developing States supported the establishment of the Paris Agreement at the 21st UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in 2015. The 23rd session (COP 23), which took place in Bonn, Germany, from 6 to 17 November 2017, was chaired by Fiji.

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a political grouping of 18 members, is an interlocutor for the EU for EU development funding and trade negotiations. The grouping comprises: Australia, the Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and French Polynesia. New Caledonia and French Polynesia, together with Wallis and Futuna, make up the EU's three Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in the region.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament's relations with the Australian and New Zealand parliaments date back to 1979, when the [Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand \(DANZ\)](#) was set up. Since then, the DANZ has engaged in regular interparliamentary meetings (IPMs) with the Australian and New Zealand parliaments to foster relations with the two countries and to discuss issues of common interest such as agriculture, energy, the environment and climate change, development and economic cooperation, science and technology, trade, the promotion of global and regional security in the Asia-Pacific region, countering terrorism, and human rights. The [42nd, and most recent, EU-Australia IPM took place in December 2022](#) in Brussels. Furthermore, Brussels also hosted the [27th EU-New Zealand IPM in February 2023](#).

Parliament is represented in its relations with the other Pacific countries by the [Delegation to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly \(DACP\)](#). The DACP joins its ACP counterpart in the assembly (ACP-EU JPA), which is composed of equal numbers of EU and ACP representatives. The main task of the delegation is to prepare the meetings of the ACP-EU JPA, to evaluate and follow up on Parliament's activities, to organise meetings with high-level ACP figures, and to discuss topical issues relating to the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement and, in the future, the Samoa Agreement. The [42nd session of the ACP-EU JPA](#) was held in Maputo, Mozambique on 29 October-2 November 2022, and was followed by the [43rd session](#) in Brussels in June 2023. The first Joint Parliamentary Assembly provided for under the Samoa Agreement is scheduled to take place in Luanda, Angola in February 2024.



