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Global free trade agreements of the EU

Global trade policy will be under considerable pressure in 2025. The reintroduction of comprehensive US tariffs under President Donald Trump - including a blanket 10% tariff on almost all imports and specific tariffs of up to 145% on Chinese products - has led to a noticeable slowdown in global trade. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is forecasting a 0.2% decline in the global volume of trade in goods by 2025, with the possibility of a decline of up to 1.5% if the announced tariffs are fully implemented. Trade between the USA and China will be particularly affected, which could fall by up to 80% according to WTO forecasts.

In response to the US tariffs, the European Union decided on 9 April 2025 to impose counter-tariffs on US products worth around 18 billion euros. However, these measures were suspended for 90 days to allow for negotiations with the US. At the same time, the EU is intensifying its efforts to conclude new trade agreements with partner countries such as India, Mexico, Malaysia and the Mercosur states or to modernise existing agreements.

International organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the OECD and the World Bank have repeatedly warned of the consequences of growing protectionist tendencies in recent years. In view of rising tariffs, geopolitical tensions and the weakening of multilateral trade institutions, experts see parallels with the situation in the 1930s. Back then, measures such as the US Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930) led to a spiral of tariffs and counter-tariffs, a drastic decline in global trade and a worsening of the global economic crisis. Even today, economists warn that a similar development could repeat itself if large economies rely on unilateral trade barriers and international trade cooperation is undermined. The EU therefore believes it has a responsibility to actively counteract this through new agreements, open-market strategies and strengthening the WTO.

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1. EU competence for trade agreements

In accordance with Article 3(1)(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Union has exclusive competence for the common commercial policy. This includes, among other things, the conclusion of international trade agreements. The European Commission conducts negotiations on behalf of the Union on the basis of a mandate from the Council. If an agreement relates exclusively to matters that fall within the exclusive competence of the Union, it can be concluded by the EU alone.

However, as soon as policy areas are affected that fall within the shared competence between the Union and the Member States - for example in the areas of investment protection, labour law or environmental protection - it is a so-called mixed agreement. In this case, in addition to the approval of the Council and the European Parliament, ratification by all Member States is also required in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements. In practice, the involvement of the Member States regularly leads to delays and political controversy. Numerous member states and civil society players are calling for more binding regulations with regard to human rights obligations, compliance with international labour standards (in particular the ILO) and environmental and climate protection requirements.

Notwithstanding the above, international agreements may be provisionally applied even if they have not yet been fully ratified. Provisional application is carried out by Council decision in accordance with Article 218(5) TFEU and only concerns those parts of the agreement that fall within the exclusive competence of the Union. A prominent example is the CETA agreement, which has been provisionally applied since 21 September 2017. However, its final entry into force still depends on ratification by all member states. This instrument enables the Union to remain capable of acting internationally, but harbours considerable legal and political risks if a member state definitively rejects ratification.

2. Europe

2.1. United Kingdom

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK) has formed the basis for bilateral relations after Brexit since 1 May 2021. It replaces the UK's EU membership and comprehensively regulates trade, cooperation on security issues and other areas.

2.1.1. Main contents of the agreement

- Duty-free trade in goods: The agreement stipulates that goods that fulfil the rules of origin can be traded duty-free and without quantitative restrictions. However, customs formalities and proof of origin are required, which leads to additional bureaucracy.

- Services and investments: While trade in goods is largely liberalised, access to service markets remains limited. There is no longer any mutual recognition of professional qualifications and access to financial services is restricted.

- Security and judicial cooperation: The TCA establishes a new framework for law enforcement and judicial cooperation, including the exchange of information to combat cross-border crime and terrorism.

- Fisheries: Transitional arrangements for access to fishing waters have been agreed, with fishing quotas being gradually adjusted. This remains a sensitive issue in bilateral relations.

2.1.2. Current developments (as at April 2025)

The British government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer is endeavouring to deepen relations with the EU. A new strategic partnership framework is to be adopted on 19 May 2025 and includes.

- Increased cooperation on security and defence issues, including joint support for Ukraine.

- Introduction of a bilateral youth mobility programme that enables young adults to commute between the UK and the EU for work or study.

- Harmonisation of food standards to reduce customs controls and facilitate trade.

- Access for British companies to the EU Defence Fund, with the UK having to make financial contributions.

This rapprochement comes against the backdrop of difficult trade talks with the US, particularly due to differences over food standards. For example, the UK is opposed to the import of chlorine-treated chicken and hormone-treated beef, which is causing tensions with the US.

The trade and cooperation agreement between the EU and the UK provides a comprehensive basis for bilateral relations after Brexit. While duty-free trade in goods will be maintained, there are still restrictions in the services sector and additional bureaucratic hurdles. Current efforts to establish a strategic partnership aim to deepen cooperation in key areas and stabilise relations

2.2. Switzerland

Cooperation between Switzerland and the European Union is based on the Bilateral Agreements I and II. Agreement I, which came into force in 2002, regulates, among other things, free trade in industrial goods, the free movement of persons and land and air transport. Certain areas of agriculture were also partially liberalised. The Bilateral Agreements II, which were concluded from 2005, expanded cooperation, including Switzerland's participation in the Schengen area (abolition of systematic border controls) and in European asylum policy (Dublin system). Other areas such as research, the environment and education were also included in the cooperation.

The status of relations is such that the existing agreements continue to apply. However, negotiations on an institutional framework agreement, which was intended to create a better legal basis for the further development of relations, failed in 2021. Without such a framework agreement, existing agreements are not automatically adapted to new EU legislation and new market access is more difficult to negotiate.

A special feature of Switzerland is that, although it is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), it is not a member of the EU and is not part of the European Economic Area (EEA). Nevertheless, economic integration with the EU is very high: over half of Switzerland's foreign trade takes place with the EU. However, the lack of further development of bilateral relations harbours economic risks for Switzerland in the medium term.

2.3. Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein

Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are closely linked to the European Union via the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement). The EEA Agreement, which came into force in 1994, enables these countries to participate fully in the EU internal market. As a result, they benefit from the free movement of goods, services, capital and people. However, they have no co-determination rights in EU legislation. Instead, they largely automatically incorporate new EU internal market regulations into their own legislation. As a result, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are politically and economically closely intertwined with the EU, but remain formally independent and not members of the European Union.

2.4. Western Balkan states

The Western Balkan states - including Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo - have each concluded a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. These agreements serve the purpose of political and economic rapprochement with the EU and are a central component of the EU accession perspective for the region. In economic terms, the SAAs allow for largely duty-free trade in industrial products and provide for the gradual liberalisation of trade in agricultural and food products. In addition, the partner countries undertake to adopt certain EU standards, particularly in the areas of competition law, consumer protection and environmental protection. The SAAs thus form the legal and economic basis for future EU membership.

These countries are also networked with each other through the regional CEFTA agreement (Central European Free Trade Agreement).

2.5. Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have concluded so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the European Union, which are part of their respective association agreements . The agreements entered into force in 2016 for Ukraine and Georgia and in 2017 for Moldova. The aim of these agreements is to enable economic integration into the EU single market. To this end, the partner countries undertake to gradually harmonise their laws and standards with EU law - particularly in areas such as competition law, product safety, food safety, public procurement and the environment. In return, they receive extensive duty-free access to the European market. The DCFTAs are seen as an important step towards closer economic and political ties with the EU.

Since the start of the Russian war of aggression in 2022, the EU has significantly expanded its trade relations with Ukraine. In addition to the existing free trade agreement (DCFTA), the EU temporarily suspended all tariffs and quotas for Ukrainian exports - initially until June 2025. This measure strengthened the Ukrainian economy, but led to tensions in the EU, as favourable agricultural exports (e.g. grain, sugar, eggs) put pressure on local markets. Tariffs were therefore reintroduced on some of these products in 2024. It remains to be seen whether full duty-free status will continue after 2025 - new trade regulations are currently being prepared.

3. North America

3.1. Canada

The free trade agreement between the European Union and Canada, known as CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement), is a comprehensive trade agreement that aims to promote trade and investment between the two partners.

3.1.1. Overview

CETA has been provisionally applied since 21 September 2017. However, full implementation requires ratification by all EU member states. Ratification of the CETA agreement is currently still pending in ten EU member states, including France, Italy and Ireland.

The agreement provides for 99% of all tariffs between the EU and Canada to be abolished, with 98% having already been eliminated upon provisional application. CETA also facilitates access to public tenders and services and protects European geographical indications. Provisions on investment protection and the settlement of investment disputes are also part of the agreement, but are not yet fully in force as they are awaiting final ratification by all EU member states.

CETA facilitates trade for companies on both sides of the Atlantic by eliminating tariffs and simplifying regulations. European companies will also benefit from improved access to public tenders in Canada. In addition, the agreement strengthens the protection of intellectual property, in particular through the recognition of European geographical indications of origin on the Canadian market.

3.1.2. Criticism and concerns

The CETA free trade agreement continues to be criticised, both in terms of its origins and its effects. A central point of criticism concerns democratic legitimacy: many critics criticise the fact that the negotiations were conducted in a largely non-transparent manner and that the agreement has already been provisionally applied before full ratification by all national parliaments. This is perceived as a disregard for parliamentary participation rights.

There are also considerable concerns with regard to environmental and social standards. Critics fear that CETA could lead to a lowering of existing standards by making it easier for products manufactured under less stringent environmental or labour conditions to enter the European market. This could intensify competition at the expense of sustainability and social justice.

The investment protection mechanism contained in the agreement is particularly controversial. It provides for the establishment of a special dispute settlement procedure between investors and states. Critics warn that this mechanism could give companies the opportunity to challenge state regulations - for example in the area of environmental or consumer protection - if they feel their profits are being affected. This could undermine democratically legitimised legislative processes.

3.2. USA

There is currently no comprehensive free trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA). Negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which were conducted from 2013 to 2016, officially ended in 2019 without an agreement being reached.
Despite the lack of a free trade agreement, the EU and the US remain important trading partners. In 2023, the volume of trade between the two regions totalled 1.6 trillion euros, with the EU recording a trade surplus of 48 billion euros.

3.2.1. Customs duties: current developments

Trade relations between the European Union and the United States are currently very tense. In April 2025, US President Donald Trump announced a series of protectionist measures. Since 5 April, for example, a flat-rate additional tariff of 10% has applied to almost all imports into the USA - regardless of the country of origin. The US government is also planning a country-specific surcharge of 20% on EU imports. This was originally due to come into force on 9 April 2025, but was suspended for 90 days and is now due to take effect on 8 July 2025.

In addition, the US government has introduced targeted tariffs on certain groups of goods from the EU. Since 12 March 2025, an additional 25% tariff has been levied on steel and aluminium imports. Since 3 April, there has also been a 25% surcharge on imports of passenger cars and light commercial vehicles from the EU. This duty will apply to vehicle parts from 3 May 2025 at the latest.

In response to these measures, the EU has announced retaliatory tariffs of 25% on US products with a trade volume of around 21 billion euros. These were to be introduced in stages from 15 April 2025. However, in order to avoid an escalation, the countermeasures were initially suspended until 14 July 2025 to create room for negotiation.

Despite the tense trade relations, the European Union continues to strive for a negotiated solution with the United States. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has submitted a far-reaching offer to the US government, which envisages the complete abolition of all tariffs on industrial goods - including the automotive sector. However, a concrete response from Washington is still pending.

In view of the current political tensions and the protectionist orientation of US trade policy, the future of a comprehensive free trade agreement remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the EU is sticking to its course and focusing on dialogue, cooperation and a long-term solution that benefits both sides economically and strategically.

3.2.2. EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC)

The EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was launched on 15 June 2021 by US President Joe Biden and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at the EU-US Summit in Brussels. The aim of the TTC is to strengthen transatlantic cooperation in the areas of trade, technology and business and to promote shared values such as democracy and the rule of law.

Despite some progress, the TTC is now facing major challenges. The introduction of blanket tariffs by the United States and the increasingly protectionist trade policy have significantly undermined confidence in the transatlantic partnership. The future of the TTC is also the subject of intense debate: It is unclear whether the Council will continue in its current form, be reduced to technocratic working groups or possibly be cancelled altogether.

There are also growing differences in terms of content. The EU and the US are pursuing different approaches in key policy areas such as climate protection, digital regulation and the control of large technology companies, which is making cooperation even more difficult .

4. Central America and South America

The European Union (EU) maintains free trade and association agreements with several countries in Central and South America, which are intended to promote trade and deepen political and economic cooperation.

4.1. Mexico

After several years of negotiations, the European Union and Mexico agreed on a modernised global agreement in January 2025. It is intended to deepen economic

exchange, improve access to markets and set common standards in areas such as sustainability, labour protection and anti-corruption. Despite the agreement reached, full ratification by the European Parliament and the member states is still pending.
The original trade agreement has been in place since 2000 and had to be renegotiated in order to take current issues such as sustainability, digitalisation and the fight against corruption into account. Among other things, the new agreement provides for the extensive reduction of customs duties, better access to public tenders, stronger protection of intellectual property and binding environmental and social standards.
Mexico is the EU's second-largest trading partner in Latin America, while the EU is Mexico's third-largest partner. Both sides are hoping for economic benefits and closer strategic cooperation.
The lack of transparency in the negotiations and the investment protection clauses, which could impair democratic processes, have been criticised. The enforcement of environmental and social standards is also considered weak. Some sectors - such as agriculture - fear competitive disadvantages. It remains to be seen whether all EU states will vote in favour, as there has been resistance to similar agreements in the past. However, ratification is considered likely.

4.2. Chile

After nearly six years of negotiations, Chile and the European Union concluded a modernized Advanced Framework Agreement in December 2022, updating the original free trade pact in force since 2003. The new agreement strengthens economic and political ties between Chile and the EU — a market of over 450 million consumers — and positions Chile as a key partner in sustainable trade, digital transformation, and the global energy transition. The deal provides for the elimination of tariffs on 99.9% of EU exports and significantly improves access for Chilean agricultural, fishery, and mining products, particularly critical raw materials like lithium and copper.
However, final ratification is still pending. In Chile, the agreement has sparked both optimism and debate. While the government views it as a strategic step toward attracting investment and strengthening green value chains, civil society organizations and some political groups have raised concerns about transparency in the negotiation process, the role of investor-state dispute mechanisms, and the environmental impact of expanding extractive industries. To address these concerns, the Chilean government has pledged to submit the agreement to public scrutiny and parliamentary approval, ensuring alignment with Chile’s environmental and social commitments.

4.3. EU-Central America Association Agreement

The Association Agreement between the European Union and the six Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) was

signed in 2012 and has been partially in force since 2013 and fully in force since May 2024. In addition to trade policy aspects, it also includes political and development policy cooperation and is considered a strategic instrument for the regional integration and stabilisation of Central America. Among other things, the aim is to gradually create a free trade area that goes beyond WTO standards.
Despite these ambitions, the agreement has been criticised. Human rights organisations point to serious abuses in several partner countries - such as violence against environmental and human rights activists, restrictions on freedom of expression and the press and systemic corruption. Nicaragua and Guatemala in particular are considered problematic. Enforcement of the environmental and social standards contained in the agreement also remains inadequate due to a lack of effective control and sanction mechanisms. Critics are therefore calling for the EU to formulate minimum human rights and democratic requirements more clearly and to react consistently in the event of violations. However, in the face of growing geopolitical competition (e.g. from China), the EU is attempting to maintain the dialogue and bind the region more closely to itself both economically and politically.

4.4. EU-Colombia/Peru/Ecuador free trade agreement

The European Union has a multilateral free trade agreement with the Andean countries of Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. The original agreement with Colombia and Peru was signed in 2012 and has been provisionally applied since 2013. Ecuador joined the agreement following successful accession negotiations in 2017. The aim is to gradually liberalise trade in goods and services, improve access to public tenders and reduce technical barriers to trade.
The agreement also contains provisions on the promotion of investment, compliance with competition rules and sustainable development. In a separate chapter on sustainability, the contracting parties undertake to implement international labour and environmental standards. The agreement is seen as an important step towards economic integration between the EU and the Andean region.
Full ratification by all EU member states took place on 1 November 2024. Until then, the agreement was only provisionally applied, as some member states had postponed their approval due to ongoing concerns - particularly with regard to human rights violations, environmental damage caused by raw material extraction and the inadequate enforcement of sustainability clauses in the partner countries. With full ratification, all provisions are now legally binding.

4.5. EU-Mercosur free trade agreement

After more than 20 years of negotiations, the European Union and the Mercosur states - Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay - reached a political agreement on a comprehensive free trade agreement in December 2024 . The aim is to create one of the largest free trade zones in the world with over 700 million people. The agreement provides for the gradual elimination of around 91% of customs duties on goods traded between the two regions.

However, ratification of the agreement is still pending. There are considerable reservations in several EU member states, particularly in France and Italy - especially with regard to environmental and climate protection and the impact on European agriculture. Among other things, Brazil's role in protecting the Amazon region has been criticised. In order to facilitate approval, the EU Commission is planning to put the trade policy part of the agreement to a separate vote. This is intended to enable majority approval within the EU without national parliaments having to decide on the entire association agreement.

4.6. EU-CARIFORUM Agreement

The EU-CARIFORUM agreement is part of the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) that the EU has concluded with regions in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. It was signed in 2008 and has been in force on a provisional basis since then. It was the first fully implemented EPA with an ACP region.

CARIFORUM comprises 15 Caribbean states, including the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as others such as Barbados, Haiti, the Bahamas, Grenada, Saint Lucia and Suriname.
The agreement grants duty-free access to the EU for almost all goods exported by the CARIFORUM states. In return, these countries are gradually reducing their tariffs on EU goods. It also contains regulations on services, investments and sustainable development, in particular on labour and environmental standards. Regional integration in the Caribbean is also being promoted.
The aim is to strengthen economic development and secure long-term access to the EU market. The main criticism is directed at the asymmetrical market liberalisation, the complicated implementation in small island states and the limited benefits for economically weaker countries.

5. Asia

The European Union (EU) has concluded free trade agreements with several Asian countries or is in advanced negotiations. These agreements aim to reduce trade barriers, promote investment and deepen economic cooperation.

5.1. Regional initiatives

For many years, the European Union has been pursuing the strategic goal of concluding a comprehensive free trade agreement with the **ASEAN region** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) as a whole. Initial negotiations began in 2007, but were suspended in 2009 due to substantive and political differences. Since then, the EU has pursued a bilateral approach in which it concludes individual trade agreements with individual ASEAN member states - for example with Singapore (in force since 2019) and Vietnam (since 2020). Talks with other countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines are at various stages - ongoing, resumed or suspended.

In the long term, however, the idea of an interregional EU-ASEAN free trade agreement remains. Such an initiative would be of great economic and geopolitical importance: with a population of around 670 million, dynamic economic growth and a growing middle class, ASEAN is one of the EU's most important trading partners in Asia. At the same time, common standards in areas such as sustainability, digitalisation and corporate responsibility could have a global impact.

In contrast, the EU is not part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) - the world's largest free trade agreement, which came into force in January 2022. RCEP brings together 15 Asia-Pacific countries: the ten ASEAN members plus China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Together, these countries account for around 30% of the world's population and around a third of global GDP. The agreement aims to reduce tariffs, standardise rules of origin and expand regional supply chains - albeit with less ambitious standards than the EU agreements, for example, particularly in the areas of the environment, labour law and consumer protection.

The EU thus remains on the sidelines of Asia's institutional trade integration, which weakens its geopolitical and economic presence in the region. Instead, Brussels favours bilateral agreements with high standards and strategic partnerships, for example as part of the "Global Gateway" initiative or the EU-Indo-Pacific concept. This approach is considered to be "value-based", but compared to RCEP or other Asian initiatives, it is much more fragmented and slower to implement.

5.2. Existing bilateral free trade agreements

5.2.1. Japan

The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement came into force on 1 February 2019 and was the most comprehensive bilateral trade agreement ever concluded by the European Union. It provides for the extensive elimination of customs duties on industrial and agricultural products, thus significantly facilitating mutual market access. The agreement also includes regulations on intellectual property, sustainable development, the protection of geographical indications and the opening of public procurement markets. It thus creates a binding framework for fair trade and deeper economic cooperation between the two economic areas. The agreement was expanded in 2023 to include further cooperation in the areas of digital trade and green technologies.

5.2.2. South Korea

The free trade agreement between the EU and South Korea came into force on 1 July 2011 and was the EU's first comprehensive trade agreement with an Asian country. It provides for the almost complete abolition of customs duties on industrial products and the gradual elimination of customs duties on agricultural products. It also regulates the protection of intellectual property, access to public procurement markets, the liberalisation of trade in services and the removal of technical barriers to trade, for example through the mutual recognition of standards. Sustainable development issues - in particular environmental and social standards - are also part of the agreement. Bilateral trade has more than doubled since the agreement came into force: the volume of trade rose from 62.8 billion euros (2011) to over 135 billion euros in 2024. EU exports to South Korea recently totalled around 62 billion euros, while imports amounted to just under 73 billion euros.

5.2.3. Singapore

The free trade agreement between the EU and Singapore entered into force on 21 November 2019 and is the first agreement of its kind between the European Union and an ASEAN member state. It represents an important milestone in economic cooperation between Europe and Southeast Asia. The agreement not only provides for the almost complete elimination of tariffs on trade in goods, but also regulates trade in services, access to public tenders and the protection of intellectual property. It also contains binding clauses on sustainable development, particularly with regard to environmental and social standards. A separate investment protection agreement was also signed at , but has not yet been ratified by all EU member states. For European companies, the agreement opens up improved access to one of Asia's leading technology and financial centres.

5.2.4. Vietnam

The free trade agreement between the EU and Vietnam (EVFTA) entered into force on 1 August 2020 and is one of the most ambitious trade agreements that the EU has concluded with an emerging economy. It provides for the gradual elimination of almost 99% of all tariffs on both sides, with a large proportion already eliminated upon entry into force. In addition, the agreement facilitates access to public tenders and regulates key areas such as investment protection, intellectual property and technical barriers to trade. Particular attention is paid to sustainable development: both sides undertake to comply with international labour and environmental standards. The implementation of these commitments is accompanied by regular dialogue and independent review bodies. The agreement is seen as a door opener for European companies in one of the most dynamic growth markets in Southeast Asia.

5.3. Ongoing bilateral negotiations and talks

5.3.1. India

The European Union and India are aiming to conclude a comprehensive free trade agreement (EU-India Free Trade Agreement, FTA) by the end of 2025. Negotiations were officially resumed in June 2022 after having been suspended for almost a decade. Both sides are pursuing the goal of not only facilitating mutual trade in goods - for example by reducing tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers - but also strengthening regulatory cooperation in areas such as services, investment, sustainability and intellectual property.
The talks will also cover strategically relevant topics such as digital connectivity, data security, supply chain stability, energy partnerships and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. In parallel to the free trade agreement, the EU and India are also negotiating an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications.
With over 1.4 billion people, India is a key geopolitical and economic partner for the EU - both as a growth market and in the context of diversifying global trade relations. A successful conclusion of the agreement could secure the EU better access to one of the world's largest domestic markets and at the same time integrate India more closely into global supply chains.

The negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and India have been widely criticised. Human rights organisations and some MEPs criticise the fact that democratic deficits in India - such as restrictions on press freedom and civil society - are not being sufficiently addressed. Environmental and climate protection requirements are also a point of contention: while the EU demands binding sustainability clauses, India largely rejects strict ecological requirements. In the area of intellectual property, European pressure for extended patent protection in particular is causing tensions, as there are fears that this could jeopardise access to affordable medicines worldwide. There are also conflicts of interest in agricultural and industrial goods trade, as both sides want to protect their sensitive markets - for example for food, textiles and machinery. Another critical point is digital regulation: the EU is calling for data protection standards on a par with the GDPR, while India is focusing more on data localisation and state control. All of these differences raise doubts as to whether a balanced and viable agreement by the end of 2025 is realistic.

5.3.2. China

There are close economic ties between the European Union and China, but no comprehensive free trade agreement exists to date. Instead, the *Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)* was concluded in December 2020, which was intended to provide European companies with better market access in China and fair competitive conditions - in particular through regulations on forced technology transfer, state subsidies and dealing with Chinese state-owned enterprises. However, ratification was frozen by the European Parliament in 2021 after China imposed sanctions on European parliamentarians in response to EU sanctions over human rights violations in Xinjiang.
In April 2025, China announced the lifting of these sanctions in order to revitalise talks on the CAI. However, the reaction in Brussels was cautious: European representatives now see the agreement as "outdated" and are demanding new concessions. At the same time, trade relations are becoming increasingly tense. In 2024, the EU introduced anti-subsidy tariffs of up to 45% on Chinese electric vehicles, which led to a significant decline in China's market share in Europe. China responded with a complaint to the World Trade Organisation. Despite these conflicts, Chinese companies such as BYD and Nio are continuing to expand in Europe - partly by relocating production to avoid tariffs.
Against the backdrop of heightened tensions with the USA, China is increasingly seeking economic rapprochement with the EU. The EU, in turn, is pursuing a strategy of "de-risking": it wants to reduce critical dependencies without completely cutting economic relations. A comprehensive free trade agreement between the EU and China is currently not in sight, and the future of the CAI also remains uncertain.

5.3.3. Indonesia

The European Union and Indonesia have been negotiating a comprehensive free trade and partnership agreement since July 2016. The aim of the talks is to gradually reduce tariffs, facilitate access to markets for goods and services and regulate other areas such as investment, sustainability, intellectual property and public procurement. However, negotiations are progressing slowly, partly due to differences over environmental standards, particularly in connection with palm oil exports and deforestation-related sustainability requirements. A conclusion is not yet in sight, but the talks are continuing.

5.3.4. Malaysia

Negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and Malaysia resumed in January 2025 after a twelve-year break. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, announced the resumption of talks on 19 January 2025. The original negotiations, which began in 2010, were suspended in 2012 due to differences of opinion, particularly over palm oil policy.
Malaysia is the EU's third largest trading partner within the ASEAN region, with a bilateral goods trade volume of around 45 billion euros in 2023. A free trade agreement would further intensify trade and create new business opportunities for companies on both sides.
The negotiations aim not only to reduce tariffs, but also to regulate areas such as investment, intellectual property, public procurement, labour rights and climate and environmental protection.

5.3.5. Thailand

Negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and Thailand were officially resumed in March 2023 after being suspended in 2014 following the military coup in Thailand. The aim of the planned agreement is to gradually reduce tariffs on industrial and agricultural products, facilitate trade in services and comprehensively regulate investment protection, intellectual property and sustainable development. The resumption of talks is seen by the EU as an important step towards deepening economic cooperation with the ASEAN region. Thailand is already one of the EU's largest trading partners in Southeast Asia, with a trade volume of around 42 billion euros (as of 2023).

Despite their economic potential, the free trade negotiations between the EU and Thailand have also been criticised. Human rights organisations point to persistent deficits in democracy, freedom of expression and the role of the military, while trade unions criticise the lack of labour rights and restricted trade union freedoms. Environmental organisations also express concerns about inadequate environmental standards, deforestation and industrial agriculture. There are also concerns that strict EU regulations on patent protection could restrict access to affordable medicines in Thailand. Critics are therefore calling for the EU to enshrine binding and verifiable standards for human rights, social justice and sustainability in the negotiations.

5.3.6. Philippines

Negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union (EU) and the Philippines were resumed in March 2024 after a seven-year interruption. The first round of negotiations took place in Brussels in October 2024, followed by a second round in Manila in February 2025. The next round is planned for June 2025 in Brussels. The aim of the agreement is to deepen bilateral trade, particularly in view of the upcoming abolition of trade preferences under the EU's Generalised System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) programme, which is expected to expire in 2027. The conclusion of the FTA is seen as crucial to secure long-term duty-free access for Philippine exports such as textiles, electronics, agricultural products and critical raw materials.

Despite progress in the negotiations, there are considerable concerns about the human rights situation in the Philippines. Reports of extrajudicial killings, the disappearance of activists and the persecution of human rights defenders have triggered calls for binding human rights clauses in the agreement. The lack of an up-to-date human rights impact assessment by the EU has also been criticised. Further criticism relates to possible negative effects on indigenous communities and the environment - particularly due to an expansion of mining. Whether the agreement can be finalised by 2026 depends crucially on whether both sides are prepared to address these points.

6. Oceania

The European Union (EU) has intensified its trade relations with countries in Oceania, particularly New Zealand and Australia, in recent years. While a comprehensive free trade agreement is already in force with New Zealand, negotiations with Australia were resumed in April 2025 following an interruption in 2023.

6.1. New Zealand

The free trade agreement between the European Union and New Zealand came into force on 1 May 2024. It stipulates that around 91% of tariffs on New Zealand exports to the EU will be abolished immediately; this figure is set to rise to 97% within seven years. In return, all customs duties on EU exports to New Zealand have been completely abolished. The EU anticipates annual savings of around 140 million euros as a result of the tariff reduction. In the long term, bilateral trade could grow by up to 30 %, while EU investment in New Zealand could increase by up to 80 %. In addition to the economic benefits, the agreement also contains binding regulations on compliance with the Paris Climate Agreement and basic labour and social standards - a clear sign of the combination of trade liberalisation and sustainability.

6.2. Australia

In October 2023, negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and Australia were suspended, mainly due to differences in the agricultural sector, particularly with regard to import quotas for Australian beef, sheep meat and sugar. In April 2025, both

sides announced that they would resume talks. A concrete timetable for the resumption of negotiations has not yet been announced.
Australia sees an agreement with the EU as a significant opportunity to improve access to a market with over 440 million consumers and a nominal GDP of USD 18.6 trillion. The EU, for its part, is seeking to diversify its trade relations. Despite the current pause, future developments in global trade policy or progress in related areas could favour the resumption of talks.

6.3. Pacific Islands

The European Union also maintains trade relations with the Pacific Islands, in particular as part of an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with several countries in the region. The agreement, which came into force on 1 January 2021, includes Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The aim is to facilitate bilateral trade , create export opportunities for these developing countries and promote their economic integration into the global market. The EPA grants duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market for a wide range of products - particularly fishery products, agricultural products and raw materials. In return, the partner countries commit to gradual market liberalisation, compliance with basic trade and sustainability standards and the promotion of good governance. In the long term, the agreement is intended to contribute to economic diversification and regional cooperation in the Pacific region.

7. Southern Mediterranean countries

The EU has concluded association agreements with several countries in the southern Mediterranean region to promote trade in goods and deepen political and economic cooperation. These agreements generally include tariff reductions for industrial products and gradual liberalisation in the agricultural sector.

7.1. Morocco

The European Union maintains close economic and political relations with Morocco. The existing association agreement came into force on 1 March 2000 and forms the basis for bilateral trade and cooperation in areas such as politics, culture and migration. Negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), which will also cover services, investment, public procurement and sustainability, have also been underway since March 2013. Morocco has also enjoyed "advanced status" in its relations with the EU since 2008, which enables closer political ties and extended access to EU programmes.

However, the DCFTA negotiations were already suspended in 2014 at Morocco's request. The main reason for this is the disputed status of Western Sahara under international law. The European Court of Justice has repeatedly ruled that EU trade agreements are not automatically applicable to this territory as long as the Sahrawi people have not given their consent. This legal uncertainty places a considerable strain on bilateral relations.

There is also economic criticism, particularly from Spain: Farmers are complaining about competitive disadvantages due to low-priced fruit and vegetable imports from Morocco, partly from Western Sahara. Accordingly, the Spanish agricultural association FEPEX welcomed an ECJ judgement that declared the application of customs benefits to products from Western Sahara to be illegal.

Despite these challenges, Morocco remains a key partner for the EU. However, negotiations on the DCFTA are not expected to resume until the Western Sahara issue has been resolved.

7.2. Tunisia

Negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Tunisia, which began in October 2015, have stalled since the last round of negotiations in May 2019. The talks aim to go beyond the existing association agreement and also include areas such as services, investment and agriculture.

The DCFTA has been criticised in particular by Tunisian civil society, agriculture and politics. There are fears that far-reaching market liberalisation could have a negative impact on local producers. There is also scepticism about the possible dominance of European standards and economic interests.

Despite these challenges, the EU remains Tunisia's most important trading partner. However, a resumption of the DCFTA negotiations depends on the willingness of both sides to address the aforementioned concerns and find joint solutions.

7.3. Egypt

Economic relations between the EU and Egypt are based on the Association Agreement of 2004, which enables duty-free trade in industrial products and improves market access for agricultural and fishery products. It was supplemented in 2010 by an additional protocol on agricultural products.

A deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA), which would also cover services, investment, public procurement and sustainability, has been under discussion since 2013. However, these negotiations are currently suspended. No official new rounds have been held, in particular due to political and economic uncertainties in Egypt.

7.4. Jordan

The European Union and Jordan have had an association agreement in place since 1 May 2002, which provides for the gradual liberalisation of trade. In 2010, Jordan was also granted "advanced status" in relations with the EU, which enables more intensive political cooperation and greater access to EU programmes.

A free trade zone for industrial products was established as part of the association agreement. A protocol on the settlement of disputes over trade provisions came into force on 1 July 2011. In addition, an agreement on the mutual liberalisation of trade was signed in 2007, which provides for changes to the original association agreement.

In 2016, the EU and Jordan agreed the "Jordan Compact", which offers Jordan easier access to the EU market, particularly for products from certain industrial and free trade zones. In return, Jordan gradually opened its labour market to Syrian refugees.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. Many Jordanian exporters have difficulties meeting the technical and quality standards of the EU, which makes market access more difficult. In addition, the Jordanian economy is strongly service-orientated, with a limited industrial sector mainly focused on textiles and chemical products.

There are currently no negotiations on a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Jordan. Economic cooperation focuses on the implementation of existing agreements and the promotion of reforms to improve competitiveness and the investment climate.

7.5. Lebanon

The Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement between the EU and Lebanon came into force on 1 April 2006. It aims to promote trade and strengthen economic co-operation. The agreement provides for the gradual liberalisation of trade in industrial products and contains provisions to promote trade in agricultural products. It forms the basis for bilateral economic relations between the EU and Lebanon.

To date, there are no negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Lebanon. Economic cooperation is focussed on implementing the existing association agreement and promoting reforms to improve the investment climate.

7.6. Israel

The Association Agreement between the EU and Israel has been in place since 1 June 2000 and forms the basis for bilateral trade relations. It provides for the gradual liberalisation of trade in industrial and agricultural products. In addition, an agricultural

agreement was signed in 2010 and a protocol on conformity assessment (ACAA) was signed in 2013, which facilitates trade in certain industrial products.
A more comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) is not currently being planned. Cooperation is focussed on the existing trade structure.
However, political tensions, particularly in connection with the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, are increasingly straining relations. Parts of EU civil society are calling for a review of the agreement. Nevertheless, an EU-Israel Association Council was held in February 2025, at which both sides reaffirmed their willingness to engage in dialogue.

7.7. Palestinian territories

The Palestinian territories have had an interim association agreement with the EU since 1997, which functions as a free trade agreement and provides for duty-free access for industrial products and a gradual reduction in tariffs for EU exports. An additional agreement on the liberalisation of trade in agricultural and fishery products was concluded in 2012 and extended for ten years in 2021. In addition, the rules of origin were modernised and integrated into the pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential zone in 2024, making the origin of goods more flexible. A similar free trade agreement also exists with the EFTA states.

7.8. Algeria

The Association Agreement between the EU and Algeria, which has been in force since 1 September 2005, provides for the gradual creation of a free trade zone. Almost all tariffs were to be abolished by 2020, which has largely been achieved. However, Algeria has introduced several protectionist measures since 2021, including import licences, local production requirements and restrictions on foreign ownership, which significantly limit market access for EU companies. In response, the EU initiated a dispute settlement procedure in June 2024, as these measures violate Algeria's trade liberalisation commitments. In February 2025, both sides began talks on a possible revision of the agreement in order to rebalance trade relations.

7.9. Syria

The current status of free trade relations between the EU and Syria is characterised by the political developments of recent years. The cooperation agreement that came into force in 1977 continues to form the basis of bilateral relations, but was partially suspended in 2011, particularly in the area of trade in oil and petroleum products. An

association agreement initialled in 2008, which also contained free trade provisions, was never signed and is now considered obsolete.
Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 and the formation of a transitional government by the former rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the EU has begun to gradually ease certain sanctions. In February 2025, measures in the energy, transport and banking sectors were suspended in order to support Syria's economic reconstruction. Nevertheless, key sanctions, particularly against arms exports and against HTS itself, remain in force

7.10.

Negotiations on a framework agreement between the EU and Libya, which was to include free trade provisions, began in November 2008 but were suspended in February 2011 due to the Libyan civil war. To date, these negotiations have not been resumed and a formal free trade agreement between the EU and Libya does not exist. Libya is also neither a member of the Union for the Mediterranean nor part of the Barcelona Process .

8. Middle East

8.1. United Arab Emirates

On 10 April 2025, the European Union and the United Arab Emirates decided to start negotiations on a free trade agreement. The aim of the agreement is to facilitate bilateral trade in goods and services, promote investment and intensify economic cooperation in forward-looking areas such as renewable energy and critical raw materials. Through the envisaged partnership, both sides want to strengthen their economic relations and find joint answers to global challenges such as energy security, sustainable development and the diversification of supply chains. The planned agreement emphasises the strategic importance of the UAE as an economic hub in the Gulf region and the EU's efforts to diversify and expand its global trade relations. However, critics point out that human rights concerns and labour standards in the UAE should be given greater consideration in the negotiations.

8.2. Iraq

The European Union and Iraq have had a partnership and cooperation agreement in place since 2012, which forms an important basis for bilateral relations. The agreement aims to promote trade, intensify economic cooperation and accompany Iraq's development through institutional support and technical dialogue. It also covers areas such as the rule of law, human rights, energy and education. Despite the difficult political and security situation in Iraq, the EU remains committed to supporting the country in its economic stabilisation and reconstruction. However, it is criticised that the implementation of the agreed reforms is progressing only slowly and that the political instability in Iraq has so far hindered the full utilisation of the agreement.

8.3. Golf Co-operation Council (GCC)

Negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, began back in 1990 but were suspended in 2008 without being finalised. Despite the long interruption, both sides continue to reaffirm their interest in deepening economic cooperation. The aim is to strengthen trade relations, facilitate market access and expand investment opportunities. Given the geopolitical importance of the region and the growing role of the GCC in global energy markets, a future resumption of talks remains of strategic interest to the EU. At the same time, civil society organisations are calling for greater focus to be placed on issues such as human rights, social standards and environmental requirements in the event of a possible resumption of negotiations.

9. Africa

The Samoa Agreement was signed on 15 November 2023 and entered into force provisionally on 1 January 2024. It replaces the previous Cotonou Agreement and forms the legal framework for relations between the European Union and the ACP countries for the next 20 years. The agreement consists of a common foundation and three regional protocols for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.
Trade relations between the EU and African countries continue to be largely based on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that were introduced under the Cotonou Agreement. The aim of these agreements is to secure duty-free access to the EU market for African exports and at the same time to liberalise trade in order to promote economic growth and sustainable development. In return, the African partner countries undertake to gradually open up their markets while protecting sensitive products. Eight EPAs are currently in force with 33 out of 79 ACP countries, including 15 African countries.
In addition, poor countries in particular benefit from the EU's "Everything But Arms" (EBA) programme, which grants them duty-free and quota-free access to the European market - with the exception of weapons and ammunition. However, critics criticise the fact that the asymmetrical market opening could hamper the industrial development of African countries in the long term.

9.1. Southern Africa (SADC EPA)

The Economic Partnership Agreement with Southern Africa, known as the SADC EPA, has been in force since October 2016. It covers the countries of Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. This agreement is the first comprehensive regional EPA between the EU and an African region. The aim is to secure the duty-free access of these countries to the EU market on a permanent basis and at the same time enable a gradual opening of their own markets to EU products. There is also a particular focus on promoting regional integration within the SADC states and on development support.

9.2. East and Southern Africa (ESA EPA)

The ESA EPA (Economic Partnership Agreement with Eastern and Southern Africa) has been provisionally applied since 2012 and includes the countries of Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. The agreement gives these countries duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market, while they gradually open their markets to EU products in return. At the same time, the agreement provides for protective measures for sensitive products in order to protect local industries from being overburdened by competition. The aim of the ESA EPA is to promote economic growth, regional integration and sustainable development in the participating countries.

9.3. West Africa (ECOWAS EPA)

A comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was initialled in 2014, but has not yet been fully ratified. The delay is mainly due to political reservations and economic differences within the ECOWAS states. In order to secure access to the EU market nonetheless, individual countries such as Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have concluded bilateral interim EPAs with the EU, which are already in force. These agreements guarantee duty-free and quota-free access for exports to the EU and also serve as a basis for possible future regional implementation.

9.4. Central Africa

In Central Africa, only Cameroon has so far signed an interim economic partnership agreement with the European Union, which has been provisionally applied since 2014. This agreement gives Cameroon duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market, while the country is gradually opening its market to EU products in return. Other countries in the region have not yet decided to sign such an agreement, mainly due to political and economic reservations and a lack of regional unity.

9.5. East Africa (EAC EPA)

An Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the East African Community (EAC) was initialled in 2014. The countries involved include Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. Despite the agreement at a technical level, ratification of the agreement is still pending. The main reason for this is the political reservations of individual member states, which have expressed concerns about the impact on local industries and regional integration. While Kenya has already signed the agreement, other countries are still hesitating, which has so far prevented the full implementation of the EAC EPA.

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