

EPFMA

Bulletin



94 · March 2026

European Parliament Former Members Association

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editorial Board would like to thank all those members who took the time to contribute to this issue of the FMA Bulletin. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that the decision to include an article lies with the FMA Editorial Board and, in principle, contributions from members who are not up-to-date with the payment of the membership fee will not be included. Due to the long time lag between the call for contribution and the publication, some articles may be outdated.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Members,

This year, the European Parliament Former Members Association celebrates its 25th anniversary. Since its creation, our association has pursued a clear and ambitious goal: to preserve the institutional memory of the European Parliament and to ensure that former Members can continue to contribute to the European project beyond the end of their parliamentary mandates.

Our events in December 2025, once again, demonstrated the continued relevance of this mission. The high level of participation and debate confirmed that our members remain deeply engaged and committed to the EU project. Their experience, institutional knowledge and long-term perspective were greatly appreciated not only by their fellow former Members, but also by European Parliament staff and the general public in attendance. A detailed report on these exchanges is included in this edition of the Bulletin.

This publication comes at a particularly important and difficult time for the European Union and the international community. The focus of this edition, 'Is the EU a global actor?', is therefore particularly timely. Relations between the European Union and the United States, long considered a pillar of global stability, are currently being reassessed. While the transatlantic partnership remains rooted in shared democratic values and decades of cooperation, differences have emerged in areas such as trade, industrial policy, energy security, and particularly in terms of defence and global governance.

In these circumstances, the European Union must act with clarity and cohesion. It must maintain a strong and constructive



transatlantic relationship while strengthening its own capacity to act with unity, resilience and strategic credibility. I fully endorse the words of President Von der Leyen, who said 'We stand collectively, firmly and unequivocally with our Member States in the face of any threat', and express our solidarity with our colleagues and citizens in Cyprus, a Member State of the Union which holds the Presidency of the Council at a very difficult and delicate time.

In this context of heightened regional tensions and in light of the cancellation of the Conference of Community Affairs Committees (COSAC) scheduled for 15 to 17 March 2026 in Nicosia (the meeting will take place remotely), the FMA visit to Cyprus, scheduled for 25 to 27 March, has also been cancelled. While we regret not being able to hold these exchanges in person, we will hold these exchanges online, allowing us to maintain dialogue with our Cypriot counterparts despite the circumstances.

This edition also coincides with International Women's Day, celebrated on 8 March. It provides an important opportunity to reflect on the progress made and the responsibilities that remain. Many of our members have been strong advocates for women's rights during their terms of office and continue this commitment today through political, cultural and civic initiatives. The European Union's ambitions cannot be achieved without determined action to promote genuine equal opportunities.

In June, we will meet again for our annual events, on 2 and 3 June 2026. On this occasion, we will organise a special exhibition for our 25th anniversary at the European Parliament, prepared under the direction of FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi. As per tradition, we will pay tribute to former members who passed away in 2025 and 2026, honouring their commitment and dedication to the European ideal. We will also elect new members to the FMA's Management Committee, ensuring continuity and renewal in our leadership. I strongly encourage you to participate in this important moment in the life of our association.

We have chosen "Commitment for Europe" as our guiding message for this year. As we commemorate a quarter of a century of our Association's work, we reaffirm our shared duty to uphold the principles upon which the Union was built and to contribute, with wisdom and experience, to its future development.

May this anniversary renew our confidence in Europe's capacity to persevere, to adapt, and to lead. I wish you an inspiring reading and look forward to welcoming you in June for our Annual Events.

With my very best regards,

Dr. Klaus Hänsch
FMA President

Key facts

Boosting EU support for defence investment

(December session - P10_TA(2025)0320)

MEPs approved measures under the ReArm Europe plan to strengthen Europe's defence technological and industrial base by directing EU funds towards defence investment. Following a provisional deal on 5 November 2025, the legislation amends existing EU programmes, and the objective is to increase funding for defence-related investment. The measure responds to rising geopolitical threats and aims to enhance the Union's strategic autonomy and competitiveness.

The EU to phase out Russian gas imports

(December session - P10_TA(2025)0330)

The European Parliament approved legislation that will ban Russian natural gas imports in order to safeguard EU energy security from Russian weaponisation. Spot-market Russian liquefied natural gas will be prohibited once the regulation enters force in early 2026. In addition, pipeline gas imports are set to end by 30 September 2027. The law includes penalties for member states by way of enforcing compliance. The proposal responds to Russia's long-standing energy coercion that intensified after its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which triggered market manipulation and soaring prices.

EU-Mercosur: MEPs demand a legal opinion on its conformity with the EU treaties

(January session - P10_TA(2026)0008)

The European Parliament voted to request a legal opinion from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on whether the EU-Mercosur agreement complies with EU treaties. The resolution passed narrowly, with 334 votes in favour, 324 against and 11 abstentions. A second proposal seeking a legal review was rejected. The ECJ will now assess the legal basis of both the EU-Mercosur Partnership Agreement and the interim Trade Agreement. Parliament cannot vote on granting consent until the court delivers its verdict.

Support for Greenland's territorial integrity and sovereignty

(January session - P10_TA(2026)0012)

The European Parliament rejected US plan to acquire Greenland. They warned that the acquisition would undermine sovereignty, NATO cohesion and transatlantic security. EU member states and Danish representatives stressed that Greenland's status is solely for Denmark and Greenland to decide. Greenland's authorities reiterated that the island country is not for sale. Greenland is an autonomous Danish territory and is covered by a 1951 US-Denmark defence treaty, however, US presence is limited to Pituffik Space Base.

Tackling critical medicine shortages

(January session - P10_TA(2026)0001)

The European Parliament adopted proposals to enhance the availability and supply of essential medicines in the EU, including antibiotics, insulin and vaccines. The proposal aims to reduce reliance on third countries and strengthen pharmaceutical competitiveness through strategic manufacturing projects and improved cross-border procurement. Following a March 2025 Commission proposal, the regulation addresses shortages, over half of which are caused by manufacturing and active substance supply issues. It also seeks to improve access to medicines facing market failures.

Asylum: vote on new rules on safe countries of origin and safe third countries

(February session - P10_TA(2026)0025)

Changes to the EU asylum procedure regulations were adopted. To enable faster processing of claims, a common list of safe countries of origin for asylum seekers was established. This list included Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo, Morocco and Tunisia. EU candidate countries are presumed safe unless specific risks apply. The rules also update the concept of safe third countries, allowing applications to be rejected if applicants can be returned there. Appeals against these decisions will not automatically stop the return.

EU climate law: a 2040 emissions reduction target of 90% for the EU

(February session - P10_TA(2026)0031)

Following a vote in Parliament, the EU will be required to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2040 compared with 1990 levels, putting it on track to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The ETS2 system that covers CO2 emissions from fuel combustion in buildings and road transport will commence in 2028. Progress will be reviewed every two years. These reviews will determine if possible adjustments need to be made to the target.

Parliament approves €90 billion Ukraine support loan package

(February session - P10_TA(2026)0035)

A €90 billion loan package was approved to support Ukraine in 2026–2027. €60 billion will strengthen defence capabilities, while €30 billion will provide macro-financial and budget support via the EU's Ukraine Facility. The loan which is financed through common EU borrowing, is conditional on democratic and anti-corruption reforms. Ukraine will repay it once it receives Russian war reparations. The Council must formally approve the loan package before disbursement begins.

Parliament's proposals to eradicate poverty in the EU by 2035

(February session - P10_TA(2026)0049)

The European Parliament calls for the eradication of poverty within EU member states by 2035, calling it a violation of human dignity. A focus to be placed on fighting child poverty, which affects one in every four European children. In addition, MEPs seek €20 billion for child poverty measures, stronger labour protections, universal access to public services, and an EU homelessness action plan by 2030.

Other main dossiers discussed in the plenary sessions were:

17.12.25

MEPs debated and voted on the **“My Voice, My Choice”** draft resolution. This citizens’ initiative **was backed by over one million signatures** and urged the Commission to create a voluntary, EU-funded mechanism to support access to safe and legal abortion across participating member states.

18.12.25

The European Parliament **condemned Belarus’s escalating hybrid attacks on Lithuania**. MEPs denounced airspace incursions, cyberattacks and weaponised migration. They expressed solidarity with Lithuania and called for **tougher sanctions and stronger EU-NATO cooperation**.

15.01.26

The European Parliament’s Foreign Affairs committee urged the **EU to strengthen its strategic autonomy amid shifts in US foreign policy**. MEPs reaffirmed the US’s vital role in NATO and called for continued support for Ukraine. Regarding trade, they highlighted the EU-US partnership as the world’s largest and encouraged efforts to remove tariffs and non-tariff barriers to deepen economic cooperation.

15.01.26

MEPs debated **stronger enforcement of EU laws to combat AI-generated deepfakes and illegal sexual content online**. The discourse follows allegations that X’s chatbot Grok created explicit images of women and minors. MEPs are expected to push for tougher action under the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Artificial Intelligence Act.

22.01.2026

Iran’s violent repression of protesters was condemned by the European Parliament. MEPs demand an end to executions and for the release of detainees. They called for the expansion of EU sanctions, terrorist designation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and making future EU relations conditional on democracy and the upholding of human rights.

26.01.26

Cypriot ministers outlined the **Council Presidency priorities to European Parliament committees**. Their **priorities focus on competitiveness, security and defence, justice, agriculture and the safeguarding of a global European Union**.

27.01.26

On 27 January 2026, the European Parliament commemorated **International Holocaust Remembrance Day** with a special plenary session. Holocaust survivor Tatiana Bucci addressed the MEPs and there was a **minute’s silence to mark eighty-one years since Auschwitz’s liberation**.

12.02.26

The European Parliament calls for the **eradication of poverty within EU member states by 2035**, calling it a violation of human dignity. MEPs seek €20 billion for child poverty measures, stronger labour protections, universal access to public services, and an EU homelessness action plan by 2030.

12.02.26

Parliament adopted a resolution backing continued **EU commitment to Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan**. In 2024, 2.7 million people were diagnosed with cancer within EU member states and 1.27 million people died of it. MEPs call for **dedicated health funding in the 2028–2034 budget**, improved access to treatments, and stronger protections against financial discrimination for survivors.

12.02.26

New rules to **protect farmers from cross-border unfair trading practices** were adopted by the parliament. National authorities can act on their own initiative, cooperate via EU information systems, and investigate non-EU buyers. The measures ensure farmers receive fair remuneration and improve coordinated action across the single market.

For more information, please visit:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/plenary>



A CONSIDERATE AGREEMENT WITH THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR THAT OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS

The signing of the association and trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) is a historic milestone in our strategic and trade partnership with Latin America.

The current controversy surrounding this agreement is striking given that this EU trade agreement is among those that have been the most considerate of our agricultural production, is one of the most ambitious in terms of sustainability and, given the EU's role as an agri-food power, represents an opportunity for export.

The bulk of the agri-food chapter was finalised in June 2018, one year before the political agreement between the EU and Mercosur was reached in December 2019. Since then, the agreement has been continuously improved, with increased environmental and labour commitments as well as additional measures proposed by the Commission including safeguards protecting our sensitive products from a harmful increase in imports, strengthened controls on imported products and more audits on the ground in countries of origin.

All products sold in the EU must comply with our stringent sanitary and plant protection regulations to protect European consumers. This is non-negotiable for any agreement, and producers who wish to sell their products on the EU market have to adapt. To further strengthen this position, the Commission has proposed amending regulations to ban products from entering the EU that have traces of plant protection products that are banned in the Union.

The agreement protects our agricultural production by progressively reducing tariffs and setting quotas for the most sensitive products such as beef, poultry, sugar, honey and rice, so that reduced tariffs only apply to between 1 and 2 % of what is consumed in the EU.

According to a 2024 Joint Research Centre study, the cumulative impact of Mercosur and other trade agreements is quite balanced and EU agri-food exports would even increase.

These trade agreements create more markets for our agricultural products and diversify countries that supply key raw materials, improving the resilience of food supply and contributing to the food security of Europeans.

The Mercosur agreement opens up interesting opportunities for Spanish production, including by gradually lifting tariffs on 93 % of agri-food tariff lines, allowing us to increase exports of products such as olive oil, wine and spirits, pork, fruit and vegetables, spices, confectionery and cheeses, for which the agreement allows high tariffs (between 10 and 35 %) to be lifted.

The agreement also strengthens protection against imitations, safeguarding 344 protected European designations of origin and geographical indications.

In addition, it removes bureaucratic and other non-tariff barriers, allowing for faster, simpler and more predictable export procedures.

“(...) this historic development will support greater economic, social and environmental progress in both blocs through trade.”



Lifting export duties will also improve the supply of raw materials for the European livestock sector, for example for animal feed that we do not have enough of, such as soya beans.

Against a backdrop of protectionism and tariff wars, once the agreement has been ratified this historic development will support greater economic, social and environmental progress in both blocs through trade.

Luis Planas Puchades
SOC, PES, Spain (1986-1993, 1993)
Spanish Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

WOMEN RUN EUROPE. THE SYSTEM STILL DOESN'T.

For two decades, the European Union has offered the world a rare picture: women not only present in political life, but shaping its direction from the very top. This mattered because it coincided with Europe's demanding chapters - enlargement, deeper integration, and crises that tested the Union's cohesion and capacity to act.

The story is bigger than any single leader. What is distinctive is that the EU is beginning to normalise something still exceptional globally: women holding several consequential political and economic posts at the same time.

Today, two prime ministers illustrate this agenda-setting power. Denmark's Mette Frederiksen (S&D) has helped set the pace for Europe's new security posture. As Denmark took on the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, she made security independence and stronger European defence capabilities central priorities. Frederiksen has also shaped the European conversation on migration, with Denmark's restrictive approach increasingly cited - admired by some, criticised by others - as a model for an EU-wide rethink.

Italy's Giorgia Meloni (ECR) has, in parallel, become a pivotal voice in the European Council, especially on migration, where she has convened "like-minded" leaders (including Frederiksen) to push what she calls "innovative solutions". Analysts note that, once ostracised, Meloni is now "centre stage" in Europe and key for transatlantic relations; in Brussels, that rising influence is often described as de facto agenda-setting power in key Council debates.

At EU level, the roster is equally striking. Ursula von der Leyen (EPP) leads the European Commission, setting strategic priorities and steering the College of Commissioners. Roberta Metsola (EPP) presides over the European Parliament, shaping its legislative agenda and representing the institution externally.

Europe's foreign policy is coordinated by Kaja Kallas (Liberals), who serves as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and a Vice-President of the Commission. In the economic sphere, Christine Lagarde leads the European Central Bank, while Nadia Calviño (S&D) - formerly Spain's First Deputy Prime Minister and Economy Minister - serves as President of the European Investment Bank.

This is a powerful narrative. But it should not lull us into complacency. Following the 2024 elections, the share of women MEPs fell from its 2019 high of 41% to below 40%, reversing an upward trend for the first time. No EU member state parliament reaches parity, with large variations and Cyprus holding the wooden spoon with less than 15% of its parliamentarians being women.

Why does it matter? Empirical data shows a clear correlation between women's political representation and economic growth, highly desired in the EU, to just mention one argument. However, should the 'why' really be a discussion in the Europe of 2026?

What holds Europe back is not a lack of talent; it is the design of politics. Party recruitment and selection too often reward informal gatekeeping and "old networks". The realities of political work - late nights, constant travel, permanent availability - still collide with unequal caregiving burdens. And harassment, especially online, continues to drive talent away and to normalise toxicity in democratic debate.

March, and International Women's Day in particular, should therefore be more than symbolic. Europe can recognise the strength of its current female leadership while treating women's representation as democratic infrastructure: something to maintain through party reform, modern working rules, and a zero-tolerance stance on violence against women in politics. Europe has shown what is possible. Now it must show that progress is durable.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin

ALDE, Germany (2004-2014)

President and Founder of Women Political Leaders (WPL)



Women Political Leaders Summit 2023. © European Union 2023 - Source : EP

SODIUM BATTERY MANUFACTURING: A PATH TO EUROPE'S ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

As the rapporteur for the EESC CCMI/250 Exploratory Opinion on the Sodium Battery Manufacturing Sector, which I lead together with Co-rapporteur Hervé Jeannin, I would like to present a summary of our findings.

Sodium batteries are emerging as a key alternative to traditional lithium-ion systems for different strategic sectors, and our report emphasises their importance in enhancing the European Union's (EU) energy independence and competitiveness in the global market.

Sodium batteries not only offer a more environmentally friendly option but also provide an opportunity for Europe to establish a robust ecosystem that integrates research, industry, and workforce development. Building this ecosystem demands strong collaboration among various stakeholders, including governments, private sector players, and research and technology organisations.

To fully leverage the potential of sodium battery technology, it is crucial for the EU to implement supportive measures such as investment subsidies and production tax credits. These financial incentives will stimulate demand and facilitate the scaling of production capabilities.

"(...) sodium battery manufacturing presents immense potential for Europe, fostering technological sovereignty, enhancing energy independence, and promoting sustainable practices"

Our report calls for significant investment in collaborative research and development (R&D), particularly in areas like solid electrolytes and sodium-saltwater systems, with a proposed budget of at least €220 billion to drive technological advancements.

Moreover, the sustainable manufacturing of sodium batteries is of paramount importance. The production process should prioritise eco-design and recycling from the outset, ensuring alignment with Europe's broader sustainability initiatives, such as the Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan. This approach will help ensure that sodium batteries make a positive contribution to both the economy and the environment.

With the growing global interest in sodium batteries, our report underscores the importance of a well-planned market entry strategy. Navigating regulatory hurdles is also critical. Streamlined permitting processes, especially with existing infrastructure and skills for lithium-ion technology, will enable the rapid establishment of production sites.

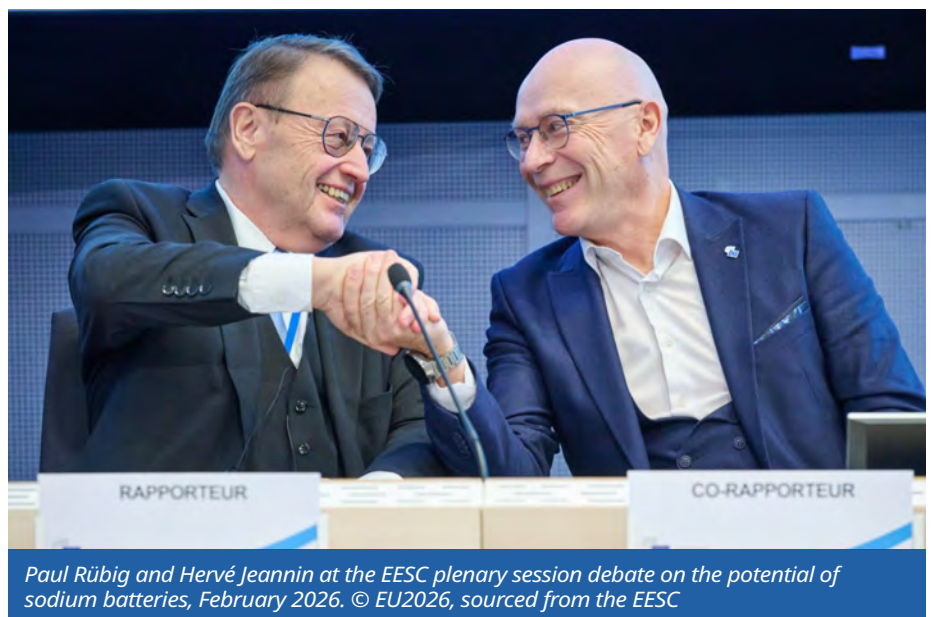
This will allow the EU to keep pace with advancements in battery technology on an international scale.

To maximise the impact of sodium battery initiatives, we must prioritise strong workforce strategies. This includes investing in training programs that address the skills gap and engage local communities, ensuring that the growth of this sector is inclusive and benefits all stakeholders.

In conclusion, the transition to sodium battery manufacturing presents immense potential for Europe, fostering technological sovereignty, enhancing energy independence, and promoting sustainable practices within the battery industry. Through strategic investments, collaborative ecosystems, and supportive regulatory frameworks, we can position Europe as a leader in this industry, paving the way for a greener and more sustainable future.

Paul Rübige
EPP, Austria (1996-2019)

Content created by EESC and with the assistance of AI technology



Paul Rübige and Hervé Jeannin at the EESC plenary session debate on the potential of sodium batteries, February 2026. © EU2026, sourced from the EESC

ZELENSKY AND THE EU MUST RESIST THE AMERICAN EAGLE AND THE RUSSIAN BEAR

Birds of prey, like all predators, learned from their ancestors how to hunt and kill. Their hunting and killing roughly has two ways: one, after observation, striking by lightning, the other way is just using massive force. The American eagle strikes suddenly after attentive observation, the Russian bear strikes with huge force anytime, anywhere: it bites, strangles and beats.

The Trump administration combines both ways: observation, striking by lightning and by brute force. It's all there. The outcome results then in the big question: what's in it for us? Do we get the prey, or even more? The Putin administration just strikes with force against enemies both inside and outside. Many, many opponents were thrown out of windows, thrown down from stairs or poisoned. With the killing of Aleksej Navalny the intra-Russian opposition lost its last stronghold. Russia has been attacking Ukraine since 2014 with brutal force resulting in the death of many soldiers on both sides of the frontline. Many Ukrainian civilians were killed by force of heavy rockets, drones and massacres with strangling, rape etc. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian children were deported to Russia for 're-education'.

And now we have the US-Russian 'peace-plan'. A combination of the American eagle hunting together with the Russian bear. The plan is a sheer combination of 'what's in it for us', and how can we strike Ukraine with force in such a way, that it is knocked out for decades to come. The Ukrainian prey is the Christmas turkey that loses everything it fought for: the Crimea, the Donbas and ultimately its sovereignty. It is obliged to reinstate the Russian language, plus the Russian Orthodox church, its leader being the former KGB-agent and multi-billionaire

Vladimir Michailovitsj Goendjajev. Ukrainian sovereignty will de facto be eradicated since its army must be sharply reduced, amnesty must be given even to the most brutal Russian actors, and the plan stipulates and limits Ukraine's international relations. US-Russian investments will benefit both the eagle and the bear, and Europa has to contribute one hundred billion dollars too.

In the end this so-called peace plan is nothing but Ukrainian capitulation to the combined force of the Russian bear and the greedy cunning of the American eagle. Neither president Zelensky nor the European Union must accept this combined approach of hunting and killing. Resist this violence!

Peter van Dalen
EPP, Netherlands (2009-2023)



Ukrainian and European flags in front of the EP in Brussels, on the 4th anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
© European Union 2026 - Source : EP

"Neither president Zelensky nor the European Union must accept this combined approach of hunting and killing. Resist this violence!"



Speech by Peter van Dalen during a plenary session of the EP on the deterioration of the situation of refugees as a consequence of Russian aggression against Ukraine.
© European Union 2022 - Source : EP

A MISUNDERSTOOD MIRACLE: EUROPEAN PEACE

European integration began as an original political project, serving a utopian goal. The plan: a new type of political organisation in Europe; utopia: peace – a definitive and perpetual peace – between the same countries which for centuries had regarded themselves as hereditary enemies and had been responsible for the most appalling wars in human history. That utopian vision seemed so crazy that even their creators did not dare to believe in it.

Since 1945, we have experienced two 'layers' of peace. The two world wars of the 20th century were followed by an unexpected and welcome Long World Peace. But this peace is simply an absence of war between the current powers, who have maintained a Clausewitz state of mind: peace is preferable, but, as a way to achieve their goals, war can be seen as 'a continuation of politics by other means'. Türkiye has shown that principle to be true with the Armenians and the Kurds, the Russians are displaying it in Ukraine, the Chinese and Indians resort to it periodically, and the Americans did not wait for President Trump to wage preventive wars in Grenada, Panama and Iraq.

Europe is now in another universe. It has built its own, true peace: reconciliation between our peoples. Two thirds of French people believe that the people closest to them are the Germans. This reconciliatory approach has spread throughout the Union: between Spain and Portugal, between Hungary and Romania, and between Poland and Lithuania. If the word 'miracle' seems too strong, let's call it a 'first': there has been no precedent in human history and, for the time being, there is no comparable example elsewhere.

An incredible paradox: 75 years later, political construction is still a work in progress, but a utopia has well and truly been built.

Paradox of paradoxes: the beneficiaries are unaware of this miracle. It was the Norwegian Parliament that recognised it first, awarding the EU the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.

But following the events of 24 February 2022 and 7 October 2023, we must realise that, in the west and centre of the continent, we are the spoilt children of peace.

How has that come about? The Treaties played a role, but each institution has also discovered or invented negotiation, decision-making and working methods that constitute a comprehensive set of peacemaking tools.

Can reconciliation be measured?

Can we transfer and export this truly European expertise?

Curiously, the academic world has little interest in it. Working with the Wilfried Martens Centre, we have invited historians, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, diplomats and geostrategists to work on these matters. Contributions and insights from all former Members, not just those in the EPP family, will of course be welcomed and duly quoted. Christian Democrats do not have a monopoly on miracles.

Alain Lamassoure

*LDR, EPP, France
(1989-1991, 1991-2019)*

"If the word 'miracle' seems too strong, let's call it a 'first': there has been no precedent in human history and, for the time being, there is no comparable example elsewhere."



Alain Lamassoure and Proinsias De Rossa during an official visit at the Qalandia checkpoint near the West Bank city of Ramallah, May 2010. © European Union 2010 - EP

THIRD APPEAL

For the third time, I should like to draw the attention of my fellow former MEPs to a grave danger. Our EU institutions were made for peace, but they are increasingly being turned towards war. And there is a risk that they won't be able to turn back.

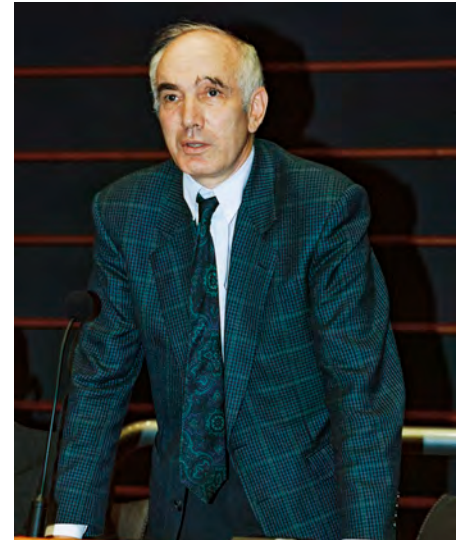
In pointing this out, I am not making any value judgements about the war in Ukraine. I am simply observing that the EU is getting more and more involved in it. And that is not what the EU is for. The wishes of its founding fathers, the Lisbon Constitution and the tradition of the Commission are all a testament to that. It is for each of the Member States to decide what military support they wish to provide, either alone or with others, to the government in Kyiv. The European Union should not get involved. Its assistance should be humanitarian – nothing more.

The negative consequences of the EU's involvement in the war are increasingly apparent. Last summer, when Ursula von der Leyen was forced to sign a one-sided customs deal with Donald Trump, it was in the hope of bringing the US, an ally, back into the fold with regard to providing military backing to Ukraine. That hope was dashed, but the humiliation has remained. The EUR 90 billion that the European Council has just given Kyiv is deepening the rifts between our 27 governments. The war has made them more divided and acrimonious than ever. The Commission has had to resort to unconvincing legal contortions to extend the economic sanctions against Russia, and this has undermined its authority. Increasingly heavy spending on the war will weigh down future EU budgets.

This means that it is the people of the Member States who will pay for all this, and the services they are entitled to will suffer as a result. People in our countries are starting to worry about this and are expressing their discontent by turning en masse towards the most Eurosceptic parties.

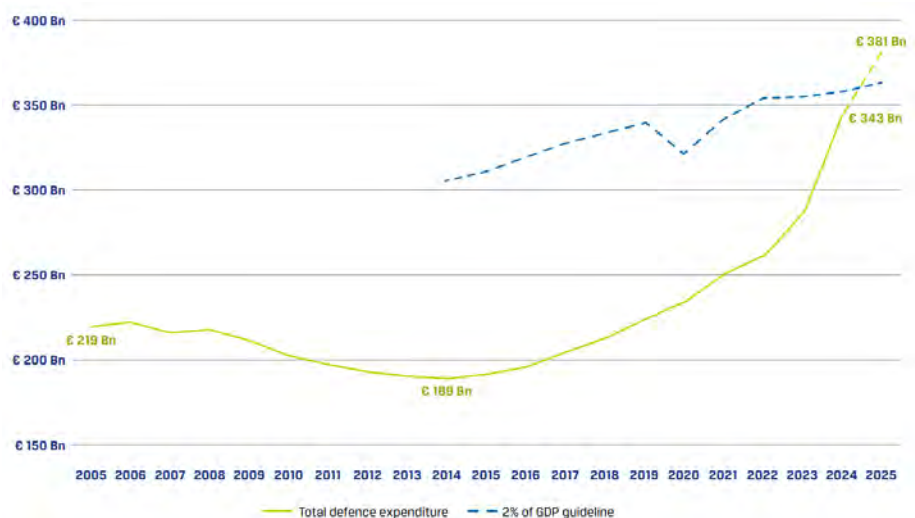
And this is why I predict – not that it takes much – that the EU is heading straight for an existential crisis. It is already getting very late in the day to restore respect for the institutions that we worked so hard to build. But there is no alternative.

Michel Pinton
NA, France (1993-1994)



Michel Pinton during a Plenary session in Brussels, October 1993.
© Communautés Européennes 1993

“ And this is why I predict – not that it takes much – that the EU is heading straight for an existential crisis. It is already getting very late in the day to restore respect for the institutions that we worked so hard to build. But there is no alternative.”



Total Defence Expenditure by the 27 Member States vs the previous 2% of GDP NATO Guideline © European Defence Agency, 2025

FMA ACTIVITIES



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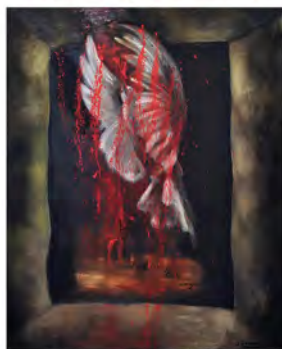
Peace and War

by **Enrique Barón Crespo**, published by RBA Libros

Enrique Barón Crespo

PAZ Y GUERRA

De la URSS a la Magna Rusia. Notas de viajes



RBA

The recently published 'Peace and War' is Enrique Barón Crespo's account of his very active and multi-faceted career, which spanned the realms of government, politics, social affairs and culture.

Inspired by Tolstoy's work, the author indicates peace as the guiding principle of his actions, referring to a significant historical period for Europe and the world, presenting an exceptional reportage on the many meetings that took place in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), now aspiring to greater Russia.

The founding father of the Spanish Constitution takes the reader through his institutional trips and political missions, describing with great care the places, conferences, meetings and situations he was involved in as a Spanish Government minister, MEP and President of the European Parliament.

A particular highlight is Mr Barón Crespo's analysis of the Cold War, which he believes prompted young people in Spain to join the Communist Party because they

viewed this as the most effective and revolutionary course of action.

The description of the meeting in the Kremlin with Heydar Aliyev, right-hand man of Yuri Andropov, also from the KGB school, is extraordinary. It took place during his first trip to the USSR, in 1983, as Minister of Transport, Tourism and Communications to conclude a trade agreement opening up Spanish land transport to Spain and vice versa, opening Spanish ports to the Soviet merchant fleet.

The deal's strategic importance made Mr Barón Crespo understand just how strong Russia's ongoing ambition is to overcome its overpowering sense of claustrophobia and become a naval power by gaining access to all five seas.

His testimony of the moment when he was given the news of the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall while he was on an official visit to Rome, a guest of the Italian Government, in his capacity as President of the European Parliament, is picturesque. And, consequently, the invitation extended to the then President of the European Council, François Mitterrand, and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to address the meeting together in Strasbourg. Indeed, on November 22, 1989, an unprecedented, historic debate took place, which represented Franco-German reconciliation and laid the foundations for the transition from the European Community to the European Union.

He then received in Parliament the Georgian Edvard Shevardnadze, Mikhail Gorbachev's Foreign Minister, and later Boris Yeltsin, who, as Chairman of the Supreme

Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, was in sharp opposition to Gorbachev. Visits by emerging leaders followed, including Prime Minister Mazowiecki of Poland, President Havel of Czechoslovakia, and President Landsberg of Lithuania.

And he was especially struck by the concern expressed by Ukrainian Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma over the existence on his soil of a huge number of nuclear warheads controlled exclusively by Moscow.

His description of the meeting in the Kremlin with Gorbachev is delightful - he calls him "a cordial man, in stark contrast to the hieratic characters I had known."

Following the implosion of Yugoslavia, the author recounts his commitment as Chairman of the EP Foreign Affairs Committee to the frustrating task of trying to stop the war in the Balkans.

Finally, the essay's statement regarding the "attempt to return to a Europe of states as an alliance, with Putin's delusional claim to emulate Tsar Alexander I at the Congress of Vienna in 1814, with Russia invading Ukraine as the continental hegemonic power," is thought-provoking. This means that much work remains to be done to achieve the peace the powers of the time sought to secure. In this context, the book's introduction is particularly significant: "Building peace is a weaver's work; it requires willpower, skill, and perseverance."

Monica Baldi

EPP, Italy (1994-1999)

FMA Vice-President

FMA END OF YEAR EVENTS

HOW CAN PARLIAMENTS ACT AS PLATFORMS FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION SERVING THE COMMON GOOD?

The Former Members Association concluded 2025 with a series of events at the European Parliament in Brussels. Across all events, a common thread emerged: Parliamentary diplomacy.

Unlike traditional diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy directly involves elected representatives who seek to contribute to international relations, promote bilateral and multilateral agreements, and represent the interests of their citizens. Members of parliaments, and particularly of the European Parliament, play a key role in fostering interinstitutional dialogue and strengthening multilateralism, while advocating for peace, human rights, climate action, and international cooperation. Their closeness to citizens across Member States also allows them to bring a plural and diverse perspective that enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU's external action.

From this standpoint, it is also important to highlight the continued role that former Members of the European Parliament can play in parliamentary diplomacy after leaving office. The experience gained during their mandates, the networks they have built, and their deep understanding of the EU's internal functioning give them a privileged perspective and a sustained capacity to contribute to international affairs. They can act as mediators, advisers, or facilitators in dialogue and conflict-resolution processes, benefiting from their ability to build consensus across different political sensitivities and Member States. As a result, they can continue to contribute meaningfully to strengthening the EU's role in shaping a more just, peaceful, and cooperative international order.



Pat Cox, Former EP and FMA President, during his speech at the FMA Annual Dinner 2025.



From left: Arianna Podestà, Guido Podestà, Britta Thomsen, Jean-Pierre Audy, Monica Baldi, Deputy Ambassador Serhii Tereshko, Elisabetta Fonck, Werner Schmitt, President Klaus Hänsch, President Hans-Gert Pöttering, President Pat Cox, Teresa Riera.

"it is also important to highlight the continued role that former Members of the European Parliament can play (...) [contributing] to strengthening the EU's role in shaping a more just, peaceful, and cooperative international order."

Our speakers illustrated this powerfully, drawing on their institutional and personal experiences to show how parliamentary action can respond to today's geopolitical challenges.

We began on 9 December with the FMA's Annual Cocktail Reception and Dinner. European Parliament Vice-President Christel Schaldemose opened the evening, followed by an address from Serhiy Tereshko, Deputy Head of the Mission of Ukraine to the EU, whose words

reminded us of the very real human and political stakes underlying our discussions. The highlight of the night was a keynote address by Pat Cox, former EP and FMA President, who spoke with clarity and urgency about Europe's responsibilities towards Ukraine. President Cox stated: "Thousands have suffered injury and death to preserve Ukraine's democracy. It does not honour their memory to fail to prepare that democracy for the predictable assault aiming to achieve through the ballot box what eleven years of war have failed to deliver on the battlefield". Werner Schmitt, President of the Ukrainian Culture Network, added a deeply human dimension to the discussion, highlighting how arts and culture in Ukraine have become a backbone of resilience, identity and international recognition in the face of oppression.

On 10 December, we turned our attention to democratic memory and institutional evolution with the Librorum event presenting the book "Ten Elections: A History of the European Parliament at the Ballot Box (1979–2024)". Introduced by Martí Grau, Director of the Jean Monnet House, the discussion brought together former MEPs, and FMA colleagues, that contributed to the book: Enrique Barón Crespo (former EP and FMA President), Richard Corbett, Danuta Hübner, and Domènec Ruiz Devesa. Their reflections, grounded in personal experience, traced how successive elections have shaped the Parliament's legitimacy, authority and capacity to act, reminding us how far the institution has come and how central democratic participation remains to its future. The event was moderated by FMA Vice-President Monica Baldi, who also delivered the closing remarks of the event.



Librorum event, December 2025. From left: Martí Grau, Monica Baldi, Elisabetta Fonck, President Klaus Hänsch, Danuta Hübner, Richard Corbett, Domènec Ruiz Devesa.

These reflections flowed into our Annual Seminar on "The Role of EU Institutions and Parliamentary Diplomacy in a Changing World", which I had the pleasure to moderate. Ana Palacio, former MEP and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, warned that Europe is entering a decade that will test it in unprecedented ways. Ms Palacio underlined the indispensable role of the European Parliament, calling on it to address the Union's vulnerabilities, exercise restraint in moments of escalation, maintain internal coherence and act with strategic seriousness.

Other speakers reinforced this sense of responsibility. Sabine Verheyen, First Vice-President of the EP, spoke of the need to mobilise all available resources in the fight for peace, freedom, prosperity and diversity. Georgi Pirinski, former MEP and former Chairman of the National Assembly and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, reflected on the Parliament's unique and well-established network for parliamentary diplomacy, stressing the importance of renewing its mission to integrate

democratic values, human rights and modern security guarantees. Stefan Dobrev, Chair of the EIT Governing Board, reminded us that "In today's geopolitical landscape, parliamentary action must help ensure that Europe's knowledge becomes innovation, because prosperity and values depend on it."

This intense and rewarding programme concluded with a convivial lunch, offering an opportunity to strengthen the sense of community that defines the FMA. These events reaffirmed why our association matters. Rooted in experience and memory, yet firmly focused on the future, the FMA remains committed to strengthening parliamentary democracy.

In 2026, the year in which the FMA celebrates its 25th anniversary, we reaffirm once again our Commitment for Europe.

Teresa Riera
S&D, Spain (2004-2014)
FMA Honorary Secretary

EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

MAIN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

UNIVERSITY OF PORTO, 6 DECEMBER 2025 (ONLINE)

We live in a time of global change. We know that “nothing is permanent except change”, but nowadays the change is faster than ever. The substantial changes are reflected in our major challenges.

Security challenges are highlighted by Russia’s criminal invasion of Ukraine. Russia is supported by North Korea, Iran and China, while Ukraine is supported by more than 50 democratic countries. It means it is a war between autocratic and democratic regimes and our EU’s future will depend on the result of this war and the ability to protect the freedom of Europe.

The revolution of information brings floods of information pushing us to distinguish what is important and what is false. Data will play a crucial role in the economy similar to what electricity played in the 19th century. The use of Artificial Intelligence will also have a significant impact on our development.

Environmental-energy transition is pushed by climate change with leading European political positions and significant changes to technologies and energy sources. We have already broken the barrier as we produce more electricity from renewables than from fossil fuels.

EU Energy Security refers to the European Union’s ability to ensure a stable, affordable, and sustainable supply of energy, while minimising dependence on external or unstable suppliers. Energy prices in the EU are higher than in the US and in Asia, and therefore, there is a strong need for common action. Despite the long term Euromena strategy for energy diversification, only Russian aggression pushed EU to act.

Fortunately, the importation of fossil fuels from Russia declined dramatically with the aim to finally stop financing Russian terrorism and to phase it out by 2027, hopefully even sooner.

The role of nuclear energy is changing not only in terms of growing acceptance, but also in terms of future use of smaller nuclear reactors. The EU’s energy security has significantly improved, especially since 2022, through a strategy of diversifying supply from external sources, accelerating renewable energy, and reducing overall demand. A very positive fact is the growing public support for environmental-energy transition.

EU competitiveness is becoming a more important topic on the European table. It refers to the European Union’s ability to ensure sustained economic growth, innovation, productivity, and prosperity in a global context. The success of EU competitiveness is a mixed picture: recent progress includes record employment and renewable energy use, but growth remains a concern, particularly in innovation and digital technologies compared to our competitors.

While the EU has a strong Single Market and established trade relationships, it faces challenges in closing the innovation gap, reducing administrative burdens, ensuring energy price stability, and finally the completion of the Single Market.

EU Enlargement Policy is one of the EU’s most powerful tools. Our historical experience shows major positive experience based on enlarging prosperity, strengthened democracy and ensured stability across the Union, which became a stronger geopolitical player. The EU should continue with enlargement based on sharing the same values and meeting all criteria.

The world is changing faster than ever and we have to be more flexible. The answer is our European cooperation and we will emerge stronger from all crises. If we focus more on economy and competitiveness, we can simplify and improve the life for our citizens.

Ivan Štefanec
EPP, Slovakia (2014-2024)



Ivan Štefanec discussing with students at the University of Porto.

EUROPEAN DIGITAL REGULATION: IN SEARCH OF DIGITAL HUMANISM

SETSUNAN UNIVERSITY, 13 DECEMBER 2025 (ONLINE)

Last 13 December, I gave an online address to Setsunan University students on European digital regulation. I intended to make a whole comprehensive overview from the beginning of former terms to now, identifying goals, addressing achievements and envisaging next future (plus a reflection on the EU role in the world).

During the past legislative term, it became increasingly clear that Europe faced a decisive moment in its digital development. The digital transformation was no longer a sectoral issue but a structural one, affecting productivity, public services, democratic life, and Europe's position in the world.

Among the strategic priorities was the construction of a comprehensive regulatory framework to steer digitalisation in line with European principles and values.

A fundamental political choice shaped this framework: to build a true European Digital Single Market through directly applicable Regulations, leaving limited discretion to Member States. The objective was clear - identical rights and obligations for citizens and operators across the Union, and

uniform rules for all companies seeking to operate in the EU, regardless of where they are established.

The resulting digital regulatory package is unprecedented. The Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act, ended decades of internet deregulation by imposing transparency, accountability, and proportional obligations on digital platforms, with stricter rules for dominant gatekeepers. The Data Act and Data Governance Act aim to unlock Europe's non-personal data economy, rebalance power in data sharing, and support industrial digitalisation while protecting users, trade secrets, and public interests. Complementary instruments - such as the European Health Data Space, the Cyber Resilience Act, and the European Chips Act - strengthen security, trust, and strategic autonomy.

At the centre of this architecture stands the Artificial Intelligence Act, the most ambitious regulatory effort the Union has ever undertaken in the digital field. The AI Act establishes harmonised rules based on risk, prohibiting practices incompatible with our democratic values, imposing strict requirements

on high-risk uses, and introducing specific transparency and systemic-risk obligations for general-purpose and generative AI.

Ultimately, Europe's digital strategy reflects a clear conviction: technology must serve human dignity, democracy, and justice. If governed by principles, innovation can reinforce freedom - and with it, the European project itself.

After my presentation, many students asked for the floor. It is curious (but not surprising to me) how in the face of cultural distance, the essential dilemmas posed to me were exactly the same as those posed to open and democratic societies:

- How to make innovation and technological progress compatible with the defense of fundamental rights and collective values.

- Concern about the almighty power of large tech multinationals and their influence on regulators.

- How to defend the rights of creation/authorship/copyright against its massive use and without authorisation or compensation, in the training of generative AI model.

Iban Garcia del Blanco
S&D, Spain (2019-2024)



Students from Setsunan University attending Iban Garcia del Blanco's presentation.

“It is curious (but not surprising to me) how in the face of cultural distance, the essential dilemmas posed to me were exactly the same as those posed to open and democratic societies”

EP TO CAMPUS PROGRAMME

WHAT DRIVES EU INTEGRATION FORWARD: RESOLVING CRISES, SPILLOVER PROCESSES, OR BOTH?

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY, 15-16 DECEMBER 2025

On 15-16 December 2025, I took part, on behalf of the EP to Campus programme, in a series of events at Leuven University.

On the first morning, I had the pleasure of giving a lecture and leading a debate on “European Crises and the Future of the European Union” with over 100 students doing the Joint Bachelor of European Studies (BAES). This is an interesting new course that involves ten universities across Europe (Leuven, Bologna, Edinburgh, Madrid, Paris-Sorbonne, Krakow, Leiden, Dublin, Zurich and Helsinki) with students taking part of their course in at least two of them, broadening their European experiences and learning from different perspectives.

We delved further into the same theme in the afternoon, in workshops with Professor Kolja Raube and Dr Franziska Petri. Does the EU evolve through its response to crises, or does it evolve through longer term trends and spillover, with one aspect of integration triggering another step?

It is easy to point to examples of both: recent examples of the former include the 2009-11 debt crisis triggering the creation of the European Stability Mechanism, the Covid crisis and the creation of the NGEU economic recovery instrument and the Russian invasion of Ukraine leading to the creation of SAFE. On the other hand, without particular crises, the single market created a need for common rules for that market, such as on consumer protection, fair competition, and environmental standards, and created pressure for a single currency. Having a customs union meant negotiating as a single entity on trade deals with all their political and foreign policy implications.

But some things also happened without being triggered by a crisis or being the result of spillover. ERASMUS and HORIZON spring to mind: they were simply the result of the habit of working together and using the EU framework for new areas where Member States could see the benefits of cooperation.

On the second day, I met researchers from Leuven International and European Studies (LINES) and I had a working lunch with Leuven University professors. These were opportunities to discuss recent and current events and trends with leading academics, many of whom I had previously either met or read their works.

Finally, I helped judge a poster competition - held simultaneously across several universities - in which BAES students were invited to create posters illustrating key episodes in the history of European integration. On subjects as varied as the Schuman Declaration, the Schengen Treaty, the 1995 Enlargement, Brexit, Qatargate, and more, students were asked to produce a poster with visual graphics to illustrate the philosophical, historical, political, legal and theoretical importance of the event. Quite a challenge - but they did brilliantly!

Richard Corbett
S&D, United Kingdom (1996-2020)



Richard Corbett discussing with students at Leuven University.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS INSPIRE IN BOLOGNA

UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA, 15 DECEMBER 2025

The University of Bologna was founded in 1088, making it one of the oldest universities in the world. With over 100 000 students it is also one of the largest in Europe. Since leaving the European Parliament in 2009 I have returned to education, as a visiting professor at Royal Holloway College, one of the constituent colleges of the University of London.

In conjunction with eight other institutions Bologna University organises a Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (BAES) and it was as part of this course that I was invited, to contribute to their pre-Christmas two-day event entitled, 'The EU: current global and international challenges'. The students are from all over the world, but mainly Europe, with the course is taught in English.

My first presentation was on the challenges facing the European Union; both internally and externally. Migration and youth unemployment were two areas I highlighted for the internal challenges, whilst there are four figures who challenge the EU externally; Vladimir Putin, Benjamin Netanyahu, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump.

There was much sympathy for my view that the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine has contributed to the EU's uncertainties. It is still difficult to see an easy or lasting solution, whilst Putin is around. Across Europe there is much solidarity for Palestine and whilst, no-one could condone the vicious Hamas attacks of 7th October 2023, the unprecedented retaliation from Benjamin Netanyahu's forces have all but destroyed Gaza and over 100 000 Palestinian lives.

I responded that it is possible to be a fervent supporter of the state of Israel but a strong opponent of the present Israeli government.

China poses a different sort of challenge to globalisation; a consistently growing economy, but one operating outside many of the accepted standards and practices of the EU, with a great many of the goods and services we take for granted are now dependent on China, in a way they were not, less than a generation ago.

The second session centred around the future relationship between the UK and the EU-post Brexit. I believe the British people were duped or confused by the 2016 referendum. 'Let's take back control' was a successful slogan for Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson and their leave campaign, one to which the pro-Europeans failed to adequately respond.

After many thoughtful questions I helped judge a poster campaign, part of the students' course work to which, in small groups, they had clearly devoted much time and effort.

Professor Carmelo Danisi and his colleagues were the most gracious of hosts; their charm and hospitality being second to none. Bologna is a fascinating city and I wish I could have stayed longer. I remember visiting many years previously with the late Renzo Imbeni MEP, who had been mayor of this great city. Renzo would have been proud of today's students; incredibly well informed, asking intelligent questions and making the whole event a wonderfully enlightening experience.

Robert Evans

PES, United Kingdom (1994-2009)



Students from University of Bologna attending Robert Evans presentation.

SCHUMAN TRAINEESHIP

MISSION TO STRASBOURG: A SCHUMAN TRAINEE'S PERSPECTIVE

As my Schuman traineeship at the European Parliament comes to an end, I had the opportunity to go on a mission to Strasbourg in January 2026 to observe a plenary session firsthand. It was my first time visiting this historic city, and I quickly understood why the European Parliament's official seat is located here, right on the border between France and Germany. Strasbourg feels like a living symbol of European reconciliation and unity, and the city's charm, from its Colombarie houses to the mandatory Alsatian cuisine, from delicious tarte flambée to pretzels with lardons, made the experience even more memorable.

The European Parliament building itself speaks volumes about the values it represents. Its two wings are connected by different types of bridges, literally building bridges, as it were. The colosseum-shaped building and the unfinished roof are clear reminders that the EU is built for dialogue, open to improvement, and never truly "finished." In today's complex geopolitical landscape, this symbolism resonates deeply: Europe's strength lies in its unity, its commitment to democracy, and its readiness to stand up for what is right.

"Experiencing Strasbourg, seeing the plenary in action, and reflecting on what the EU represents, from dialogue to unity, left me with a reinforced commitment for Europe and a clearer perspective on the work that still lies ahead."

During the plenary session, several important topics were on the agenda. The territorial sovereignty of Greenland was discussed, alongside the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Spain and Portugal joining the EU. It was inspiring to witness King Felipe VI of Spain and President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa of Portugal address MEPs, emphasising the transformative power of European integration. As EP President Roberta Metsola noted, "Europe is always a work in progress... together we will keep building a Union ready for the next forty years." Other highlights included discussions on Mercosur and the presentation of Cyprus' priorities for its upcoming presidency of the Council of the EU.

Experiencing Strasbourg and the plenary session reinforced my understanding of how decisions are made at the EU level and reminded me why I value this institution so deeply. On a personal level, as someone with dual Belgian and French citizenship, the EU's work resonates even more, it has brought my two home countries closer together and made cooperation tangible in ways that affect everyday life.

Throughout my Schuman traineeship with the Former Members Association of the European Parliament, I also had the opportunity to contribute to the Association's communication and outreach activities. Working on editorial and digital content for publications such as the FMA Bulletin, and supporting the visibility of initiatives like the "EP to Campus" programme, allowed me to engage with the FMA's broader mission of keeping former Members connected to European public life while promoting dialogue about the European project with universities and younger generations.

Following the Parliament's work during my traineeship, both through communication activities and through initiatives organised by the FMA, gave me a deeper appreciation of the continuity between past and present parliamentary work. The experience of attending the plenary session in Strasbourg therefore felt like a natural extension of this traineeship, connecting the institutional life of the Parliament with the legacy and ongoing engagement of its former Members.

Camille Horemans

FMA Trainee (September 2025 - February 2026)



Camille Horemans with the FMA Management Committee Meeting and FMA Staff.

UPCOMING EVENTS



ACTIVITIES - SAVE THE DATE

25-27
MARCH 2026

FMA Visit to Cyprus

Due to the serious crisis in the Middle East, the visit scheduled for March 25-27 for the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union will be conducted online on the same dates.

1-5
JUNE 2026

FMA 25th Anniversary Exhibition

In the European Parliament (Brussels): from June 1st to 5th, the exhibition will be held at Yehudi Menuhin Mezzanine. The opening ceremony will take place on June 2nd at 16.00, with the EP Choir performance.

2
JUNE 2026

Annual Memorial Service, Cocktail Reception and Dinner Debate

In the European Parliament (Brussels): at 16 opening ceremony in Yehudi Menuhin Space; at 17.45 FMA honours members and former members who passed away in the past year in the Hemicycle; cocktail reception at 18.30, followed by the dinner debate at 19.30.

3
JUNE 2026

Annual General Assembly and Annual Lunch

In the European Parliament (Brussels): from 9 to 13 Annual General Assembly, beginning with a special session dedicated to the 25th FMA Anniversary. This will be followed by the Annual Lunch offered to FMA members.

21-23
OCTOBER 2026

FMA Visit to Ireland

On the occasion of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a FMA Delegation will visit Ireland from October 21st to 23rd. Dates are still to be confirmed.

FMA MEMBERS' NEWS

Josianne Cutajar appointed as a member of the Administrative Board of the EU Agency for Energy Regulators (ACER)

FMA member, Ms Josianne Cutajar, has joined the Administrative Board of the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators. Ms Cutajar was appointed by the European Parliament, following the conclusion of the mandate of Ms Edit Herczog, FMA Board member and outgoing Chair. FMA Board member Paul Rübige also continues to serve on the ACER Administrative Board. The FMA congratulates Ms Cutajar on her appointment and wishes her the best in this new role.



FMA AT WORK

MEMBERS OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Klaus
HÄNSCH



Monica
BALDI



Jean-Pierre
AUDY



Teresa RIERA
MADURELL



Edit
HERCZOG



Michael
HINDLEY



Edward
McMILLAN-
SCOTT



Manuel
PORTO



Godelieve
QUISTHOUDT-
ROWOHL



Paul RÜBIG



Marc ANGEL
*Quaestor
responsible
for relations
with the FMA*



Fabienne
KELLER
*Quaestor
responsible
for relations
with the FMA*

FMA BUREAU

President: **Klaus HÄNSCH**

Vice-President: **Monica BALDI**

Treasurer: **Jean-Pierre AUDY**

Secretary: **Teresa RIERA MADURELL**

LIST OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

FMA Bulletin Editorial Board:

Ms Baldi (Chair), Mr Audy, Mr Porto, Ms Riera Madurell and Mr Rübig.

EP to Campus: Mr Hindley (Chair), Mr Porto and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

Relations with Budgets Committee, DG Finance: Mr Audy and Ms Herczog.

Relations with Belgian administration: Ms Herczog.

Archives: Ms Herczog.

Dinner Debate: Ms Baldi.

Delegates to the Bureau of the European Association of Former Members (FP-AP): Mr Audy and Ms Riera Madurell. If necessary they will be substituted by Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

FMA Communication: Ms Baldi (Chair) and Mr Hindley.

Delegates to the Annual General Assembly, seminars and colloquies of the FP-AP:

Mr Audy, Ms Riera Madurell and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl. Besides the FMA delegates or their substitutes and in agreement with the European Association, other FMA Management Committee Members may participate in the annual seminars or colloquies at their own expense.

Relations with Former Members Associations outside Europe: Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl (Chair), Mr Audy, Ms Baldi and FMA Member with advisory role Isabella De Martini.

Annual seminar and relations with think tanks, policy institutes and foundations: Ms Riera Madurell (Chair), Ms Baldi, Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl and Mr Rübig.

Working Group on Democracy Support and Election Observation: Mr McMillan-Scott (Chair), Mr Hindley and Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl.

Relations with the House of European History: Ms Herczog and Mr Hindley.

Relations with the European University Institute (EUI): Ms Baldi.

FMA Recruitment: Mr Audy, Ms Riera Madurell and FMA Member with advisory role Michel-Ange Scarbonchi

IN MEMORIAM



Annemarie KUHN

☞ 10 December 2025

SOC, PES, Germany (1990-1993, 1993-1999)

She served as a German Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Ms Kuhn represented the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*.



Dumitru Gheorghe Mircea COȘEA

☞ 18 December 2025

ALDE, ITS, NA, Romania (2005-2007, 2007, 2007)

He served as a Romanian Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Coșea represented the *Partidul Național Liberal*.



Christian ROVSING

☞ 22 December 2025

ED, EPP, Denmark (1989-1992, 1992-2009)

He served as a Danish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Rovsing represented the *Det Konservative Folkeparti*.



Antonio NAVARRO

☞ 31 December 2025

ED, EPP, Spain (1986-1989, 1989-1984)

He served as a Spanish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Navarro represented the *Partido Popular* in his last term of office.



Dominique BUCCHINI

☞ 2 January 2026

COM, France (1981-1984)

He served as a French Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Bucchini represented the *Parti communiste français*.

IN MEMORIAM



Robert GOEBBELS

☞ 5 January 2026

PES, SOC, S&D, Luxembourg (1999-2004, 2004-2009, 2009-2014)

He served as a Luxembourgish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Goebbels represented the *Parti ouvrier socialiste luxembourgeois*.



Colette FLESCH

☞ 21 January 2026

LD, LDR, ELDR, Luxembourg (1979-1985, 19890-1990, 1999-2004)

She served as a Luxembourgish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Ms Flesch represented the *Parti démocratique*.



Brian CROWLEY

☞ 23 January 2026

EDA, UFE, UEN, ALDE, ECR, Ireland (1994-1995, 1995-1999, 1999-2009, 2009-2014, 2014-2019)

He served as an Irish Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Crowley represented the *Fianna Fáil Party*.



Philippe MORILLON

☞ 29 January 2026

EPP, ALDE, France (1999-2004, 2004-2009)

He served as a French Member of the European Parliament. At the national level, Mr Morillon represented *Mouvement Démocrat* in his last term of office.

IS THE EU A GLOBAL ACTOR?



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THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A GLOBAL ACTOR?

After several centuries of Europe playing a major role in the world, albeit more economically than politically in the second half of the 20th century (the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union is the most prominent feature), the world will be very different in the 21st century, as new powers emerge. Economically, the days of 'the triad', when the most prominent players were the United States, Europe and Japan, are already far behind us, with enormous growth in some countries, such as China and India, for example.

Taking into account the competition from these and other countries, increasingly in the same sectors, the fears of countries such as the United States and European countries, which have higher wages and a costly social model, are understandable; it could be concluded that protectionism should be the way forward (leaving our political and social model out of the equation), preventing competition for goods from the outside world (that has been the path chosen by President Trump and is the option some European politicians support).

It is not a position that the European Union has taken, however: it has continued (with the exception of CAP protectionism) to be open. It applies low to average level of customs taxes and many products are not taxed at all; and it has advocated its policy of openness in documents that have been published, including the Europe2020 strategy from 2010, and even in documents published in the last couple of years.

It has been stressed that enlarging and deepening the single market is the right path to follow; the Letta Report, "Much more than a market", said as much in 2024. That route is intended to put EU citizens' interests

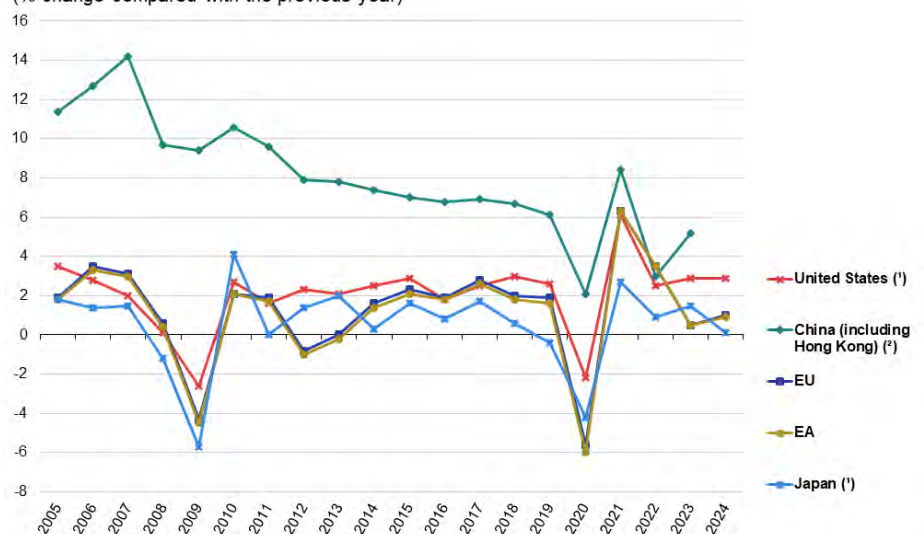
and EU activities first, but it also benefits people and businesses from outside the EU, who are able to move freely within it and follow common technical requirements in an economic area with considerable sway. The euro, the single currency for 20 countries, also makes it much easier for people from outside the space where it is used.

These steps are not possible outside an institutional framework that brings countries together, as is the case for the European Union. Integration spaces are also necessary for financially burdensome or risky initiatives (of which the success of the Airbus project is an excellent example) and to bolster social and territorial cohesion; and in cases of that kind they may offer benefits beyond what we might expect of integration spaces.

The EU's success in that approach, with very positive economic results, is an incentive to open up more markets and to create and deepen integration spaces in other areas of the world, to the benefit of its citizens and its economic activity, but in turn it is also a way of expanding opportunities for the EU's economic activities.

"It has been stressed that enlarging and deepening the single market is the right path to follow (...) That route is intended to put EU citizens' interests and EU activities first, but it also benefits people and businesses from outside the EU."

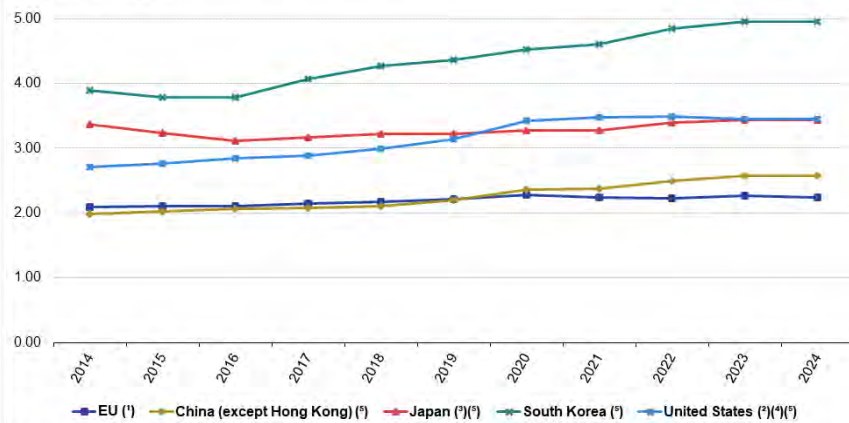
Real GDP rate of change, 2005–24
(% change compared with the previous year)



Note: based on chain linked volumes.
(*) 2024: estimate.
(†) 2024: not available.
Source: Eurostat (online data codes: naida_10_gdp and nama_10_gdp)

Gross domestic expenditure on R&D, 2014-2024

(%, relative to GDP)



(¹) 2014 to 2024 data: estimates

(²) excludes most or all capital expenditure, definition differs: 2014-2023

(³) 2018: break in series

(⁴) 2015, 2016, 2021 and 2023: break in series

(⁵) 2023 data

Source: Eurostat (online data code: rd_e_gerdot) and OECD database

eurostat

“The European Union is facing some tough challenges. But it is in a position to overcome them, as a major global actor, in its own interest and in the interest of the whole world.”

Gross domestic expenditure on R&D, 2014-2024. © Eurostat

As we go into the second quarter of the 21st century, however, we have two major challenges to address.

One is the challenge of research and technological innovation. In the Lisbon Strategy, from 2000, an ambition was set for the European Union ‘to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, with respect for the environment’.

In 2010, the Europe 2020 strategy drew attention to the need for ‘smart growth’, an ‘economy based on knowledge and innovation’. That is the only way to compete with countries that have lower wages, are capital rich and are located close to strong markets.

But there is a lot more to be done here. The Draghi Report, “The future of European Competitiveness”, draws attention to how Europe has fallen behind the United States and China on innovation.

The recent global landscape, with major powers’ territorial ambitions, has demonstrated the need to beef up Europe’s political weight (especially in the field of defence); it is an area in which the European Union has to increasingly rely on itself, as Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Council President António Costa pointed out at the European Parliament sitting in Strasbourg on 21 January 2026.

The European Union is facing some tough challenges. But it is in a position to overcome them, as a major global actor, in its own interest and in the interest of the whole world.

Manuel Porto

ELDR/EPP, Portugal

(1994-1996 / 1996-1999)

Professor of Law at the University of Coimbra



Manuel Porto during a plenary session at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. © Communautés Européennes 1998 - Source : PE

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR U.S. AND EUROPEAN UNION RELATIONSHIP: A VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

The European Union has never been more important. If there was ever any doubt, the 2026 Davos World Economic Forum and events following made that more evident than ever. This year's event was one of the highest-level gatherings in its 56-year history, bringing together nearly 3,000 leaders from across the globe. While the focus was "A Spirit of Dialogue", it was probably best defined by two opposing speeches which defined the challenges the free world faces.

President Trump crudely dismissed the post-WWII order, erroneously called into question the sovereignty of Greenland and dismissed the importance of our NATO alliance. He confused Greenland with Iceland, had previously threatened more tariffs, and made his tired argument why the U.S. should own Greenland. He did so without the support of the American people or Congress, causing chaos overseas, as well as a huge drop in U.S. markets in the lead up to his speech - demonstrating that isolationism and bullying

our allies isn't good for peace or prosperity at home or abroad.

Prior to his arrival, Canadian Prime Minister Carney had spoken eloquently with a serious speech that noted a "rupture" in the world order and warning that a US-led rules-based international order is no longer a reality. He called for greater cooperation and partnerships among middle powers working together to resist economic bullying and still work within the NATO values-based framework. This was wise and provided a strong framework for the EU to build on its strengths. Already Canada and EU countries have been building their defense capabilities and making new trade deals and he stressed the "value of our strength". Carney received a standing ovation.

In the end, weeks of President Trump's bluster ended with a whimper at Davos in his meandering speech that backed off his threats to Greenland and essentially settled for further (face saving) discussions.

EU leaders, Prime Minister Carney, and US leaders who argued to stand by our allies and NATO principles, won the day. And trade deals that followed by the EU and Canada that didn't involve the U.S. got lots of attention in the U.S. press where many promised trade deals are still yet to come. A stronger and united EU and Canada will be important in maintaining peace and prosperity in the world in these challenging times. We have already seen that in the strong support for Ukraine and more countries joining NATO in recent years.

If this new force of middle powers unites to fill the vacuum that increased (but hopefully temporary) U.S. isolationism is leaving open - this could be the European Union's greatest hour to build on their strengths as Prime Minister Carney detailed. Certainly there are many challenges, whether on Ukraine, trade or elsewhere. And the U.S. still has many political differences on issues with the EU and other allies.



"A stronger and united EU and Canada will be important in maintaining peace and prosperity in the world in these challenging times. We have already seen that in the strong support for Ukraine and more countries joining NATO in recent years."

Address by Donald J. Trump at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026.
© World Economic Forum

Yet, most Americans still recognise that the European Union and Canada have long been our most steadfast and dependable partners through military, trade, and diplomatic cooperation and we have no interest in a rupture. We want to move together as allies and deal with the real threats that face democracies in the world (notably Putin, and terrorism, for example).

For 80 years, the alliance between Europe and the United States has guaranteed peace and prosperity for millions of people across the globe. We know that the only time NATO's Article 5 has ever been invoked, was in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and European troops served side-by-side with their American brothers-in-arms. President Trump's insults on this front wound us, as well as our European allies.

Although the Trump Administration and the President himself have often carelessly tested these bonds that have served us all well, these bonds are still recognised by most Americans and Congress. As a nation we continue to be dedicated to maintaining and strengthening our relations with our EU partners. While Administrations in the US come and go, Congress – both current and former Members – should be viewed by our European partners as a voice – although not as loud as it should be at times – but one that does take a longer-term view.

In a time when there is little bipartisanship on Capitol Hill, preserving the US-EU relationship is a rare example of Democrats and Republicans coming together. It was our current Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, who, after all, co-authored and passed bipartisan legislation in 2023 with Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia to prevent any U.S. President

from leaving NATO without Senate approval or an Act of Congress.

When the legislation passed, Senator Kaine noted that it sent a strong message “to authoritarians around the world that the free world remains united.” Most current Senators have made it clear that a U.S. takeover of Greenland is absolutely not a priority and will not be pursued. We respect the US-Denmark and the US-EU alliance. Influential Republican Members of Congress, for example Senate Armed Services Committee Chair Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi), Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Senate Armed Services Committee member Senator Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) have all expressed their disapproval of the current Administration's saber-rattling. Senator Thom Tillis, who serves on the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, called the President's remarks “a drama we don't need”. Many of these Members of Congress made a point to travel to Denmark and Greenland to share their message of US support for our allies in person.

Let us make sure that despite what challenges come, we will continue to find those who want to preserve and promote our continued strategic partnerships based on our strengths and values going forward. Europe and our allies will always have stalwart partners in the United States and the U.S. Congress, committed to productive and respectful dialogue. In a dangerous world, America standing alone is not a strength; we are all safer with stronger allies.

Barbara Comstock

President of the US Association of Former Members of Congress



Barbara Comstock, President of the US Association of Former Members of Congress.

“Europe and our allies will always have stalwart partners in the United States and the U.S. Congress, committed to productive and respectful dialogue. In a dangerous world, America standing alone is not a strength; we are all safer with stronger allies.”

THE IMPERATIVES OF SELF-RELIANCE

Emerging from the coal and steel sector, the EU today performs a wide range of functions, including in the security and foreign policy arena. In its development, every new challenge was confronted by the EU with the deepening of intra-community relations, as every major treaty indicates. The EU is a significant economic entity in the world today, representing approximately 13-15% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about 15-16 % of global trade in goods and services. The EU is a foremost trade partner for most countries, and a development donor, especially with its GSP+ scheme and with programmes to involve NGOs, education and health sectors. It has Free Trade Agreements with many regions, like Mercosur and with important countries like India, which has brought together roughly a quarter of global GDP.

Along with its members, the EU exercises substantial influence on the functioning of global financial institutions like the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund. Even when other powers have stepped back, the EU continues to be the major humanitarian aid provider with its share of about 36% of the global total. In the trade and economic sphere, undoubtedly, the EU is a major global player with a substantial influence on economic and developmental processes in the world and in effecting a rule-based trading system.

The EU is the undisputed leader in terms of setting the global agenda on climate action and global climate financing to support climate-related projects in developing countries. The Global Gateway strategy to boost infrastructural projects in the needy regions has made many look up to the EU for a better future.

The projects, such as the multi-modal 'India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor' (IMEC), launched with the support of the EU and perceived as an alternative to debt-trapped China's Belt and Road Initiative, have made the EU a prime mover in projects of global significance. The EU norms and regulations on data protection, AI, environmental and health standards are emulated by the world. On all these, the EU is not only a trend setter but also a guiding force. Besides, aligned with trade policies and diplomatic dialogues, the EU also contributes significantly to the promotion of democracy, human rights and Sustainable Development Goals, enhancing its global role as a value-based, normative actor. Undoubtedly, the image and standing of the EU as a global actor are on the rise.



Indian Prime Minister, Mr Modi, welcoming Presidents Costa and von der Leyen. © European Union



Professor Jayaraj Amin with Michael Hindley, FMA Board member, at an EP to Campus event at Mangalore University in 2019.

“The EU is a global actor on its own strength, though not in terms attributed to dominant powers like China and the US, but in terms of power to shape the outcome by reliance on effective and legitimate sanctions, in particular economic, in case of non-compliance.”

However, when it comes to security aspects, the role of the EU is contested depending upon who assesses it and on what grounds. The EU historically was painted as “an economic giant but a political dwarf.” But considering the general attributes of a global actor requiring the ability to act with impact felt by others, today the EU qualifies to be a global actor in the strategic sphere too. The EU today is a major actor with its own Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) and Command Structure, and European Defence Industrial Strategy framework. It is a major actor in conflict resolution, be it in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa or elsewhere. However, it is not a great power with unequivocal military might, displaying hard power capability in the traditional/ realist sense, as the U.S. or China is referred to, but it is an actor to reckon with, wielding significant capability to influence the course of events in conflict situations often coupled with credible personnel deployment or with its typical soft power approach and power of sanctions.

Nonetheless, the internal dissensions and reliance on the U.S. defence umbrella for long have prevented the EU from pursuing strategic autonomy and becoming a credible global security player with its own fighting force. Its outsourcing of security to the U.S., energy resources to Russia and manufacturing to China has come back to hound it with the U.S. uncertainties on security provision, Russian coercion on gas and Chinese pressures on supply chains. The EU is learning the hard way - be it from the actions of the U.S. President, Donald Trump or the Ukraine crisis - the imperatives of self-reliance, particularly in the security domain and the need for internal unity. Nonetheless, this does not detract the worth of the EU as a prominent global player or its efforts towards a rule-based order and liberal values.

The EU is a global actor on its own strength, though not in terms attributed to dominant powers like China and the U.S., but in terms of power to shape the outcome by reliance on effective and legitimate sanctions, in particular economic, in case of non-compliance. Its present drive for global networking away from the U.S. and China for self-reliance, and alignment with like-minded countries like India, will add to the confidence level and strategic autonomy in the true sense, enabling the EU to exercise its rightful place in the world. If it is coupled with gradual building up, rather than the use, of military strength, the EU's role as a major global power is incontrovertible.

Prof. Jayaraj Amin
*Department of Political Science,
 Mangalore University*

“The EU is learning the hard way - be it from the actions of the US President, Donald Trump or the Ukraine crisis - the imperatives of self-reliance, particularly in the security domain and the need for internal unity.”

EUROPE IS IN URGENT NEED OF NEW TRADE ROUTES

If Donald Trump's first presidency left us dumbfounded, the start of his second is terrifying – because of his domestic policy decrees and his global tariffs in equal measure. His decisions reflect a mindset that denies universalism and rationality, and a strategy of dominating the world through economic might and fear, rather than reason and law.

He perfectly embodies the famous saying 'when we know where he's going, we no longer know where he is, and vice versa; if we understand what he wants, we don't know what he will do, and when we understand what he's doing, we wonder where he's going.'

He has kickstarted the 'de-Americanisation' of the world and that should be welcomed, if only we knew where it would lead.

As the writer Georges Van Heuven pointed out, while the name 'Trump' means 'money' in Chinese and 'to triumph' in German, it meant 'cunning' in old French and 'trumpets' in the Bible! Quite the spectrum..

But rather than wringing our hands, should we not actually be pleased?

Brutal as they may be, are the tariff crisis and military retreat of the United States not a welcome development for Europe? Do they not open up a new opportunity for our continent?

We used to have the guarantee of a US nuclear umbrella, the price of which was a dollarised market.

We have had to put up with this military, economic, cultural, technological and digital subjugation since 1945, but is it not now coming to an end as the US grapples with major budget and economic challenges and social and societal unrest?

This is a major upheaval for Europeans, but it must at last be a catalyst for action and give us new momentum.

Why not follow the example of China and the new silk roads created by Xi Jinping in 2013, which are actually six corridors linking it to Russia, Türkiye, Pakistan, Africa and Europe?

In the maritime sector alone, the European Union has felt the impact of this, with China holding majority stakes in the ports of Piraeus in Greece, Antwerp in Belgium, Fos and Le Havre in France, Valencia in Spain and Hamburg in Germany. The latter now accounts for 40 % of traffic between Europe and Asia, and 9 of the world's 20 largest container sites are Chinese...

Not to mention the automotive, pharmaceutical and steel sectors!

Faced with 'Trumpian protectionism' and the lethal US-Chinese pincer, is it not time for Europe to expand its areas of influence?

Beyond Canada, four areas could benefit from European products and investment: India, South America (hence the importance of the Mercosur agreement), the Middle East and Africa – trade regions with which we have long-standing ties.

Take Africa, for example: it is home to 1.2 billion people, right on Europe's doorstep.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), set up in January 2021, aims to eliminate 90 % of the duties on goods and services traded between African countries by 2036.

So why is the European Union holding back, when it should be driving this process forward and creating a free trade area covering both continents?

Jean-Louis Guigou¹ of the Africa-Mediterranean-Europe Foundation, based on the example of the US and Asian 'vertical' axes (one economic unit on the same continent), had anticipated this development.

The European Union-African Union axis is the first challenge that needs to be addressed, given that the Mediterranean and Africa are natural trading spaces. This is all the more vital as the Americans have been absent from Africa – except for their military – since Bill Clinton was in power, and Trump has just done away with their sole presence by dismantling USAID² (USD 40 billion in 2024).

We need a co-production agreement, a charter of values, an intercontinental bank providing investment security and capital mobility, a coordinating body (African-European commission) representing the 55 African states and the 24 Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP³), linked through an agreement with the European Union under the European Development Fund (EDF), and the 27 EU Member States, i.e. 106 of the 193 members of the UN.

1 Jean-Louis Guigou, former Director of Datar

2 USAID, United States Agency for International Development

3 ACP, African, Caribbean and Pacific association agreements with the European Union, known as the Cotonou agreement since 2000

The priority topics to be addressed in this European-African area would include food security, energy transition, health, education, migration, infrastructure, defence and digital technologies.

In 2050, 2.4 billion people in Africa will have to be fed, housed and clothed. In addition to its extensive mining and agricultural resources, that continent will have exceptional human assets and will be home to 70% of the planet's 18 to 25-year-olds. In short, by 2050 there will be more young people in Africa than in the rest of the world combined.

Is it not time for Europe to view Africa as a future rather than a migratory millstone?

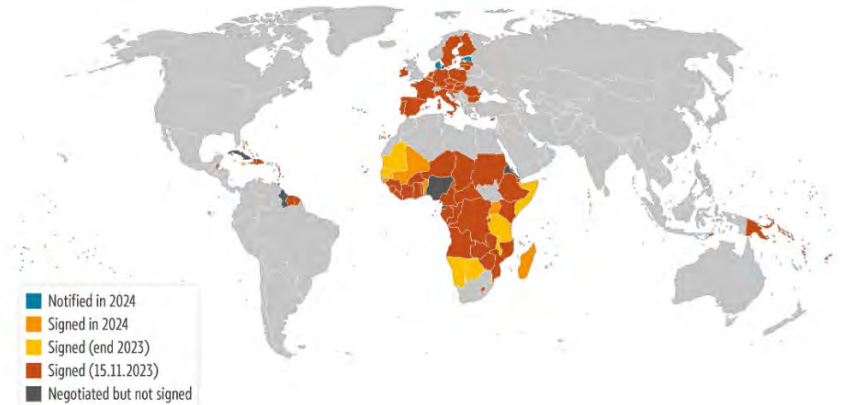
Against the backdrop of the 'American tango' and Beijing's need to find new markets for its products, targeting the European market in particular, Europe must create new 'mutually beneficial' trading spaces for the various parties involved.

It's now up to the Commission and Parliament to tackle this sensitive issue.

Let's be bold and inventive, at long last! The time has come.

Michel Scarbonchi

*ERA, PES, GUE/NGL, France
(1997-1999, 2001-2002, 2002-2004)*



Data source: [Council](#), 2024; Map by Samy Chahri. Countries that are neither in the EU nor OACPS are shown in grey (see [online interactive version](#)).

Signatories of the Samoa Agreement (as of 13 May 2024) © European Union, 2014-2025.

“In 2050, 2.4 billion people in Africa will have to be fed, housed and clothed. (...) by 2050 there will be more young people in Africa than in the rest of the world combined.

Is it not time for Europe to view Africa as a future rather than a migratory millstone?”



*Michel Scarbonchi meets Jean CODO, expert in Cargo Tracking Note.
© Communautés Européennes 2003*

THE EU FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Is the EU a global player?

Yes, the EU is indeed a global player. But to what extent is the EU able to make an impact, and on what issues?

In foreign and security policy, the EU is weak and fragmented.

EU leaders have struggled to get involved in the exploratory talks for peace in Ukraine initiated and conducted between the US and Russia, and have therefore also struggled to set about building a new European security system.

Before the start of the war, NATO member states spent weeks negotiating common positions.

Within NATO, the United States and Europe worked closely together.

I don't know about the EU's discussions.

President Macron of France addressed the European Parliament in January 2022. 'In the coming weeks, we must draw up a European proposal for a new security system. We Europeans must do this before we discuss the matter with our NATO allies. After that, we will start negotiating with Russia.'

What has happened since that speech?

The big picture of Europe's security system is being redrawn, but not by the leaders of the EU. The EU and Ukraine have found it extremely difficult to bring their own ideas and views to the negotiating table. The discussions are based on proposals made by Russia and Trump. The EU is largely a bystander.

In Davos early this year, Zelenskyy noted that: 'Europe loves talking about the future, but avoids taking action today.' His message could not have been clearer. During my 15 years as an MEP (2004-2019), I had the opportunity to hear many magnificent speeches at the European Parliament.

We are living in an era of power politics. In January, President Trump announced that international laws would not stand in his way, and that the only thing stopping him was his own morality. The rules-based global order has been pushed aside.

The EU's role in the world of power politics is weak. The EU is unable to defend its Member States, or Europe. Eighty per cent of NATO's defence funding comes from non-EU countries. Türkiye, the UK, the US and Canada are not EU Member States.

Twenty-eight NATO member states are European countries. Some 600 million people live in European NATO member countries, and 450 million people live in EU Member States. NATO includes more of Europe than the EU does.

So when European leaders talk about European sovereignty, we ought to be asking what they are talking about – Europe or the EU?

EU leaders have held many summits on Ukraine. The speeches have been impressive and have had an impact. Support to Ukraine has increased over the months and years, and that must be acknowledged.

European countries and the EU institutions have supported Ukraine with humanitarian and financial assistance to the tune of EUR 70 billion. Military support has reached EUR 62 billion.

The US has provided EUR 64 billion in military support, but the total amount of support provided by the US is less than Europe's contribution.

Eleven European countries have given more than the US has when we look at the aid as a proportion of each country's GDP.

Top of the list are Estonia, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Sweden, Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Croatia and the US.

The support provided by EU Member States varies dramatically. Estonia has given 2.20% of GDP, Germany 0.44% and France 0.18%. US support looks impressive in dollars and euros, but accounts for just 0.53% of the country's GDP. Finland, despite being a small country with big debts, has contributed 0.98% of GDP.

Why am I writing so much about aid and backing for Ukraine? Ukraine is part of Europe and a future EU Member State.



Anneli Jäätteenmäki chairing the EP plenary in October 2015. © European Union 2015 - source : EP

The future of Ukraine is part of the future, strength or weakness of the EU.

The EU cannot play a major role on the global stage if it is not a strong and reliable player in Europe.

Although the EU adopts tough stances on human rights policy, its efforts in doing so cannot be said to be coherent.

And this undermines its credibility.

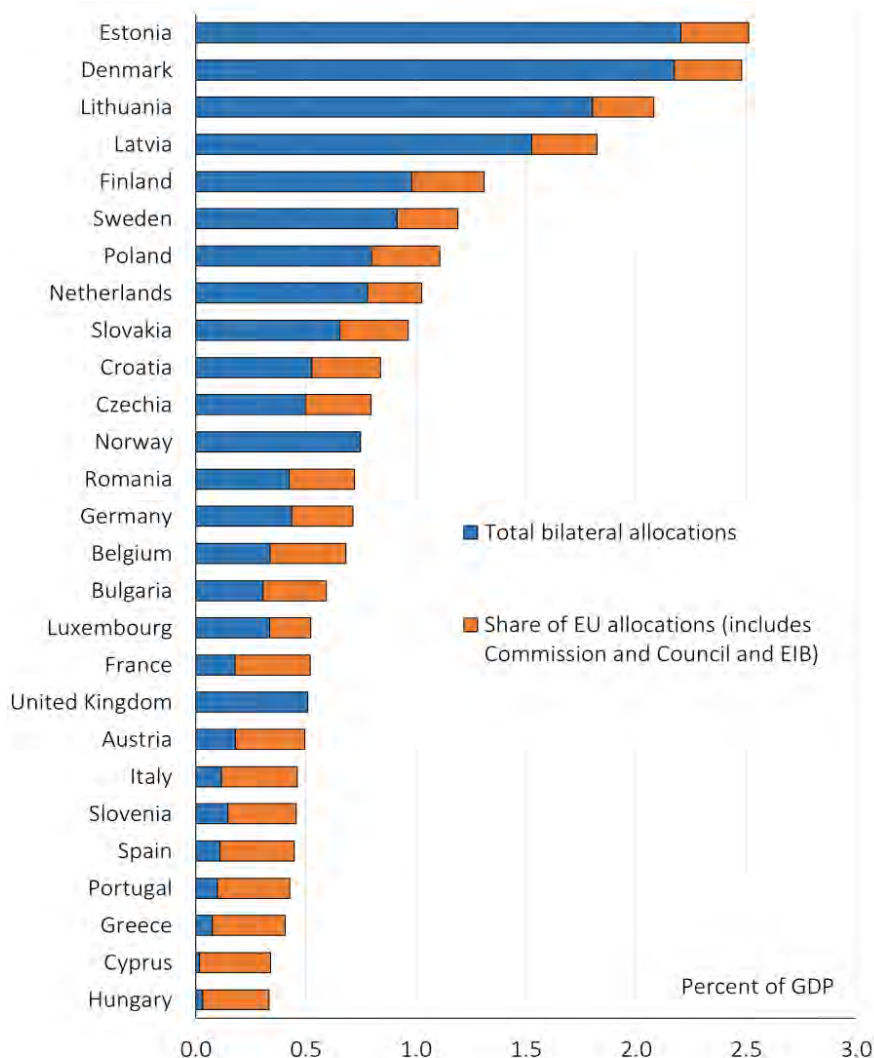
What about economic and trade policy? If it is to remain relevant, Europe must be able to achieve stronger economic growth. Last year, economic growth in the US was 2.5%. In China it was 5% and India 6.5%. Europe has a lot of catching up to do. There is still a long way to go before the EU becomes the most competitive region in the world.

The trade agreement concluded with India in January and the now delayed Mercosur Agreement are major successes. The negotiations were long and difficult. EU Member States have had and still have different interests when it comes to trade policy, but in the end a result was achieved.

India's economic power is growing, and the fact that the agreement was reached at this point was important. Indeed, the significance of this issue was written all over the Commission President's face. I have never seen von der Leyen look so happy.

Why is it so difficult to get results in foreign and security policy? Trade policy lies with the EU. Foreign and security policy requires unanimity.

If the EU wants to remain a relevant global player in the future, it will have to pull itself together. On foreign and security policy issues, it is time to move from unanimity to qualified majority voting. The timing may not be quite right at present, and the debate is likely to rumble on for years.



Share of GDP allocated to Ukraine. © Kiel Institute for the World Economy

But without change, the EU will be a bystander with no influence globally.

The EU can only be a global player if it has the will and ability to act in a unified and calm manner.

Cooperation among sovereign states is challenging, and unanimity cannot be achieved by command or coercion. The EU and its Member States need to learn how to heal rifts more openly than they do at the moment. Openness is important in building unity and solving difficult issues.

In conclusion, competition between traditional and digital currencies does not trigger crises and instability. Instead, it broadens the structure of the global financial system and it makes it more resilient – with the support of robust regulation.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki
ALDE, Finland (2004-2019)
Former Prime Minister of Finland

IS THE PARLIAMENT A MATURE LEGISLATOR?

The Parliament today enjoys more powers and influence than it sometimes acknowledges - and there are moments when its use of that influence, that power, could be more measured. The Union faces a world in which institutional introspection and Brussels-centric rivalries must be subordinated to strategic essentials. A mature Parliament must calibrate its power with discipline, not because its powers are in question, but because Europe's room for error has evaporated. Where does the Parliament stand at this moment of geopolitical upheaval? And what role must this House play in a European Union navigating a profoundly altered world?

Parliament's power has never been only what the Treaties stated. It is what the Parliament has extracted, interpreted, normalised, and consolidated through three decades of political practice. The Parliament is no longer in its aspirational phase; it is in its responsible phase. And responsible power is exercised differently from activist power. This does not mean, at any moment, refraining from exercising scrupulously the responsibilities that being the direct representatives of European citizens entails. It means exercising them with measure.

We are living through the most unstable geopolitical environment of any moment since the early 1990s - and arguably since the launching of the Cold War. This dislocation has four dimensions.

"We are living through the most unstable geopolitical environment of any moment since the early 1990s - and arguably since the launching of the Cold War."

Firstly, on our borders, the Union confronts the most demanding strategic environment since its creation. Since we launched this common endeavor for the future.

Secondly, China is reshaping the global environment and Europe's strategic space as well. It is the primary global architect of industrial and technological dependencies that directly affect Europe's room for manoeuvre.

Thirdly, there is the growing unpredictability of our closest ally. The United States remains indispensable for Europe's security, but it is also undergoing a domestic and geopolitical transformation that reshapes the environment in which the European Parliament legislates.

Finally, technology is the infrastructure of power in the 21st century. Europe has led the world in regulatory innovation. But regulation is not a substitute for capacity, and capacity is precisely where Europe has been losing ground. The European Parliament has played a decisive role in shaping the Union's digital framework - and rightly so. But there is a risk we must name: when regulation becomes a stand-in for competitiveness, the Union deepens its dependencies instead of reducing them. The European institutions, and in particular the European Parliament, have been the standard bearer of the planetary awareness challenge that energy transition entails.

"(...) when regulation becomes a stand-in for competitiveness, the Union deepens its dependencies instead of reducing them."

Having said that, the policies remain entangled in the consequences of having built the European Union's strategy in a world that no longer exists. The Parliament must adapt, maintaining ambition, while dispensing dogma.

For the first time, the Parliament directly influences - in some cases decisively - the shape of Europe's defence industrial base.

The Parliament has an important role to play and has become a central actor in shaping defence capability development. But - and this must be stated without ambiguity - Europe's defence gap cannot be closed through institutional assertion, and even less through institutional competition. It can only be closed through: joint procurement; integration of demand; predictable, multi-year contracts for industry; interoperability; and a shared understanding of threat.

The European Parliament has been the global pioneer of digital governance. But the geopolitical context has changed. Europe no longer leads in foundational technologies: AI compute, cloud infrastructure, deep-tech platforms, satellite mesh networks, semiconductors. Regulation remains essential - but regulation cannot compensate for lack of capacity.

A Parliament that overregulates, or that uses its regulatory power as an arena for institutional showdowns, risks deepening Europe's dependencies, especially vis-à-vis the United States.

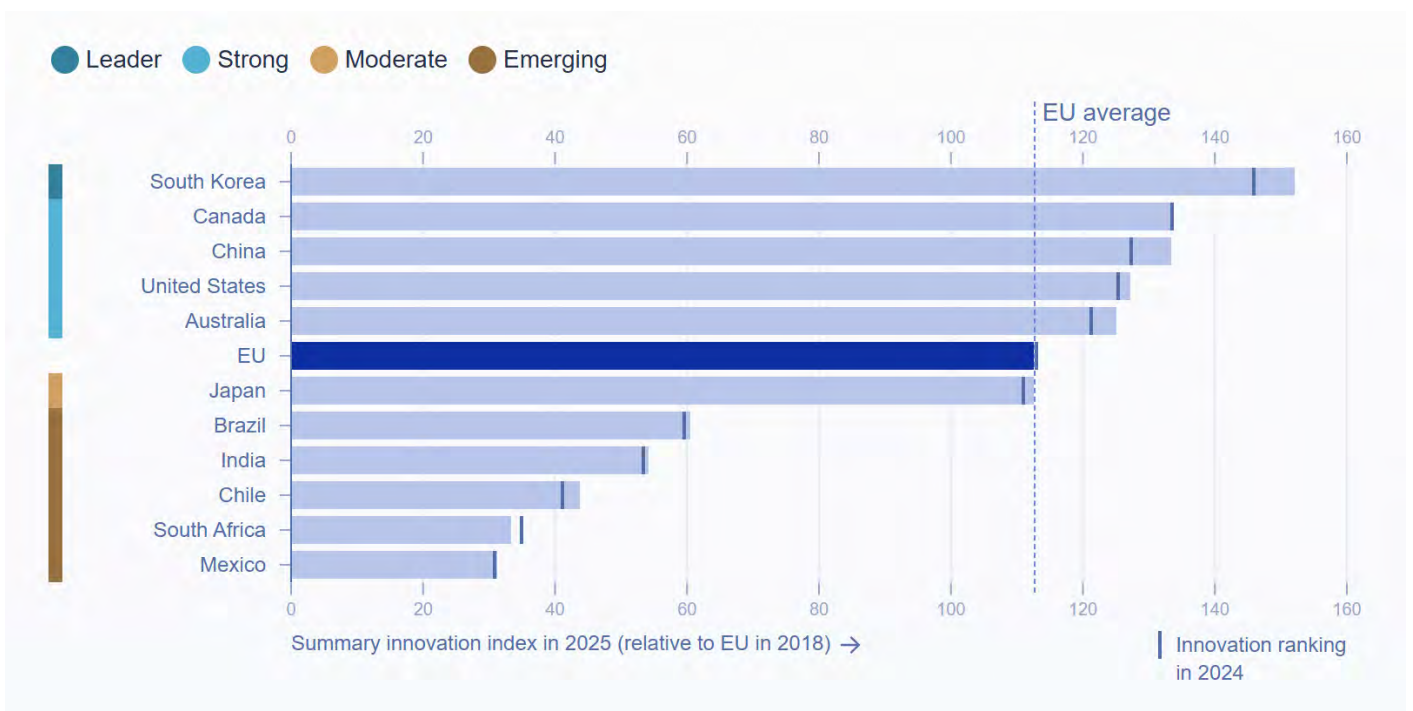
This Parliament is no longer an aspirational institution it once was. It is a mature legislator, a constitutional protagonist, and the most visible expression of European democracy. But maturity is not measured by power - it is measured by the use of power.

Europe is entering a decade that will test us in ways we have not experienced for generations.

Ana Palacio Vallelersundi
EPP, Spain (1994-2002)
Former Foreign Minister of Spain



Ana Palacio and Sabine Verheyen, speakers at the FMA Annual Seminar in December 2025. © European Union 2025 - Source : EP



Summary innovation index in 2025 (relative to EU in 2018). © Eurostat

THE EU CAN ACT – IF IT WANTS TO

Mario Draghi recently made it very clear: Europe is under threat of subordination, division and deindustrialisation – not because it lacks values, but because it lacks power. In a world where the US openly sees fragmentation as a strategic advantage and China politically instrumentalises supply chains, Europe’s inability to act is no longer an abstract problem, but a threat to Europe’s competitiveness and security.

Europe is facing a historic opportunity: to use the crisis as a catalyst. However, instead of acting, we are blocking ourselves. Not because there are no solutions, but because we lack the courage to implement them.

We both worked in – and with – the EU for decades. And we know: The biggest lie about the EU is that it is ‘too slow’. In truth, it is all too often paralysed by rules that have long since become obsolete.

But there is a way out. Without treaty change. Without years of debate. Here is how.

THE PROBLEM – WHY UNANIMITY IS PARALYSING THE EU

Climate action: One country is stopping the next carbon border adjustment levy – despite 26 Member States agreeing.

Tax fairness: One country is blocking minimum taxation for corporate groups – thereby protecting tax havens rather than the citizens of Europe.

Foreign policy: Sanctions against autocratic regimes? Only if everyone agrees. A veto is enough to scupper everything.

THE SOLUTION – THREE WAYS TO CIRCUMVENT THE VETO RIGHT

1. The ‘passerelle clause’: the legal emergency exit

The EU Treaties already allow unanimity to be replaced by majority voting – if all Member States agree. A paradox? Not necessarily.

Proposed solution: A coalition of the willing (e.g. Germany, France, Benelux and the Nordic countries) says: ‘We waive our right to veto in the areas of climate, tax and foreign policy – irrespective of future governments.’

Is this legally possible? Yes. A national law (e.g. in Germany) could oblige the federal government never to veto on specific issues.

The advantage: Anyone wanting to reverse this would have to go to court—and publicly explain why they are sabotaging the ability to act.

2. National pledges: ‘We will no longer veto’

Countries could conclude bilateral agreements: ‘On issue X, we will always vote in favour of majority decisions – even if the EU Treaties do not yet provide for this.’

Example: If 20 out of 27 countries were to do so, a de facto standard would emerge. The remaining seven would no longer be able to block decisions without isolating themselves.

There already is a precedent: Informally, the Eurogroup already takes decisions by majority vote. Why not other bodies?

“We both worked in – and with – the EU for decades. And we know: The biggest lie about the EU is that it is ‘too slow’. In truth, it is all too often paralysed by rules that have long since become obsolete.”



Ceremony of the signature of the Treaty on the European Union in Maastricht on February 7, 1992, which introduced the special (environmental) passerelle clause.
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3. Transparency as a means of exerting pressure: 'Anyone blocking decisions will be named'

The EU currently does not publish who scuppers which decision. This needs to change.

Our demand: An 'EU Decision Monitor' – publicly accessible, showing names and justifications.

'If a country stops the next climate action, every citizen should know: It was this country that blocked it.'

Result: Anyone who blocks decisions would incur a greater political cost. After all, no one wants to be seen to be acting as a brake.

WHY NOW? THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE MOMENT

The war in Ukraine: This has shown that Europe can act quickly (sanctions, aid to refugees, arms transfers) – when it has to.

Green Deal: The climate crisis will not wait. Each blockage costs us time and money.

Global competition: China and the US take majority decisions. Why shouldn't we?

Someone once told me: 'The EU is like a bicycle: If it stands still, it will fall over. Now is the time to pedal.' (A European Commissioner, whose name is known)

Our call to action: 'What you can do'

As members of the FMA community, as MEPs.

You know the mechanisms. Use your networks! Talk to current MEPs, Commissioners, national parliamentarians. Make the demand: 'Our country should be the first to renounce veto rights on climate issues!'

As for everyone else: Share this article. Write to your Member of Parliament. And above all : Demand that your government take action – rather than blocking it.

The EU is not a fixed entity. It is what we make of it. The tools for an effective Union are there. All we need to do is to use them. The question is not whether to reform the veto right. But rather: Who will take the first step? It is high time to shift Europe from a state of paralysis to a state of action.

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Michael Detjen

S&D, Germany (2018-2019)

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