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To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND  
THE COUNCIL**

**2024 Annual Report on the implementation of the European Union's External Action  
Instruments in 2023**

{SWD(2024) 267 final}

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# GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

## Introduction

This report highlights the key elements of the EU's foreign policy in 2023, focusing on its support through its financial instruments for international partnerships, humanitarian aid, security and defence, foreign policy and enlargement. It outlines the activities under the EU's multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027, particularly under the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), alongside other instruments such as the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)<sup>(1)</sup> and humanitarian assistance.

In 2023, the EU's foreign policy landscape was marked by two devastating conflicts unfolding on its borders: Russia's continuing war of aggression against **Ukraine**, and, as a consequence of the large-scale terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel on 7 October, the deteriorating humanitarian situation of Palestinians in **Gaza** due to the continued intensification of hostilities and consequent Israeli military operation. Both presented direct security risks for the EU, in a context of rising global geopolitical tensions.

These developments severely impaired international cooperation at a time when it is needed more than ever, not least to address **intensifying global challenges**, including food and energy security, climate change, poverty and inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), illegal migration, and to achieve the green and digital transitions.

In 2023, the EU continued to support **Ukraine** and the Ukrainian people, providing unprecedented political, financial, economic, humanitarian, legal and military support. It also continued to help the partner countries around the world to address the **global consequences** of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

The EU continued to implement its **Global Gateway strategy**, and more notably the three Economic and Investment Plans, to help narrow the global investment gap, support global economic recovery and accompany the twin green and digital transitions beyond European borders.

The EU adapted its **humanitarian efforts**, including the European Humanitarian Response Capacity, to the shifting landscape of global crises, by focusing on delivering immediate responses to ongoing and emerging humanitarian emergencies.

In December 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with **Ukraine** and the **Republic of Moldova**<sup>(2)</sup>, grant candidate status to **Georgia** on the understanding that relevant steps are taken, and open accession negotiations with **Bosnia and Herzegovina** once it fulfils the membership criteria.

The EU has continued to **support democracy and human rights across the world**, deploying election observation missions to **Nigeria, Zimbabwe, the Maldives, Guatemala, Paraguay, Liberia and Sierra Leone**, as well as election expert missions and follow-up missions.

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see the Staff Working Document Part I, Introduction, accompanying this Annual Report.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter 'Moldova'.

The **EU's commitment to global security and defence** was also shown by the launch of new civilian missions in **Armenia, Moldova** and a civil-military initiative in the **Gulf of Guinea**<sup>(3)</sup>, as well as by Common Security and Defence Policy operations in neighbouring countries, Africa and the Red Sea.

## The EU response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

The EU continued to give **Ukraine** unprecedented political, financial, economic, humanitarian, legal and military support while deploying sanctions to further weaken Russia's war machine. In December 2023, EU leaders decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine.

In 2023, the EU budget mobilised EUR 19.5 billion in assistance to Ukraine. This included an unprecedented support package of EUR 18 billion in concessional loans under the Macro-Financial Assistance Plus instrument and part of the EUR 1 billion for fast recovery. Guarantee agreements have the capacity to unlock over EUR 800 million in investments from the Ukrainian private sector to repair and rebuild the country's economy. EU Member States also provided over EUR 28 billion of military support, including via the European Peace Facility.

EU humanitarian and civil protection assistance helped alleviate the suffering of the Ukrainian population and made it possible to restore vital physical infrastructure. The EU mobilised EUR 300 million in humanitarian assistance for Ukraine in 2023 and EUR 20 million for Moldova. Nearly 11 million people across Ukraine<sup>(4)</sup> have received humanitarian support thanks to the EU and other donors. The EU continued to deploy the largest, longest and most complex Union Civil Protection Mechanism operation in its history and extended until March 2025 the Temporary Protection Directive for people fleeing the war. The EU has made available EUR 17 billion to host refugees in its Member States.

The Commission has also proposed to set up a dedicated financing instrument – the Ukraine Facility – allowing the EU to provide Ukraine with up to EUR 50 billion of predictable and flexible support for 2024-2027 to assist its recovery, reconstruction and modernisation, in line with its EU path.

The Commission led the coordination efforts between Ukraine's donors and established the G7 Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform in January 2023 to coordinate short- and long-term support for Ukraine's relief and reconstruction.

The 27 EU Member States have acted to isolate Russia politically and economically. In 2023, the EU adopted three additional packages of sanctions against Russia and cracked down on circumvention. By the end of the year, the EU had adopted a total of 12 packages of sanctions, including individual measures against over 1 950 individuals and entities.

In 2023, over EUR 2 billion were also mobilised to scale up the Solidarity Lanes that enable Ukraine to export grain and other agricultural products and import the goods it needs. The EU has also ensured duty-free and quota-free treatment for Ukrainian exports with Autonomous Trade Measures, supporting Ukraine's economy to the tune of EUR 2 billion in additional export revenue. The EU also supported the UN-led efforts and those of Türkiye to find an alternative solution to the Black Sea Grain initiative (from which Russia withdrew in July 2023). Following a 'Team Europe' approach<sup>(5)</sup>, the EU

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<sup>3</sup> Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) and EU Security and Defence initiative Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI).

<sup>4</sup> [Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, December Update \(Snapshot as of 31 December 2023\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Team Europe approach and Team Europe Initiatives | Capacity4dev \(europa.eu\)](#)

and its Member States have committed EUR 18 billion in grants for 2021-2024 to support food security in partner countries, over EUR 13.5 billion of which have already been disbursed (EUR 7.5 billion in 2022 and EUR 6.1 billion in 2023).

Significant support was also provided to Ukraine in the framework of the international actions of the Erasmus+ programme. In 2023, Erasmus+ financed, through the external action instruments, more than 3 500 mobility opportunities for Ukrainian higher education students and academic staff to come to Europe.

### The EU: a strong global actor

In 2023, the EU scaled up implementation of its **Global Gateway** strategy<sup>(6)</sup> - including the Economic and Investment Plans for the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood - on all continents, promoting smart, clean and secure links in the digital, energy and transport sectors, and helping strengthen health, education and research systems across the world.

The Council endorsed 225 new Global Gateway flagship projects in 2023. In October, the first Global Gateway Forum took place, bringing together 20 heads of states and governments, over 70 ministers and heads of international organisations, leading CEOs and representatives of non-governmental bodies. The Global Gateway governance structure was launched, with the first meetings of the Business Advisory Group and the Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform. Over a dozen Global Gateway business forums were held in partner countries.

On 15 November 2023, the EU, its Member States, and the 79 Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States signed the **Samoa Agreement**, the successor to the Cotonou Agreement. This new framework will strengthen its signatories' capacity to address global challenges together, from sustainable development and economic growth to human rights, peace and security, climate change, migration and global health.

Signing the **EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding**<sup>(7)</sup> in July 2023 and committing to working on a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership with Egypt gave new impetus to cooperation with these partners.

In 2023, the EU continued to help make Europe stronger in the world by promoting an integrated approach to security sector reform, and by providing expertise and support for training and for strengthening the entire criminal justice chain in partner countries.

The EU and its 27 Member States, in a 'Team Europe' approach, collectively remain the largest provider of official development assistance (ODA) with EUR 95.9 billion in 2023, accounting for 42 % of global ODA (representing 0.57 % of EU Member States' gross national income) based on preliminary Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data.

The EU remained a major global humanitarian donor, providing humanitarian assistance in 114 countries. The European Humanitarian Response Capacity responded to 16 crises affecting 15 countries and allocated EUR 56 million to developing and deploying its capacities and services, including Humanitarian Air Bridge operations. A total of EUR 42.95 million in humanitarian emergency

<sup>6</sup> [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway_en)

<sup>7</sup> 'Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the European Union and Tunisia'.

funding was mobilised through the Emergency Toolbox to respond to unforeseen events around the world in 2023.

In 2023, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre expanded further to become a 24/7 single operational hub, managing the EU's response to cross-sectoral crises at home and globally.

The Union Civil Protection Mechanism was enlarged to include Ukraine and Moldova. Besides Ukraine, it was activated 66 times worldwide in 2023 for various natural and human-induced disasters, including in response to the major earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria in February 2023.

In December, the EU co-organised the 25th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum together with a network of **human rights** NGOs. The event brought together 300 participants to discuss the theme 'Youth as actors of change for human rights'. In 2023, the EU supported 7 618 human rights defenders and family members through its emergency fund and the flagship programme ProtectDefenders.eu.

### Fostering sustainable development

Overall progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda has been severely disrupted over the past few years, including because of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit of September 2023 was a major opportunity for world leaders to recommit to the 2030 Agenda and to accelerate action. The SDGs continue to be at the heart of EU policymaking. The Global Gateway strategy is the main vehicle for this EU effort in its external action, and to tackle increasing inequalities.

At the UN High-level Political Forum in 2023, the EU presented the first EU Voluntary Review on SDGs implementation<sup>(8)</sup>. The report details how the EU contributes to progress towards achieving the SDGs, and how policy coherence for development helps the EU to implement its SDG strategy.

At the Global Gateway Forum, the EU and partners signed many new agreements including, for example, an agreement between the European Investment Bank and Bangladesh worth EUR 395 million for renewable energy projects to boost capacity and access.

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<sup>8</sup> European Commission, Secretariat-General, *EU voluntary review on progress in the implementation of the 2030 agenda*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2792/343208>

## GLOBAL PRIORITIES

### Human development and humanitarian assistance

Eradicating poverty remains central to the EU's international partnerships. It is the primary objective of the European Consensus on Development, and a long-term goal for Global Gateway investments. Two regional Team Europe initiatives (TEI) focus on reducing poverty and inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In 2023, the EU launched the Inequality Marker, which is a new tool that can be used to track the inequality reduction impact of EU external action.

EU investments in education focused on teachers and learning, more equitable and inclusive education systems, and skills to enable partner countries to make the most of the fair digital and green transitions. The EU and its Member States implemented measures to reinforce EU education and training support in around 80 partner countries. In addition, humanitarian support for education in emergencies reached EUR 162 million in 2023, benefiting nearly 1.8 million crisis-affected children and helping them safely access quality learning. In December 2023, the EU presented a comprehensive education pledge at the Global Refugee Forum.

The Regional Teachers Training initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa was launched in 2023 as one of the main education flagships, to improve the education and training of teachers and to make sure that schools have enough qualified teachers.

In 2023, the EU continued to help low-income countries access quality disease-prevention and response measures through vaccines, treatment and diagnostics, channelling funding through global health initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation. The EU deployed major Global Gateway programmes, including the TEI on manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines & health technologies in Africa (MAV+). On the humanitarian side, the EU's humanitarian health aid to the most vulnerable people in fragile contexts reached EUR 334 million in 2023.

The latest Global Report on Food Crises, co-funded by the EU, shows that over a quarter of a billion people in 59 countries faced acute hunger in 2023. The EU mobilised over EUR 670 million for humanitarian food and nutrition assistance in 2023.

The EU remains a key global humanitarian donor, providing more than EUR 2.4 billion humanitarian assistance in 114 countries during 2023.

The EU adopted ambitious commitments for the Water Action Agenda at the UN 2023 Water Conference, including improving transboundary cooperation across water basins, strengthening regional integration, reducing source-to-sea pollution and making water a key driver for sustainable development, the green transition and peace.

Two flagship initiatives on transboundary water management in Africa and Central Asia were launched in 2023. They provide over EUR 1.1 billion for projects in 47 countries involving 18 major transboundary water basins.

### Green Deal

The EU promoted climate action in alignment with the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and continued to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity



Framework. It integrated climate and environmental goals into many sectors, including food systems, ocean governance, urban development, energy, and transport, while working with partners throughout the world to expedite a fair green transition. It scaled up actions to tackle the root causes of biodiversity loss and promote the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of natural resources. It developed roadmaps to implement the five Forest Partnerships signed at COP27 with Mongolia, Guyana, Uganda, the Republic of Congo, and Zambia. A new Forest Partnership was signed with Honduras. A Team Europe initiative on Deforestation-free Value Chains was launched at COP28 in Dubai.

In 2023, the ocean became an increasingly important aspect of EU diplomacy and cooperation in the context of the EU commitment to double external funding for biodiversity over 2021-2027. Three ocean related programmes worth a total of EUR 115 million were adopted, in West Africa and Southern Africa, addressing ocean governance, sustainable blue economy and marine conservation, and enhancing maritime security in Africa. Under the Global Gateway strategy, port infrastructure was financed.

The Italy-Tunisia electricity interconnexion project 'ELMED' was established thanks to a EUR 307.6 million grant by the Connecting Europe Facility that was approved in August 2023, complemented by a financing set-up through the EFSD+ adopted in December, blending a European Commission grant with EIB, EBRD and KfW loans to work on infrastructures and the reform of the electricity market.

At COP28, the EU and 118 countries agreed to triple renewable energy capacity and double the global annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030. One major achievement was implementing the Africa-EU Green Energy initiative, which aims to help generate at least 50 GW of renewable electricity, giving access to electricity to over 100 million additional people in Africa by 2030.

<p>The Commission has disbursed 90 % (EUR 450 million) of the EUR 500 million allocated in the form of budget support, as part of the EUR 1 billion Western Balkans Energy Support Package addressing the immediate impact of the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in the Western Balkans.</p>
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## Digitalisation, science, technology and innovation

As of 2023, 16 Member States have joined the Digital for Development Hub (D4D Hub) and its four branches: Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and the Neighbourhood. Ten thematic working groups are now promoting the EU's human centric model of digital transformation through greater coordination, dialogue and joint action. D4D is now the key platform to design and support EU-Africa digital partnerships in close cooperation with the Member States. It is also a key networking opportunity for players involved, in the perspective of synergising all initiatives on digital, especially for Team Europe initiatives. The D4D Hub is also playing an increasing role in preparing or supporting bilateral partnerships and diplomatic requests.

In July 2023, the EU and the African Union adopted a joint Innovation Agenda.

Cooperation in the digital domain has progressed in a comprehensive manner with the development of key digital infrastructures such as the MEDUSA submarine cable project to provide fast and secure connectivity between the EU and Northern Africa.

At the Global Gateway Forum in October, the European Commission and Finnfund signed the **Africa Connected Programme**, a landmark agreement to mobilise more than EUR 1 billion in sustainable investment for digital infrastructure and digital service platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2023, the EU4Digital initiative supported the roll-out of broadband connectivity in rural areas, connecting more than 300 research and education institutions, and benefiting 730 000 students, teachers and scientists in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The Western Balkan Investment Framework supported the 'Go Digital in the Western Balkans' programme aiming to provide over EUR 177 million in concessional financing to micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises in the region for digitalisation and enhanced competitiveness.

## Sustainable growth and jobs

The EU established partnerships on critical raw materials, cooperating with partners to develop sustainable regional value chains, and scaling up engagement with the private sector.

The High-level Expert Group on scaling up sustainable finance in low- and middle-income countries, mandated by the Commission as an independent advisory body, continued its work, publishing its *Preliminary Findings & Recommendations* report in June<sup>(9)</sup>. The recommendations of the High-Level Expert Group will inform the Commission for its future strategy on scaling up sustainable finance in EU's partner countries, while they don't commit the Commission nor do they preclude any policy outcomes.

In 2023, the EU signed a EUR 7 million Financing Agreement for 'Technical and Vocational Education and Training' in the agro-forestry sector in **Timor-Leste** to promote green and sustainable economic diversification and resilience, and to help young people find jobs.

## Migration and forced displacement

In 2023, the EU further developed its strategic approach to migration and forced displacement. The Commission worked closely with key partner countries, including countries of origin and transit, to develop Action Plans for tailor-made EU support covering all four key migratory routes towards Europe. It was also active internationally, including through the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling launched in November, and at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum in December, at which the EU pledged some EUR 9 billion.

In North Africa, migration pressure increased on all routes in 2023 and in response the EU adopted new actions worth EUR 318 million aiming to improve capacities in the areas of protection and social cohesion, migration governance, combating migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, strengthening border management, facilitating voluntary returns, reintegration and legal migration. As to the latter, Talent Partnerships were launched with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt.

Migratory pressure in the Western Balkans decreased by 31 % in 2023 compared to 2022, thanks to concerted action by the EU and its Member States, including via the implementation of the EU Action Plan on Western Balkans, part of which was the signature of new status agreements with Albania and

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<sup>9</sup> [Preliminary Findings & Recommendations](#), High-level Expert Group on scaling up sustainable finance in low- and middle-income countries, June 2023.

Montenegro, allowing for the deployment of Frontex Standing Corps to support the countries with border management. In Türkiye, between 2021 and 2023, an additional EUR 3 billion was provided for refugee and host community support, and migration management.

The EU continued to support Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries as well as internally displaced people in Syria. In 2023, it organised two major donor conferences ('Together for the people in Türkiye and Syria' in March in the aftermath of the February earthquakes as well as the 7th edition of the 'Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region' in June) that raised over EUR 16.6 billion from the international community of which EUR 5.3 billion was pledged by the EU. It also continued to support Palestinian refugees in the region.

Support to Ukrainian refugees also continued, including through humanitarian aid and assistance in transit, voluntary repatriation and reintegration efforts. EU support for Armenia addressed the integration needs of over 100 000 Karabakh-Armenians following Azerbaijan's military offensive in September 2023.

The **Sudan crisis** uprooted over 6 million people, adding to the 3 million already displaced within Sudan. By the end of 2023 over 1.5 million people had been displaced into neighbouring countries. EUR 30 million in humanitarian assistance were activated to support Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, the EU strengthened its partnerships with key countries of origin, transit and destination, providing support on all aspects of migration and forced displacement.

The EU launched migration dialogues with Bangladesh and Pakistan, to help foster governmental discussions, enhance inter-state dialogue on migration policy issues, and contribute to the reinforcement of international migration cooperation. These dialogues also included the launch of Talent Partnerships.

The EU also maintained its leading role in the global response to the Venezuelan crisis. In March, it co-organised the Venezuela Solidarity conference, raising EUR 815 million.

### Governance, peace, security, and human rights

The EU continued to uphold and advance human rights and democracy, using its multilateral, regional and bilateral tools and working with non-governmental bodies.

The EU made progress on implementing its Gender Action Plan III<sup>(10)</sup>, improving protection against gender-based violence, fostering the inclusion of women in security and peace building, promoting participation in public life and improving access to quality education, health and social protection.

As part of its humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach<sup>(11)</sup>, the EU applied a stronger and more focused approach to conflict sensitivity, by, for example, taking initiatives and supporting various actions to prevent and combat terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalisation.

The European Union, in its humanitarian, development, peace, security and diplomatic engagement, and collectively with its Member States, is committed to prioritise the protection, wellbeing and empowerment of children affected by armed conflict, addressing their specific needs and vulnerabilities without discrimination on any grounds.

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<sup>10</sup> [Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Resilience and Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

In 2023, the EU deployed 14 civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions in the Middle East, Africa, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. It also continued to support peace and security in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Gulf, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus through the work of 10 EU Special Representatives and through cooperation programmes.

The coordination network of the Global Team Europe initiative on Democracy, comprising 14 Member States and non-governmental bodies, was inaugurated in June 2023. A Global Initiative on Impunity was established to improve global capabilities and coordination in monitoring, denouncing, and seeking accountability for international crimes and the gravest human rights violations.

EU election observation is a crucial tool for strengthening democratic institutions and upholding the principles of the rule of law. In 2023, the EU deployed 15 electoral missions (election observation missions, election expert missions, and election follow-up missions) and supported non-governmental bodies monitoring of electoral processes.

2023 marked the first year of the implementation of the Youth Action Plan in EU external action (2022-2027), putting young people at the heart of EU external action as participants for positive change. Over 30 youth sounding boards were set up in EU Delegations.

## GLOBAL REACH

### Sub-Saharan Africa

The EU is Africa's leading partner in many areas, from trade, investment and security to the green transition and digital transformation. It supported the African Union's request for **permanent membership of the G20**, thereby helping it to fully integrate into this multilateral forum.

In **Central Africa**, the EU began implementing its new Great Lakes strategy, adopted in February 2023, and continued to support the difficult transition process in **Chad**. It deployed an electoral expert mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during the general elections in December 2023.

In the **Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region**, the EU further deepened its partnerships, holding ministerial meetings with South Africa and Angola and signing with Angola the first ever Sustainable Investments Facilitation Agreement worldwide.

The EU also launched the Global Gateway Lobito Corridor project linking Angola, Zambia and the DRC, aiming to support investments in infrastructure, implement trade and transit-facilitating measures, foster economic development, and create local value added and jobs.

In **East Africa**, the EU works in the framework of the Horn of Africa Initiative, a regional initiative led by the Ministers of Finance aiming at promoting regional economic integration with the support of donor partners<sup>(12)</sup>. The EU contribution to this initiative is around EUR 1 billion. On top of this, the EU signed an Economic Partnership Agreement with Kenya to strengthen economic, political, and environmental cooperation.

The EU launched a security and defence initiative to help the **West African** countries of the Gulf of Guinea address spillover risks from the Sahel to the West African coastal states. The initiative brings together prevention, stabilisation, security, economic development and humanitarian assistance in line with the needs expressed by the partner countries.

### Asia and the Pacific

In 2023, the **EU-ASEAN** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) plan of action to implement the strategic partnership (2023-2027) made progress, which was reviewed at the EU-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in Jakarta in July. The EU presented 22 Global Gateway initiatives at the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum in September.

Free trade agreement negotiations with **Indonesia** were expedited and those with **Thailand** resumed, while negotiations on a digital trade agreement with **Singapore** began.

The EU worked closely with the ASEAN chair, Indonesia, to address the situation in **Myanmar/Burma** and continued to back ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus to tackle this crisis.

In **Afghanistan**, a review of basic needs and humanitarian aid was launched, and a set of guidelines devised with an overarching '*for women by women*' principle enabling the EU to continue operations supporting the Afghan population.

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<sup>12</sup> The EU, World Bank, African Development Bank, BMZ – the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development – and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

In June 2023, the EU's first ever EUSR for **the Gulf** was appointed and the 27th EU-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Joint Council was held in Muscat in October with very positive outcomes.

In September 2023, the EU adopted two contributions to the regional Team Europe initiatives in **Central Asia**, respectively on Digital Connectivity and on Water-Energy-Climate Change, worth EUR 20 million each.

In April 2023, the EU launched the Copernicus programme in the Philippines, contributing EUR 10 million to the Philippines Digital Connectivity Team Europe initiative.

## The Americas and the Caribbean

In June 2023, the Commission and the High Representative adopted the Joint Communication 'A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean'<sup>(13)</sup>, making the case for a stronger, modernised partnership through greater political engagement, in particular with the **Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)**.

The **EU-CELAC Summit** held in Brussels in July brought together, for the first time in eight years, leaders of all countries from both regions who committed to renewing and modernising the bi-regional partnership. The **EU-CELAC roadmap for 2023 to 2025** was presented, and an EU-Caribbean leaders' meeting was held in the margins of the Summit.

At the Summit, the EU, as part of its 'Team Europe' approach, also presented a Global Gateway investment agenda for the region worth EUR 45 billion up to 2027, covering various areas including renewable energies, transport, digital transformation and pharmaceutical innovation.

Memoranda of Understanding on deepening **cooperation on energy** with Uruguay and Argentina and on cooperation on **critical raw materials** with Argentina and Chile were agreed upon. The **EU-Chile Advanced Framework Agreement**, the most modern and ambitious agreement to date with a LAC country, was signed in December after five years of negotiations.

**Haiti** is the largest recipient of EU assistance in the Caribbean region. In 2023, 5.2 million Haitians were in a dire humanitarian situation, with 1.9 million of them needing protection.

## European Neighbourhood

In the **EU's Eastern Neighbourhood**, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine overshadowed 2023. However, in 2023 the EU also deepened relations with partner countries, culminating in the decision in December to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (to which a support package was also presented to address the impact on Moldova of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to bring the country closer to the EU), and give Georgia candidate country status.

The Annual **Eastern Partnership** foreign affairs ministerial meeting in December reaffirmed the validity of the 'recovery, resilience and reform' agenda and its importance for regional cooperation.

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<sup>13</sup> [JOIN\(2023\) 17 final of 7 June 2023](#)

As of December 2023, the **Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Eastern Partnership** had mobilised EUR 7.5 billion of investments in its five priority areas: economy and connectivity; rule of law and security; environment and climate; digital; and fair and inclusive societies.

Following Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, which caused the displacement of 100 000 Karabakh Armenians needing to be integrated in Armenia, the Commission provided emergency and long-term support to **Armenia**, including humanitarian assistance packages, budget support, further investments via the EIP, and repurposing of bilateral and regional programmes.

The situation in the **Southern Neighbourhood** remained volatile. The Hamas' terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023 and their aftermath have added to the region's protracted fragilities. Despite the challenging context, the EU continued to demonstrate its commitment to supporting its partners in the region.

The **Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood** had mobilised EUR 23.8 billion in investments by December 2023 in the strategic priority areas in the sectors of sustainable energy, water and infrastructure.

At the **regional level**, due to the situation after 7 October, the 2023 EU-Southern Neighbourhood ministerial meeting, initially scheduled for 27 November, was postponed, while the eighth Union for the Mediterranean Regional Forum (Barcelona, 27 November 2023) ended up focusing on the situation in Israel and Gaza.

The EU gave urgent humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza most in need and quadrupled its humanitarian assistance in 2023 to more than EUR 100 million. A EUR 118.4 million assistance package was adopted in December to support the Palestinian Authority.

The EU collectively remains the largest donor of humanitarian aid for Syria. In 2023, it organised two major donor conferences<sup>(14)</sup> that raised over EUR 16.6 billion.

## Western Balkans and Türkiye

The key policy framework for disbursement of IPA III funds is **the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)** and the **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans**.

The EIP is largely implemented by the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), which combines Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funds with loans to support socio-economic convergence.

As of December 2023, the WBIF Board endorsed 59 flagship investments of the EIP, totalling EUR 8.9 billion, including EUR 2.6 billion of IPA grants.

In November, the European Commission proposed a new growth plan for the Western Balkans together with the EUR 6 billion Reform and Growth Facility that aims to accelerate the Western Balkan partners' integration to the EU by offering some of the benefits of EU membership in advance of their accession and to accelerate reforms on the fundamentals of the EU accession process.

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<sup>14</sup> The International Donors' Conference 'Together for the people in Türkiye and Syria' (16 March 2023) and the '7th edition of the Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region' (14-15 June 2023).

The EU also continued the roll-out of the EUR 1 billion Energy Support Package announced in December 2022 to mitigate the immediate effects of the energy crisis and accelerate the energy transition in the region in the short- and medium terms.

In 2023, the EU and **Türkiye** continued to re-engage in key areas of mutual interest. In November 2023, the Commission and the High Representative presented the Joint Communication on the State of play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations<sup>(15)</sup>, which proposes to the European Council specific actions to energise key areas of cooperation. After the devastating earthquakes in February 2023, an International Donors' Conference, organised by the Commission and the Swedish EU Council Presidency, generated EUR 7 billion in pledges. Using the Turkish Investment Platform, the Earthquake Reconstruction Framework Loan was made possible thanks to the guarantee provided by the European Commission. The loan agreement of EIB is expected to generate approximately EUR 1.55 billion in investments in earthquake affected areas.

### Overseas countries and territories (OCTs)

The OCTs have special constitutional links with three EU Member States (Denmark, France and the Netherlands) and play an increasingly strategic role for the EU as ambassadors in their regions. They also have significant assets, such as vast exclusive economic zones, and host strategic infrastructure.

In Greenland, the target is to increase renewable energy in the public electricity provision to 90 % of the total in the coming years. Since 2023, the EU also looks to team up with Greenland in the domain of raw materials, critical for the clean energy transition. A Memorandum of Understanding establishing a Partnership on Sustainable Raw Materials Value Chains was signed between the EU and Greenland in November 2023.

The EU has earmarked financial support of EUR 500 million for OCTs for 2021-2027 to contribute to their economic and social development and to help tackle challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

In 2023, an EU budget support operation, 'Empowering youth to reinforce the sustainable development of the island', helped to train 421 young people in **Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon**, a French OCT in the Atlantic, and boost entrepreneurship and employment among young people there.

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<sup>15</sup> [JOIN\(2023\) 50 final of 29 November 2023](#).