

Press release – Empowering Africa: Parliament defines strategy for a new EU-Africa partnership



On Thursday, MEPs adopted a wide-ranging strategy for a new EU-Africa partnership by 460 votes in favour, with 64 votes against and 163 abstentions.

The strategy emphasises that human development must be at the centre of future EU-Africa relations, prioritising education, including teacher training, reducing early school leaving, and concentrate on the inclusion of girls. A future EU-Africa strategy should also aim to improve health care and national health systems.

Additionally, MEPs call for cooperation on issues such as the green transition, energy, digital transformation, sustainable jobs, good governance and migration, as [already identified by the Commission and the European External Action Service](#).

Empowering Africa

MEPs underline that the EU-Africa relationship must “move beyond the donor-recipient relationship”. Instead, the EU and Africa should cooperate on equal terms, as part of an EU-Africa strategy that empowers African governments to

achieve the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), curb climate change, and foster gender equality, among other targets. To achieve this, MEPs call for substantial funds to be earmarked for the SDGs in the upcoming external financial instrument [NDICI – Global Europe](#).

Expectations for a future strategy

Parliament's expectations for the future EU-Africa strategy also include long-term EU financial and technical support for African countries to boost climate adaptation, and today's report includes a demand for Europe to support African regional integration with the intention of eventually helping to reduce the continent's dependence on foreign imports.

The EU also has to encourage African ambitions for a continental free trade area, while international lenders, such as the IMF and the World Bank, should do more to relieve African government debt, MEPs stress.

Finally, they demanded the EU protects sexual and reproductive health and rights in the new partnership, alongside the safeguarding of the human dignity of refugees and migrants.

Quote

Rapporteur [Chrysoula Zacharopoulou](#) (Renew, FR), [said](#): Africa, in all its diversity and desire to release its untapped potential, will have a decisive impact on the future of the world. Our African friends are our allies and all Europeans have to grasp the importance and the opportunity that this partnership offers to us. This Parliament wants a partnership that places human relationships at its centre, which starts with reinforcing Africa's healthcare systems; we also have to implement an EU-Africa Green Pact. To succeed, we will need all 27 member states – and not just a select few – to actively engage in this partnership.”

Next steps

The resolution will contribute to the development of the future EU-Africa strategy. The process will be concluded with the adoption of the joint strategy at the EU-African Union Summit, to be held later this year.

Background

In 2020, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the renewal of the EU-Africa relationship.

[Press release – Parliament urges EU to](#)

take drastic action to reduce marine litter



In a report adopted on Thursday by 646 votes in favour, 3 against and 39 abstentions, MEPs stress that [marine litter](#), and especially micro and nano plastic, “poses a serious threat to a number of marine animal species”, as well as to fishermen and consumers. They highlight that an average consumer of Mediterranean shellfish ingests around 11 000 fragments of plastic every year. The fishing sector is estimated to lose between 1 and 5% of its revenue because of marine pollution.

Fisheries and aquaculture waste accounts for 27% of marine litter. Therefore, Parliament urges the EU to accelerate the development of a [circular economy](#) in this sector by phasing out expanded polystyrene packages and improving marine waste collection and recycling channels. Research on sustainable materials and new designs for fishing gears are also key, MEPs add.

EU action plan to tackle pollution

Only 1.5% of fishing gear is currently recycled in the EU and some gear that is abandoned, lost or discarded at sea “remains active for months or even years”. These so-called ghost nets “indiscriminately impact all marine wildlife, including fish stocks”, the report alerts. To address this issue, MEPs demand the Commission and member states to adopt the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s [Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing](#)

[Gear.](#)

Parliament also demands an EU action plan to substantially reduce the use of plastics and to tackle the pollution of rivers, water courses and coastlines, highlighting that 80% of marine waste comes from the land. MEPs also call for more research to be carried out on the impact of marine litter and micro and nano plastic on fishery resources.

Quote

[Catherine CHABAUD](#) (Renew, FR), rapporteur: “Marine litter is a cross-cutting issue that needs to be addressed holistically. The fight against marine litter does not begin in the sea, but must involve an upstream vision that encompasses the complete lifecycle of a product. Each piece of litter that ends up in the sea is a product that has fallen out of the circular economy loop. To fight marine pollution, we must continue to promote virtuous business models and integrate new sectors like fisheries and aquaculture in these global efforts. There is no sustainable fishing without a healthy ocean.”

Context

Only 1% of the plastic in the ocean is found floating on the surface, whilst most of it ends up in deep-sea. Every day, 730 tonnes of waste are dumped directly into the Mediterranean and every year a further 11 200 tonnes of plastics dumped in the environment find their way into the Mediterranean, affirms the report, based on information from the World Wildlife Fund.

[Press release – MEPs ready to take Commission to court for failing to protect EU budget](#)



In a resolution adopted on Thursday by 529 votes in favour, 148 against and 10 abstentions, MEPs recall that the failure of member states to respect the rule of law may affect the integrity of the EU budget. They warn the European Commission that if it fails to fulfil its obligations under the legally-binding conditionality regulation and does not take all appropriate measures to defend the EU's financial interests and [values](#), Parliament "will consider this to constitute a failure to act" and will take the Commission to court under [Article 265 TFEU](#).

MEPs insist the existing [rules](#) on the rule of law must be applied and "cannot be subject to the adoption of guidelines", a move the Commission is currently preparing. If the Commission does deem such guidelines necessary, today's resolution requests they must be ready by 1 June 2021, and that Parliament should be consulted prior to their adoption. MEPs reiterate the importance of applying the Rule of Law mechanism without delay, particularly given its potential implications for the upcoming disbursement of the [NextGenerationEU](#) recovery fund.

Background

The resolution voted on by MEPs today is the conclusion of the [debate](#) held at the previous plenary session, where MEPs reminded the Commission that the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism has already been in force since 1 January 2021.

Almost all speakers in that debate reiterated that the Regulation is legally binding – regardless of the position adopted by the [European Council](#), which carries no legal effect, and despite the ongoing legal actions before the Court of Justice of the European Union, which do not have any suspensory effect. The rule-of-law conditionality mechanism is a new tool designed to protect EU funds from being misused by EU governments who are found to have failed to respect the principle of the rule of law.

[Press release – Parliament fast-tracks procedure to adopt Digital Green Certificate by June](#)



With 468 votes in favour, 203 against and 16 abstentions, MEPs supported using the urgency procedure ([Rule 163](#)), which allows for faster parliamentary scrutiny of the Commission's proposals, while fully respecting its democratic prerogatives.

During the [plenary debate](#) on Wednesday, a large majority of MEPs supported a swift creation of the Digital Green Certificate, which aims to facilitate safe and free movement inside the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Commission proposal, this could include information on whether a traveller has been vaccinated against COVID-19, a COVID-19 test result, and information on recovery from a COVID-19 infection. Several speakers highlighted the need to have strong data protection safeguards on personal and medical data, and stressed that those who have not been vaccinated must not face discrimination.

Next steps

Plenary will adopt its mandate for negotiations with Council, which may

include amendments to the Commission's proposal, during the next plenary session (26-29 April). As the committee steering this file through Parliament, the Civil Liberties Committee can request to have the file back, in order to start the talks. The outcome of the negotiations among the co-legislators will have to be endorsed by both Parliament and Council.

Quote

After the vote, the Chair of the Civil Liberties Committee [Juan Fernando LÓPEZ AGUILAR](#) (S&D, ES) said: "We need the Digital Green Certificate to re-establish our confidence in the Schengen zone while continuing to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The certificate cannot be a precondition for free movement as this is a fundamental right in the European Union, and it cannot lead to discrimination against those individuals who do not hold one. Citizens' data must be safe and only necessary data should be included in the certificate."

Background

On 17 March, the Commission tabled a proposal for a Regulation on a Digital Green Certificate to facilitate free movement in the EU – [2021/0068 \(COD\)](#) and an accompanying proposal on third country nationals legally staying or residing in the EU ([2021/0071 \(COD\)](#)).

[Article – Sassoli: “To earn trust, unity and transparency are needed”](#)



During the online meeting, Parliament's President said that democracy depends on trust: "Democracy is a system of institutions and laws, which relies on citizens' trust. As politicians, our role is to do whatever it takes to maintain that trust. This is even more true in times of crisis. Europe, like the rest of the world, is in the throes of a pandemic with grave social and economic implications." He added: "Granted, our system and our institutions must be improved. But trust is earned by means of unity and transparency, by adopting a clear and consistent stance."

Sassoli also addressed the ongoing vaccine roll-out: "We need to step up vaccine production; speed up the distribution and administration of vaccines both inside and outside the European Union. But we cannot afford to be naïve. It is time to apply the principles of reciprocity and proportionality before giving the green light to exports from the EU."

Speaking about China's recent sanctions against MEPs and different EU bodies, the President said: "I am concerned about the growing trend towards authoritarianism and the many moves to destabilise democracy. These are developments we must take seriously. Attempts are being made to steer our recovery plan in certain directions, in a clear bid to undermine our independence."

Sassoli also referred to the EU-China investment agreement Parliament will soon be discussing: "As always, Parliament will take great care to ensure that the imperatives of free trade do not outweigh human rights and fundamental freedoms."

Cooperation with the US following the election of Joe Biden has also created new opportunities for the EU, Sassoli said. "Renewed cooperation between the EU and the new administration in Washington will help lend impetus to our global leadership. We recognise how necessary this is, in the interests of our society."