

13 May 2026, Brussels

Subject: Making the strategic choice for the future of EU external action at the Foreign Affairs Council on Development

Dear Ministers responsible for development cooperation,

In the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) on Development taking place on May 18th, you will discuss the future of EU external action, taking into consideration geopolitical developments. In the context of the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the upcoming FAC will be an important opportunity for EU Member States to call for the next EU external action funding instrument, Global Europe, to effectively enable the EU to address drivers of fragility and build peace. In a world in which fragility and conflicts are increasing, with regional and global repercussions, the EU needs to strengthen its ability to build peace.

Fragility is increasing, and conflicts are an important driver of this phenomenon. Conflicts are at their highest number since the end of World War II. Since 2008, there has been a deterioration of peace in 97 countries, including in the neighbourhood of the EU. Yet, EU funding for fragile contexts and peacebuilding is insufficient. Global Europe should therefore set out a differentiated approach to fragility encompassing both highly and extremely fragile states, and aiming to support social cohesion, governance improvements and access to basic services. In these fragile contexts, which often do not attract private investments, the EU should prioritise grants as the primary funding modality, and strengthen partnerships with civil society, which has long collaborated with the EU to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite difficult economic times, the EU should remain firmly committed to acting for a more peaceful and prosperous world. The Foreign Affairs Council on Development is an important opportunity for Member States to support the proposal put forward by the European Parliament in April to increase the budget for the Global Europe regulation to €225 billion. The EU budget for external action should continue to represent at least 10% of the overall budget of the EU. This is especially important as 17 EU Member States have cut their ODA budgets in 2025 - a trend which only underlines the need for the EU to step up collectively. The external action budget of the EU should not be construed as charity, but as an investment in shared prosperity, tackling the root causes of fragility and supporting stability and rights.

The EU's economic resilience is important, but the EU should not deprioritise the peace, development and humanitarian needs in partner countries. In a deeply interconnected world, even distant crises impact the EU's interests. From disrupting trade routes to forcing displacement, conflicts have repercussions well beyond national borders. Where the EU disengages, others will fill the space, with priorities that may run counter to the EU's international cooperation objectives and its interests. The question is therefore not whether the EU can afford to address fragility and conflicts, it is whether it can afford not to. Member States should therefore ensure that the Global Gateway Strategy places the needs



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of partner countries at its core from the selection of projects to the way they are carried out. Peace should be fully understood as a part of the enabling environment of Global Gateway, and peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity as a tool and requirement of its 360-degree approach. Importantly, **the EU's competitiveness should not become the sole focus of the Global Europe regulation.** In particular, the EU should refrain from making competitiveness actions eligible for non-programmable funding, which would weaken its ability to fund crisis response and humanitarian action.

While the EU needs to respond more flexibly to geopolitical developments, it also needs to set clear overarching goals in its external action. This should be underpinned by budgetary spending targets embedded in the Global Europe Regulation. This is essential to guarantee a true policy-first approach and robust governance. Given the strong commitment of the EU to gender equality and in light of the global gender backlash, binding gender targets should notably be re-introduced. These should sustain the contribution of the EU to the implementation of the Women, Peace & Security agenda. In the context of the worsening climate crisis, the EU should also demonstrate that it will uphold its global climate commitments through a binding climate and environment target in Global Europe. This target will contribute to mitigating the impact that climate change is having on peace in various fragile contexts.

The EU should not lose sight of its achievements in building peace. Geopolitical developments only make the commitment of the EU to peace, human rights and multilateralism more necessary than ever. The EU's diplomatic assets, including its network of EU Delegations, should be maintained and invested in. Their ability to develop context-driven policies and programming is central and enables better support for, and engagement with, local civil society actors, which the EU should upscale.

Member States are the backbone of the role of the EU in the world. Building the EU's own agency in external action is a strategic choice and we urge you to support the necessary budget for EU external action, putting peace, sustainable development and rights at its core.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sonya Reines-Djivanides', written in a cursive style.

Sonya Reines-Djivanides
Executive Director
European Peacebuilding Liaison Office