

Strengthening Europe's Democratic Institutions and Our Recommitment to Responsible Global Leadership

5 December 2023

The European Commission affirms its resolve and commitment to address the needs of our citizens in a period of repeated threats to basic democratic and civil liberties and heightened global competition. In the past year, the European Commission has noted the increasing challenges to democratic institutions both within and external to the European Union. This includes repeated attacks on free media and journalists that undermine transparency and enable greater disinformation. Moreover, geopolitical challenges in regions such as the Indo-Pacific and Africa pose increasing risks to long term European economic and strategic interests. The European Commission calls for a recommitment of the EU in these regions to demonstrate our capacity as a responsible global leader and partner.

Thus, we are committed to working with Member States to ensure a coordinated response—including consideration of national emergency measures—that utilizes all available EU resources to ensure financial and material stability of our citizens. We also maintain our conviction to marshal the full power of this Union to address ongoing foreign policy issues that are critical to preserving EU security and maintaining the rules-based international order. **To address these broad range of policy matters, the following stipulations are proffered for collective consideration:**

PREAMBLE

WHEREAS the European Union (EU) has consistently sought to deepen integration among Member States and declare our shared commitment to promoting democratic principles, the following should be taken into account:

1. That we are abroad, diverse community historically divided by conflict and misgivings for centuries, now dedicated to jointly overcoming strategic challenges.
2. That the EU is a union that stands for human freedom, democratic principles, the rule of law, and the upholding of fundamental rights.
3. That closer integration between Member States will strengthen our shared values and create greater benefits for our citizens and community.
4. That our union will continue to build economic, political, and social partnerships that enhance Europeans' standard of living and reinforce the EU's global influence.
5. That our community understands the need to adopt policies that position Europe to withstand future economic or political crises through sound economic reforms, responsible foreign policies, and technological cooperation.

On Building Resilient Democratic Institutions

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

WHEREAS democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are the foundations on which the European Union is based. Democracy is a core European value, and a precondition for EU membership. The EU's citizens see democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as its most important assets.

WHEREAS democracy allows citizens to shape laws and public policies at European, national, regional, and local levels. It requires safeguards, checks and balances, and institutions that fulfil their roles and uphold the rules of pluralistic democratic debate. For participation to be meaningful, citizens must also be able to form their own judgements – they should be able to make electoral choices in a public space where a plurality of views can be expressed freely and where free media, academia and civil society can play their role in stimulating open debate, free from malign interference, either domestic or foreign. Democracy can only thrive in a climate where freedom of information and freedom of expression are both upheld, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights, allowing everyone to express their views, regardless how critical they are towards the governments and those in power.

WHEREAS the EU is not only concerned with protecting democracy within its borders, but as pressure is mounting on democracy, the rule of law and human rights globally, the EU is working actively to protect, inspire and support democracies around the world. The challenges relating to the exercise of democracy are global and the world's democracies have a common interest in working together to address them. At the EU level, this requires a coherent approach between internal and external actions. With this action plan, the Commission is proposing a response centered around individual rights and freedoms, transparency and accountability which can also serve as an example of how to approach these global challenges to democracy and a basis to build partnership with like-minded democracies.

WHEREAS the digital revolution has transformed democratic politics. Political campaigns are now run not only on the doorstep, billboards, radio waves and TV screens, but also online. This gives political actors new opportunities to reach out to voters. It brings new opportunities for civic engagement, making it easier for some groups — in particular young people — to access information and participate in public life and a democratic debate.

WHEREAS the digital revolution has also created new vulnerabilities and made it more difficult to maintain the integrity of elections, ensure a free and plural media, and protect the democratic process from disinformation and other manipulation. Digitalization enables new ways to finance political actors from uncontrolled sources, cyber-attacks can target critical electoral infrastructure, journalists face online harassment and hate speech, and false information and polarizing messages spread rapidly on social media, also by coordinated disinformation campaigns.

WHEREAS existing safeguards to ensure transparency and parity of resources and airtime during election campaigns are not designed for the digital environment. Online campaign tools have added potency by combining personal data and artificial intelligence with psychological profiling and complex micro-targeting techniques. Some of these tools, such as the processing of personal data, are regulated by EU law. But others are currently framed mainly by corporate terms of service and can also escape national or regional regulation by being deployed from outside the electoral jurisdiction. Concern about the transparency and accountability of online platforms adds to the challenge of enforcing rules. Online platforms can both have news media-related activities and act as gatekeepers for online news, while not being subject to the same national rules and professional standards.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that in the online environment, it is often difficult to recognize paid-for political material and distinguish it from other political content. There is a clear need for more transparency in political advertising and communication, and the commercial activities surrounding it. Stronger enforcement and compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules is needed.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED the Commission calls for the creation of rules for the sponsors of paid content and production/distribution channels, including online platforms, advertisers, and political consultancies, clarifying their respective responsibilities, and providing legal certainty. They will also determine which actors and what type of sponsored content fall within the scope of enhanced transparency requirements. They will support accountability and enable monitoring and enforcement of relevant rules, audits, and access to non-personal data, and facilitate due diligence. Certain specific obligations could be proportionately imposed on online intermediaries, advertising service providers and other actors, depending on their scale and impact.

BE IT HEREBY RESOVLED that the funding of European political parties is governed by EU law and the 2019 European Parliament election report highlighted the need to strengthen some of the rules to prevent external interference, in particular by improving transparency as regards sources of financing for European political parties so as to tackle indirect funding by foreign interests channeled through national means or private donations. The Commission proposes a review of the legislation on the funding of European political parties with a view to addressing the financing of European political parties from outside the EU, revising the audit requirements, strengthening the links between European financing and national campaigns, and facilitating transparency and auditing. The goal is to have the new rules in place in sufficient time ahead of the May 2024 European Parliament elections.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Commission proposes a new operational EU mechanism to support resilient electoral processes, organized and coordinated through the European Cooperation Network on Elections to support deployment of joint expert teams and exchanges on issues such as the cybersecurity of elections and online forensics, in close cooperation with the Network and Information Systems Cooperation Group and the EU's Rapid Alert System. The Commission also calls for strengthened cooperation among Member States competent authorities in addressing specific challenges (e.g., linked to election periods, elections

observation, independent electoral oversight and effective remedies) and covering monitoring (including online), threat identification, capacity building, the operation of national elections networks and engagement with the private sector.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that specific legislative proposals to enhance the security of network and information systems and the protection of critical infrastructures must be taken to protect election infrastructures against cyber-attacks. In this context, the compendium on cyber security of election technology will be updated and further practical exercises will be organized to explore risk and preparedness, drawing on joint work by the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the Network and Information Systems Cooperation Group.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that while Member States have traditionally been reluctant to introduce IT more generally in the voting process, the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for physical distancing has prompted renewed interest in electronic voting solutions. The Commission calls for legislative proposals concerning e-voting practices, together with Member States and in close cooperation with the Council of Europe, which has already issued substantial guidance in this area, including on accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Commission encourages Member States to make best use of relevant EU structural and investment funds to support and reinforce civil society capacities at both the national and local level and involve civil society organizations in the partnership with the different levels of public administration, including by building a deliberative democracy infrastructure. This will allow for better civic participation and public engagement in the shaping of priorities, including for the Next Generation EU initiative in each Member State.

On A Stronger Europe in the World

Expanded Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

WHEREAS the Indo-Pacific is increasingly strategically significant for Europe. The region's growing economic, demographic, and political weight makes it a key player in shaping the international order and in addressing global challenges. The EU intends to increase its engagement with the region to build partnerships that reinforce the rules-based international order, address global challenges, and lay the foundations for a rapid, just and sustainable economic recovery that creates long-term prosperity.

WHEREAS the Indo-Pacific region is home to three-fifths of the world's population, produces 60% of global GDP, contributed two-thirds of pre-pandemic global economic growth and is at the forefront of the digital economy. The EU outermost regions and overseas countries and territories, constitutionally linked to its Member States, are an important part of the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific.

WHEREAS the EU and the Indo-Pacific are natural partner regions in terms of trade and investment. The EU is the top investor, the leading provider of development cooperation, and one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe account for over 70% of the global trade in goods and services, and over 60% of foreign direct investment flows. Trade exchanges between the Indo-Pacific and Europe are higher than between any other geographical regions in the world, with annual trade reaching EUR 1.5 trillion in 2019. The region is the second largest destination of EU exports and is home to major waterways that are of vital importance to EU trade, including the Malacca Straits, the South China Sea, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

WHEREAS the Indo-Pacific is both an important source of global environmental challenges as well as a potential beneficiary of their remedies. The share of the region in global carbon dioxide emissions has grown from 37% to 57% since 2000 and the region will account for more than 70% of growth in global energy demand by 2030. Climate change is expected to further increase pressure on marine biodiversity, natural resources, and fish stocks, leading to changes in ecosystem dynamics. The Indo-Pacific region includes several marine biodiversity hotspots. Therefore, the region is vital for mitigating climate change and protecting our planet's delicate ecological balance.

WHEREAS in recent years, geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific have given rise to intense competition, including tensions around contested territories and maritime zones. There has been a significant military build-up, including by China, with the Indo-Pacific's share of global military spending increasing from 20% of the world total in 2009 to 28% in 2019. The display of force and increasing tensions in regional hotspots such as in the South and East China Sea and in the Taiwan Strait may have a direct impact on European security and prosperity. There is also an increase in hybrid threats, including cyber security.

WHEREAS democratic principles and human rights are also under threat from authoritarian regimes in the region, putting the region's stability at risk. Similarly, efforts to establish a global level playing field based on transparent trade rules are increasingly undermined by unfair trade practices and economic coercion. These developments increase tensions in trade, supply and value chains. The COVID 19 pandemic has tested the resilience of economies, further exposed the interdependence of EU and Indo-Pacific partners, and highlighted that both gain resilience from open, diversified, and undistorted access to world markets.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that resilient value chains are essential for continued economic prosperity. The EU must work with its Indo-Pacific partners to reinforce value chains by strengthening and diversifying trade relations, implementing existing trade agreements, finalizing ongoing trade negotiations, and developing cooperation in strategic sectors, including to address strategic dependencies in supply chains. The EU must cooperate with partners to strengthen rules to protect international trade against unfair practices, such as industrial subsidies, economic coercion, forced technology transfers and intellectual property theft.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that to reduce technical barriers to trade, the EU must work with likeminded Indo-Pacific partners on standard setting and other regulatory priorities, in compliance with WTO principles. Particular attention must be given to implementing and enforcing the comprehensive trade agreements with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Vietnam, and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the Pacific States, as well as the EU investment protection agreements with Singapore and Vietnam that are expected to enter into force in the coming years. In addition, the EU remains interested in further engaging with ASEAN and its member states, including through the possible resumption of trade negotiations with Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, once the conditions are right, and by the eventual negotiation of a region-to-region trade agreement.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that EU action in the Indo-Pacific is based on a long-term plan to work with partners to fight, mitigate and adapt to climate change and to counter biodiversity loss, pollution, and other forms of environmental degradation. As part of the strategy, there is the call for: continued prioritization on the transition away from coal in bilateral and multilateral engagements and international fora, including ending new coal investments, phase-out of unabated coal-fired power generation and coal mining, and engage on just transition with the partners in the region; continued efforts with the region to protect biodiversity and restore degraded ecosystems on land and in the oceans. This will include work with key partners on an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework; promotion of deforestation-free supply chains; enhanced regional and global action to tackle plastic pollution, notably by cooperating with ASEAN, Japan and China.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, has increased the spending target for actions focusing on fighting climate change to 30%. Around 35% of the Horizon Europe research programme will also be dedicated to climate action, offering significant cooperation opportunities for EU and Indo-Pacific partners to address climate change and biodiversity loss.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that there is a call for a strengthening of ocean governance in the Indo-Pacific in full compliance with international law, in particular UNCLOS, and with the main objective to ensure the sustainable management of the ocean's resources and safeguarding biodiversity. Through its various Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements in the region and its dialogues and working groups on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, the EU will continue supporting Indo-Pacific partners in achieving reforms of fisheries management and control systems, in building capacity for better ocean governance by creating an international marine data network and a regional ocean forecasting system, and in promoting living and working conditions of fishers in accordance with the labour standards of the ILO.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that in line with the Communication 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade, international digital partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region should be set up and new ones put in place. These partnerships aim to enhance technical, policy and research cooperation with partners on infrastructures, digital transformation of business and public services, and skills development, also with a view to facilitating digital trade. They will

allow the EU and like-minded partners to ensure the development of standards for emerging technologies, including in areas like artificial intelligence, in line with democratic principles and fundamental rights. At an initial stage, negotiations with Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore ought to be explored.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that EU investments in education be increased to at least 10% of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe with a view to strengthening education systems. The recent Team Europe pledge of EUR 1.7 billion to the Global Partnership on Education will translate into increased funding for primary and secondary education, as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the EU conduct more joint exercises and port calls with Indo-Pacific partners, including multilateral exercises, to fight piracy and protect freedom of navigation while reinforcing EU naval diplomacy in the region. Given the importance of a meaningful European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, the EU will explore ways to ensure enhanced naval deployments by its Member States in the region. Considering the lessons learned from the first assessment of the EU Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept, the EU will assess the opportunity of establishing Maritime Areas of Interest in the Indo-Pacific and engage with partners in the region, including by exploring the possibility for them to be associated with this initiative.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED the EU seeks to implement its programme to promote Regional Maritime Security for the partners of the Western Indian Ocean, and also seek to extend its Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) capacity-building project to the Southern Pacific and increase synergies with likeminded partners. It will build maritime capacity against drug trafficking, human trafficking and wildlife crime, and illicit financial flows linked to terrorism. The EU will also encourage the consolidation of information-sharing mechanisms through information fusion centers, including through the Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing (IORIS) platform.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the EU will also develop activities with partners under the project Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA), which covers counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security, and crisis management. The pilot partners are India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam, with EU military experts already operating in Indonesia and in Vietnam. The EU will also encourage greater participation of Indo-Pacific partners in CSDP missions and operations, seek to conclude Framework Participation Agreements with other Indo-Pacific partners, and, in addition, support Indo-Pacific partners' efforts to develop their own peacekeeping capacity.

Africa-EU Partnership

WHEREAS Africa is Europe's closest neighbor. The ties that bind Africa and the European Union (EU) are broad and deep because of history, proximity and shared interests. In Africa, new prospects and challenges are emerging from economic, political, social, technological, demographic, climate, and environmental changes. We need to partner with Africa, our twin continent, to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century and to further our common interests and future.

WHEREAS Africa has been recording steady economic growth. In 2018, six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world were African. Thirty African States are middle-income or high-income countries. The continent's economic expansion has the potential to accelerate and drive broader social and human development with new opportunities arising from the digital transformation, the demographic dividend, low-cost renewable energy, the green transition and a low-carbon, blue and circular economy. This reflects the vision of the African leaders' transformative initiatives, including the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, the African Visa-free Area, a Single African Digital Market and the Single African Air Transport Market.

WHEREAS growth has not always been inclusive, notably due to governance challenges. Thirty-six of the world's most fragile countries are in Africa, often weakened by conflicts. The continent hosts 390 million people living below the poverty line. Africa, as with the rest of the world, is also affected by the consequences of climate change, environmental degradation, and pollution. The EU and Africa must work together to seize the opportunities and address these challenges and develop actions that ensure stability, peace, security, human rights, democracy, gender equality, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable economic growth based on healthy ecosystems, social cohesion, and good governance.

WHEREAS to benefit both continents, our partnership should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities, reflecting the comprehensiveness and maturity of our relationship. These interests include: developing a green growth model; improving the business environment and investment climate; boosting education, research and innovation, the creation of decent jobs and value addition through sustainable investments; maximizing the benefits of regional economic integration and trade; ensuring food security and rural development; combatting climate change; ensuring access to sustainable energy and protecting biodiversity and natural resources; promoting peace and security; ensuring well-governed migration and mobility; engaging together on the global scene to strengthen the multilateral rules-based order, promoting universal values, human rights, democracy, rule of law and gender equality.

WHEREAS Africa's potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene, the EU and its Member States must work together in unison, adapting in the way it engages with Africa. The EU and its Member States are Africa's biggest partner on all accounts, be it in terms of investment, trade, official development assistance, or security. This reliable, long-term, multi-

faceted partnership should now also translate into a strong political alliance. Stronger political, economic, and cultural ties between Europe and Africa are crucial in a multipolar world where collective action is sorely needed. Enhanced cooperation on global and multilateral affairs will be at the heart of our common action.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED the Commission calls for Africa-Europe Investment Package of at least EUR 150 billion that will support our common ambition for 2030 and AU Agenda 2063, composed of an Investment, a Health and an Education Package. The Investment Package will help build more diversified, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient economies. This Global Gateway Investment Package aims to boost public and private investment building on existing initiatives and partnerships. The Package will boost large-scale sustainable investments, supported by Team Europe Initiatives, with due consideration to the priorities and needs of the African countries, including: investment in energy, transport and digital infrastructure aligned with the PIDA PAP II; energy transition that is fair, just and equitable, taking into account specific and diverse orientations of the African countries with regards to access to electricity; green transition including supporting the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) of African Countries under the Paris Agreement to enhance mitigation and adaptation; digital transformation that supports trusted connectivity through investments in infrastructures and an affordable and enhanced access to the digital and data economy while boosting digital entrepreneurship and skills; sustainable growth and decent job creation, including by investing in the establishment of youth-owned businesses in Africa; transport facilitation and efficiency of connected transport networks; human development, notably through scaling up mobility and employability of students, young graduates and skilled workers.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED to support a renewed and enhanced cooperation for peace and security, the Commission calls to further our cooperation through support for adequate training, capacity building and equipment, to strengthen and scale up autonomous peace operations of African defence and security forces, including through EU missions and assistance measures, as well as support for law-enforcement capacity-building. Together, we will also continue to support African-led Peace Support Operations and the on-going discussions on the use of UN-assessed contributions for operations authorised by the UN Security Council, and the implementation of the AU human rights compliance framework in that context. We will intensify our cooperation on security, including on cybersecurity.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED to enhance our partnership for migration and mobility, the Commission calls for a deepening in our cooperation in finding durable solutions for asylum seekers, refugees, and vulnerable migrants in need of international protection and commit to revitalize the work of the joint AU-EU-UN Tripartite Task Force. We must further strengthen asylum systems with a view to providing adequate reception and protection for those entitled, as well as work on their integration. We will keep addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and enhance cooperation on tackling all issues related to migration. Respecting national needs, competencies and legal frameworks, pathways for legal migration opportunities will be further developed between both continents and within Africa.

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED we pledge to reduce global inequalities, strengthen solidarity, promote international cooperation, fight, and mitigate climate change and improve delivery on 'global public goods', in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063. We commit to providing political support to achieve the necessary reform of the WTO and to improve its functioning with a view to strengthening the multilateral trading system. Both sides commit to contribute to the UN system reform efforts, including the UN Security Council. We also recommit to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement and the outcomes of the COPs. We recognize that Africa's energy transition is vital for its industrialization and to bridge the energy gap. We will support Africa in its transition to foster just and sustainable pathways towards climate neutrality.