EU trade policy digest September–December 2024

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Recent developments in EU trade policy

European Commission: Negotiations and agreements

Update

A brief outline of progress in EU trade negotiations with low- and middle-income countries, and key developments in trade policy. For detail see the AGRINFO Quarterly Trade Digest: EU Trade Policy September–December 2024.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

EU negotiations with low- and middle-income countries

Mercosur

The European Union and Mercosur have finalised technical negotiations on a revised Partnership Agreement, addressing key concerns about deforestation, climate protection, and labour rights by embedding the Paris Agreement into their relationship, and including enforceable commitments. Provided the Agreement has sufficient domestic support on both sides, it could enter into force in the second half of 2026.

Eastern and Southern African States (ESA5)

The European Commission reported that progress has been made in negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement with the ESA5 (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe). Advances have been made in relation to rules of origin, labour and environmental standards, economic development cooperation, and dispute settlement.

India

Progress in the EU–India Free Trade Agreement negotiations is reported to be slow, with limited advances made on market access, but with some progress on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. There are still key challenges in relation to rules of origin and security-related exceptions.

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Philippines

In October 2024, the EU and the Philippines began negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement covering areas including sustainable food systems, market access, and trade development. The second round of negotiations is scheduled for February 2025.

Trade policy

Ban on products made with forced labour

The EU has published a Regulation banning the import and sale of products made with forced labour. This will be effective from December 2027, and will cover all stages of production including agriculture.

New Trade Commissioner

The European Commission's new Trade Commissioner, Maroš Šef■ovi■, plans to deepen ties with developing countries. He emphasises the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) as a key tool to promote sustainable development and to advance rights. His priorities will include completing the GSP Regulation review, modernising Economic Partnership Agreements, exploring Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreements in Africa, and evaluating the EU's rules of origin.

EU annual trade policy report

In its September report, the European Commission highlighted the integration of trade and sustainable development policies. This includes greater engagement of civil society, and dialogue on labour and human rights issues.

Steps towards new EU Customs Union

Poland currently holds the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU. It has made customs reform a priority, aiming to reach an agreement on the European Commission's initial proposal by June 2025. That proposal includes creating a centralised Customs Data Hub to replace national systems, and establishing a European Customs Authority to improve risk analysis and controls.

European Court of Justice ruling on EU–Morocco trade agreement

The ECJ has ruled that the rights of the people of Western Sahara were breached by the conclusion of an EU–Morocco trade agreement. The Court judged that the European Commission had not consulted the people of Western Sahara sufficiently, reaffirming a previous decision by the General Court.

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European Court of Justice ruling on use of EU organic production logo on imported products

The ECJ has ruled that only products fully meeting EU organic standards can use the EU organic production logo, including in the context of a trade agreement. Organic products imported on the basis of a trade agreement, but not fully compliant with EU organic requirements, may be labelled with the organic logo permitted in the country of production, but not the EU logo.

Evaluation of EU–SADC Economic Partnership Agreement

The European Commission has published a mixed evaluation of the EPA between the EU and six Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. It notes positive trade impacts, but also highlights significant weaknesses in governance, and some unresolved issues such as sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) matters.

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