

What is Europe's trade policy?



A trading continent



Europe's single most important contact with the world beyond its borders is through trade. Every day, Europe exports hundreds of millions of euros worth of goods and imports hundreds of millions more. Europe is the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods and services, and is the biggest export market for more than one hundred countries. Trade is the motor of Europe's prosperity. New technologies, faster communications and more efficient means of transport have made it possible to produce, buy and sell goods around the world, underpinning Europe's place in the world.

The 27 Member States of the European Union share a single market, a single external border and a single trade policy. This gives the European Commission tremendous leverage when it talks trade with the EU's partners. It means there is one negotiation, one negotiator – the Commission - and at the end of the process just one agreement instead of 27 different sets of trade rules with each of our trading partners. The Commission also represents the EU Member States in the World Trade Organisation. By speaking with one voice, the EU has the weight both to shape an open global trading system based on fair rules and to ensure that those rules are respected.

A single trade policy for a united Europe

Standing up for fair and open trade for everyone



The European Union is a leading member of the World Trade Organisation

European countries were amongst the founding members of the modern international system of trade rules. This system, which has grown over sixty years into the network of agreements and obligations overseen by the World Trade Organisation, helps to ensure that trade is open, predictable and fair. The WTO provides a forum in which all of its members have an equal say in the making of trade rules and in the negotiation of new WTO trade agreements. The WTO system has helped to shape and maintain a system of global trade rules that not only keeps the global economy open for trade, but reflects and respects the special needs and concerns of developing countries. Maintaining the WTO system, and ensuring that it continues to adapt to a fast-changing world, is a central priority for Europe's trade policy.

Creating opportunities for European companies and their workers



An open and fair international trading system is one of the foundations of Europe's competitiveness

Europe's trade policy seeks to create jobs, investment opportunities and growth for European companies – and for the wider economy – by increasing their opportunities to trade with the rest of the world. Thanks to the ease of modern transport and communications, even the smallest European companies have the potential to trade outside Europe. European trade policy helps to open new markets for European exports through trade agreements with other countries which reduce the tariffs and other barriers to the markets of potential trading partners. In addition, the European Commission works on a day to day basis to remove specific barriers and obstacles encountered by exporters, to open up new opportunities for European investment, and to reduce counterfeiting and piracy of European goods.

Making sure others play by the rules



Because international trade rules are designed to ensure that trade is fair, it is vital that they are respected. The European Commission represents and defends European interests in the court system of the World Trade Organisation, helping to ensure that others live up to their WTO obligations. The European Commission is also responsible for making sure that the imports that enter the European Union are traded at fair prices and that they do not cause unfair damage to European companies and their workers.

The European Union works for transparent and fair rules worldwide

Ensuring trade is a force for sustainable development



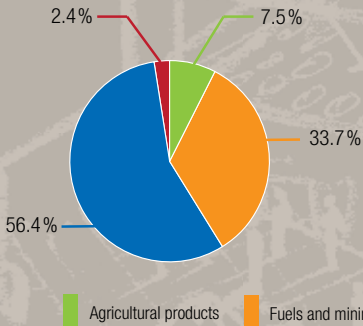
| *Europe's trade strategy aims at reconciling economic growth and development, social cohesion and environmental protection*

The EU is committed to pursuing a trade policy that not only boosts economic growth and creates jobs in Europe, but which actively helps countries and people around the world to use trade as a tool for development. These objectives do not contradict each other: the EU's trade policy takes account of, and is adapted to, the specific developmental needs and situations of its trading partners. Europe has opened its markets fully to all imports from the world's poorest countries, while making sure that trade opening by developing countries is gradual, progressive and adapted to their individual strengths and weaknesses.

The EU also works actively to help developing countries take greater advantage of trade. The EU is the world's largest provider of "Aid for Trade" to developing countries - more than €7 billion a year. This assistance helps developing partners develop the infrastructure and skills needed to trade successfully. These are important tools in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

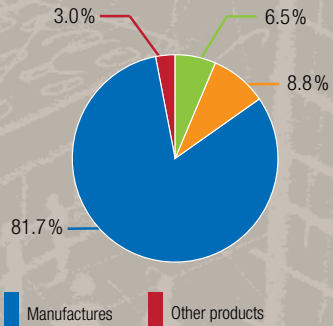
Europe also uses its trade policy to promote European values: supporting the fight to protect our environment and reverse global warming; striving to improve working conditions for workers in developing countries and ensuring the highest standards of health and safety for the products we buy and sell.

EU IMPORTS OF GOODS (2008)



Source: Eurostat (Comext, Statistical regime 4)

EU EXPORTS OF GOODS (2008)



“Trade is more than just the contents of shipping containers. I see it as creating the conditions by which investment, skills, experience and opportunity can spread around the world, and into the places where they are often needed most. The goal of trade policy is not trade for trade’s sake: it is a more prosperous, stable and equitable world.”

Catherine Ashton, European Commissioner for Trade



Europe is the world’s largest trading bloc, accounting for one fifth of global trade.

In brief...

The European Union speaks with one voice in international trade.

The Commission negotiates deals on behalf of the 27 Member States.

The World Trade Organisation is based in Geneva and more than 150 countries are members. It agrees the international trade rules and ensures those rules are applied.

Global trade rounds have been part of international trade for more than 50 years. The current (Doha) Round was launched in 2001.

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