

# Trade Monthly Monitor – April

Latest update: 30/04/2026

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## Highlights

### **GSP Regulation Reform – European Parliament adopts updated regulation granting developing countries preferential access to the EU market**

28 April

The European Parliament plenary [adopted](#) the [regulation](#) updating the EU's Generalised scheme of tariff preferences (GSP) with 459 votes in favour, 127 against and 70 abstentions. The new regulation will continue allowing vulnerable developing countries to export goods to the EU with low or no tariffs. Several international human rights and environmental conventions have been added to the list of international treaties that participating countries must ratify to benefit from trade preferences. These include the Paris Agreement, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

MEPs rejected last-minute amendments tabled by Italian, Portuguese and Spanish members of the European People's Party that sought to tighten the safeguard for rice imports. In any case, the EU's rice sector has been given an automatic safeguard, where MFN tariffs are withdrawn for the rest of the year when a given country exceeds their ten-year import average by more than 45%.

Background: GSP has been the EU's preferential trade arrangement with developing countries since 1971. It offers developing countries reduced duties when exporting to the EU with the aim of eradicating poverty, promoting sustainable development, and better integrating these countries into the world economy. The GSP system covers more than 60 countries and 2 billion people around the world.

**Next steps:** The legislation is to be formally adopted by the Council of the EU in the next few weeks. Publication in the Official Journal will follow. The new GSP is set to apply for the next 10 years. It shall start applying on 1 January 2027, when the previous regulation lapses.

## FTAs

### **EU-ASEAN Trade Relations – ASEAN and EU reaffirm strategic partnership in Brunei**

27-28 April

At the 25th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Brunei, ASEAN and the EU reaffirmed their intention to deepen the strategic partnership and continue discussions on a possible upgrade to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

On trade, the [joint statement](#) confirms that both sides want to strengthen economic cooperation and preserve a rules-based multilateral trading system. They endorsed implementation of the 2026-2027 ASEAN-EU Trade and Investment Work Programme, noted progress in bilateral FTAs between the EU and individual ASEAN

member states, and reiterated the longer-term objective of completing a region-to-region ASEAN-EU FTA. In parallel, ministers highlighted ongoing cooperation on digital policy, transport, energy, sustainable finance, intellectual property and support for SMEs to meet EU regulatory requirements.

**Next steps:** Regional cooperation on digital and trade issues will continue, with the implementation of the 2026-2027 trade and digital work programmes. Both regions will continue discussions on a possible partnership upgrade, and prepare for the 50th anniversary of dialogue relations in 2027. In parallel, the EU will advance its bilateral FTA agenda with Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

### **Malaysia – EU and Malaysia target October 2027 for FTA conclusion**

16 April

EU and Malaysian officials are aiming to conclude a free trade agreement by October 2027, in parallel to the 50th anniversary of relations between the EU and ASEAN. In a [meeting with the European Parliament's International Trade Committee](#), a European Commission representative explained the state of play and reported that progress in the talks has been satisfactory so far, but a number of difficult issues remain unresolved.

According to the Commission, the main obstacles include Malaysia's protected motor vehicle market, geographical indications and halal certification for EU meat exports. The EU is also seeking stronger access in public procurement and clearer disciplines in areas such as technical barriers to trade, state-owned enterprises, energy and raw materials, and trade and sustainable development. The Commission reported better progress in chapters covering investment, goods, rules of origin and trade facilitation, and said the sides are close to agreement on SMEs, good regulatory practices, digital trade and trade defence.

**Next steps:** The Commission expects to exchange market access offers on goods, services and procurement by summer or shortly afterwards. The next negotiating round is scheduled for 8-12 June 2026.

[Link](#) to the FTA documents.

### **Bangladesh – EU and Bangladesh initial Partnership and Cooperation Agreement**

18 April

EU High Representative Kaja Kallas and Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman marked the conclusion of negotiations and [endorsed](#) a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Bangladesh. The agreement would create a new framework for political, economic, trade and strategic cooperation and, once in force, replace the 2001 Cooperation Agreement.

Bilateral ties between the EU and Bangladesh span over 50 years, with development cooperation and trade as major facets of relations. The EU is Bangladesh's largest trading partner and two-way trade now exceeds €22 billion. Since 2001, Bangladesh benefits from the EU's ['Everything But Arms' \(EBA\)](#) arrangement, which grants duty-free, quota-free access for all exports, except arms and ammunition.

29 April

Separately, at the fifth [Bangladesh-EU Diplomatic Consultations](#) in Dhaka, both sides welcomed the PCA initialling and discussed future cooperation in trade, governance, migration, research, climate and regional issues. Bangladesh highlighted the importance of maintaining preferential market access to the EU and pointed to possible future instruments such as a free trade agreement and an investment protection agreement.

**Next steps:** the PCA now moves to formal signature and ratification procedures. Bangladesh and the EU are also expected to continue discussions on future trade arrangements and broader sectoral cooperation.

### **Mexico – European Parliament groups support ratification of upgraded trade deal**

15 April 2026

The main political groups in the European Parliament signaled support for ratifying the upgraded EU-Mexico trade agreement. According to reporting after a [joint meeting of the foreign affairs and international trade committees](#), the EPP, S&D, Patriots for Europe, ECR, Renew and ESN all spoke in favour of the agreement, while only the Greens and the Left opposed it.

Negotiations on the agreement were concluded in January 2025, and signature by the two sides is expected next month. The interim trade agreement would require approval by the European Parliament and the Council by qualified majority in order to enter into force, while the broader global agreement would still require ratification by all member states.

**Next steps:** The European Parliament's international trade (INTA) and foreign affairs (AFET) committees are expected to vote on 23 June, followed by a plenary vote in July.

### **Mercosur – Poland announces legal challenge against the EU-Mercosur deal**

24 April

Deputy Prime Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz [announced](#) that Poland will challenge the EU-Mercosur agreement before the Court of Justice of the EU. The action is motivated by concerns about food security, consumer protection and the procedure used to advance the deal. Agriculture Minister Stefan Krajewski said the government aimed to file the case before **1 May, when provisional application of the agreement is set to start**. The European Parliament has previously also referred the trade agreement to the CJEU.

**Next steps:** The interim trade agreement is set to provisionally apply from 1 May and the Commission will publish implementation guidance for exporters through the Access2Markets platform.

### **Eastern and Southern Africa - EU and five African states close to upgraded trade deal**

21 April

The EU and five Eastern and Southern African states (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe) [are close to concluding negotiations](#) to upgrade their Economic Partnership Agreement beyond trade in goods. According to the Commission, the parties agreed during talks on 17-18 March to try to resolve all remaining issues before the next ministerial meeting. Negotiators provisionally closed chapters on trade in services, investment liberalisation and digital trade.

Background: The current agreement, which dates from 2012, covers only goods trade. It abolishes EU duties and quotas on imports from the five ESA countries and allows for the gradual opening of those markets to EU exports. The parties agreed in October 2019 to launch talks to widen the agreement to cover services, investment, technical barriers to trade, intellectual property rights and trade and sustainable development. The last formal negotiating round took place in March 2025. Since the agreement entered into force, EU trade with the ESA-5 countries has grown by 31%, according to the Commission. Other members of the eastern and southern African region may join the agreement in future, subject to negotiations.

**Next steps:** The parties aim to settle the remaining issues ahead of a ministerial meeting intended to conclude the upgraded agreement.

## EU Customs

### Commission expected to publish guidance on €3 flat-rate duty

May

The European Commission is expected to release a draft guidance document regarding the application of the 3 EUR flat rate charge. The new measure is set to replace the de minimis rule that previously exempted packages under 150 EUR from customs duties, and it is to apply from 1 July 2026.

**Next steps:** The draft guidance is to be published in the second week of May, and it will be up for public consultation. The final guidance will be published in time to prepare for the application of the temporary measure, which will be in force until 1 July 2028, when the Customs Data Hub will be operational.

(Info obtained directly from the Commission)

## US – EU relations

### EU and US launch critical minerals partnership

24 April

The EU and the United States [signed a memorandum of understanding](#) on critical minerals and agreed on an accompanying action plan aimed at strengthening supply-chain resilience. This is part of the implementation of the EU-US Turnberry Trade Agreement. The trade-policy element to the partnership foresees joint work to support resilient supply chains, including standards-based markets, price support mechanisms, offtake arrangements and coordinated responses to supply disruptions. It also refers to cooperation on standards and stockpiling.

After the signing, [Trade Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič said](#) the focus would now shift to implementation, including development of concrete joint projects and possibly a broader plurilateral initiative. He also linked the discussion to wider EU-US industrial cooperation, including work on steel and coordination in response to global overcapacity.

**Next steps:** The EU and the US will begin implementing the action plan, with priority given to joint projects and further technical work on critical minerals and related industrial cooperation.

## Other Market Access Issues

### Switzerland – INTA mission to Switzerland reports back to the committee

16 April

A delegation of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade (INTA) visited Bern, Switzerland, from 31 March to 1 April. The delegation, led by INTA Chair Bernd Lange, [reported back to the Committee on 16 April](#) and recalled the generally constructive mission. They said that the agreement was generally positively received in Switzerland, and that there is recognition on both sides of the need for a stable and predictable framework for trade and worker mobility. However, MEPs stressed that Swiss sovereignty concerns and worry over EU steel protectionism are central to the domestic debate and can complicate ratification. The session highlighted that there is effectively no viable alternative to the current package for EU-Switzerland cooperation, making timely ratification politically important.

**Next steps:** The ratification process started on both sides. The Swiss procedure requires a public vote which is scheduled for the beginning of 2027.

### Türkiye – Türkiye-Europe Business Councils criticise von der Leyen's remarks

23 April

The Chair of the Türkiye-Europe Business Councils ([DEIK](#)) [criticised](#) European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for referring to Türkiye alongside Russia and China in remarks on Europe's geopolitical environment. In a written statement, he said Türkiye should be regarded as a strategic European partner and future EU

member rather than a threat. Türkiye's role as an EU candidate country, NATO ally and customs union partner makes it an integral part of Europe's economic, security and social framework, which explains the controversy sparked after the statement has been made.

## DG TRADE changes

### Commission appoints Ditte Juul Jørgensen as new Director-General of DG TRADE

28 April

The European Commission [announced](#) personnel changes within DG TRADE and the wider Commission administration. It decided to transfer Ditte Juul Jørgensen to serve as Director-General of DG TRADE, with effect from 1 June 2026, while current Director-General Sabine Weyand will move to the Secretariat-General as Hors Classe Adviser for European Strategic Partnerships from the same date.

Jørgensen is currently Director-General of DG ENER and previously held several senior roles in DG TRADE, including Director for Legal Affairs and Trade in Goods, as well as Head of Unit for Sustainable Development and for Legal Aspects of Trade Policy. The Commission said her experience in trade law, WTO matters and sustainability-related trade issues would support the leadership of DG TRADE. Weyand, who currently heads DG TRADE, will take up a new role in the Secretariat-General focused on European strategic partnerships and will also focus on academic research at the European University Institute.

**Next steps:** The personnel changes will take effect on 1 June 2026, when Jørgensen takes over as DG TRADE Director General.