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COVER NOTE

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Subject: Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the
Council establishing Global Europe
- Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Delegations will find attached the opinion adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee on the above proposal.

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OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Global Europe (Multiannual Financial Framework proposal)

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing
Global Europe
(COM(2025) 551 final – 2025/0227 (COD))

REX/611

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Advisor	Anna COLOMBO, Co-rapporteur's Advisor, Group III
Referral	European Commission, 16/7/2025
Legal basis	Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	External Relations
Adopted in section	7/11/2025
Adopted at plenary session	3/12/2025
Plenary session No	601
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	186/9/7

1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC welcomes the Commission proposal to increase expenditure on the EU's external policies under the upcoming multiannual financial framework (MFF). The 'Global Europe' area has been budgeted at EUR 200.3 billion – excluding support for Ukraine, which constitutes a reserve of maximum EUR 100 billion above the MFF ceiling.
- 1.2 The EESC welcomes the consistent increase in Global Europe's budget as a positive step towards strengthening the EU's external action. This is essential to address the challenges ahead, enabling the EU to affirm its role as a global player, foster sustainable development, multilateralism, dialogue and peace, eradicate poverty, uphold human rights and equality, diversify its export markets, support civil society, regions and businesses in this effort, boost its sources of sustainable internal growth and build strategic autonomy in foreign policy, diplomacy, security and defence.
- 1.3 The EESC believes that the Global Gateway should become Global Europe's main instrument for a 'multilateral Europe' capable of revitalising the United Nations and its bodies and agencies. Moreover, in response to the significant cuts and restructuring at USAID, Europe should seize the opportunity and play a leading role in maintaining global development and humanitarian efforts as the most reliable partner in this regard. The EESC warns that an excessive focus on regionalisation could hamper such global strategic orientations. On the contrary, the Global Gateway should become a catalyst for moving from the current partnerships to a strategic alliance involving all stakeholders, including civil society and social partners from all the countries involved, to jointly decide on priorities, objectives, indicators and projects.
- 1.4 The existing Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Advisory Board for the Global Gateway has remained largely ineffective and disconnected from decision-making, while business representatives are consulted separately through another advisory group, thereby fragmenting dialogue and preventing a genuinely inclusive and coordinated approach. The EESC calls on the Commission to review and strengthen these mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation linked to policy-shaping and monitoring processes. The EESC and the CoR should also be granted an active role in this mechanism and not be mere observers.
- 1.5 Global Europe is characterised by consolidation of objectives, regionalisation and significantly more flexible fund management. The EESC expects this to facilitate the implementation of tasks, but fears that it will lead to reactivity in how EU policy is conducted. The EESC expects transparency in decision-making and the meaningful engagement of civil society organisations and social partners in the entire annual EU budget planning process and in reviews and periodic evaluations of the entire fund. It expects this not only from the EU, but from the partner countries as well.
- 1.6 The EESC emphasises the need to build consistency between foreign policy, development, trade actions and agreements and the European Competitiveness Fund, to ensure that all instruments work in concert to support the EU's values and principles and its broader geopolitical and economic objectives. Such synergies would help develop a coherent and strategic approach that strengthens the EU's global position so as to achieve sustainable development and economic resilience. Furthermore, such an approach should boost EU competitiveness and access to funding. In this regard, too, capacity-building for all actors involved in the work of bodies dedicated to monitoring relevant trade agreements between the EU and partner countries and regions should be supported.

- 1.7 The EESC supports the Commission's Inequality Marker as a valuable instrument for measuring and mainstreaming the fight against inequalities and ensuring the effectiveness of development aid. Furthermore, it calls on the Commission to extend it to Global Gateway projects. To this end, it is necessary to specify a significant percentage of projects for which both the redistributive and the social impact can be assessed, including through consultation and participation of the regions and populations concerned.
- 1.8 The EESC expects existing bodies, such as civil society platforms and others responsible for cooperation with external partners, to be consulted and engaged more extensively to build and maintain relations with organisations in partner countries. The EESC therefore calls for support for capacity-building for organisations involved in such cooperation.
- 1.9 It will be particularly important to support and fund civil society organisations wherever support from other actors is declining. This will be particularly important for strengthening democracy, civic space and gender equality and building relationships between organisations in the EU and in partner countries. Predictable and stable support is crucial, especially for external partners.
- 1.10 The EESC supports all efforts to reinforce prosperity and security in our neighbourhood and thus within the EU. After more than 11 years without any new members, Europe must give a fresh push to the enlargement process, its most successful peace project.
- 1.11 The EESC also expects that the objectives related to stimulating economic cooperation and entrepreneurship will be accompanied by ambitious social, human rights and environmental safeguards. It is particularly important that projects under this instrument do not lead to exploitation of the environment and local communities.

2. Background to the opinion, including the COM document concerned

- 2.1 The Commission has proposed an MFF worth almost EUR 2 trillion (or 1.26% of EU gross national income on average over the period 2028-2034). Although this volume represents a notable nominal increase, excluding inflation adjustments and the repayment of NextGenerationEU, this will only be 1.15% of EU GNI, which is close to no increase when compared to the 1.13% of the previous MFF.
- 2.2 According to the Commission, the new MFF is guided by specific objectives: increasing flexibility; simplifying, streamlining and harmonising EU financial programmes; improving local integration; providing a competitiveness boost; and providing a package of EU own resources.
- 2.3 The overall structure of the multiannual financial framework has been simplified and comprises four main headings: 1) economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture, rural and maritime prosperity and security; 2) competitiveness, prosperity and security; 3) Global Europe; and 4) administration.
- 2.4 The 'Global Europe' area, the subject of this opinion, has been budgeted at EUR 200.3 billion – excluding support for Ukraine, which constitutes a reserve of maximum EUR 100 billion above the MFF ceiling. This represents a significant nominal increase of 74% over the current MFF. However, when inflation is taken into account, the real increase in external policy spending is more modest. Nevertheless, the EESC appreciates the increase in spending, given

the numerous geopolitical challenges¹ and the fact that several countries, including the United States, are reducing their spending on international cooperation. This can allow the EU to become a more significant actor in international processes.

3. General comments

- 3.1 The EESC welcomes Global Europe as a positive step towards strengthening the EU's external action. Global Europe is essential to address the challenges ahead, enabling the EU to affirm its role as a global player, foster sustainable development, multilateralism, dialogue and peace, eradicate poverty and uphold human rights and equality, diversify its export markets, support regions and businesses in this effort, boost its sources of sustainable internal growth and build strategic autonomy in foreign policy, diplomacy, security and defence.
- 3.2 The EESC emphasises the need to build consistency between foreign policy, trade actions and agreements and the European Competitiveness Fund, to ensure that all instruments work in concert to support the EU's broader geopolitical and economic objectives and uphold the EU's values and principles, including human rights and equality. Such synergies would help develop a coherent and strategic approach that strengthens the EU's global position so as to achieve sustainable growth and economic resilience. Furthermore, such an approach should boost EU competitiveness and access to funding.
- 3.3 The Fourth Financing for Development Conference was held in Seville on 30 June; it brought together representatives of 190 UN states (excluding the United States) with the common aim of mobilising resources for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reaffirming trust in multilateralism. The 'Sevilla Commitment' adopted at the conference focused on commitments on poverty, inequality and sustainability. The 0.7% GNI target for official development assistance was reaffirmed, although threatened by drastic cuts. The birth of the Global Alliance against Inequality, promoted in Seville by emerging countries, was a positive outcome. Human development and social inclusion, including health and social protection and defence of public goods, must also apply in external action. This Commitment must become part of the framework of the future Global Europe.
- 3.4 The new Global Europe will be based on a new financial architecture. Unlike the current NDICI (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) model, which had three pillars (geographic, thematic, and a rapid response mechanism), the planned Global Europe will be more centralised and based more on consolidation. It will combine current instruments (development, neighbourhood, humanitarian aid, pre-accession assistance) into a single, unified tool focused primarily on geographical coverage.
- 3.5 The Global Europe instrument is based on six pillars. There are five geographic pillars – 1. Europe (EUR 43.17 billion), 2. Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (EUR 42.93 billion), 3. Sub-Saharan Africa (EUR 60.53 billion), 4. Asia and the Pacific (EUR 17.05 billion), and 5. Americas and the Caribbean (EUR 9.14 billion) – and one global pillar (EUR 12.67 billion) aimed at focusing on global initiatives. It includes the former standalone programmes on human rights, civil society, and global public goods.

¹ Presented in the EESC's Resolution on *Defending the EU's values and strengthening its future in the new geopolitical order*.

- 3.6 These six pillars consist of programmable and non-programmable components. The non-programmable funds include humanitarian aid, macro-financial assistance, resilience, competitiveness, as well as crisis, peace and foreign policy needs. The emerging challenges and priorities cushion constitutes a budgetary buffer; the allocation for the cushion is proposed to be increased compared to the current MFF, which, given that the available funds were used up quite quickly in the current financial framework, can also be seen as a positive development.
- 3.7 The draft regulation on Global Europe strongly emphasises the flexibility of financing, which the EESC welcomes in principle, as flexibility and ability to respond quickly to emergency situations can enhance the EU's credibility and counter the perception of the EU as an overly bureaucratic and slow-moving structure. However, the EESC strongly recommends maintaining clear and ambitious economic, social and environmental objectives, to ensure maximum effectiveness and alignment across the MFF.
- 3.8 The lack of specific gender equality targets can jeopardise and decrease the financial commitment to the promotion of gender equality and women's rights globally, in a context of rapidly shrinking civic space, an anti-gender movement and cuts to ODA which impact women and girls the most.
- 3.9 The remaining quantitative target is official development assistance (ODA), set at 'at least 90% of expenditure', with a further 30% climate and environment target². However, even this target can be amended by the Commission via a delegated act, without having to reopen the entire regulation (Article 6(6)). The EESC strongly calls on the Commission to ensure that, despite this possibility, it remains committed to promoting fair development, particularly in areas such as social policy, health, and human capital in less developed countries, and to providing stable and predictable support.
- 3.10 The EESC also notes that Article 12(3) of the draft regulation introduces an option to suspend payments if serious shortcomings in partner countries' readiness to readmit their own nationals are identified. This is the only area where such an option is envisaged for serious shortcomings by third countries, while nothing similar is expected in relation to other key policies, for example, violations of human rights and fundamental labour standards. The EESC opposes such an approach, as we need positive incentives to achieve crucial goals. Since the stated main goal of Article 12 on migration and forced displacement, which includes irregular migration and its root causes, commits the EU to a comprehensive approach based on partnership with third countries, such an approach could be largely counterproductive.
- 3.11 Despite the positive assessment of the proposed flexibility in external action, civil society expects full transparency and accountability in the spending of funds. The EESC requests that funds allocated within Global Europe be subject to periodic audits. Annual budget planning will be particularly important. The EESC will also present its own observations and recommendations regarding planned activities

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As established for Global Europe in Annex III to the Commission's Proposal for a Performance Framework Regulation ([COM \(2025\) 545 final](#)).

- 3.12 This planning and auditing will be crucial because the regulation's rather general outline of priorities and its lack of references to strategic documents will ultimately encourage the EU to act reactively, potentially losing sight of a more strategic and long-term perspective, to the detriment of external partners, especially recipients of EU support. Under the current framework, certain measures are defined at a minimum guaranteed level. This is all the more important because Article 17(2) of the regulation allows for the review of the multiannual indicative programmes (MIPs) where there are substantive changes in the policy framework or in a crisis or post-crisis situation.
- 3.13 It will also be particularly important given that Global Europe is to break with the *ex ante* involvement of parties other than the European Commission and move towards *ex post* evaluation, which constitutes a significant paradigm shift and raises legitimate questions about competences in the field of external policy and ultimate responsibility for it. This should be further assessed in relation to what is streamlined under the proposed horizontal Performance Regulation.
- 3.14 The regionalisation of spending, as outlined above, should not be an end in itself. Proper, detailed targeting of expenditure will be crucial, ensuring maximum effectiveness, and not only in the purely economic sense. Therefore, the EESC strongly advocates that programming and evaluation of expenditure should involve partners representing civil society and social partners, from both the EU and partner countries. The role of bilateral bodies comprising CSO representatives should be emphasised here: they are ready-made spaces for dialogue involving actors with the experience and knowledge needed to advise EU institutions responsible for EU external policy and to exchange knowledge with external partners.
- 3.15 The EESC therefore calls for capacity-building for bodies that pursue cooperation with civil society and social partner organisations in partner countries, including youth organisations, particularly by providing adequate resources to allow regular meetings to be held. The lack of resources for this purpose, especially for travel and accommodation costs, is a major obstacle to further stepping up and developing cooperation.
- 3.16 As already indicated, the number of thematic priorities within global programmes will be reduced. Traditionally, these programmes are focused on supporting civil society, even without the consent of host governments. Therefore, focusing on financial planning as set out in the MFF presents a significant risk that the portion supporting global initiatives for democracy, civil society and gender equality will be reduced. This would represent a missed opportunity for the EU to fill gaps created by other countries' reductions in international spending.
- 3.17 The EESC welcomes Global Europe's greater focus on achieving concrete benefits for the EU on the international stage, as outlined in Article 5 of the draft regulation. In the current geopolitical environment, enhanced cooperation with partners, greater assertiveness and the defence of European interests on the global stage are essential, as is the implementation of the EU's strategic objectives. This is especially important given its centrality to the EU economy. Funds spent inside and outside the EU's borders generally provide a positive boost to the EU economy.
- 3.18 In this context, the Global Gateway strategy, rightly recognised by the European Commission as a key instrument of economic foreign policy, is gaining significant importance. This will enable greater external investment aimed at achieving sustainable development goals in partnership with partner countries. Building active and equal cooperation for all Member States

within these investments will be crucial. The Global Gateway also provides significant infrastructure investment for the transport of key minerals, with a particular focus on private companies. The EU must be involved to ensure sustainable growth and to avoid social and environmental exploitation.

- 3.19 The Global Gateway should indeed become the reference policy framework to strive for the ‘multilateralisation’ of Global Europe. In this regard, excessive ‘regionalisation’ might entail the negative consequences of losing sight of global strategic orientations. The EU could be the global hub of a pragmatic multilateralism that could favour the rebirth of the UN. To this end, the Global Gateway should be transformed from partnership to a true strategic alliance.
- 3.20 The EESC regrets that, despite its central role in the EU’s external action, the Global Gateway has so far lacked meaningful involvement of civil society. The EESC calls on the Commission to ensure that civil society participation is embedded in the governance of the strategy and that the necessary conditions for participation are met, in particular transparency, access to information, clarity of governance structures and timely consultation processes. The existing Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities Advisory Board for the Global Gateway has remained largely ineffective and disconnected from decision-making, while business representatives are consulted separately through another advisory group, thereby fragmenting dialogue and preventing a genuinely inclusive and coordinated approach. The EESC calls on the Commission to review and strengthen these mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation linked to policy-shaping and monitoring processes. The EESC and the CoR should also be granted an active role in this mechanism and not be mere observers.
- 3.21 The EESC calls for the swift setting-up of the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism provided for in the Samoa Agreement and of a permanent EU–Africa Civil Society Engagement Mechanism and requests that the EESC is adequately involved in these mechanisms as the voice of organised civil society in the EU institutional framework.
- 3.22 In general, the EESC wants to highlight that Global Europe may create positive outcomes, mainly increased competitiveness, access to funding and private sector leverage, but the proposal raises concerns which need to be addressed. It is expected that access to EU funds will be simplified and that no new burdens will be imposed on society and businesses when it is not necessary. The EESC emphasises that the EU’s external policy should be conducive to investment and strongly interconnected with an ambitious trade policy. This should be facilitated by strong partnerships around the world.
- 3.23 If the EU intends to build a viable multilateral policy, it should not only focus its efforts on project implementation, but also plan strategic actions to develop lasting alliances. Ultimately, this would require greater consideration of the importance of co-creating programmes and related expenditure with the participation of all stakeholders – not just governments but also representatives of CSOs and social partners. In this regard, coordination of EU and Member State efforts should be stepped up. This type of cooperation with local partners is crucial if the EU wants to achieve goals that are important to it, but also dependent on progress in other regions of the world.

3.24 This is all the more important because the EU is currently losing competitiveness due to its ambitious energy transformation goals, especially in the industrial sector³. The lack of progress in making European goals globally applicable will exacerbate these current problems.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The EESC also welcomes the fact that Global Europe will include a pillar for global action, such as initiatives within the United Nations or in areas such as counter-terrorism, global health, cybersecurity, combating disinformation, and climate and ocean governance.

4.2 The EESC supports all efforts to reinforce prosperity and security in our neighbourhood and thus within the EU. After more than 11 years without any new members, Europe must give a fresh push to the enlargement process, its most successful peace project.

4.3 At the same time, the EESC stresses that the whole process must remain merit-based, with the overarching goal of ensuring democracy, the rule of law and fundamental values in the EU's new members, including social and civil rights. Supporting and strengthening social partners and CSOs as an integral part of the European model must be ensured.

4.4 In principle, the EESC welcomes the Commission's emphasis on the need for conditionality in implementing EU enlargement policy. The Commission emphasises criteria related to the rule of law, and expects enlargement policy to take account of local contexts. This will further ensure that EU actions are not perceived as interference or attempts to force change where it is not necessary.

4.5 On the other hand, the regulation is not as decisive when it comes to conditions related to socio-economic development. Improving both economic and social well-being both in Europe and around the world is essential to achieving the SDG agenda. These two aspects are deeply intertwined. Ensuring that the economic growth targeted in 'Global Europe' actually leads to broad social improvement is the key to a sustainable future.

4.6 Therefore, the EESC expects that spending will also be focused on achieving social goals, especially the proper implementation of fundamental labour standards set by the International Labour Organization, and will support the fight against all inequalities. This should not only apply to enlargement policy but also be a cross-cutting criterion encompassing all regions and activities. This should be followed by the definition of appropriate indicators of social progress.

4.7 In addition, the reference to support for integrating young people into the labour market (especially those not in employment, education or training) in areas of high unemployment which appeared in the 2021-27 IPA III Regulation should be reinstated to ensure that candidate countries can continue to run Youth Guarantee schemes.

4.8 In particular, the regulation lacks measures to mainstream the fight against inequalities. Conditions must be placed on the public policies of aid-recipient countries. It is essential to ensure that development cooperation is effective. To this end, the tools put in place by the Commission to measure, for example, the redistributive impact (i.e. the percentage of project beneficiaries who are in the bottom 40% or women, children, people with disabilities, etc.)

³ OJ C, C/2024/1575, 5.3.2024, ELI: <https://data.europa.eu/eli/c/2024/1575/oj>.

through the Inequality Marker should be extended to all Global Gateway projects. It is therefore necessary to specify a significant percentage of projects for which both the redistributive and social impact can be assessed, in terms, for example, of effects on sustainable job creation, SMEs and the general improvement of community living conditions (health, education, etc.), including by consulting and involving the territories, CSOs, social partners and populations concerned, to improve local ownership.

- 4.9 Moreover, the Commission ties funding to the achievement of specific goals. It will be crucial to avoid the associated risks, including situations where the expected reforms are not accompanied by adequate technical assistance, and where independent entities, including supervisory authorities, civil society, social partners and free media, are insufficiently funded. Situations where governments with authoritarian tendencies are the recipients of funding should be avoided.
- 4.10 It is necessary to prevent situations where unsatisfactory results from a given state result in cuts in support for independent democratic actors, especially for organised civil society and social partners.
- 4.11 In this context, the EESC emphasises the need to build consistency and synergies between external and trade policy actions. The EESC would like to highlight the role of civil society and social partners in monitoring trade agreements between the EU and third countries. In this respect, the functioning of dedicated bodies should also be strengthened by providing financial support to allow these stakeholders to participate physically in meetings.
- 4.12 The EESC expects external action to also focus on building alliances to combat tax avoidance and evasion and promote fair taxation. Solutions such as the ‘GAFAM’ digital services tax⁴ should be pursued and the announced steps back are not acceptable. Furthermore, greater efforts are needed to combat tax havens as they cause unequal competition and drain public budgets.
- 4.13 The EESC proposes that direct budget support be used more widely, as was the case under the current MFF with excellent results, since it can have a positive impact on the public policies of recipient countries.
- 4.14 In addition, it is important to address the issue of the foreign debt of many countries in the Global South, which has re-exploded following the COVID-19 pandemic and then the surge in energy and food supply prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It will be necessary to relaunch the instrument of debt swaps, to convert debt shares into local currency funds, tied to development projects led by local governments. The cooperation funds would thus have a dual effect of alleviating the country’s debt position and promoting development). The practice was defined in the Paris Club at the end of the last century.

4.15 The EESC agrees that, in certain cases, access to tenders should exclude entities from third countries that cannot be considered trustworthy for security reasons, while preventing protectionism and avoiding closing ourselves off from our allies and trustworthy partners from third countries. However, in all cases, it is expected that tenders awarded to European companies, financed under EU external policy funds, will take into account criteria related to compliance with at least the fundamental labour standards set by the ILO.

Brussels, 3 December 2025.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee

Séamus BOLAND
