

# Resolution on association agreements for the participation of third countries in Union programmes

2023/3018(RSP) - 08/02/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on association agreements for the participation of third countries in Union programmes.

## *General considerations*

Parliament acknowledged the potential to enrich the achievements of Union programmes through active and mutually beneficial cooperation with third countries that share common democratic values with the EU. In this regard, it recognises Horizon Europe as the world's biggest collaborative research and innovation programme for the period 2021-2027. The Commission is urged to conclude other association agreements with third countries, as this increases the competitiveness of the EU on the global stage.

Parliament questions the **Commission's approach as regards the conclusion of international agreements** dedicated to the participation of third countries in Union programmes, which **hinders Parliament's exercise of its prerogatives** within the procedures for the conclusion of the Union's international agreements. It urged the Commission and the Council to give full consideration to the role of Parliament when concluding any association agreements that follow this new structure, in accordance with the Treaties.

## *Cooperation and association agreements between New Zealand and the European Union*

Members underlined the recently concluded free trade agreement between the EU and New Zealand, the intended purpose of which is to strengthen bilateral relations even further and to liberalise and facilitate trade and investment, creating significant mutual benefits and economic opportunities for businesses and consumers.

While welcoming the proposal to enhance the EU's partnership with New Zealand through New Zealand's association to the Horizon Europe programme, Parliament notes, however, the **lack of provisions allowing proper parliamentary scrutiny** of the future association of New Zealand to Union programmes. In the agreement on the participation of New Zealand in Union programmes, the Commission and the Council give the Joint Committee established under that agreement the power to adopt protocols associating New Zealand to any Union programme, despite Parliament objecting to this prerogative, which de facto grants the Joint Committee implementing power on essential aspects.

Members emphasised their stance on association agreements related to Horizon Europe stressing that any body established through such agreements should not bypass the need to seek Parliament's meaningful consent. They believe that essential aspects of a third country's involvement in Horizon Europe should not be delegated to such a body. Moreover, Parliament disagrees with this new structure for international agreements, which does not allow Parliament to exercise its powers. It believes that this is an impediment to the fulfilment of Parliament's prerogatives, neglects the required institutional balance and therefore needs to be modified.

The resolution recalled that the agreements in question are without precedent as they allow for the participation of a new type of third country and, for the first time, do this through a general agreement

covering all Union programmes. In the past, such participation would be arranged through an individual agreement for each Union programme and limited to a specific multiannual financial framework. Given the novel nature of these agreements, Parliament lacks relevant data or information that could be used to meaningfully assess their potential impact on the current generation of Union programmes or on future generations of Union programmes.

### *Participation of other like-minded countries in Union programmes*

Members regretted that the draft agreement on the participation of the Faroe Islands and the proposed associations of Canada, the Republic of Korea and Japan follow the same structure as the draft agreement with New Zealand. They requested that the Commission refrain from preventing the exercise of Parliament's right of consent to any association to a Union programme and that association agreements with new partners only be entered into when Parliament has been able to exercise its right of meaningful consent. They also expressed concern about the fact that the recently agreed automatic rebate on the UK's contribution to Horizon Europe in the event of 'lower than expected' UK participation in the programme has resulted in inconsistencies with the provisions of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement to which Parliament gave its consent.

### *A way forward*

Parliament recalled that it should be **immediately and fully informed** at all stages of the negotiation and conclusion of international agreements, in line with the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The Commission is called on to:

- provide regular, detailed reports on the implementation of the agreements, such as updates on such aspects as milestones achieved, challenges faced, success rates of proposals by entities from third countries, annual contributions of third countries, budget execution and audit results;
- launch negotiations on an interinstitutional agreement that would lay down the general principles of democratic scrutiny by Parliament of the implementation of agreements on the participation of third countries in Union programmes.