



EU-Thailand Newsletter

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Second EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum takes place in Stockholm

Foreign Ministers of EU Member States met (13 May) with 26 Indo-Pacific partners to discuss the **state of play of the EU's Indo-Pacific engagement** and how to strengthen and improve relations. This format was first introduced by France during its Presidency of the Council of the EU last year. ASEAN countries – with the exception of Brunei, Cambodia and Myanmar – participated in this year's Forum. China was not invited.

The Forum was structured as **three simultaneous roundtables**: (1) 'Building more sustainable and inclusive prosperity together;' (2) 'Pursuing green opportunities and overcoming global challenges;' and (3) 'Facing jointly the evolving security landscape in the Indo-Pacific.' In these discussions, **Brussels claimed to have fully activated all the relevant resources and policy initiatives outlined in its Indo-Pacific strategy and presented itself in addition as a security provider to the region.**

Most of the EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific goes through **boosting investment in ASEAN countries**. So far, the EU has announced **projects worth €60 million** across a wide array of areas including economic and green connectivity, transport, energy and digital, as well as a **€50 million grant for the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility**. Furthermore, Brussels hopes to **enhance its participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus**.

Despite claims that China was not mentioned 'a lot,' it is the countering of Beijing that is the main rationale behind the Forum. The EU wants to show it means business in the Indo-Pacific and that its commitment with the region is a long-term one, with the intention of **wooing the countries in the region away from China and back towards Europe**.

Macron calls for a regulatory break on the EU Green Deal

Achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 cannot come without a deep transformation of the European industry. Since the start of its mandate in 2019, the current Commission has tabled **46 legislative proposals related to the Green Deal**, out of which **29 have already been concluded**. French president Emmanuel Macron recently called for a European 'regulatory pause' in order to **focus on the implementation of the concluded legislation**, which includes targets on renewables and energy efficiency for 2030, or a ban on the sale of new diesel and gasoline cars by 2035. This, in a way, **goes along the push for a 'regulatory moratorium' on green laws supported by right-wing lawmakers** across Europe, as they argue European industries are being weighed down with excessive environmental regulations that could not be sustained and implemented appropriately while keeping a competitive edge.



The Commission foresees to deliver **over 100 pieces of Green Deal-related secondary legislation in the coming years** – including new regulations and directives, or implementing acts to effectively execute already passed legislation. However, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who is hoping for a second term after next year’s European elections (6-9 June), has hinted a conciliatory proposal to slow down the rhythm of production of new environmental laws. Polls show **growing support for right-wing parties in Europe**. A Commission anchored to the right will slow down the Green Deal deployment to grant industry time to catch up and thrive.

EU Framework for Sustainable Food Systems, to be agreed before European elections

The Commission is currently working on the Framework for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS), one of the **flagship legislations of the Farm to Fork Strategy** that seeks to **mainstream sustainability** and **strengthen the resilience of food systems**. However, the proposal suffered a setback with its impact assessment – a technical evaluation that considers potential consequences, effects, and implications of proposed EU legislation.

The Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB), an independent quality control body that advises the College of Commissioners, has **not granted approval of the impact assessment** and therefore it will have to be revised and re-submitted. The Commission expects to do this by June. If the new assessment is approved by the RSB, **the proposal will be finalised and presented in September**, as originally scheduled. This would give the European Parliament and the Council just the time **to finalise negotiations before the end of this legislature in June 2024**. In order to speed things up, the Commission is planning to launch this summer an informal **stakeholder forum** to discuss **principles and definitions** such as sustainability requirements for public procurement.

The issue of sustainable food systems also has a **very important local component**, with cities at the centre of an effective approach. EU and Thai cities participate in networks such as the EU-funded **International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC)**, where Bangkok and the Italian city of Milan are cooperating to innovate the Thai capital’s urban food systems and explore urban farming. Additionally, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, linked to IURC, is helping Bangkok and Chiang Mai develop their food strategy to achieve more sustainable food systems¹.

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¹ <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/mufpp-iurc-team-europe-and-thai-cities-commit-to-sustainable-food-systems/>