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On 13 September, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presented her State of the European Union speech setting out policy priorities for the remainder of the Commission's mandate. One week later, a high-level delegation from the European Union institutions participated in the UN General Assembly to call for effective multilateralism to address humanitarian needs, the climate emergency, health crises, as well as the erosion of democracy and human rights worldwide. Meanwhile the European Union presses ahead with the implementation of the largest update to the regulation of the online digital economy with the Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act. Finally, the European summer was an opportunity for New Zealand cities to continue their exchanges with EU partners on sustainability.



Key milestones in the EU-NZ relationship

President von der Leyen presents State of the European Union Speech

13 September 2023 – In her **2023 State of the European Union speech**, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, outlined a vision for bolstering European competitiveness, reducing inflation, and removing bottlenecks to economic growth caused by skill shortages. The President's "Letter of Intent", which sets out actions the Commission intends to take in the following year by means of legislation and other initiatives includes a European Wind Power Package, a 2040 climate target, an EU Space Law, and an EU Biotech and Biomanufacturing Initiative, among others. With European Parliament elections under 300 days away, President von der Leyen also emphasised her administration's achievements, including by **completing over 90% of the political guidelines** outlined and presented to European lawmakers back in 2019. Among those achievements she highlighted her administration's work on the **European Green Deal**, which is pioneering in its scope and unrivalled in its ambition.

Another major theme was Europe's "Call to History" where President von der Leyen announced **preparations for a future enlargement of the European Union**; "in a world where some are trying to pick off countries one by one, we cannot afford to leave our fellow Europeans behind."

In the face of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, President von der Leyen signalled a push for a fully-fledged European defence industry strategy. "We will work on the **European defence industry strategy** to look into how we can support our industry to ramp up the production of critical equipment."

The European Union's **engagement with Africa** also featured prominently. President von der Leyen stressed that Africa "is of direct concern for Europe – for our security and prosperity," citing Russia's involvement in the string of military coups that have taken place across the Sahel region this year which has destabilised the region making it prone to risk of terrorism. Von der Leyen insisted the EU needs "to show the same unity of purpose towards Africa as we have shown for Ukraine".

President von der Leyen also noted recent successes completing trade deals with **Chile, New Zealand**, and Kenya. She pushed for completing deals with Australia, Mexico and MERCOSUR this year, and India and Indonesia soon thereafter.

Another major initiative that will have an impact on international markets, is an **investigation into electric vehicle subsidies** for vehicles coming from China.



On the agricultural side, von der Leyen stressed working together with farmers through a strategic dialogue to discuss the **future of the European agricultural sector** and how, through a just transition, farmers can work hand in hand with conservation and sustainability initiatives.

More Information: [Video of SOTEU Speech](#), Text of SOTEU Speech ([Original](#)) ([EN](#)), [Letter of Intent](#), [Euractiv](#) (Enlargement), [Euractiv](#) (Defence), [Euractiv](#) (Africa)

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EU Digital Ambassador visits New Zealand

28 August 2023 – The European Union Senior Envoy for Digital to the U.S. and head of the EU office in San Francisco, **Gerard de Graaf**, paid a special visit to New Zealand last month.

His visit coincided with a flagship event held in Wellington on the future of Artificial Intelligence. Mr de Graaf spoke at the conference on the EU's approach to regulating artificial intelligence, which is a world-first (see August newsletter for a summary).

Mr de Graaf also participated in a **Policy Futures seminar** (see below) on the EU's new digital rules to regulate online markets. In an **interview with [Radio New Zealand](#)**, Mr de Graaf explained the rationale behind the Digital Markets Act and Digital Services Act (see below).

He compared the new rules to regulating the banking sector, noting that, for example, a banking regulator wants to make sure that banks are not used for money laundering. In a similar way, companies within the scope of these new regulations will need to make risk assessments and undertake independent external audits. The EU wants to ensure companies have systems in place internally so they have the means available to minimise the risks while continuing to maximise the opportunities of the internet.

While in Aotearoa New Zealand Mr de Graaf also met with NZ officials working on digital issues including the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on the Christchurch Call and Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment on digital economy and opportunities for EU-New Zealand research cooperation.

More Information: [Radio New Zealand Interview](#), [DiploSphere AI Conference](#), [Policy Futures Seminar](#) (recording)





New Zealand cities visit Europe to partner on sustainability

13 September 2023 – Under the aegis of the EU's **International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC)** programme, delegations from two New Zealand cities, Whakatū Nelson and New Plymouth, recently visited twinned cities in the European Union.

A delegation from the **New Plymouth District Council** visited the capital of **Lithuania, Vilnius**, for an exchange of ideas on the energy transition, climate action and smart city developments. The four-day study visit (which followed a [visit of Vilnius delegates to New Plymouth](#) in 2022) led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both sides on concrete areas of exchange.

The meetings and site visits focused on Vilnius's main challenges, solutions and plans in the areas of public transportation, circular economy, central heating, urban retrofitting and the use of renewable energy. [Deputy Mayor Bublitz](#) and his New Plymouth colleagues expressed their challenges in achieving a more circular economy model as well as the progress on hydrogen energy usage for transportation and aviation. Experts from both sides then discussed city management (open data), smart city solutions (digital twins, use of drones, etc) and [climate action](#).

After four days in Vilnius, the New Zealand delegation travelled to Brussels, Belgium for another series of meetings with the likes of **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM)** and **European Association of Development Agencies (EURADA)**. In addition, the delegation had a targeted meeting with the EU Commission (DG Research and Innovation, RTD) to learn about possible collaboration within the **EU Horizon Europe programme** (see below).

Meanwhile, a delegation from Wakatū Incorporation, the Whakarewa Trust and Nelson City - led by Rohan O'Neill-Stevens, Deputy Mayor - went to Lemvig, Denmark. The trip's objective was to strengthen the relationship between Klimatorium, Lemvig, Denmark

and Klimatorium, Nelson, New Zealand, by sharing knowledge and working together on projects that build climate and community resilience.

The four days in Denmark resulted in various visits, meetings, and presentations with local stakeholders including a presentation of a Mauri stone to the Lemvig City Council at the Mayoral Reception, and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two cities. The other major themes of the visit included (i) a focus on **improving water infrastructure** to better prepare for future climate change related weather events, and (ii) the opportunities available through the **Horizon Europe** research programme to work jointly on a proposal.

Finally, three delegates from the IURC partner city of Malaga took part in the Smart Christchurch Innovation Expo 2023 held in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Both cities share a strong emphasis on technology and innovation, and this visit to Christchurch presented an opportunity to nurture relationships with Christchurch businesses, the City, Universities, and the Economic Development Agency, ChristchurchNZ.

More Information: [IURC Report](#), [IURC Report](#)



Foreign Policy Developments

EU participates at UN General Assembly

22 September 2023 – A high-level delegation of the European Commission attended the **78th session of the United Nations General Assembly** demonstrating the European Union's commitment to multilateralism and the international rules-based order.

This year's US General Assembly comes at a time of open aggression in Ukraine and destabilisation in the Sahel region. Multilateralism is needed more than ever to solve collective action problems and push humanity toward a better future.

On Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 September, **President von der Leyen and Commissioner Urpilainen participated** in the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and related side-events, reaffirming the EU's commitment to bring the SDGs back on track.

As well as the SDGs, the EU and its Member States focuses on two other priorities at the General Assembly this year: strengthening global governance, and building global partnerships to help achieve our common goals.

President von der Leyen represented the European Union at the signature ceremony for the new **Treaty for the High Seas**.



The agreement provides for the common governance of about half of the Earth's surface and 95% of the ocean's volume, the largest habitat on our blue planet. It contains clear rules to conduct environmental impact assessments, with the right checks and balances, before running activities in the high seas.

The adoption of this agreement is a historic achievement marking the successful end of more than a decade of multilateral work. It complements the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, which provides the legal framework under which all human activities in the ocean take place.

The text of the Treaty was agreed in March 2023 and formally adopted on 19 June, by consensus, at UN Headquarters in New York. It will enter into force after 60 countries ratify. Once ratified, the High Seas Treaty will allow the establishment of marine protected areas in the high seas at global level. This will safeguard the ocean from human pressures to protect biodiversity and is a significant contribution to protect at least 30% of the planet by 2030.

Comment

New Zealand joined the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom and six Pacific countries as signatories to the Treaty on the High Seas. With one of largest Exclusive Economic Zones in the world, the Treaty for the High Seas is a major development that will assist all parties, including Aotearoa New Zealand's commitments to protect biodiversity and sustainability.

More Information: [Press Release](#), [Treaty on the High Seas Press Release](#), [Politico](#)



The world marks International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

8 August 2023 – High Representative Josep Borrell issued a statement marking the **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples** to reiterate the European Union's firm and continued commitment to the respect, protection and fulfilment of indigenous peoples' rights as set out in international human rights law and in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This year is dedicated to "Indigenous Youth as Agents of Change for Self-determination". The EU invested €2.3 million in a new **Arctic Youth Dialogues initiative** to involve Arctic and European youth, including indigenous youth, in policy and decision-making, for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous future for the region, in line with the EU's Arctic Policy and the Youth Action Plan in EU external relations.

Comment

Provisions in the NZ-EU Free Trade Agreement acknowledge te Tiriti o Waitangi and the rights and obligations that arise from it. The Agreement also includes a specific chapter on Māori Trade and Economic Cooperation.

More Information: [Press Release](#), [Ministry of Maori Development](#)



Green Deal Developments

Commission adopts detailed reporting rules for the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

17 August 2023 – The European Commission has adopted **rules governing the implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)** during its transitional phase, which starts on **1 October** of this year and runs until the end of 2025.

In the implementation phase traders will only have to report on the emissions embedded in their imports subject to the mechanism without paying any financial adjustment.

To assist importers and third country exporters, the Commission has also produced guidance on the practical implementation of the new rules.



Comment

Suppliers in New Zealand should prepare themselves for additional reporting requirements from customers in the European Union.

More Information: [Press Release](#), [Implementing Regulation](#), [Guidance](#), [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism](#)

European institutions reach agreement on Greenwashing

21 September 2023 – The three European Union institutions have struck an agreement to put an end to erroneous green labelling claims. The new rules will mean that companies cannot label their products as “green” or “carbon neutral” without any evidence.

Companies that wish to make such claims in the EU will have to provide verifiable evidence that their product or services is genuinely carbon neutral. Importantly, the changes will ban green claims based on carbon offsetting and green labels that are not from approved sustainability schemes.

The law still requires final approval by EU countries and the parliament’s plenary assembly, but the effects of the changes will be felt from 2026 onwards. EU Member States will have two years to implement the changes in national legislation.

The Greenwashing directive is part of a package of new eco-design legislation that will bolster consumer protection including the right to repair and the eco-design regulation that will make products more robust and durable.

More Information: [Euractiv](#), [Politico](#) (paywall), [Financial Times](#)



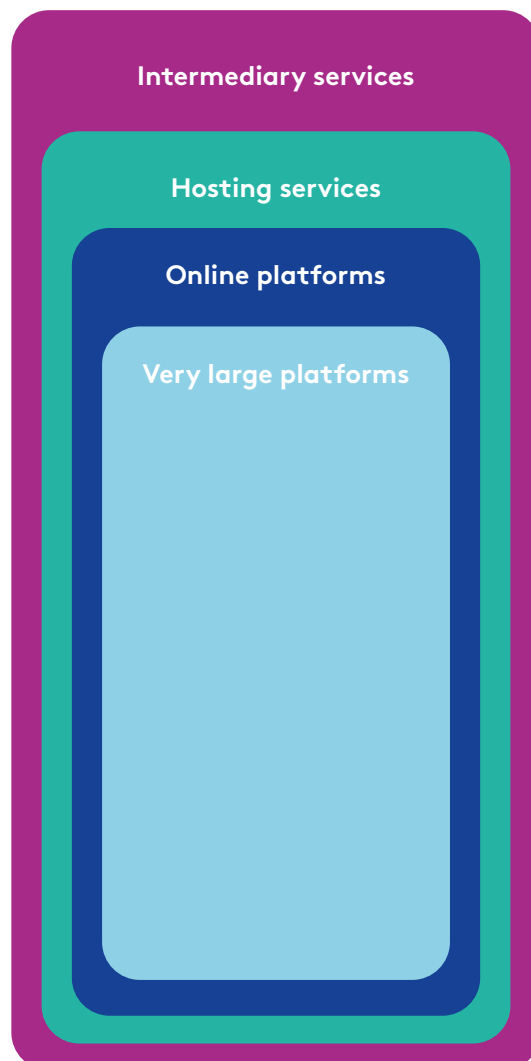
Digital Developments

Digital Futures: accountability for online platforms

30 August 2023 – The EU Delegation to New Zealand recently held its third seminar of the Policy Futures: EU-Aotearoa New Zealand initiative. The panel discussion focused on accountability of online platforms and featured speakers across a spectrum of stakeholder groups. These included:

- **Gerard de Graaf**, Senior Envoy for Digital to the U.S. and head of the EU office in San Francisco.
- **Paul Ash**, Prime Minister’s Special Representative on Cyber and Digital, Cyber Coordinator at Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- **Tom Barraclough**, Director, Brainbox Institute.
- **Anjum Rahman**, Founder & Project Co-Lead, Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono.
- **Prof. Alistair Knott**, School of Engineering and Computer Science, University of Wellington, Member of Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence.

Gerard de Graaf took the opportunity to explain the rationale of the European Union’s new landmark **Digital Services Act**, which targets online platforms and search engines with “due diligence,” and the **Digital Markets Act obligations**, which designates “gatekeepers” to ensure consumer rights and fair competition in the digital marketplace (see more below). Under the new Digital Services Act, Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) will have to take measures to counter illegal content online, track sellers on online market places, put in place effective safeguards for consumers, and improve transparency by including better information on terms and conditions, as



well as transparency on the algorithms used for recommending content or products to users.

The panel also explored the evolving landscape of online platform accountability in both the EU and Aotearoa New Zealand. Amidst their global influence and shared commitment to human rights, the discussion considered the feasibility, relevance, and necessity of global regulatory alignment among jurisdictions.

Comment

As New Zealand considers how to regulate digital markets in its own jurisdiction, the European Union has set an international benchmark for doing so. As the companies within the scope of these regulations adjust themselves to comply with these regulations, New Zealand stakeholders might expect to benefit from spillover effects as companies might opt to rollout changes globally rather than just for the EU.

More Information: [Recording of Seminar](#), [Digital Services Act](#), [Digital Markets Act](#)

European Commission designates six gatekeepers under the world first Digital Markets Act

6 September 2023 – The European Commission has designated six gatekeepers under the Digital Markets Act (DMA). The companies are Alphabet (Google, Youtube), Amazon, Apple, ByteDance (TikTok), Meta (Facebook, Instagram), and Microsoft.

The six gatekeepers will now have six months to ensure full compliance with the DMA obligations for each of their designated core platform services.

The Digital Markets act is a new ex ante piece of legislation intended to regulate the competitive environment of the digital economy and ensure there are clear rules in place to preserve competition for smaller businesses. The Commission can designate ‘gatekeepers’ if they provide an important gateway between businesses and consumers in relation to core platform services.

Commenting on the designations, Commissioner for Competition Didier Reynders said “the Digital Markets Act will help creating a level-playing field for all companies competing in the European digital market, as it will bring about more contestability and openness in markets. Today, we identified the first six gatekeepers that must respect the new rules set forth by the DMA.”

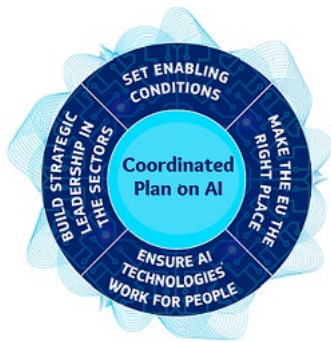


Comment

The DMA is in essence legislation to regulate competition ex ante, but this does not mean that the European Commission Directorate for Competition will let up on its rigorous enforcement of competition. The DMA is another tool in the toolbox for enforcers to ensure that marketplaces remain competitive and benefit consumers.

More Information: [Press Release](#), [Digital Markets Act](#), [Official Journal Text](#), [RNZ Interview with Gerard de Graaf](#)

President von der Leyen announces EU push for global framework for Artificial Intelligence



13 September 2023 – In her [State of the Union speech](#) (see above) last month, President von der Leyen announced her intent for Europe to lead global efforts on artificial intelligence, guiding innovation, setting guardrails and developing global governance.

While Europe has been the first to put in place guardrails for the development of AI in the European Union, given the nature of the global economy, it is also important that there is a certain degree of harmonisation around the world. The EU would like that its AI Act serve as an inspiration for global governance on AI. Thus, with the [Coordinated Plan on AI](#), the EU would like to work towards a governance framework for AI, which can be a centre of expertise, in particular on large foundation models, and promote cooperation internationally.

More Information: [Commissioner Thierry Breton's Blog](#), [Coordinated Plan on AI](#)

Horizon Europe Developments

New Zealand appoints Horizon Europe National Contact Points

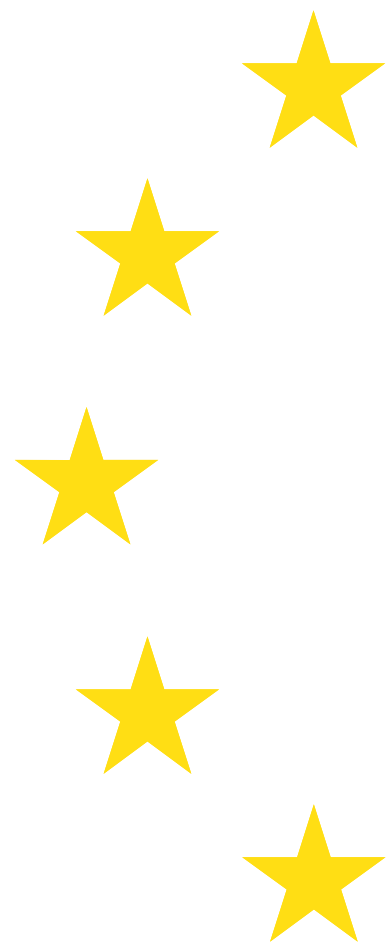
7 September 2023 – Following the signing of association agreement between the European Commission and New Zealand on the participation of New Zealand to Horizon Europe, the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment (MBIE) has appointed **Horizon Europe National Contact Points (NCPs)**, to provide information and advice to potential applicants and assist with building research consortia.

The NCP Coordinator for New Zealand is John Creech (nzncp@mbie.govt.nz). [Click here](#) for a full list of the contact details for the six clusters.

To get involved, you should start by:

- Browsing the work programme of the relevant cluster for open and forthcoming calls by following the links above.
- Reaching out to your networks in Europe as early as possible to find partners and build your consortium.

Of possible interest to New Zealand researchers is the news that the United Kingdom has agreed with the European Union on [rejoining the Horizon Europe programme](#). This expands the opportunities for researchers to collaborate with both EU and UK researchers on Horizon Europe projects.



More Information: [EURAXESS](#), [Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment](#), [Press Release](#) (UK Horizon Europe)