

## **Emerging fault lines in the negotiations on the future Global Europe Instrument**

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### **Summary**

The negotiations on the future Global Europe Instrument (GEI) are increasingly revealing the core political fault lines of the next EU multiannual financial framework (MFF). While early debates focused on the structure of the instrument and its broader strategic orientation, both the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union now broadly accept an instrument that is expected to deliver simultaneously on development, humanitarian, enlargement and geopolitical objectives. The central disputes are therefore increasingly shifting from architecture towards governance, safeguards and implementation.

This briefing note argues that the key questions concern who controls the instrument, who steers reallocations and flexibility mechanisms, how strategic priorities are translated into financing decisions, and what safeguards should govern their implementation. As the GEI becomes more strategic and politically salient, governance debates increasingly reflect competing institutional efforts to shape and influence implementation decisions. The Parliament seeks stronger oversight and scrutiny, the Council stronger political steering by member states, and the Commission greater implementation discretion.

These governance tensions are particularly visible in debates around the use of flexibility mechanisms, Global Gateway governance, enlargement financing,

migration conditionality and the growing integration of economic security considerations into external financing.

The note concludes that the GEI trilogues are unlikely to fundamentally redesign the architecture of the GEI. Instead, they will increasingly determine how the Union governs the growing number of political, development and strategic objectives embedded within its external financing architecture.

## Introduction

Both the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union are finalising their respective positions on the European Commission's proposal for a €200 billion [Global Europe Instrument](#) (GEI) under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).<sup>1</sup> While the Council is advancing compromise discussions with a view to reaching a position by mid-2026, the Parliament is still working through more than 1,900 amendments to the draft report. The analysis presented here should therefore be understood as reflecting evolving rather than final institutional positions.

The [debates surrounding the GEI](#) are increasingly revealing some of the core political and institutional fault lines of the next MFF. While initial discussions focused on the architecture of the instrument and the broader geopolitical repositioning of EU external financing, both institutions now broadly accept an instrument expected to deliver simultaneously on development, humanitarian, enlargement and increasingly strategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives.

The [key questions](#) increasingly concern how strategic priorities are translated into financing decisions, who steers those choices and what forms of political oversight and accountability should accompany implementation.

These discussions are unfolding against the [backdrop of wider negotiations](#) on the EU's next long-term budget, of which the proposed GEI represents roughly 10% of total expenditure. Alongside debates on flexibility, strategic steering and political oversight, negotiations are increasingly shaped by disagreements over the overall size and priorities of the future MFF. [Longstanding divisions](#) between net contributors and net beneficiaries have re-emerged, with several member states calling for a more restrained budget focused on efficiency and reprioritisation, while others argue that new ambitions on competitiveness, security, enlargement and external action require additional resources. The [European Parliament](#) has positioned itself firmly in the latter camp, calling for a significantly larger MFF and proposing an increase in the GEI envelope to EUR 225 billion in current prices.

These budgetary debates are now entering a more political phase. In June, the European Council is expected to discuss the first MFF negotiating box containing financial figures. While these figures are unlikely to be agreed at this stage, their introduction will bring broader political and budgetary trade-offs increasingly to the fore. At the same time, the Council is seeking to finalise partial general approaches across several thematic programmes, including the GEI, while

negotiations on the Parliament's draft report are expected to continue after the summer. As institutional positions take shape and budgetary trade-offs become more visible, the GEI negotiations are increasingly serving as a testing ground for wider debates on the governance, priorities and political direction of the next MFF. In doing so, it also highlights the growing need to [connect the dots](#) between debates on external action, competitiveness, enlargement, migration and security that are increasingly shaping the future EU budget.

## 1. The geopolitical turn and its safeguards

A close reading of both the [Parliament draft report](#) and Council compromise texts<sup>2</sup> suggests that the future GEI is gradually evolving from a development instrument with geopolitical ambition into a geopolitical instrument with development safeguards. While both institutions broadly preserve the development foundations of EU external action, they increasingly embed them within a wider framework of geopolitical, economic security, competitiveness and strategic objectives.

Both the Parliament and Council texts reinforce the strategic and geopolitical framing already present in the Commission proposal. Across several recitals and operative provisions, the amendments strengthen references to the Union's geopolitical, economic and security interests, economic resilience, strategic dependencies, resilient and sustainable value chains, competitiveness and economic security, increasingly connecting enlargement policy, Global Gateway, investment governance and external financing to wider EU strategic, economic and security objectives. This confirms the broad political acceptance of the instrument's strategic orientation.

Furthermore, the broad architecture proposed by the Commission is unlikely to be fundamentally reopened during trilogues (between the European Commission, European Parliament, and Council of the European Union). Both broadly preserve the Commission's integrated architecture, centred on geographic programmable actions alongside global and non-programmable actions, as well as greater flexibility and reallocation possibilities linked to emerging priorities and geopolitical developments.<sup>3</sup>

This is perhaps most visible in the treatment of humanitarian assistance. Earlier debates around the Commission proposal raised concerns that integrating the funding of the standalone humanitarian aid instrument into the GEI could increase risks of politicisation and weaken adherence to humanitarian principles. Yet, neither Parliament nor Council seeks to reverse the merger. Instead, both

focus on reinforcing safeguards within the new architecture, with Parliament additionally proposing a minimum €25 billion allocation for humanitarian assistance, illustrating the broader willingness across institutions to accept integration provided that sufficient protections remain in place.

Yet, the development logic of EU external action has not disappeared. Both institutions' draft amendments preserve references to Article 208 TFEU, poverty eradication and ODA objectives, suggesting that development cooperation continues to enjoy a significant degree of political support despite the instrument's increasingly strategic orientation.

The Parliament nevertheless pushes further in embedding development safeguards within the Regulation itself. It proposes reinstating both the gender target and the 93% ODA target from NDICI–Global Europe. The latter remains the subject of ongoing debate, reflecting wider discussions about the balance between development objectives and the instrument's broader strategic ambitions. The Parliament also (re)introduces spending targets for social inclusion, human development, as well as new targets for fragile and conflict-affected settings and least developed countries, and human rights and democracy, civil society organisations as well as for peace, stability and conflict prevention under each geographic pillar, further ringfences resources for the Global Pillar, and strengthens references to development effectiveness, democratic resilience and civil society.

The Council takes a different approach. Rather than introducing new quantitative safeguards, it largely preserves and in some cases reinforces references to poverty reduction, least developed countries, ODA principles, human rights, democracy, humanitarian principles, resilience and partner-country needs. At the same time, these objectives are increasingly framed alongside strategic interests, competitiveness, economic resilience and economic security. This reflects an emerging attempt to reconcile the development foundations of the instrument with a broader geopolitical and geoeconomic agenda.

The emerging divide is therefore not between a development-oriented Parliament and a geopolitical Council. Both institutions broadly accept the strategic evolution of the instrument. The difference lies in the extent to which development objectives should be protected through binding commitments and safeguards rather than left to political and institutional discretion during implementation.

At the same time, [concerns](#) remain that growing emphasis on geopolitical, economic security and migration objectives could dilute attention to poverty reduction and development effectiveness over time. More fundamentally, it raises

questions about whether a single instrument can [simultaneously deliver](#) on an expanding range of development, geopolitical, economic security and strategic objectives, and what governance arrangements are needed to manage the resulting trade-offs in practice. Recent analysis would seem to point to the requirement of [bridging](#) different objectives and institutions rather than mixing them in the design of instruments.

## 2. The struggle over flexibility

One of the clearest tensions running through the negotiations concerns the balance between long-term programmable partnerships and the need for rapid responses to emerging crises, strategic priorities and geopolitical developments. Yet, a closer reading of the emerging Parliament and Council positions reveals more convergence than is often assumed.

Both Parliament and Council reinforce the role of geographic programmable actions as the “main approach” of the instrument and insist that they should constitute a “large majority” of the overall envelope. The concern is that too much flexibility risks turning the instrument into a reactive, crisis-driven geopolitical reserve. This could indeed subordinate long-term partnerships to short-term foreign policy needs, weakening partner country ownership and eroding development effectiveness. While this geopolitical approach may demonstrate high European political relevance, its effectiveness, efficiency and articulation of values are highly questionable.

The Parliament seeks to place stronger political and procedural safeguards around the use of flexibility mechanisms. It reinforces the role of the Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) that the Commission will have to lay out. Yet also the predictability and dialogue with partner countries and civil society, while linking programming more explicitly to development effectiveness, democratic governance and Article 208 TFEU poverty focus.

Like the Parliament, the Council broadly preserves the instrument’s programmable architecture centred on geographic actions and long-term partner-country programming. However, it places greater emphasis on strategic steering by the Council and on the governance of flexible resources, particularly the emerging challenges and priorities cushion.

In the current MFF, the cushion has gradually become an important source of financing for new political priorities and strategic initiatives. Recent debates around the use of cushion resources to support strategic initiatives linked to EU

relations with [India](#), [Mercosur](#) and [Greenland](#) have fuelled [growing debate](#) over how much discretion should rest with the Commission when allocating resources that increasingly carry significant geopolitical, economic and foreign policy implications. Several member states have openly questioned whether such decisions should rest solely with the Commission, foreshadowing broader disputes over the governance of the future cushion.

The growing political importance of the cushion is fuelling wider debates about governance. As flexible resources are increasingly mobilised in support of strategic and geopolitical priorities, questions of political oversight, accountability and decision-making authority have moved closer to the centre of the negotiations. The more external financing is used to pursue strategic, geopolitical and economic security objectives, the stronger the pressure becomes for greater political steering by member states. The Commission proposal already partly reflects these concerns by reserving 90% of cushion resources for decisions by the budgetary authority, while retaining autonomous control over the remaining 10%. Several member states nevertheless argue that even this share should be subject to consultation.

The debate on flexibility, therefore, increasingly feeds directly into a broader institutional struggle over governance, political control and accountability. At its core lies a fundamental tension between preserving the agility and rapid-response capacity that flexibility mechanisms are designed to provide, and ensuring sufficient political oversight over decisions that increasingly shape the Union's external priorities and geopolitical posture.

### **3. Governance as the main battleground**

Behind many of the technical amendments under discussion lies a broader institutional struggle over control of the future instrument. As the GEI acquires a more strategic and geopolitical role, Parliament, member states and the Commission are each seeking to shape how decisions on programming, investment priorities, flexibility mechanisms and politically sensitive financing operations will be governed.

The Parliament seeks stronger political oversight, scrutiny rights and formal governance safeguards around the geopolitical use of external financing. The insertion of an entirely new chapter on "Parliamentary Oversight and Evaluation" is particularly revealing in this regard. The proposed chapter creates a permanent "Global Europe Dialogue", establishes regular hearings with Commissioners and the High Representative, strengthens reporting obligations, introduces detailed

written information requirements and creates expanded monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, including random impact assessments and expenditure tracking systems.

The draft report also seeks to expand the use of delegated acts for MIPs, policy-based loans and performance-based plans. This reflects the Parliament's broader attempt to regain leverage over implementation decisions that increasingly carry major geopolitical, strategic and macro-financial implications. Delegated acts provide the Parliament with significantly stronger scrutiny and objection power over politically sensitive implementation decisions. The Parliament has often sought unsuccessfully Delegated acts over external financing in past MFF negotiations.

As the future GEI increasingly relies on guarantees, blending investment mobilisation and policy-based lending, investment governance is progressively becoming political governance, reflecting the growing weight of Global Gateway and investment-based approaches within EU external action.

This is particularly visible in the debates around the Global Gateway. In a new article aimed at "codifying" the Global Gateway initiative, the Parliament simultaneously seeks to preserve development legitimacy, strengthen democratic safeguards and increase political oversight over investment governance. The co-rapporteurs emphasise poverty reduction, SDG achievement, democratic resilience, transparency and partner-country ownership, while also proposing stronger reporting requirements, enhanced scrutiny of the Investment Board and greater use of delegated acts.

More broadly, the negotiations increasingly raise political questions about who defines strategic investment priorities, how geopolitical trade-offs are arbitrated and what balance should exist between development impact and European strategic interests.

The Council, for its part, places greater emphasis on strategic steering, operational coordination and Team Europe implementation structures. Across the wider GEI architecture, it seeks a stronger role for member states through strategic programming reviews, an annual strategic Council debate based on a Commission strategy report, and enhanced information and oversight arrangements surrounding the mobilisation of flexible resources, including the emerging challenges and priorities cushion. Taken together, these proposals reflect a broader concern that increasingly strategic financing decisions should not rest exclusively with the Commission.

The Commission, meanwhile, seeks to preserve broad implementation discretion within an increasingly integrated and flexible financing architecture.

These debates also increasingly intersect with the wider MFF governance reforms, including the Commission's proposed performance framework and political steering mechanism, which both Parliament and Council fear could further centralise strategic steering and implementation discretion within the Commission. Annual strategic debates, implementation reviews, reallocations and flexibility mechanisms are progressively becoming intertwined with the annual budgetary cycle and evolving political priorities.

Yet, the relationship between long-term programming, strategic steering and institutional accountability remains only partially defined, opening what is likely to become one of the central governance fault lines of the trilogues and wider MFF negotiations.

#### **4. Geopolitical conditionality, migration and economic security**

The governance struggle becomes particularly consequential in areas where the geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions of the instrument are most visible.

**Enlargement policy** is now widely framed by both institutions as a geopolitical tool for enhancing resilience, stability and Europe's broader strategic positioning. Enlargement financing is increasingly linked to political alignment, migration cooperation and wider geopolitical priorities, reinforcing the more conditional nature of the Europe pillar.

The Council also seeks a stronger role in the governance of performance-based plans and politically sensitive financing decisions under the Europe pillar, notably for Ukraine. Several amendments strengthen Council involvement in approval, review and disbursement procedures, reflecting broader member state concerns about political oversight over what are increasingly strategic and high-profile financing decisions. The [debates surrounding Ukraine](#) also foreshadow wider questions about the governance of future enlargement financing.

Meanwhile, the Parliament is also seeking a stronger role in the governance of the Europe pillar and is advocating for a strengthened "fundamentals first" approach, centred on democratic conditionality. It also seeks to define more clearly the modalities of "reverse conditionality" and explicitly includes provisions allowing the reduction, suspension or reallocation of funding in cases of democratic

backsliding. Together, these amendments highlight growing tensions between the geopolitical acceleration of enlargement policy and the preservation of credible governance and rule-of-law safeguards.

**Migration conditionality** is likely to become one of the most [politically sensitive](#) fault lines of the negotiations. While the current Parliament draft report remains relatively cautious, discussions surrounding migration-related provisions have highlighted the political sensitivity of this issue within Parliament. Broader political dynamics increasingly point towards stronger leverage-based approaches linked to returns, readmission and migration cooperation. These dynamics are also reflected in growing support across parts of the EU policy debate for more “innovative solutions” to migration management, raising further questions about the role external financing should play in supporting migration-related objectives.

The Council compromise text moves further in this direction and strengthens the operational focus on returns and readmission. It reinforces incentives, leverage mechanisms and funding reallocations linked to migration cooperation, and expands the suspension mechanism in cases of insufficient cooperation on readmission obligations. It also increases Council involvement in suspension and resumption decisions.

At the same time, the stronger the instrument moves toward leverage-based migration cooperation centred on returns and readmission, the more sensitive the balance may become between geopolitical migration objectives, Development Assistance Committee (DAC-OECD) eligibility requirements and the broader development rationale of the instrument. This could create growing tensions between migration-related spending priorities and the objective of maintaining high levels of ODA-eligible expenditure under the instrument.

**Economic security** constitutes another important battleground, particularly through proposed changes to eligibility rules and restrictions. The Council wants to substantially broaden the possibility for eligibility restrictions linked to strategic interests of the Union, such as supply chain resilience, strategic dependencies and broader economic security concerns. It also reinforces references to reciprocity, support for European implementation capacities and economic actors. Recent debates around the [participation of Chinese companies](#) in EU-supported infrastructure projects have reinforced calls from some member states and institutions for tighter eligibility provisions and greater support for European implementation capacities.

While the Parliament’s draft report remains more cautious, references to trusted partners, strategic resilience and the European dimension of investments

increasingly appear across institutions. The broader economic security logic is therefore progressively becoming mainstreamed, even if significant differences remain regarding how far it should reshape implementation modalities and eligibility frameworks. In practice, this points towards a more strategic approach in which supply-chain resilience, reciprocity and support for European operators play a growing role in eligibility and implementation decisions. As these decisions become more closely linked to strategic interests, they also become more politically sensitive, reinforcing demands for stronger oversight and political steering.

## **5. What is really being negotiated**

The coming months will mark an important transition from institutional positioning to political bargaining. In June, the European Council is expected to discuss a first revised MFF negotiating box containing financial figures, marking the beginning of a more political phase of the negotiations. In parallel, the Council is advancing compromise discussions with a view to reaching a partial general approach on the various MFF sectoral programmes and instruments by mid-2026. On the Parliament side, negotiations continue on a draft report that attracted more than 1,900 amendments and remains subject to ongoing compromise discussions between political groups. As a result, the GEI negotiations are progressively becoming intertwined with broader debates on the size, governance and priorities of the future MFF. While institutional positions may begin to crystallise in the coming months, the most consequential negotiations are likely to take place once the wider budgetary parameters of the next MFF become clearer.

Taken together, the emerging positions on the proposed GEI suggest that the trilogues are unlikely to fundamentally redesign the architecture of the future instrument. The main contours of the Commission's proposal, notably its integrated structure, broad flexibility architecture and increasingly strategic orientation, are broadly accepted by both institutions. The key fault lines instead concern how this more geopolitical and strategically oriented instrument should be governed.

Several issues are likely to become particularly contentious. These include the governance of the emerging challenges and priorities cushion, the role of delegated acts in programming and implementation decisions, the design of the annual strategic debate and Commission strategy report, migration conditionality provisions, the governance of performance-based plans under the Europe pillar, and the scope of eligibility restrictions linked to economic security considerations. The outcome of these debates will provide important indications

of how the balance between flexibility, political steering and accountability is ultimately resolved.

More fundamentally, the emerging positions suggest that many of the underlying tensions are being accommodated rather than resolved. Strategic interests, economic security, migration cooperation, enlargement objectives, poverty reduction, humanitarian action and development effectiveness are all increasingly embedded within the same instrument. Rather than establishing clear hierarchies between these objectives, the emerging compromises largely seek to accommodate them simultaneously. This may facilitate political agreement on the Regulation itself, but it also risks shifting difficult trade-offs from the legislative phase to implementation, where competing priorities will need to be reconciled through programming, allocation and financing decisions.

The GEI negotiations therefore offer an early indication of wider tensions that are likely to shape the next MFF as a whole. These debates cannot be understood in isolation from wider discussions on competitiveness, enlargement, security and migration financing under the next MFF. The GEI increasingly sits at the intersection of these agendas, making it a particularly revealing test case for the Union's ability to reconcile multiple policy objectives within a coherent budgetary framework.

The future instrument may become one of the first major tests of whether the EU can reconcile a more geopolitical approach to external action with the principles of partnership, predictability and accountability that have traditionally underpinned its external financing architecture. In this sense, the negotiations are not only about the future of the GEI, but also about the governance model for an EU budget increasingly expected to deliver simultaneously on development, humanitarian, enlargement, migration, economic security and broader geopolitical objectives.

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## Endnotes

1. This briefing note assumes a basic understanding of the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework and the original Global Europe Instrument proposal. For those entirely new to the topic, some of ECDPM’s other earlier analyses available [here](#) may prove instructive.
2. This briefing note draws on analysis of evolving Council compromise texts and ongoing negotiations on the future Global Europe Instrument and the 2028–2034 MFF as of May 2026. As these texts remain under negotiation and are not publicly available, the analysis should be understood as reflecting emerging positions that may evolve further during the legislative process.
3. This is significant as the Council and European Parliament actually did unravel the Commission’s proposal for merging external instruments in the proposed 2007–2013 MFF, feeling that a merged instrument did not include enough safeguards for development and human rights.

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