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Why New Zealand looks to Europe

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern explains why the EU is a natural partner in today's challenging times

Read this article in German.

Few places are as far away, from almost anywhere, as New Zealand. Each year, our country's remote beauty attracts millions of tourists seeking a great escape amid unique, unspoiled landscapes. But our physical distance from the rest of the world also gives New Zealanders a special understanding of community and connection that has fresh relevance today.

For us, international partnerships with those who share our commitments – to human rights, open societies and economies, inclusive trade, and social justice – are neither dispensable nor optional. They are crucial to our survival as an island state and integral to who we are.

The European Union was founded on the same principles. So, in today's challenging times, it is no surprise that New Zealand looks to the EU as a natural partner on so many global issues.

This sense of connection has roots in history. Many thousands of young men from New Zealand willingly travelled to the other side of the world to fight alongside our allies in two world wars. World War I left a particularly grim mark on our country, with three of every five men who fought in that conflict being either injured or killed.

New Zealand has never forgotten that tragic loss and the lessons arising from it. We learned that a world without rules, or with no peaceful means of resolving disputes, is one of chaos and bloodshed. We learned that even the smallest countries have a part to play in building and defending the world in which they wish to live. And we learned to be fierce defenders of dialogue, diplomacy, and the international rule of law, and enthusiastic participants in institutions of global governance and peace.

Global threats require global responses

Today, with global rules and norms again under threat, and cooperation in meeting the world's big challenges faltering, countries like ours must work even more closely with those that are committed to the same core values. In this regard, New Zealand sees the EU and its member states as key partners on three issues in particular: climate change, promoting global peace and stability, and trade.

Climate change is the defining global challenge of our time. We are therefore working together with our EU partners to set ambitious targets for emission reductions, and sharing information and expertise that will support domestic initiatives to meet these targets.

New Zealand has never shirked from playing its part on the global stage. Now, as in previous times of volatility and uncertainty, we stand shoulder to shoulder with Europe in meeting the biggest global challenges.

New Zealand and the EU are also cooperating to help the world's most vulnerable and worst-affected countries adapt to the effects of climate change and enable them to develop and achieve higher living standards sustainably. In the Pacific, for example, we have worked together to support increased use of renewable energy. This has reduced reliance on fossil fuels and made communities more economically resilient, thereby facilitating the region's progress toward fulfilling its climate-change goals.

Our partnership in the field of global peace and stability is equally valuable. We work together to combat terrorism through peace support operations, promote the rule of law, and address emerging threats such as cyber security. Global threats require global responses, and our partnership with the EU is essential to this.

Progressive, inclusive, and sustainable trade

Finally, the EU is an indispensable partner in protecting and advancing the rules-based global trading system that is crucial to our shared prosperity – and to that of small countries like New Zealand. We also jointly strive to ensure that the benefits of trade are fairly shared among all our citizens.

Maintaining the integrity of the World Trade Organization will of course be central to such efforts. But New Zealand and the EU have an opportunity to provide further momentum to the global trading system

by concluding a comprehensive, high-quality free-trade agreement.

Despite our close ties and shared outlook on trade, we currently discriminate against each other owing to our respective FTAs with other countries. An EU-New Zealand FTA would therefore bring significant benefits to both sides. More generally, it would give a much-needed boost to supporters of progressive, inclusive, and sustainable trade that delivers for all members of society. I hope that progress can be made toward an agreement as soon as possible.

New Zealand has never shirked from playing its part on the global stage. Now, as in previous times of volatility and uncertainty, we stand shoulder to shoulder with Europe in meeting the biggest global challenges. Our physical distance only underscores the depth of that commitment.

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