

# European imperialists seek access to markets, cheap labour and critical raw materials amid deepening great-power rivalries--Part 1

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8 July 2026

*This is the first of a two part series*

Europe's imperialist powers have for the past several years concluded a series of far-reaching trade agreements and raw materials partnerships spanning Latin America, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific. Donald Trump's return to the White House and embrace of an "America first" global trade war has significantly accelerated this process.

At the beginning of May, the long-negotiated agreement between the European Union (EU) and the Mercosur trade bloc officially came into force. The agreement between the EU's 27 member states and the Latin American countries Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay epitomises the intensification of the struggle among the world's major powers for access to markets, raw materials, and investment opportunities.

Mercosur and similar deals with India, Mexico, and New Zealand are invariably labelled "free trade agreements." But they represent an attempt to corner key markets and supply chains for European capital at the expense of its rivals and denote a further breakup of the global trade arrangements established after World War II on the basis of American imperialism's unchallenged hegemony. World capitalist markets are breaking up into competing blocs, each seeking to secure markets, resources and strategic advantage at the others' expense under conditions of mounting geopolitical conflict.

As Brussels, Berlin, and Paris demand market access for European capital, from Buenos Aires to Mumbai, Washington's "America first" agenda is based on the exclusion of all "non-hemispheric" rivals from economic life on the American continent. Both rival blocs are simultaneously directed against China, whose

economic expansion and push to grow trade and investment has made Beijing a major threat to the predatory ambitions of the North American and European imperialists.

The US/Israeli war against Iran, following the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, mark the initial stages of a third world war to redivide the globe that is escalating from day to day. The European Union's expanding network of trade agreements and raw materials partnerships must be analysed within this context.

European imperialism is not simply pursuing an economic agenda but rearming to the teeth so it can deploy ruthless military force against its rivals to seize markets, pools of labour, raw materials, and geostrategic influence. This drive is accelerating the breakdown of the transatlantic alliance between US imperialism and the European powers that dominated much of the post-war era.

## Creating a Europe-led trade bloc

At the heart of the EU's global strategy of economic plunder and profit lies the drive to secure critical raw materials, both for industries of the future and aggressive military operations. The Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), which came into force in 2024, sets out explicit targets for reducing dependency on single suppliers, particularly China. It aims to do this through a combination of strategic partnerships with other suppliers across the globe, an increase in the

recycling of minerals, and the promotion of domestic extraction projects.

Although China does not extract significant quantities of critical raw materials, it dominates the refining and processing of some of the most important elements. For example, Chinese refineries are responsible for processing most of the world's manganese, cobalt and graphite, three materials essential for the production of batteries for EVs and digital equipment, and other high-tech operations. Over decades, US and European imperialism have invested hundreds of billions in China to build it up as the world's sweatshop.

The CRMA reflects a growing recognition that direct control over materials such as lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements (REEs) and nickel is essential for European "technological sovereignty," i.e., the ability to produce EVs, renewable energy infrastructure, smartphones, digital infrastructure and equipment for waging war independently of the US and China. The EU Commission noted, "Lithium, cobalt and nickel are used to produce batteries; gallium is used in solar panels; raw boron is used in wind technologies; titanium and tungsten are used in the space and defence sectors."

Demand for some of these materials is projected to increase many times over in the coming decades. For example, the EU projected in 2024 that demand for lithium would increase 10-fold by 2030 and 21-fold by 2040, while demand for rare earth metals would rise by six or seven times over the same periods.

In response, the European Union is trying to establish a global network of resource relationships.

In the Indo-Pacific, Australia occupies a central position. In 2024, the EU signed with Australia a memorandum of understanding on strategic minerals that identified the EU's need for increased supplies of lithium, rare earths, graphite, manganese, and cobalt. Access to Australia's large deposits of raw materials will be supported by financing from the European Investment Bank, which agreed in late 2025 to provide financial assistance for mining projects, the processing of raw materials, and transport infrastructure.

Central Asia is another arena that European imperialism is determined to penetrate for its natural resources, pitting the EU against China, the US, and Russia. Countries such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan possess significant reserves of uranium,

copper and REEs. The EU has sought to deepen its engagement in the region, including at the first EU-Central Asia Summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in April 2025. The summit's declaration committed to establishing a "strategic partnership" between the EU and Central Asian republics, before outlining plans for joint resource exploitation establishing transport corridors to bypass Russia.

The recent European Political Community summit in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, traditionally a close ally of Russia, was bound up with the country's location as a key transportation route for trade flows from Central Asia to Europe that bypass Russia. Following the conquest by Azerbaijan of Nagorno-Karabakh during the 2023 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the US intervened to develop a transportation corridor through the Zangezur Gap, a thin stretch of Armenian territory separating Azerbaijan from Turkey, which has been named the Trump Route for International Peace.

*To be continued*



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