EU cooperation with the Trans-Pacific Partnership

Economic opportunities and a driving force for global trade rules

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As of: July 2026

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The global trading system is under pressure. International trade is increasingly characterised by uncertainty, protectionism and the erosion of the rule of law – to the detriment of the German economy. This makes a 'coalition of the willing' all the more important, one that champions open markets and the preservation and further development of global trade rules.

The European Union could lead such a coalition together with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Together, the 27 EU Member States and the twelve CPTPP member states – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Vietnam – account for 37 per cent of world trade – more than the US and China combined. In the long term, this cooperation should also be open to other like-minded economic partners who wish to strengthen rules-based trade. At the same time, close EU-CPTPP cooperation also offers opportunities to deepen bilateral trade and investment relations, which must be seized.

The first steps towards this alliance were already taken when the EU and the CPTPP agreed in November 2025 in Melbourne to establish a trade and investment dialogue aimed at closer cooperation. A few months later, in March 2026, a joint declaration on the future of world trade was issued at the 14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Yaoundé. The German Government should now work to institutionalise these declarations of intent and flesh out their content in order to facilitate and safeguard international trade for German companies.

A close partnership rather than joining the CPTPP

Trade in goods and services with the CPTPP region is also of great significance to German foreign trade. The EU should therefore seek to establish as close a partnership as possible with the CPTPP. However, the EU should not become a full member of the CPTPP, as this would require it to adopt the alliance's regulatory approaches. Many of these rules, for example in the digital sector, were advanced until 2016 by the US, which had intended to lead the originally planned alliance – then known as the TPP. Even after the US withdrew, these rules remained in place. By joining the CPTPP, the EU would have to adopt regulatory frameworks thereby transforming itself from a 'rule maker' into a 'rule taker'. However, in the interests of the European economy and given its geo-economic significance, the EU should not relinquish its role as a 'rule maker'.

Instead, the aim should be to conclude trade agreements with as many of the alliance's member countries as possible. Through bilateral agreements, the EU is already linked to many CPTPP countries or is negotiating new agreements that would offer comprehensive market access. Negotiations with Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines should now be concluded swiftly, and the agreements with Indonesia and Australia should be ratified soon. In the medium term, the aim should be to consolidate these bilateral EU agreements into an EU–ASEAN agreement.

A comprehensive EU–CPTPP trade agreement, on the other hand, would tie up a great deal of trade policy capacity and would quickly stall when it comes to sensitive agricultural goods. As extensive agreements with many CPTPP partners are already in place or are on the horizon, the focus should be on concrete measures to facilitate trade in the areas of cumulation, digital trade, economic security and supply chain resilience, as well as sustainability.

Harmonising rules of origin

Trade relations between the EU and the CPTPP countries are hampered by a complex system of differing and bureaucratic rules of origin, which particularly affects SMEs. To link regional supply chains more closely with the EU, it is important to be able to utilise trade preferences for goods produced across multiple countries within the region. A common protocol on rules of origin could provide a solution here. This would give companies the choice of relying either on the bilateral rules from the respective EU agreements or on the joint protocol. Ideally, bilateral rules could be replaced entirely by joint ones. The joint protocol could enable diagonal cumulation. The revised Pan-Euro-Med rules should form the basis for the joint EU-CPTPP protocol. German companies already have extensive experience with these rules.

Securing digital trade

The EU is the world's largest exporter of services, 48 per cent of which are provided digitally. It is therefore crucial for the economy that EU trade policy opens up and keeps open service markets worldwide – particularly in the digital sector. The EU should work closely with the CPTPP member states to play an active role in shaping future global standards for digital trade. Through bilateral digital agreements, the EU has already concluded arrangements with individual CPTPP members that facilitate and safeguard trade. An EU–CPTPP agreement should be negotiated on this basis. A key element here would be a ban on tariffs on electronic transmissions. An agreement should also strengthen legal certainty with regard to technology transfer and localisation requirements, as well as consumer and data protection, and include trade facilitation measures such as e-invoicing and e-signatures. Particularly with regard to future developments, for example in the fields of AI and quantum technology, regulatory cooperation frameworks would be important, enabling the EU, together with the CPTPP, to have a say in shaping global standards. Cooperation on digital sovereignty – for example in the areas of open source and open, interoperable standards – must be strengthened in order to reduce strategic digital dependencies. Furthermore, all CPTPP members should accede to the plurilateral WTO e-commerce agreement and ratify it swiftly.

Economic security through supply chain resilience

An agreement to refrain from export restrictions and economic coercive measures would be fundamental. In addition, government transparency and notification obligations regarding export controls should be strengthened – for example, in the form of a code of conduct. This applies in particular to export restrictions on sensitive goods in the sectors of energy, critical raw materials, medicine and food. Both sides should also better coordinate their trade defence, Manufacturing Industry and support policies and agree on a closer exchange of information in the form of an early-warning mechanism for critical supply chains. Finally, agreements on critical raw materials are important. All of this should be codified in an economic security agreement. The recent Singapore–New Zealand Agreement on Trade in Essential Goods (AOTES), as the first binding agreement of its kind, can serve as a model for future agreements.

The EU's 'Global Gateway' strategy should also focus more strongly on Asia and support key connectivity and raw materials projects. So far, the EU has set only one investment target for the ASEAN region, amounting to 10 billion Euro.

Sustainability

Unilateral EU measures in the field of sustainability, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or the Deforestation Regulation, have been met with criticism from many CPTPP partners. From an economic perspective, international and coordinated approaches are preferable. To facilitate trade and investment, the EU should work together with the CPTPP member states towards sustainability standards and procedures that are as compatible as possible, particularly on issues such as deforestation, carbon pricing and border adjustment mechanisms. In this context, the harmonisation of carbon calculation methods and the implementation of the relevant regulations using IT systems that are as interoperable as possible are of central importance.

Furthermore, all CPTPP partners should join the Climate Club and deepen their cooperation with the EU in the fight against deforestation. The EU should also consider acceding to the Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability (ACCTS) initiated by New Zealand. Closer cooperation in WTO negotiations on phasing out fossil fuel subsidies could also be beneficial.

WTO reform

The US's new policy of high tariffs and trade deals, some of which are not compatible with WTO rules, mark a turning point in the global trading system. As a community of states based on binding rules and legal certainty, the EU should be resolute in its commitment to defending and further developing the rules-based trading system – not least because the European single market is also founded on these principles. A 'standstill agreement', in which the EU and the CPTPP commit to continuing to conduct their trade relations in accordance with WTO law and key WTO principles such as most-favoured-nation treatment, and to refrain from imposing tariffs that contravene WTO rules, would provide businesses with much-needed planning certainty. Furthermore, the coalition should initiate new WTO negotiations on key economic policy challenges. These include, in particular, modernising the rules on subsidies with regard to state-owned enterprises, as well as international approaches to sustainability issues such as carbon pricing and carbon border adjustment mechanisms.

Economic data

With the exception of Brunei, the German economy is represented by foreign chambers of commerce in eleven of the twelve CPTPP member states: Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

German foreign trade 2025

billion EUR	German exports	German imports	Trade volume
United Kingdom	79.9	38.5	118.4
Chile	2.9	1.9	4.8
Canada	12.5	9.1	21.6
Mexico	15.6	9.5	25.1
Peru	1.1	1.9	3.0
Brunei Darussalam	0.04	0.01	0.05
Japan	21.0	22.1	43.1
Malaysia	5.9	10.7	16.6
Singapore	6.5	5.3	11.8
Vietnam	3.8	18.2	22.0
Australia	10.3	4.6	14.9
New Zealand	1.4	0.9	2.3
CPTPP member states	**161.0**	**122.7**	**283.6**
USA	147.1	94.4	241.4
China	81.3	171.1	252.4
Worldwide	1563.8	1,362.2	2,925.9

Source: Federal Statistical Office, own calculations

With an export volume of 161 billion euros, the CPTPP countries accounted for around 10 per cent of German exports. Taken together, the region would thus be Germany's most important export partner – ahead even of the USA.

With an import volume of 123 billion euros, its share of German imports would be around 9 per cent. This would make the CPTPP region Germany's second most important import partner after China.

German direct investment in the region (stock figures for 2023)

Region	Investment stock in billion euros	Number of German companies operating locally	Number of employees (in thousands)
United Kingdom	153.3	2,318	418
Mexico	31.9	652	336
Australia	27.5	826	100
Canada	25.8	624	70
Singapore	25.2	629	46
Japan	18.4	444	71
Malaysia	8.0	302	91
Chile	3.7	232	31
Vietnam	2.3	107	38
New Zealand	1.5	104	7
Peru	1.4	93	11
CPTPP member states	**299.1**	**6,331**	**1,219**
USA	529.3	6,173	1,042
China	127.3	2,589	813
Worldwide	153.3	44,994	8,583

Source: Deutsche Bundesbank

Who we are:

The German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) is the umbrella organisation of the 79 Chambers of Commerce and Industry (IHKs) in Germany. Together, they represent the interests of more than three million companies from industry, trade and services – from small local businesses to globally active corporations. Their shared objective is to ensure the best possible conditions for successful business.

At the national level, the DIHK consolidates the positions of the IHKs through a formal, statutory-based process. It represents the overall interests of the German business community vis-à-vis policymakers, public authorities and the wider public. At both the federal and European levels, the DIHK advocates for competitive framework conditions, including reduced bureaucracy, open markets and modern infrastructure.

The DIHK serves as a platform for the diverse perspectives of its member companies. Its analyses and statements reflect a broad range of views, including minority positions, in order to provide policymakers with a comprehensive and balanced picture. In this way, the DIHK contributes to informed and credible economic policy debates in Berlin and Brussels.

Entrepreneurs play a central role in shaping the DIHK's positions through their engagement in statutory and voluntary bodies such as general assemblies and committees. Their work is supported by more than 200 staff members in Berlin and Brussels. The DIHK's Chief Executive Officer, appointed by the General Assembly, is responsible for day-to-day operations.

In addition to its national role, the DIHK coordinates a global network of more than 150 German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs), delegations and representative offices in over 90 countries, supporting German businesses worldwide.