

EUROPE DAY 2026: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF EU-UGANDA TIES

On May 9, 1950, French minister Robert Schuman launched the idea that European nations should bind themselves together so closely that war between them would become unthinkable. It was an idea, born from the ruins of the Second World War.

Since then, the European Union (EU) has grown into the world's most successful peace project. Our integration – political, economic, and social – is proof that nations can choose dialogue over dominance, partnership over power. In today's turbulent geopolitical landscape, the EU remains strong and united, with our values at heart, as a reliable and predictable international partner.

Here in Kampala, we also mark something else. We celebrate 50 years, a golden Jubilee of partnership between the EU and Uganda. Fifty years is a serious friendship. And long enough to start making plans for the next 50. It is about what Europe and Uganda have built together and what we can still achieve together.

In 1976, the European Community opened its delegation in Kampala. The European project itself was still young. Uganda was going through a difficult period in its history. Much has changed since then.

Uganda has changed. Europe has changed. The world has changed. Europe has grown from nine to 27 member states. Uganda has become a central actor in East Africa, a voice on the African continent, chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, and a country whose choices matter far beyond its borders.

Through all these changes, one thing has endured: Europe and Uganda kept talking, kept engaging, and kept working together. Not that we have always agreed – we have not. But the partnership has remained alive and strong through continuity, dialogue and trust.

Over 50 years, the EU institutions have provided close to euro 5b (about sh22 trillion) in development co-operation to Uganda. That figure is important. But tonight is not mainly about figures. A partnership becomes real when it leaves traces in daily life. This one has and does!

Roads that connect



Sadek and Vice-President Jessica Alupo toast during the 2026 European Day reception in Kampala last week

communities. Schools that open doors. Livelihoods were rebuilt in northern Uganda after the conflict. Support given to refugees and host communities. Clean energy, agriculture, forests, water, tourism, education and trade also flourish. In so many areas, we have tried to translate some of our joint achievements into stories and pictures by the entrance. Please take a look later.

Today, our partnership is broader than development co-operation. It involves the Government, the private sector, civil society, universities, artists, farmers and young people in both the EU and Uganda. That is its strength. It rests on many pillars. Trade is one of the clearest. Uganda enjoys tariff-free access to the European market. That is not a technical detail. It is a real opportunity for Uganda.

Since 2019, Ugandan exports to the EU have tripled – from around euro 500m (sh2 trillion) to around euro 1.5b (sh7 trillion). Uganda now has a positive trade balance with the EU. In plain terms: Uganda sells more to Europe than Europe sells to Uganda.

And if one product carries this partnership

in its aroma, it is coffee. Coffee links a farmer in the hills of Uganda to a breakfast table in Rome, Paris, Stockholm, Berlin or Amsterdam. Europe loves Ugandan coffee. And that love supports farmers and families in Uganda, it pays school fees, medical bills, transport costs and salaries. It always fills me with joy to see how EU support to the sector makes a difference: higher productivity and quality, and more value addition, mean more income for farmers and communities.

Business and investment are clearly moving to the centre of the EU-Uganda partnership. European companies are here – from large investors such as TotalEnergies to smaller companies working in agriculture, energy, services, logistics, technology and manufacturing.

Uganda has high ambitions through its Tenfold Growth Strategy. Europe wants to be part of that ambition by supporting it with investment, standards, technology and long-term partnerships. That is, in fact, the purpose of Global Gateway – our approach to sustainable infrastructure and investment. Team Europe's planned support

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to the rehabilitation of the Nalubaale-Kiira hydropower plant is a good example.

Uganda's neighbourhood has also been part of our common journey, and Uganda carries an important regional responsibility. In hosting two million refugees, Uganda has shown a generosity that deserves deep respect. Uganda's contribution to regional peace and security, including through the sacrifices of Ugandan men and women in uniform in Somalia, is deeply recognised and respected in Europe, and the EU has

been proud to stand by Uganda in these efforts.

Uganda marks an important constitutional moment with the swearing-in ceremony of His Excellency President Museveni. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was invited. Unfortunately, she cannot attend in person, but she has sent her regards and warmest congratulations.

Beyond this important event, we meet in a world that is more unsettled than before. For Europeans, Russia's war against Ukraine has made the question of sovereignty painfully concrete. It has reminded us that a country's right to choose its own future is not an abstract principle. It is the foundation of peace.

Sovereignty is linked to independence, agency and respect. However, sovereignty is not solitude, not isolation. A sovereign country is not a country without partners. It is a country that engages the world with confidence.

Uganda is an independent nation with its own voice and a regional and global role that matters. The EU has no interest in diminishing that sovereignty. On the contrary, our partnership is

built on mutual respect and the belief that we achieve more together.

And in a world that is becoming more transactional, Europe remains something steady: predictable, reliable and serious. That has been true for 50 years. And it is our commitment for the next 50.

This is, I think, also where Uganda and the European Union meet in an important way: in our shared emphasis on multilateralism, dialogue and a rules-based international order. Our instincts are the same: a world governed by rules is safer than a world governed only by power.

Finally, let us do three things. First, let us continue celebrating what we have built together. Second, let's thank all those who helped build it – political leaders, officials, diplomats, EU Delegation staff, farmers, entrepreneurs, teachers, students, civil society, artists, engineers, soldiers, journalists and families across Uganda and Europe. A 50-year partnership is the work of many hearts.

And third, let us look forward. This year will be full of activities. In May, we have the Tourism Awards at the Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo and a run for climate action in Kisoro. There is also a Research and Study Fair at Makerere in June. The next Uganda-EU Business Forum will be held in October. Additionally, we are preparing new programmes on coffee, tourism, critical raw materials and women and girls' empowerment.

And towards the end of the year, the EU Delegation will move into a new office – a more visible home for the EU in Uganda and a springboard for the next 50 years.

The coming 50 years are filled with hope, and they very much belong to young Ugandans and Europeans who will study together, trade together and better understand each other. Our Youth Sounding Board, I count on you and your friends for this!

Fifty years on, the EU-Uganda partnership is strong. Its next chapter will not write itself. But it will be written – together. Long live the EU-Uganda partnership!

**Jan Sadek,
Ambassador of the
European Union to Uganda**