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# Recalibrating EU-Mexico Ties: Policy Prospects Under President Claudia Sheinbaum

By Jeanne Gounot and Christina Augustin

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# **RECALIBRATING EU-MEXICO TIES: POLICY PROSPECTS UNDER PRESIDENT CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM**

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## Abstract

*Claudia Sheinbaum's presidency presents opportunities for EU-Mexico relations in trade, energy, and geopolitics. The modernization of the EU-Mexico Free Trade Agreement (TLCUEM) offers a crucial avenue for deepening economic ties. Sheinbaum's emphasis on renewable energy aligns with EU sustainability goals, facilitating cooperation in climate policy, investment, and technology transfer. Geopolitical shifts, including a potential Trump presidency, may prompt Mexico to diversify trade, positioning the EU as a stable partner for investment and collaboration. Finalizing the Global Agreement and expanding cooperation beyond trade—particularly in sustainability and innovation—will be essential for strengthening EU-Mexico strategic ties.*

## Introduction

Currently, Mexico and the European Union base their relations primarily on the "Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Cooperation Agreement" (TLCUEM), also referred to as the "Global Agreement" (La France au Mexique - Francia en México, 2018). This treaty, which was signed by the parties in 1997 and came into force in 2000, was the first free trade agreement between a country in the Americas and one in Europe. While it spurred a 148% increase in economic exchanges between the two regions from 2000 to 2017, a modernisation and expansion initiative was proposed in 2016. This effort aimed to adapt to evolving economic and geopolitical realities, incorporating emerging industries and fostering new areas of cooperation, including the fight against climate change.

As Mexico is the EU's second-largest trading partner in Latin America, modernising this treaty is particularly justified (La France au Mexique - Francia en México, 2018). The two parties reached an agreement on the political part in November 2017, followed by an 'agreement in principle' on the trade part of the modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement in April 2018 and concluded the remaining technical

details on public procurement in April 2020 (Accord global UE-Mexique, no date).

However, the modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement is still undergoing the necessary internal procedures on both sides (Favari, 2019). This modernised agreement is intended to eliminate virtually all customs duties between Mexico and the EU. Moreover, it includes new provisions on labour and environmental law (Blenkinsop, 2018). The agreement aims to develop bilateral relations, not only in the economic sphere but also in the political, cultural, social and environmental spheres. Against this backdrop of geopolitical relationship between the two regions, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo's victory in the Mexican presidential election in June 2024 could herald a promising future for Mexico's relations with the European Union. The new president, who holds a doctorate in energy engineering from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), shares many of the EU's values, with her focus on equality, particularly among genders, the fight against discrimination and environmental protection. She entered politics with former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) as part of the MORENA party (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional), where she was appointed to lead the environment portfolio.

She also contributed to the work of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for its ambition in combating climate change (Le Monde, 2024). Then, she became mayor of Mexico City between 2018 and 2023.

While some criticise her closeness to AMLO's policies, the fact remains that she rejects certain aspects of the ruling party's agenda, particularly on climate change and job creation: While AMLO has chosen to stimulate economic growth by supporting Mexico's oil industry, Sheinbaum advocates a transition from polluting fossil fuels to state-subsidised renewable energies (Martin, 2023). This divergence in political priorities between the former Mexican president and President Sheinbaum opens the way to a variety of scenarios for the country's future on the international stage, raising a central question to which this report aims to respond: What challenges and opportunities might the Mexican presidential election represent for relations between Mexico and the European Union concerning trade and the energy transition?

## I. Geopolitical Context and Trade

The following section deals with the current geopolitical situation, a turning point which would be a valid reason for organising a mutually beneficial relationship between Mexico and the European Union. The recent election of Donald Trump as President of the United States is a good indication of the diplomatic challenges facing Mexico in the years ahead. The President's return to the White House heralds the start of a difficult period for trade between Mexico and the EU. The future president is threatening to impose 25% tariffs on Mexican goods in

order to halt the flow of migrants and drugs across the southern border of the United States (Radio-Canada.ca, 2024), since 'migration, human trafficking, organised crime and fentanyl are central to the national security of the United States and [they] will be part of any negotiations' (Sampson, 2024).

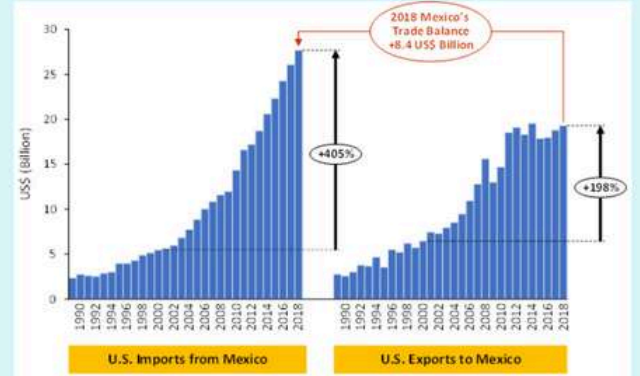
This threat is nothing new, however, since back in 2019, Trump threatened to increase tariffs on products from Mexico if AMLO—president at the time—did not do everything in his power to put an end to migrant caravans (Sampson, 2024), to which AMLO responded by stepping up measures against smuggling networks and caravans. This time, the battlefronts between the United States and Mexico are not limited to immigration, but extend to drug trafficking, in particular fentanyl, which the future American president considers to be just as serious a problem as immigration.

'Cooperation and mutual understanding are needed to meet these major challenges' (Sampson, 2024). In her November 2024 open letter to President Trump, President Sheinbaum advocated a relationship based above all on 'building peace' and 'promoting development. Nonetheless, should these threats materialise, Mexico in turn plans to impose its 'own retaliatory tariffs' (Sampson, 2024), the Mexican President subsequently announced. This would signal the start of a trade conflict between the two countries. In such a context, it would be advantageous for Mexico to diversify its trade and economic relations so as not to be dependent on trade with the United States in the event of a diplomatic crisis. One option for Mexico would therefore be to strengthen its ties with the EU, in which it could find a reliable political and commercial partner.

Moreover, President Trump's second term will have serious implications for the global efforts to combat climate change. During his first presidency, President Trump pulled the United States out of the 2015 Paris Agreement. His re-election has been called 'a major setback for climate action' (McGrath, 2024). Therefore, enhanced cooperation between Mexico and the EU is needed with regard to reducing carbon emissions.

In 2024, Mexico ranked as the world's seventh largest exporter of food products (MND Staff, 2024), with a particularly well-developed agricultural and livestock sector. The country exports many agricultural products, like fruits and vegetables, particularly to the United States (Canales & al., 2019). Expanding the export of fruits and vegetables to the European Union, facilitated particularly by the agreement currently in force and the amendments made in 2020 to include agricultural products, could help offset reduced imports from Ukraine. Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukraine has faced significant disruptions to its exports to Europe, despite the agreement signed on 22 July 2022 in Istanbul. This agreement between the UN, Türkiye, Ukraine, and Russia aims at unblocking the situation and relaunching Ukrainian exports via the Black Sea (Palacin, 2024). The invasion triggered a sharp increase in global food prices, particularly for cereals. Although the EU and the United Nations have taken measures to slow the rise in prices, the outlook is still uncertain (Palacin, 2024). The EU could therefore benefit from importing more of this type of product from Mexico.

Figure 1. Bilateral Agricultural Trade between Mexico and the United States

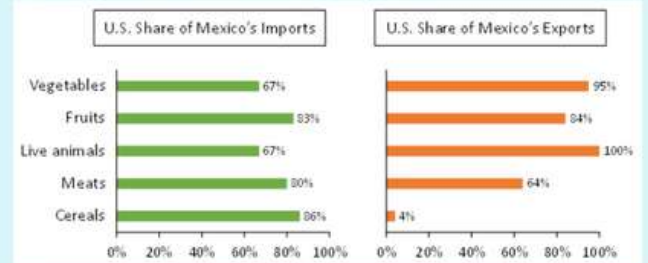


Data Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture (2019c).

Note: Total World Trade Organization (WTO) agricultural imports and exports.

Figure 1: Bilateral Agricultural Trade between Mexico and the United States (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Figure 2. U.S. Share of Mexico's Exports and Imports



Data Source: UN Comtrade Database (2018). U.S. and Mexico bilateral trade.

Note: Authors' own calculations from total export and import value data in 2018: vegetables (HS 07), fruit (HS 08), live animals (HS 01), meat (HS 02), and cereals (HS 10).

Figure 2: U.S. Share of Mexico's Exports and Imports (U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Another area in which the European Union could profit from a strong cooperation with Mexico is biotechnology, which is seen as a promising economic sector for the country. Mexico is keen to develop its expertise in all areas of biotechnology: its environment, health, agri-food and industrial applications (SPF Economie, 2024). To achieve this, the country is counting on close collaboration between its research centres. Research, development and marketing in the biotechnology sector are booming. For these reasons, Mexico is currently one of the United States' biggest

suppliers of biotechnologies (SPF Economie, 2024), but it could also collaborate more closely with the EU in this sector.

While Mexico would gain a commercial advantage from this closer collaboration, the European Union would also gain a geopolitical advantage. Strengthening its strategic influence with a North American country, a region with which relations are still tentative, would be an undeniable advantage against China, whose influence is growing worldwide. China has become the second largest investor in Mexico (Sampson, 2024), to the extent that Washington is even speculating that the country ‘could serve as a back door’ to China, as Deutsche Welle (Furió et al., 2024) puts it. Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Chinese companies to access the American market (Duthu, 2024). This rise in China’s power has had a significant impact on exports from developed and developing countries, particularly in Europe, where the increase in imports from China has raised concerns about competition in third markets (Magnier, 2024). China is also strengthening its soft power through cultural events, university programmes and a strong media presence (Magnier, 2024). In Latin America, only Guatemala and Paraguay currently maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Magnier, 2024). As a result, the European Union finds itself in direct competition with the United States and China, but without securing a dominant position. Such rivalry for influence underlines the challenges facing the European Union in asserting itself as a major player in the region. While the United States and China benefit from solid strategies and long-established relationships, the European Union has yet to demonstrate

its effectiveness and importance in this complex and unstable geopolitical context (Magnier, 2024). Hopes are therefore pinned on a future modernised agreement, successfully negotiated by the new President Sheinbaum, which should transform not only trade relations but also political and institutional relations between the two players (Malik, 2023).

## II. Energy

This section highlights the opportunities President Sheinbaum’s academic and political expertise presents for enhanced cooperation between the European Union and Mexico in the push for a just and green energy transition. Sheinbaum has a background as an environmental scientist focusing on trends in energy consumption and greenhouse gas emission in Mexico ([www.iingen.unam.mx](http://www.iingen.unam.mx), n.d.). Her political career reflects this commitment. As mayor of Mexico City (2018-2023), she advanced various projects promoting and facilitating sustainable forms of mobility, including electrification of the public bus system and the expansion of bike lanes (Sengupta, 2024).

While sustainability was not at the centre of her presidential campaign, the election of a climate scientist as the head of state captures the perceived salience of environmental issues by the Mexican population. In a 2023 study on the perception of climate change among Facebook users, 92% of respondents from Mexico are ‘very worried’ or ‘somewhat worried’ about climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2023). 81% think that climate change will harm future generations ‘a great deal’; 61% affirm the same statement for themselves personally (Leiserowitz et al., 2023); and 88% of respondents from Mexico say that



climate change should be a ‘high’ or ‘very high’ priority for their government (Leiserowitz et al., 2023).

During Felipe Calderón’s presidency (2006-2012), Mexico adopted goals and laws aiming at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, notably by focusing on the energy transition; however, these goals have not been reached (Nuccitelli, 2024). Sheinbaum’s predecessor AMLO turned the focus of energy policy away from renewables to support Mexico’s energy sovereignty by boosting the country’s production of petroleum fuels (Hernández Ibarzábal & Bonilla, 2020). New refineries were built in order to reduce Mexico’s dependence on refineries in the United States (Romero, 2024). In fact, while Mexico was a net energy importer for a long time, it has relied on imports to meet its energy needs since 2016 (IEA, 2023a).

Oil is a central part of Mexico’s national self-image (Romero, 2024). As the world’s eleventh largest oil producer, fossil fuels play an important part in Mexico’s economy (IEA, 2023b). In 2023, oil made up about 43% of the total energy supply in Mexico (see Figure 3) and more than half of the country’s fossil fuel emissions (IEA, 2023a).

CO2 emissions by fuel, Mexico, 2022

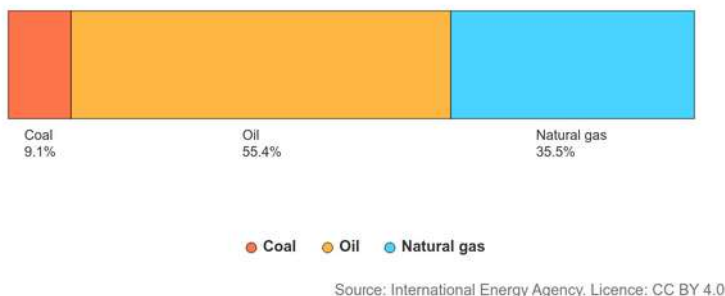


Figure 3: CO2 emissions by fuel, Mexico, 2022 (IEA)

Total energy supply, Mexico, 2023

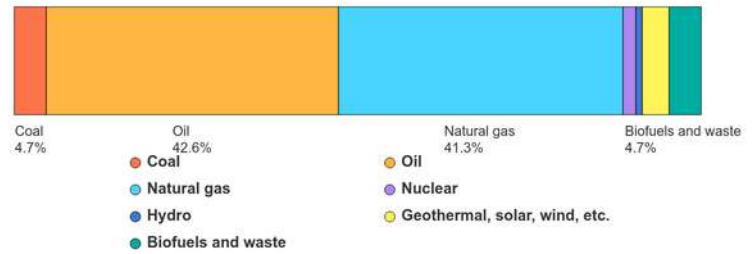


Figure 4: Total Energy Supply, Mexico, 2023 (IEA)

Total final consumption, Mexico, 2022

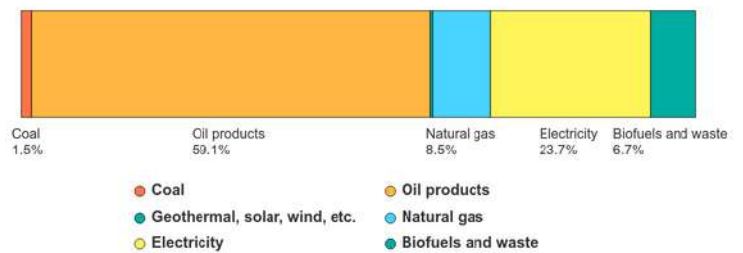


Figure 5: Total Final Consumption, Mexico, 2022 (IEA)

Renewable energy sources remain marginal as they only make up 13% of the final energy consumption (IEA, 2023a), a number that Sheinbaum wants to increase to 45% by the end of her presidency in 2030 (Squires, 2024).

However, the oil and gas extraction sector as a share of the GDP reached its lowest in 2023 with 1.3% (INEGI, 2024), and the share of oil in the total energy supply has significantly decreased since 1990. The production of crude oil has nearly halved over the course of the last two decades (IEA, 2023a). Mexico’s oil industry thus seems to have reached a pivotal point if the goal is to advance the green transition. The historic and economic importance of the state-owned petroleum corporation Pemex makes a 180° turn away from oil extraction and the end of state support for Pemex unlikely.

Nevertheless, Sheinbaum can use her presidency to shift Pemex' focus away from fossil fuels and towards sustainable energy sources. Before her election, Sheinbaum announced her intention to limit Pemex's oil production to 1.8 million barrels a day (Romero, 2024). She has also affirmed the importance of renewable energies for her term, which clearly indicates her intention to not continue AMLO's agenda (El Financiero, 2024). In November 2024, President Sheinbaum presented an energy plan including the allocation of more than 23 billion dollars on energy infrastructure projects until 2030 (Squires, 2024). In order to advance Mexico's energy transition, she seeks to facilitate private investments in the energy sector by reducing bureaucracy and similar costs hindering investment (Squires, 2024). Furthermore, while wanting to continue state support for Pemex, the new president has indicated a desire to expand its role to include lithium production, recognizing the metal's strategic importance for renewable energy and battery storage (Sengupta, 2024). If renewable sources of energy can meet increased demand, economic growth could become less strongly linked to fossil fuel combustion, allowing for a potential "decoupling" of emissions and GDP growth.

At the same time, Sheinbaum faces the significant challenge of addressing Pemex's nearly \$100 billion debt, as well as the effects of AMLO's nationalist policies, which have restricted private investment in renewables (Squires, 2024). However, the decline in crude oil production over the last decade presents an opportunity for an ambitious reorientation toward renewable energy, positioning Mexico for a more sustainable economic future.

During Ursula von der Leyen's first presidency of the European Commission (2019-2024), the European Union adopted the European Green Deal, setting the goal to be climate-neutral by 2050. The objectives have since been concretised in different policy initiatives, notably the REPowerEU plan from 2022 and the Fit for 55 package from 2023. The EU accords renewable energy a 'fundamental role' in achieving its greenhouse gas-reducing goals (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2023). In order to meet the EU's binding target of increasing the share of renewable energy sources in the EU energy consumption from 23% in 2022 to 42.5% in 2030, as stated in the Renewable Energy Directive EU/2023/2413 (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2023), the von der Leyen Commission II will have to rapidly advance the production of renewable energy. As Figure 4 shows, the EU has been able to more than double its share of renewable sources over the course of the last 18 years. However, only a few years after the presentation of the European Green Deal, the installation of solar and wind energy is already slowing down (see for example Abnett, 2024). In light of the uncertainty of Trump's new policies and the vulnerability of Europe regarding its dependencies in energy matters revealed by the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Mexico could prove to be a valuable and viable partner for the EU.

Both the European Union and Mexico aim at having 45% renewable energy in the grid by 2030 in order to meet their respective energy and climate targets. While these measures are insufficient to curb the climate catastrophe, they remain ambitious given the current dependencies on fossil fuel.

The EU and Mexico can profit from a tight coordination and policy dialogue to address common challenges. Reflecting the urgency of reducing emissions to alleviate the effects of the climate catastrophe and the general population's high level of concern about climate change, the partnership should include high-level political and economic exchange.

The combination of Sheinbaum's expertise regarding energy and sustainability and the EU's rich aggregation of different national experiences can reduce dependencies on US-policy under President Donald Trump and encourage leaders within the G20 to advocate for new international standards and policies on climate and energy. Both Sheinbaum and von der Leyen are at the start of their mandate, making this an opportune moment to launch ambitious initiatives and monitor their progress and impact.

### III. Policy Recommendation

#### *1. Strengthen renewable energy partnerships between the European Union and Mexico.*

We strongly encourage the strengthening of renewable energy partnerships between the European Union and Mexico. To this end, the respective governments could establish bilateral frameworks for the development of renewable energies, including joint research initiatives and technology transfers. The stakes are not just political, but also scientific: a stronger partnership between research centres and universities could therefore only be beneficial. The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), ranked 105th in the QS World Ranking of Universities 2022 (Gouv.fr, 2025), could be an interesting partner for these promising projects,

as could the Instituto de Tecnología de Monterrey, ranked 185th in the world (Tecnológico de Monterrey, 2024). In addition, allocating more investment for these purposes could help to achieve these objectives. In 2015 the Mexican National Council of Sciences and Technology (CONACYT) signed an Implementing Arrangement with the European Commission to enable CONACYT Research and Post-Doctoral Fellows to pursue research collaboration with research teams led by European Research Council (ERC) grant holders (European Commission, 2023). It would be essential for the cooperation to continue on this way by diversifying and multiplying research programs like this one.

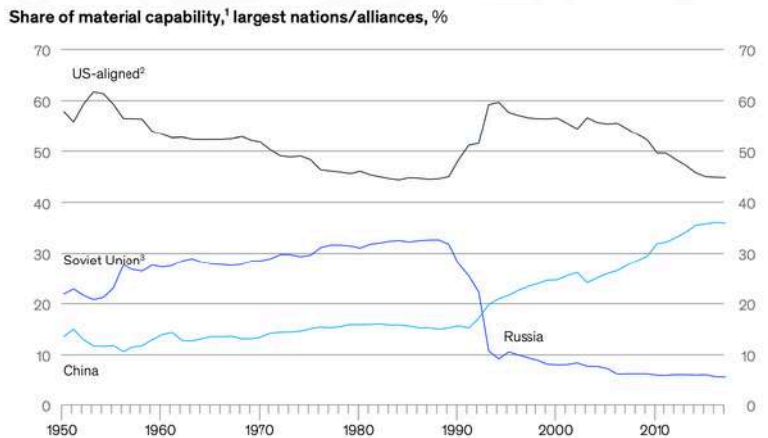
#### *2. Implement and enforce the modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement.*

It would also be appropriate to encourage private investment in the renewable energy sector in Mexico by reducing trade barriers and simplifying regulatory frameworks. A modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement would be a welcome step in this direction: we therefore encourage the two parties to move forward with negotiations to finalise this process, which was initiated several years ago. We advocate the promotion of high-level political dialogue between the Mexican government and the European Commission, as well as the governments of the EU member states, to achieve fruitful negotiations and tight cooperation.

#### *3. Enhance strategic resilience against US pressures.*

Finally, in the multipolar but unstable geopolitical context (Figure 1), we also propose strengthening strategic resilience in the face of US pressure. To achieve this, it would be necessary to diversify trade routes and partners to minimise economic dependence

on the United States. Institutional links also need to be strengthened to counterbalance geopolitical instability, who represent significant risks for companies (McKinsey, 2023).



<sup>1</sup>Composite index including population and demography, production capabilities, military expenditure, and personnel. Share is calculated between largest four nations/groups (those represented on chart, and India).  
<sup>2</sup>Includes NATO and US-aligned non-NATO members (eg. Australia, Japan).  
<sup>3</sup>Including Warsaw Pact nations and observers during relevant period.  
 Source: Composite Index of National Capability v6.0, Correlates of War, July 2021; McKinsey Global Institute analysis

**Figure 6:** Share of material capability, largest nations/alliances, %  
 (McKinsey Global Institute 2021)

#### IV. Conclusion

Claudia Sheinbaum's presidency and the EU's ongoing commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 under its new board of Commissioners create a unique opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations focused on climate, environmental issues, and trade. The EU and Mexico can leverage their shared values and goals to position themselves as global leaders in the green transition. While challenges from geopolitical uncertainties, particularly those posed by Donald Trump's return to the presidency of the United States of America, may complicate progress, strategic planning and cooperation can help both parties navigate these obstacles. The modernisation of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement provides a critical platform for addressing contemporary challenges, including climate change and energy security.

By deepening economic ties, advancing sustainable development, and promoting multilateral approaches to global governance, Mexico and the EU can set a model for future international partnerships. As both Sheinbaum and the EU's leadership embark on new mandates, this moment represents an opportunity to transform shared aspirations into actionable policies that secure economic growth and alleviate the consequences of the climate catastrophe.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Jeanne is the President of the Berlin Office and is currently completing a dual Bachelor's degree in Political Science at Sciences Po and Freie Universität in Berlin. She is passionate about international relations and international law, especially migration issues. Jeanne gained professional experience at the Préfecture du Rhône in France and at Cabinet Vray Avocat, where she focused on public law. She is fluent in French, German, and English.



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**Cover Image:** *Claudia Sheinbaum sworn in as president* via Peoples Dispatch | *Flags of the European Union and Mexico at the 25th Meeting of the Mexico-European Union Joint Parliamentary Committee* via Real Instituto Elcano

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