Welcome to a new edition of the bilaterals.org podcast where we discuss the most recent developments around free trade and investment agreements.

More than 70 civil society groups from Latin America and Europe met on the fringes of the European Union-Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Brussels on 17-18 July. The aim was to strengthen alliances and strategise on how to defeat the EU's trade deals with Mercosur, Chile and Mexico.

The groups have described these free trade agreements as an outdated model of trade that has failed people and the planet. They added that they serve corporate interests at the expense of planetary boundaries, decent working conditions, jobs and animal welfare, and drive untenable social inequalities.

A broader coalition of more than 450 organisations then criticised the announcement by EU and Mercosur leaders that they aim to conclude their trade deal by the end of 2023.

Meanwhile, negotiations continue. The Brazilian president will send a counter-proposal next month, after the Argentinian president and he said the EU's additional environmental protocol was unacceptable.

The EU and Kenya have announced the political conclusion of negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement (or EPA). There is little new in this agreement except for two key aspects: it has moved from an agreement with the entire East African Community to a bilateral EPA, and it includes a New Zealand-style chapter on trade and sustainable development.

East and Southern African trade civil society groups are calling on Kenya to withdraw from the EPA, saying it poses an immediate threat to the integration of the East African Community, which includes Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania.

Still in Kenya, Econews Africa has highlighted in a memorandum on the Kenya-US trade deal the devastating consequences of negotiating a chapter on agriculture. While the countries are not negotiating on market access, it is understood that the US government is still after access to the Kenyan market through non-tariff measures.

Activists in the US and Asia-Pacific are concerned about the involvement of tech corporations in the drafting of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. They have launched a campaign to limit their role in writing the digital chapter of the new trade deal, after it emerged that Google and IBM co-hosted an invitation-only reception for negotiators during the round in Australia last November. And at the Singapore round in May, meetings started late one morning because of a breakfast hosted by the tech industry, despite the fact that the round was supposed to be largely closed to outside stakeholders.

The IPEF has been hailed by the US administration as a new approach to global trade that turns the colonial mindset on its head. But civil society groups say the initiative looks a bit like "old wine in new bottles", with some semantic trickery. The IPEF has been designed by the

US for its own prosperity, while leaving developing countries in the colonial structure of raw material suppliers. The agreement is also likely to limit the policy space available to developing countries to promote their domestic producers of green and digital goods.

At the recent IPEF trade ministers' meeting in the US, ministers announced the 'substantial completion' of negotiations on the Pillar II supply chain agreement. However, groups have objected to the lack of transparency in the IPEF negotiations and called for the immediate release of the negotiating texts.

And that’s it for today. I’m Nicolas Roux, bilaterals.org. If you’d like more information about today’s podcast, you can click on the links provided in the description box. More trade news coming up soon in our next podcast. In the meantime, you can visit bilaterals.org.