

Introduction

Bangladesh, Nepal, Morocco, and Peru are just some of the countries in which young people have taken to the streets to protest against corruption, censorship, and low levels of security, among other grievances. In September 2025, Madagascar joined this wave of discontent. Protest banners displayed slogans such as “*L’eau et l’électricité, ce n’est pas du luxe. C’est un droit*” (“Water and electricity are not a luxury. They are a right”), referring to the daily power and water cuts suffered by the population, or “*Ils méprisent nos écoles car leurs enfants étudient ailleurs*” (“They despise our schools because their children study abroad”).

These protests, as has occurred in other countries such as Bangladesh or Nepal, led to the end of a controversial presidency embodied by Andry Rajoelina. Once again, governmental power was assumed by the military, on this occasion led by Colonel Michael Randrianirina, head of CAPSAT (*Corps d’armée des personnels et des services administratifs et techniques*).

Nevertheless, the situation is not new. Since Madagascar gained independence from France in 1960, successive presidencies and protest movements have repeatedly given way to transitional governments led by the military. This pattern reflects a structural weakness rooted in an unfinished decolonization process, widespread corruption among political elites, and the precarious living conditions of the population despite the region’s considerable natural wealth.

The international community has not remained indifferent to developments in Madagascar, and among the attentive observers is the European Union. Indeed, Brussels has been cooperating with Madagascar for decades, as illustrated by the Lomé Convention¹ (1975). Then known as the European Economic Community, it established a presence on the Great Island with the aim of supporting the former French colony during the post-independence period. Since then, agreements have multiplied in areas such as economics, fisheries, education, and environmental protection, with Madagascar also being included in the Global Gateway initiative launched in 2021.

¹ The Samoa Agreement (2023) has replaced the Cotonou Agreement (2000), which in turn replaced the Lomé Agreement (1975).

During the celebration of 60 years of cooperation, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to Madagascar and the Comoros, Giovanni Di Girolamo, stated that:

[...] our relations encompass multiple dimensions: political, economic, cultural, scientific, and humanitarian, without forgetting regional integration and development aid of considerable scale, which currently places the European Union among the principal donors².

These dimensions are numerous and continue to expand, as evidenced by the Samoa Agreement (2023), which covers areas such as the environment, peace and security, and migration. However, the natural resources of the Great Island, as well as its strategic location—alongside the Mozambique Channel—have also attracted the interest of countries such as China and Russia in this part of the Indian Ocean.

Therefore, in order to understand some of the challenges the European Union will face following the uprisings and the end of Andry Rajoelina's presidency, this article first briefly examines the history of Madagascar since independence, an independence in which the status of the Îles Éparses remains unresolved; it then analyzes the demands of the youth, followed by the relationship between Brussels and Antananarivo, and concludes with an examination of the ambitions of China and Russia.

From Philibert Tsiranana to Andry Rajoelina

The current situation in Madagascar reflects the problems that have emerged over the sixty-five years since its independence. As addressing the policies of each president would divert the focus of the present analysis, a brief examination of Philibert Tsiranana (1960–1972) and Andry Rajoelina (2009–2014; 2018–2025), the first and most recent deposed presidents, will suffice to understand the successive crises experienced by the country—most notably those of 1972, 1991, 2002, 2009, and 2025.

The presidency of Philibert Tsiranana displayed characteristics that would later be easily identifiable in his successors. First, his policies adopted a continuationist approach inspired by the French model, as can be observed in the drafting of the constitution, the

² EEAS. 60 ans de Relation Bilaterale Madagascar-Union Européenne, (n.d) <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/BOOKLET%2060.pdf> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

administrative system (seven-year terms under universal suffrage, administrative decentralization³), the predominant use of the French language—even in education—and the priority given to the signing of agreements between Madagascar and France.

Over time, the prolonged colonial legacy was compounded by neglect in social policies, leading to an economic and social crisis⁴. In 1972⁵, youth-led protests erupted and culminated in a general strike. The outcome was Tsiranana's transfer of power to General Ramanantsoa on 18 May 1972—events that bear strong similarities to the end of the mandates of many other presidents of the Great Island, including Rajoelina.

Indeed, the downfall of the most recently overthrown president also originated in youth protests, and his departure resulted in the establishment of a military transitional government. Moreover, like his predecessors, Rajoelina's political trajectory has been marked by controversy. Two episodes illustrate this point.

The first occurred in 2009, when Marc Ravalomanana⁶, then President of Madagascar, decided to shut down the television channel of one of his rivals, Rajoelina, who at the time was mayor of the capital. Rajoelina responded by mobilizing thousands of supporters to demand the president's resignation and by establishing a parallel transitional government—the *Haute Autorité de la Transition* (HAT). The international community interpreted these actions as a *coup d'état*⁷. Tensions escalated to the point where Ravalomanana opted to hand over power to three generals, who subsequently transferred it to Rajoelina. The latter remained in office from 2009 to 2014.

The second episode occurred during the 2023 elections, when it was revealed that the politician had acquired French nationality—a condition that disqualified him from running for office but did not prevent him from pursuing his objectives. As a result, Andry Rajoelina held the presidency on two occasions, both marked by irregularities.

³ VANTHUYNE, Emeline. La proclamation d'indépendance de Madagascar. Lumini Enseignement, 2023, <https://enseignants.lumni.fr/fiche-media/00000000757/la-proclamation-d-independance-de-madagascar.html> (Accessed on November 1, 2025)

⁴ BLUM, Françoise. Madagascar 1972: l'autre indépendance Une révolution contre les accords de coopération. Le Mouvement Social. Éditions La Découverte p. 69, n° 236, 2011/3.

⁵ RABENIRAINY, Jaona. Les forces armées et les crises politiques (1972-2002). Politique africaine. Éditions Karthala, N° 86, pp.86- 102, 2002/2.

⁶ Marc Ravalomanana's presidency took place between 2002 and 2009. Among the most notable cases of corruption during his tenure were the Daewoo agreement, in which he negotiated with a South Korean company the lease of 1.3 million hectares of the country, and the purchase of a presidential aircraft for 60 million dollars.

⁷ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP. Madagascar: sortir du cycle de crises. Rapport Afrique n°156, p.1, 18 mars 2010.

In sum, the impoverishment of society and lack of opportunities, corruption, presidents overthrown following popular protests, and military transitional governments are defining elements of the history of the Great Island, alongside the persistence of colonial legacies. A clear reflection of this is the unresolved status of the Îles Éparses.

France and the Îles Éparses

On 26 June 1960, Madagascar embarked on its path to independence. However, barely three months earlier—on 1 April 1960⁸—Paris approved a decree placing five small islands, previously administered from Madagascar, under the authority of the Prefect of Réunion, thereby excluding them from the independence agreement. Today, these islands form part of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (*Terres australes et antarctiques françaises*, TAAF). Known as Tromelin, the Glorieuses, Juan de Nova, Europa, and Bassas da India, they are collectively referred to as the Îles Éparses⁹ and represent approximately 640,400 km² of maritime space, as well as significant offshore oil potential.

Youth and Their Influence on Geopolitics

Protests led by young people born in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—belonging to the so-called Generation Z—have dominated newspaper headlines in recent years, particularly throughout 2025.

Some of these developments began in 2022, notably in Sri Lanka¹⁰, where young people took to the streets, weary of economic crisis and corruption, contributing to the fall of the Rajapaksa family. In 2024, similar dynamics unfolded in Bangladesh, leading to the resignation of President Sheikh Hasina. In 2025, protests multiplied and spread across all five continents. In Nepal, demonstrations erupted in response to the blocking of twenty-six platforms, including Facebook and X, resulting in the resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. In Morocco, protesters demanded improvements in education and healthcare

⁸ Mauritius claims Tromelin Island, while Madagascar claims Juan de Nova, Europa, Bassas de India, and the Glorioso Islands.

⁹ CNES. Océan Indien - Les îles Éparses : un levier d'affirmation de la France outre-mer. [Océan Indien - Les îles Éparses : un levier d'affirmation de la France outre-mer | CNES](#) (Accessed on November 1, 2025)

¹⁰In news articles, the term "Asian Spring" is used.

and an end to corruption; in Peru, they called for an end to growing insecurity and the political crisis. The list continues, including countries such as the Philippines, Kenya, and Nepal.

This wave of protests shares common characteristics: young people without opportunities or guaranteed basic rights—such as access to healthcare and education—exhausted by corruption, organizing through social media¹¹. A unifying symbol has emerged among them: a flag inspired by the 1997 Japanese manga *One Piece*. Despite repression orders resulting in deaths, injuries, and arrests, these protests have succeeded in overthrowing presidents, promoting legislative changes, and eliciting reform proposals from some governments.

In this context, Malagasy youth also took to the streets to protest water and electricity cuts, while demanding the resignation of the president. As events unfolded, a segment of the armed forces joined the demonstrators, reproducing a familiar pattern: the overthrow of the president and the establishment of a military transitional government. Indeed, President Andry Rajoelina was deposed, and the transitional government was led by Colonel Michaël Randrianirina¹². The officer, head of CAPSAT (*Corps d'Armée des Personnels et des Services Administratifs et Techniques*), pledged in his address to break with the past and to reform the socio-economic administrative system.

Within this context, beyond street mobilization, a charter and a roadmap were drafted in Madagascar, outlining the pillars of the movement and the steps to be followed in the construction of a new government.

Regarding the “Charter,” its preamble states:

We, the young women and men of Madagascar, from all regions, beliefs, and social backgrounds, united by the will to build a dignified, just, and prosperous future, declare our commitment to the implementation of a new system based on entirely different

¹¹ LOLLIA, Frabrice (2025, octubre 14), Madagascar: le rôle clé des réseaux sociaux dans la chute du pouvoir, *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/madagascar-le-role-cle-des-reseaux-sociaux-dans-la-chute-du-pouvoir-267447> (Accessed on October 31, 2025).

¹² Le Monde (2025, octubre 17) A Madagascar, le colonel Randrianirina est investi président https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/10/17/a-madagascar-le-colonel-randrianirina-est-investi-president_6647745_3212.html (Accessed on October 31, 2025).

*foundations: national sovereignty, transparency, popular participation, and collective dignity*¹³.

Meanwhile, the “Roadmap,” which argues that the military–civil transitional directorate does not constitute a coup d’état but rather a means to restore stability, emphasizes the recovery of natural resources and the return of power to the people. Two paragraphs from this roadmap reinforce the argument of the present analysis:

*This roadmap for a Popular and Sovereign Transition (PST) is framed within a will for a total break with the current system, marked by inequality, corruption, external dependence, and the confiscation of power by a minority. It proposes a refounding of the State based on national sovereignty, social justice, and the direct participation of the people in decision-making and in the form of governance that best suits them*¹⁴.

Under the heading “International Relations,” the second section states:

- *To inform international partners and diplomatic representations in Madagascar of the civil and democratic nature of the process, as well as of the present roadmap.*
- *To assess and preserve existing diplomatic and economic commitments.*
- *To reject any form of external instrumentalization: Madagascar must remain sovereign and act as a partner*¹⁵.

Therefore, according to the roadmap, a review of international relations will be undertaken. Although numerous bilateral agreements have been signed with various countries, the following section will examine some of the most significant ones.

Agreements and Disagreements: the European Union, China, and Russia

According to the World Food Programme, Madagascar currently ranks among the countries with the lowest income levels and the most alarming rates of hunger. In 2022,

¹³ GÉNÉRATION Z. Charte Génération Z Pour une refondation populaire, souveraine et participative de la Nation, https://www.gen-z-madagascar.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Charte-GenZ-23_10_2025_251023_124758.pdf (Accessed on October 31, 2025).

¹⁴ GÉNÉRATION Z. Proposition de feuille de route pour une transition souveraine et populaire. Madagascar à Antananarivo le 16 octobre 2025, p.1 <https://www.gen-z-madagascar.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Fdr-GenZ.pdf> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

¹⁵ *Op.cit.* p.13.

it ranked 173rd out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index and 119th out of 121 in the Global Hunger Index. The Programme thus highlights endemic poverty, food insecurity, dependence on subsistence agriculture, and the island’s exposure to the effects of climate change (cyclones, droughts, and floods¹⁶).

These figures stand in stark contrast to the country’s natural wealth. In 2023, Madagascar’s main exports were concentrated in nickel and related manufactures, coffee, tea, yerba mate and spices, knitted garments and clothing accessories, as well as metalliferous minerals, slag, and ash¹⁷. Its principal trading partners on the export side were France, the United States, and the Republic of Korea, while its main suppliers were China, Oman, and India, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of trade by country

Trading Partners (Export Markets)	Export Markets – Percentage of Total, 2023	Supplier Countries	Export Markets – Percentage of Total, 2023
France	15%	China	20%
United States	12,9%	Oman	13,5%
Republic of Korea	8,4%	India	9,2%
Japan	8,4%	France	6,2%
China	8,4%	South Africa	4,4%

Source: Diplomatic Information Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

On the other hand, its geostrategic location adds significant value, as Madagascar lies alongside the Mozambique Channel, an essential maritime passage connecting Europe and Asia, through which approximately 5,000 ships transit annually¹⁸. Consequently, the Great Island attracts energy, commercial, and political interests.

¹⁶ PROGRAMA MUNDIAL DE ALIMENTOS. Plan estratégico para Madagascar (2024-2028), pp. 1-3, https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000156033 (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

¹⁷ MINISTERIO DE ASUNTOS EXTERIORES. Oficina de información diplomática. Madagascar, https://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/madagascar_ficha%20pais.pdf (consultado el 1/11/2025).

¹⁸ CENTRE D'ÉTUDES STRATÉGIQUES DE LA MARINE (CESM). Brèves Marines - Le canal du Mozambique : luttes d'influence pour un passage stratégique en devenir, n°246 (n.d) p.4 <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/cesm/nos-publications/breves-marines-du-cesm/breves-marines-ndeg246-canal-du-mozambique-luttes-dinfluence-passage> (Accessed on November 1, 2025)

The European Union

The protests and regime change in Madagascar are being closely monitored by the European Union. One reason for this is the numerous agreements that Brussels has signed with Antananarivo, some of which could be suspended—either temporarily or permanently—depending on unfolding events, as occurred during the 2009 crisis. The rise to power of Andry Rajoelina was considered by Brussels a coup d'état, and, applying Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, development aid to the Great Island was suspended until a solution was found¹⁹.

Some examples of bilateral relations include the Samoa Agreement²⁰, signed in 2023 between the European Union and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries, which focuses on six priority areas: human rights and democracy, peace and security, development, migration and mobility, climate change, and economic growth. This agreement replaces the Cotonou Agreement²¹, signed in 2000, whose objectives were to eradicate poverty, contribute to the gradual integration of ACP countries into the global economy, and promote development cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, and the political dimension²².

Equally important are the fisheries agreements that have been signed over decades²³. One of the most recent is the *Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Madagascar (2023)*, under which 65 European Union vessels are permitted to fish—thirty-two tuna purse seiners, thirteen large surface longliners with gross tonnage over one hundred, and twenty smaller surface longliners with gross tonnage of one hundred or less²⁴.

¹⁹ JOURNAL OFFICIEL DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE. Madagascar P7_TA(2010)0032 Résolution du Parlement européen du 11 février 2010 sur la situation à Madagascar, p.73.

²⁰ REPOBLIKANI MADAGASIKARA. Renforcement de la coopération avec l'Union européenne: Madagascar signe l'Accord de Samoa (n.d) <https://www.diplomatie.gov.mg/index.php/actualites/725-renforcement-de-la-cooperation-avec-l-union-europeenne-madagascar-signe-l-accord-de-samoa> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

²¹ De los que se derivan los Acuerdos de Partenariado Económico (APE)

²² CONSEJO EUROPEO. Consejo de la Unión Europea. Acuerdo posterior a Cotonu. (n.d) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/cotonou-agreement/#cotonou> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

²³ DIARIO OFICIAL DE LAS COMUNIDADES EUROPEAS. Acuerdo por el que se modifica el Acuerdo entre la Comunidad Económica Europea y el Gobierno de la Republica Democrática de Madagascar relativo a la pesca en alta mar frente a las costas de Madagascar, firmado en Antananarivo el 28 de enero de 1986, 98/9, <https://www.boe.es/doue/1987/098/L00007-00009.pdf> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

²⁴ DIARIO OFICIAL DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA. Acuerdo de Colaboración de pesca sostenible entre la Unión Europea y la República de Madagascar, p.37, 2023, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22023A0719\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22023A0719(02)) (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

Finally, the Global Gateway initiative, launched by Brussels in December 2021, assumes great significance when considering its funding of approximately €300 billion and its objectives: “to promote smart, clean, and secure links in the digital, energy, and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education, and research systems worldwide²⁵.” This project has important geostrategic implications, as it aims to strengthen European presence in regions where China’s²⁶ Belt and Road Initiative is also active.

In Madagascar²⁷, the Global Gateway has developed numerous projects, specifically across eleven thematic areas, including democracy and human rights, the environment and natural resources, support for civil society and youth, and the knowledge society.

China: Belt and Road Initiative

Bilateral relations with China have a long history²⁸. A Consulate of the People’s Republic was opened in 1958 in Antananarivo, and the first trade agreement followed in 1963. Economic cooperation spans numerous sectors, including agriculture, fisheries, energy, infrastructure, construction, textiles, banking, healthcare, telecommunications, and oil²⁹. Furthermore, these bilateral relations have been strengthened under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013 with the purpose of economically linking Europe and China, and with a presence in Madagascar since 2017.

Russia in the Context of Françafrique

Bilateral relations between Madagascar and Russia began on 29 September 1972, cooperating in areas such as healthcare (delivery of medicines, training), security (training of Malagasy military and police), agriculture, and education (scholarships, exchanges), according to information provided by the association “Friends of Russia in Madagascar³⁰.”

²⁵ COMISIÓN EUROPEA. Presentación de la Estrategia Global Gateway, (n.d) https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/global-gateway-overview_es (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

²⁶ FURNESS, Mark, KEIJZER, Niels Europe’s Global Gateway: A New Geostrategic Framework for Development Policy? German Development Institute, 2022.

²⁷ Véase Actions financées par l’Union Européenne à Madagascar, <https://ue-madagascar.org/t/> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

²⁸ HARNAY, Serge, LOUIS, Bernard. Madagascar: les enjeux d’une diplomatie en plein essor. Outre-Terre, Éditions Outre-terre n° 30 pp. 261-269, 2011/4.

²⁹ *Op.cit.* 255

³⁰ Les amis de la Russie à Madagascar, <https://amisrussemadagascar.org/about-history/> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

This engagement gains further significance in the context of a growing “Russian influence³¹” in Africa. For this reason, the meeting held on 16 October between the Russian Embassy delegation in Antananarivo and the newly formed transitional government under Colonel Michaël Randrianirina aroused some concern.

Conclusions

The protests in Madagascar that began in September 2025 are the result of a structural political, social, and economic crisis that has affected the country since its independence in 1960 and continues to this day.

Successive presidents have not demonstrated a genuine willingness to address poverty, the lack of opportunities for youth, and issues of access to education and healthcare, despite the wealth of the Great Island.

Moreover, a sense of unfinished decolonization persists, the most visible example being the administration of the Îles Éparses by France.

Once again, protests swept across the country, in this case in response to ongoing electricity and water outages, as well as corruption. The result: around thirty dead and injured, the departure of President Andry Rajoelina from the country, a position immediately assumed by the military elite, and the beginning of a new period of uncertainty in which the European Union—present in the Great Island for more than six decades—will need to closely monitor the movements of multiple actors if it wishes to preserve and continue the projects and agreements that link it to Antananarivo.

First, it remains to be seen whether Michaël Randrianirina will uphold the promises he made during his inauguration, committing to change, or whether he will follow the same path as his predecessors.

Furthermore, China’s moves will be important, as in addition to being the main supplier, Madagascar lies along the route of the Belt and Road Initiative, just as it is included in the European Union’s Global Gateway.

³¹ FUENTE COBO, Ignacio. El nuevo “rusianismo”. Cómo Rusia está colonizando África. *Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos*, 2024, <https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/el-nuevo-%C2%ABrusianismo%C2%BB.-c%C3%B3mo-rusia-est%C3%A1-colonizando-%C3%A1frica> (Accessed on November 1, 2025).

Meanwhile, Russia is unlikely to miss the opportunity to expand its influence, as it is doing with other former French colonies.

Finally, the charter and roadmap drafted by the youth are of great significance, as their main principles include: the sovereignty of Madagascar, limiting external influence, and reviewing international agreements. These proposals are filled with good intentions, but only time will tell whether they are feasible or remain a utopia.

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