



## NEW EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

### NOWA EUROPEJSKA STRATEGIA WOBEC REGIONU INDO-PACYFIKU

Natalia Potera\* 

#### — ABSTRACT —

The main consequence of rapidly progressing globalization is the strengthening of new, dynamically developing economies. The paper includes the author's reflections on the European Union's strategy for the Indo-Pacific region, which is responsible for 60% of global GDP and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of global economic growth. As a result, this makes that neighborhood an area of conflicting interests and rivalry between the economically strongest state entities. Despite the relatively late involvement of other foreign players in the region, the European Union is also trying to strengthen its position in this area. On September 16, 2021, the "EU Cooperation Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region" was established. The author of the paper will try to answer two main research questions: (1) What influences the shape of the European strategy towards the Indo-Pacific region? and (2) What obstacles does the European Union face in the process of shaping its relations with representatives of this region?

**Keywords:** European Union; ASEAN; Asia; Indo-Pacific; international order

#### — ABSTRAKT —

Główną konsekwencją szybko postępującej globalizacji jest umacnianie się nowych, dynamicznie rozwijających się gospodarek. Artykuł zawiera rozważania autorki na temat strategii Unii Europejskiej wobec regionu Indo-Pacyfiku, który odpowiada za 60% globalnego PKB i  $\frac{2}{3}$  światowego wzrostu gospodarczego. W efekcie obszar ten staje się areną sprzecznych interesów i rywalizacji pomiędzy najsilniejszymi gospodarczo podmiotami państwowymi. Mimo stosunkowo późnego zaangażowania się pozostałych zagranicznych graczy w regionie Unia Europejska również stara się umocnić swoją pozycję na tym terenie. 16 września 2021 roku została opublikowana „Unijna strategia współpracy w regionie Indo-Pacyfiku”. Autorka artykułu spróbuje odpowiedzieć na dwa główne pytania badawcze: (1) Co wpływa na kształt europejskiej strategii wobec regionu Indo-Pacyfiku? oraz (2) Jakie przeszkody napotyka Unia Europejska w procesie kształtowania relacji z przedstawicielami tego regionu?

**Słowa kluczowe:** Unia Europejska; ASEAN; Azja; Indo-Pacyfik; porządek międzynarodowy

\* Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism.

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ is a relatively new concept, and the geographical boundaries of the Indian and Pacific Oceans themselves are not clearly defined. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, researchers of international relations, as well as politicians and diplomats themselves, used to use the phrase “Asia and the Pacific”, which was often unintentionally identified with Pax Americana. This approach changed when Donald Trump had taken charge as President of the United States. The new wording was used for the first time in a scientific paper in 2007 by Gurpreet Khurana – an Indian Navy Captain, who drew attention to the need to extend it to entities gaining in importance in recent years. China and India cannot be ignored in the process of analyzing the regional security architecture. Australia<sup>1</sup>, Japan<sup>2</sup>, and India<sup>3</sup> were other countries to include the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ in their official rhetoric (European Parliament, 2021, p. 2).

The purpose of this article is to indicate the reasons for the greater involvement of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, the author will try to show the main threats and opportunities related to the expansion of cooperation between the parties. In the paper, she will also present how this process has progressed over time, which, in turn, is directly related to the approach of other global powers to the European project.

The implementation of the indicated goal requires the use of a number of research methods appropriate for social sciences, including primarily political sciences. At this point, it is necessary to point out the system analysis and the comparative institutional and legal analysis.

The comparative institutional and legal analysis is intended to help identify the main similarities and differences between states’ policies in terms of enhancing cooperation or intensifying international competition. An important element of the research is also to compare the activities undertaken at the level of particular countries and in the global dimension. The institutional and legal method allows for an analysis of legal instruments used by individual states, but also of actions taken by international entities, including the EU.

After determining the actual state of affairs, the method of system analysis will be applied, assuming the analysis of phenomena in the broader structural context of the global and regional international system.

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<sup>1</sup> This keyword was featured for the first time in the strategic white paper on “Australia in the Asian Century”, published in 2012, and a year after in its defense white paper.

<sup>2</sup> Abe Shinzō used ‘Indo-Pacific’ term in his speech “Japan Is Back” at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC in 2013.

<sup>3</sup> It was used already in the 2015 by the Indian authorities in their maritime security strategy.

## THE CONCEPT OF "INDO-PACIFIC" IN THE EUROCENTRIC APPROACH

Due to the growing rivalry between the Western world and the People's Republic of China, the area of new rising economies has become increasingly important. Most of these entities are located in East and South Asia. After the victorious elections in 2016, the administration of the new president included the term 'Indo-Pacific' in its most essential strategic documents, thus demonstrating its growing interest in this area. It was related not only to the political concerns but above all to the economic reasons, thus US politicians found it crucial for the maintenance of their hegemonic position in the world. On May 30, 2018, the US Pacific Command was also renamed US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM). Principles taken into consideration included: "the importance of sovereignty, rule of law, and accountability to the public; the centrality of ASEAN in regional architecture; the importance of open commons of the sea, overflight, and cyberspace; the peaceful resolution of territorial and maritime disputes; free, fair, and reciprocal trade; and investment and regional integration through connectivity and investment projects that are financed transparently and improve social and environmental outcomes" (O'Brien, 2021).

In 2019, the Department of Defense and the United States Department of State issued separate reports on the Indo-Pacific strategy. This published document formalized the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, which in practice was aimed at China and was intended to limit Beijing's influence in the region. The position of the United States in Asia has always been somewhat dependent on its relations and cooperation with local countries. This was due to territorial remoteness, as well as the difficulties behind it in locating its army in key areas. The Indo-Pacific region is defined as crucial for the future development of the global situation. With the progressing globalization and the growing mutual dependence of international entities, not only the USA but also the European Union started to notice the growing role of the cooperation policy, which slowly but noticeably began to replace the strategy of coercion and intimidation. In 2017, at the APEC summit in Da Nang, President Trump proclaimed the "American dream" of the Indo-Pacific, which he described as "a beautiful constellation of nations, each its own bright star, satellites to none – and each one, a people, a culture, a way of life, and a home" (U.S. Department of State, 2019, p. 5), then referred to the need to combat unfair commercial practices. Although China has not been named as responsible for these viola-

tions, it is clear that it was Beijing's actions that the Washington representative was referring to.

Indo-Pacific is not a term that can be defined conclusively and indisputably. The area that would be considered as a part of this territory will be presented differently, depending on the entities including this topic in their statements. From a European perspective, it will be a region ranging from the Eastern shore of Africa to the Western Coast of the United States. Despite the fact that China and Australia are treated as an integral part of the region, the USA will no longer be included in this specific EU strategy.

### THE FIRST EUROPEAN STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE INDO-PACIFIC

For decades, the European Union focused its attention mainly on the local hegemony, i.e., the People's Republic of China. Only a few European countries decided to tighten their cooperation with other regional actors, and they were usually entities included in the group of new economic powers. France, Germany, and the Netherlands were the first to deepen their relations with India, Japan, and Australia. It was the representatives of these three European countries who insisted on formalizing, or even more visible strengthening of interregional cooperation.

Paris was the first to take additional steps to formalize its relations more closely with the region it identifies with, for the sake of over 1.5 million citizens living in French overseas territories. In May 2018 in Sydney, President Macron presented his country's new strategy for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The new action plan was to be based on three pillars:

- 1) Increasing the activity in the processes of solving regional crises, securing shipping routes, as well as combating terrorism and other forms of organized crime.
- 2) Strengthening political and economic ties with most countries in the region – not excluding cooperation with China, which is important not only for the French economy but also for the entire European community.
- 3) Deepening cooperation with regional organizations, such as: ASEAN, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Indian Ocean Community, the Pacific Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum as well as promoting ideas and values important for the global society, including environmental protec-

tion, promoting greater access to education and medical care as well as the development of the latest technologies with care to ensure equal and equitable access to them (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, 2021, p. 3).

In France, 2018 was a time of in-depth analysis of international markets and the relations that took place over there. It is also the moment when the local decision-makers decided to diversify their foreign policy and shift more attention to the Asian region, which is gaining in importance every year. The first half of 2022 is the start date of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Paris has already clearly signaled to other Member States that it intends to focus on deepening the already existing relations with the Indo-Pacific and establishing new forms of cooperation with local countries.

In 2020, Germany also decided to strengthen relations with Asian entities, especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In their Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific, they indicated its area of interest, including:

- 1) Peace and security – important due to the fact that there are three nuclear powers in the Indo-Pacific territory – China, India, and Pakistan. Furthermore, North Korea, which aspires to this name, is also indicated in this category. On top of it, this area is plunged into numerous ethnic conflicts and border disputes, which additionally favor the development of organized crime.
- 2) Diversifying and deepening relations – it is based on the deepening of mutual connections not only in the area of economy, trade and security, but also it refers to the promotion of culture and education, where priority will be given to relations with states sharing common principles and values with the Federal Republic of Germany.
- 3) Neither unipolar nor bipolar – according to Berlin, the greatest threat to the world's safety is a system in which any country is forced to choose between two sides. Equally dangerous is the situation in which such an entity is unconditionally dependent on the decisions of one state, no matter if it is a global hegemon or merely a regional power. German authorities take the view that the European Union should respond to this growing threat and give the region the third option.
- 4) Open shipping routes – Germany is aware that the prosperity and the European economy depend on the level of security of sea trade routes, especially those located in the Asian region. Up to 25 percent of the world's maritime trade passes through the Strait of Malacca, and therefore, ensur-

ing safe transport and fair rules for its organization is a priority for the EU Member States.

- 5) Open markets and free trade – the level of trade exchange between the German Federation and Asian countries has been growing for many years and it continues to present a positive trend. It is related to the fast economic development of the Indo-Pacific countries, i.e., the region that has started to be not only an area for cheap production but also a tempting market for European goods and services. Moreover, the growing trade between these two sides also positively influences the creation of new job vacancies. The principle of free trade and greater integration of world economies should, by definition, increase welfare in all the countries involved.
- 6) Digital transformation and connectivity – nowadays, almost all spheres of growth depend on the development of the latest technologies. Digital transformation is essential to strengthening the competitiveness of national economies in the international market. The Federal Government of Germany, however, expresses the need to maintain the Western principles of mutual cooperation, based on fair competition and transparency of the applicable rules, in order to avoid the digital divide between developed and developing countries.
- 7) Protecting our planet – all economies in a period of rapid growth are characterized by increased pollutant emissions and waste productivity. It has to do with widespread urbanization, a growing population, and hence – with rising demands for various types of products and services. Highly developed countries, especially European ones, are trying to move away from the so-called “overexploitation”, also called “overharvesting”, towards sustainable development that aims to further strengthen national economies without causing greater harm to the environment. Germany, as well as the entire European Union, is promoting this idea and expresses its willingness to provide assistance, also financially, to those countries that decide to undertake further steps towards such transformation.
- 8) Access to fact-based information – due to the growing importance of social media, both countries and their citizens must be aware of the dangers of sharing information through these channels. The German government calls on all states, not only those in the Indo-Pacific region but also outside that territory, to follow emerging reports or statements more consciously, and to counteract any disinformation and messages

based on manipulation (Bundesregierung – The Federal Government of Germany, 2009, pp. 9–10).

The assumptions of the German Federation translated into the final version of the European Union's strategy towards the Indo-Pacific, containing most of the postulates of Berlin, which, as already mentioned, was one of the main initiators of deepening interregional cooperation.

Another country that insisted on expanding cooperation with Asian countries was the Netherlands. In 2020, Amsterdam announced its strategy towards the Indo-Pacific in order to defend and promote its vital interests in this area. The plan to extend the cooperation between the parties covers almost the same matters as in the case of France and Germany. The points to be mentioned include:

- 1) Security and stability – as in the case of its predecessors, the Netherlands also emphasizes the importance of maintaining international control over the security of the region, in particular with regard to the South China Sea. All preventive actions are to be subject to the rules contained in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as well as in the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, in cooperation with the Indo-Pacific, the EU, NATO and other entities representing similar values. The Netherlands also maintains its willingness to participate in strategic meetings concerning the Asia region, including the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue and the Raisina Dialogue.
- 2) A framework for cooperation with democratic, like-minded partners in Asia – it relies on expanding collaboration within the framework of already existing alliances and creating a platform for establishing new coalitions. The plan to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia is to be a symbol of the Dutch willingness to cooperate. Amsterdam's efforts to deepen partnerships are not limited to purely diplomatic activities, such as participation in the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The Netherlands is one of the founders of financial support to the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).
- 3) Sustainable trade and economies – Dutch policymakers will take bolder measures to promote sustainable trade and tackle one-sided dependencies by ensuring the diversification of supplies, especially of raw materials and products of strategic significance for the national economy and the country's interests. They also want to expand their cooperation with the countries of the region under free trade agreements. In that process, they do not undermine the contribution of the Chinese economy to the global balance.

- 4) Effective multilateralism and the international legal order – the Netherlands supports the French and German measures taken to maintain the global order, based on multilateralism and partnership of all interested states. It also declares its readiness to provide assistance in the sphere of consultations and various courses, for example, on building cyber capacity or on the law of the sea.
- 5) Sustainable connectivity – one of the priority areas of this strategy is the cooperation of state entities on digital agendas such as artificial intelligence, cross-border data transfer, cybersecurity, e-commerce, Internet regulations, national digital sovereignty.
- 6) Global challenges: climate and the SDGs – the Netherlands intends to support EU efforts to promote Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ambitious international and national climate policy is a priority of highly developed countries, aware of the emerging challenges related to climate change and environmental pollution. This approach influences their need to promote the vision of more sustainable development also among poorer societies, which include, e.g., Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The strategy of the Netherlands coincides with the objectives presented by the European Union in September 2021. Amsterdam stresses its readiness to continue its cooperation with the like-minded Indo-Pacific countries, both bilaterally and through a multilateral forum such as European projects.

Over the years, the EU began to realize that its position among other global powers is starting to weaken, and soon it will be unable to compete with the strongest players on the international stage – both in the economic and political spheres. For this reason, on September 16, 2021, the “EU Cooperation Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region” was published. The document was prepared by the European External Action Service (EEAS), based on the conclusions of the EU Council of April 19 of the same year.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGY TOWARDS THE INDO-PACIFIC

There are several reasons why Brussels decided to tighten this cooperation. First, the EU is aware of the growing role of this region, which is responsible for 60% of the final global GDP and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of global economic growth. In addition, it also contributes considerably to the development of the European economy, as it



is the second-largest market for Community exports. It is also significant that this area is home to three of the four largest world economies located outside the territory of the European Union (European Union External Action, 2021). At the moment, this list includes the People's Republic of China – which is the undisputed economic hegemon in the region, India – which is the main competitor for Chinese aspirations, and Japan – which, mainly thanks to the development of the latest technologies, managed to outperform other countries in the region in terms of innovation.

The EU not only wants to strengthen its position as a key player in the international arena, but also wants to promote issues and values important from its perspective. These include, for example, maintaining international peace, combating terrorism, promoting sustainable development, and respecting fundamental human rights. These are the pillars that Europeans consider indispensable for the maintenance of an international order based on the cooperation of democratic, sovereign states. This proposal fell on a fertile ground and was approved, among others, by the ASEAN countries, South Korea, and Japan. These entities saw it as an alternative to the existing necessity to choose between cooperation with the United States or with the People's Republic of China. Cooperation is also to be strengthened with the Quad organization, which includes USA, Australia, India, and Japan<sup>4</sup>. This formation is called by Beijing an “Asian NATO”, which is to indicate its negative policy and attitude towards the Middle Kingdom (Diehl, 2021, p. 98).

The new policy of Brussels envisages the deepening of its current policy as well as the creation of a new platform for cooperation in recently developed spheres. In addition, disputes related to the inviolability and integrity of the borders of the Asian countries but also the issue of human rights violations, remain one of the priority challenges for the European Union. It also aspires to be not only an example which might be followed, but also a mediator who will adopt a neutral and objective attitude in case of any disputes or conflicts of interest. Even though this cooperation is to remain open in terms of both the objective and subjective scope, the parties agreed to define the areas of special concern, which were subsequently listed in the September agreement.

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<sup>4</sup> Quad – the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a forum of consultations between specific countries that are located in the Indo-Pacific region, whose main goal is to contain the growing power of China. The first, then informal meeting of this grouping, was held in May 2007. Nevertheless, its deepened development took place during the presidency of Donald Trump, who saw the Quad alliance as a tool of rivalry with China (Kugiel, 2021).

The Joint Communication highlights seven priority areas for EU action:

- 1) Sustainable and inclusive prosperity;
- 2) Green transition;
- 3) Ocean governance;
- 4) Digital governance and partnerships;
- 5) Connectivity;
- 6) Security and defense;
- 7) Human security (European Commission, 2021).

The first point relates to the cooperation that the Community wants to establish with similar democratic entities in order to revitalize the economies involved in the project. The main idea of the proposal is to “ensure a sound macroeconomic policy, build institutional capacity, and foster regional integration” that would serve both sides. The European Union wants to find a way to diversify supply chains, particularly as regards the so-called critical raw materials, that constitute the basis for the further expansion of highly developed economies. The parties have an additional objective to reform the World Trade Organization so that it is based on an efficient, sustainable, and fair-trading system (Rada Unii Europejskiej, 2021, p. 7).

Green transition means promoting and maintaining prudent environmental standards in both regions. In addition, it aims to ensure an economy that is sustainable in energy terms. That is to be achieved by natural resources, including water, and its further transformation towards clean and climate-neutral renewable energy. Any subsequent decisions, discussed within the framework of international cooperation, are expected to address the issues of climate change, biodiversity, and long-term decarbonization strategies. Such measures are to take account of the specificity of the situation in every country undertaking the path of dialogue (Rada Unii Europejskiej, 2021, p. 5).

Ocean governance concerns activities aimed at elaborating development standards and recommendations for a more conscious and sustainable use of living marine resources. By active participation in Regional Sea Conventions and Regional Fisheries Organizations, the European Union will be able to take bolder action to fight off illegal fishing, combat marine pollution and create marine protected areas. Caring for sustainable blue economies is one of the main priorities included in the 2021 strategy (Rada Unii Europejskiej, 2021, p. 6).

Digital governance and partnerships are supposed to be based not only on EU values but also on international law and standards related to the principle of privacy and the protection of personal data. However, the will to lay down new,

more ambitious regulatory rules must not have an adverse effect on potential or existing cross-border data flow and the trade that is indirectly associated with this issue. The European Union wants to fight and counteract the so-called digital divide, also understood as digital exclusion, which usually affects less developed countries and their citizens. Brussels is planning further investments to improve digital connectivity, which will, in turn, lead to the blurring of the disproportions between the interested parties (Rada Unii Europejskiej, 2021, p. 10).

The next point concerns the growing awareness of the need to mobilize financial resources to improve connectivity between the European region and the Indo-Pacific. It is necessary to create or modify the already existing standards and the regulatory environment, which are valid for the selected area of cooperation. Brussels aims to accelerate the talks on the Connectivity Partnerships that have already started with India and Japan (European Commission, 2021).

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S STRATEGY AMONG OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

The European Union, seeing the threat posed by the ever-growing rivalry between Washington and Beijing, finally decided to adopt an active stance in the field of security. By promoting democracy, the rule of law and the idea of resolving conflicts diplomatically and effectively, the Community presented itself as an alternative to the much more conflicting and confrontational approach of the United States. Additional assumptions in this matter aim to protect the sea and air routes, as well as solve the migration problems and counteract cross-border organized crime, including cybercrime. The European strategy does not include as advanced military projects as these drawn up the United States, however it does not contradict Washington's current initiatives, including, for example, AUKUS Pact<sup>5</sup>, which assumes closer cooperation in the military sphere, with particular emphasis on the exchange of the latest technologies<sup>6</sup>. The aforementioned security project faced an immediate reaction from Beijing, which saw it as

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<sup>5</sup> The agreement on a new format for technological and defense cooperation was signed on September 15, 2021, between Australia, Great Britain, and the United States.

<sup>6</sup> The agreement of the parties meant breaking the Australia-France agreement of 2016 regarding cooperation in the construction of 12 Australian submarines. The tender was worth around USD 66 billion, and its cancellation had a negative impact on relations between the existing partners. Canberra decided to withdraw from the provisions of the already concluded transaction in order to start a new

a direct threat to its vital interests. It creates a precedent for the further transfer of key military technologies, mainly American ones, to the Indo-Pacific countries, which so far have been completely dominated by Chinese military potential. On the other hand, the actions of Brussels are not so negatively received by China due to the inclusive nature of the strategy, which can be applied also to the PRC, as long as both sides share common respect for the same principles and key ideas. Greater involvement of the EU may not only reduce tensions in the Indo-Pacific area, but also strengthen multilateral cooperation and ease the fears regarding recent Chinese actions or aspirations.

The European Union used to take into account the issue of human rights and human security in all its policies or programs. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific strategy is no exception here. Brussels has announced that it will step up its efforts to promote fundamental rights and fight against exclusion on various grounds. For this purpose, it will continue to use its primary tools to influence other countries. Thanks to dialogues, political consultations, but also more restrictive actions, such as trade preferences or sanctions, it intends to spread the idea of freedom and equality among all people, regardless of their origin or other individual characteristics. Nowadays, however, it is still one of the points that lead to disputes between the representatives of the European and Chinese sides. Human rights and freedoms as well as the EU's values behind them do not find any takers in the Middle Kingdom, which views this issue differently. Beijing presents its own alternative to the West's vision. Their outlook on human rights is relatively more flexible than the European one and closer to autocracy rather than liberty. An example of such an approach is the way of thinking about the Uyghur issue in China, or the violation of Hong Kong's territorial integrity and its independence. Additionally, at this point it is necessary to define the type of policy that is currently pursued by the Xi Jinping's administration. The so-called "Wolf warrior diplomacy" [pinyin: *Zhànláng Wàijiāo*], which owes its name to two action movies: "Wolf Warrior" and "Wolf Warrior II", assumes a more assertive approach by Chinese officials and diplomats who are ready to take sometimes very controversial and disputable actions (Zhu, 2020). Despite President Xi's summer announcement on the shift from a policy of confrontation to a strategy based on "making friends, uniting and winning the majority" (Malekos Smith, 2021), the previously established practices are still being maintained. The

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military project based on US-British assistance in the construction of SSN – nuclear-powered attack submarines, designed to combat other warships and submarines of enemies (Bogusz, 2021).

European Union, as a relatively neutral participant of the international system, is intended to stop China's growing aspirations. However, Brussels wants to do so without endangering further relations between the sides. Nevertheless, a conflict of interest is likely to arise in the future. Even if China remains silent about European efforts to promote human rights and freedoms in the region, it will certainly not ignore the increasingly expanding fleet of EU Member States in the waters of the Indo-Pacific. European idea of this multilateral commitment is to defend the freedom of navigation and communication routes in the region. For this reason, it is one of the main arguments encouraging Asian countries to join the EU program. The next sign of the growing clash, or at least diplomatic disputes, will most likely be the Taiwanese issue. The importance of maintaining security in the Taiwan Strait is one of the priority points of the new EU's strategy. Taiwan is recognized by the West as an independent state whose sovereignty cannot be violated in any way and that should be beyond any dispute. This country is also one of the main allies of the Community in the region. That statement additionally bothers Beijing, which sees Taiwan as a part of its integral territory (Bogacz, 2021). This is one of the reasons why the Chinese will not join the implementation of the proposed strategy. They are unwilling to cooperate despite European declarations of inclusive and open cooperation with Beijing. By accepting the EU resolutions, Xi Jinping's administration would indirectly agree to recognize Taiwanese sovereignty. As already mentioned, for Chinese policymakers, Taiwan is only a rebel territory, which formally belongs to the PRC. At the moment, any change of this attitude is practically unthinkable (Maizland 2021).

Recently most of the attention of the international community has been focused on European involvement in the maritime domain. Nevertheless, it is the sphere of advanced digital technologies that can bring much greater profits to both sides – the European Union and its Asian partners. However, the new strategy does not include more precise information on additional funding for potential projects in its sections. Brussels believes that any further actions should be financed by funds obtained from previously open development aid programs or other already existing financial instruments.

At this point, the stance of the United States should be mentioned as they are the most influential foreign player in the region. Even though the EU cooperates with Washington on various levels, ranging from economic, through cultural, to military partnerships, the Americans were rather reluctant to the European proposal for a "New Deal". They considered the newly initiated program to be

insufficiently reliable and unclear. Moreover, they believe that the West should be more assertive towards Chinese provocations. Another objection is that the EU, by creating an additional platform for talks, is distracting Asian countries from choosing between the US and China. As already indicated in the article, for many Indo-Pacific entities this strategy is more attractive, mainly because it does not involve as many conditions and reservations as in the case of other partnership proposals. Additionally, it does not force either party to resign from already existing cooperation programs. Therefore, it does not destroy their previous diplomatic or trade achievements.

## CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, the growing importance of globalization and the constant interpenetration of interregional economic, cultural, and strategic spheres is noticeable in almost every single region of the world. Therefore, any national strategy needs to take into consideration the potential of all newly emerging economies. The Asian continent is an area of rising threats, posed by internal and external incentives, but also it is undoubtedly a hub of growing opportunities. The main direction of global interests has shifted into that region. It is visible not only in the strategies of the lead foreign hegemons but also in the less influential entities. The European Union, in order not to be left behind other international players, has also joined this race. By changing its approach, it became actively involved in the process of establishing new alliances. In some cases, due to its commitment to liberal values and adherence to international law, it has become a better alternative for further cooperation. That was relevant especially for the states which so far have been forced to choose between the unpredictable “Dragon of the East” and the profit-driven “Eagle of the West”. Thanks to the open approach to political dialogue with all interested parties, the new European strategy towards the Indo-Pacific does not arouse much controversy in the international arena. Despite the more or less clear disapproval of some countries, this newly developed project is relatively accepted.

Striving not only to expand but also to deepen international cooperation is a priority for almost all participants of the political arena in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thanks to the rational steps taken by European policymakers, which went beyond the current paradigm of “soft power”, the EU was able to join the race of powers, without giving up its most essential ideas and values. Behind the veil of a neutral

partner, ready for dialogue, it tries to win another countries' favor, and thus – steal new spheres of influence which so far have been under the influence of the United States or the People's Republic of China. The EU's advantage is due to the fact that its strategy, even though it takes into account also some military aspects, is not based on slogans of hostility towards any of the parties. Therefore, no one can accuse it of violating international order or security. Further development of cooperation with the Indo-Pacific countries may be more strengthened. However, it will depend not only on the European Union itself but also on the addressees of this strategy. Interested countries more and more accurately calculate the gains and losses associated with each potential alliance. For this reason, Brussels must prepare an appropriate and attractive offer for these entities.

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