



## THE EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

STRATEGIA UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ NA RZECZ PARTNERSTWA  
W REGIONIE INDO-PACYFIKU

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— ABSTRACT —

The aim of the paper is to study the European Union's geoeconomics policy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent times, the Indo-Pacific has been gaining attention of the global economic powers. On this issue, the EU has launched a cooperation policy in the Indo-Pacific. This study examines the EU's comprehensive strategy for the expansion of its presence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. The EU wants economic and security partnerships among the Indo-Pacific countries. Among the EU member states, the French government is much enthusiastic about strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The European Union's policy has been operating in the regions as an instrument of soft and hard power. The research highlighted that the EU implies the construction of structural strategic networks to intensify the high capacities in the projection of power. The EU uses the key approaches of hard and soft power to achieve transatlantic goals. The comparative case study method is useful to know the objectives and

— ABSTRAKT —

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie polityki geoeconomicznej Unii Europejskiej (UE) dotyczącej współpracy w regionie Indo-Pacyfiku. W ostatnim czasie Indo-Pacyfik zaczął przyciągać uwagę światowych potęg gospodarczych, w związku z czym UE uruchomiła w tym regionie politykę współpracy. W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano kompleksową strategię UE dotyczącą rozszerzenia jej obecności na Oceanie Indyjskim i Morzu Południowochińskim. UE dąży do zawarcia partnerstw gospodarczych i w zakresie bezpieczeństwa między krajami Indo-Pacyfiku. Spośród państw członkowskich UE bardzo entuzjastycznie nastawiony do współpracy strategicznej w regionie Indo-Pacyfiku jest rząd francuski. Polityka Unii Europejskiej funkcjonuje w tych obszarach zarówno jako instrument *soft power*, jak i *hard power*. W badaniu podkreślono, że działanie UE pociąga za sobą budowę struktury sieci strategicznych w celu zintensyfikowania zdolności w zakresie projekcji siły. Unia wykorzystuje podejścia ugruntowane w *soft* i *hard power*,

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results of the research. In conclusion, the EU needs to establish a much stronger relationship among the pacific countries to counter the Chinese aggression and expansion in maritime diplomacy.

**Keywords:** European Union; Indo-Pacific; strategic partnership; maritime politics; geoeconomics

aby osiągnąć cele transatlantyckie. Dla osiągnięcia celów badania i poznania jego wyników korzystne okazuje się zastosowanie w studium przypadku metody porównawczej. Reasumując, UE musi ustanowić znacznie ściślejsze stosunki między krajami Pacyfiku, aby przeciwstawić się chińskiej agresji i ekspansji w dyplomacji morskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Unia Europejska; Indo-Pacyfik; partnerstwo strategiczne; polityka morska; geoeconomia

## INTRODUCTION

Geostrategy is a key concept to gain economic power by states and is called geoeconomics (Wigell, 2016). In the era of economic competition among the world countries which have been expanding their market at global level, the Indo-Pacific region is gaining the attention of many political scientists and academicians from Asia and beyond. Policymakers from the around the world pay attention to the importance of geoeconomics connections in the era of maritime politics. The European Union (EU) itself seems to be deeply interested in the Indo-Pacific region to cooperate between the countries. Since the last decade, France has been the member of the EU eager to collaborate with India, Australia, and Japan. The question is why the Indo-Pacific region has become strategically important for far reaching countries. The concept of geoeconomics is increasing the importance of the Indo-Pacific maritime economic and trade route. It is shaping the concept of geopolitics and the security environment among the various political powers. Global politics is moving in the direction of an international order of balanced power between emerging powers and nobody wants hegemonic powers to emerge to lead the geoeconomics across the world (Zhu, 2015, p. 46).

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging fast for the rule in several aspects. Nowadays, the maritime business route is a matter of obsession for international communities due to its importance. Since the last decade, the Indo-Pacific has been gaining attention of the global players. The future maritime policy and its relevance are of paramount importance for geoeconomic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is becoming a business hub for commercial activi-

ties throughout the region. In recent years, there have been grave security challenges in the region. The rivalry between China and the United States of America (USA) is a reality in the South China Sea. And North Korea's defence phobia creates chaos and tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Despite the US-China competition, the EU is keen to be interested in the Indo-Pacific. There are many countries in the world that decide their policy on the basis of national and international factors that relate to classical realism in international relations theory. Thus, the political and economic strategies of states are influenced by international circumstances and changes in the global order. The concept of "Indo-Pacific" emerged in the trade, investment, and energy supply in this region (Zhu, 2015, p. 54).

In recent days, many EU countries are expanding cooperation with neighboring Indo-Pacific countries. France, as a strong country in the EU, has a more influential role in peaceful cooperation between the various states. There is also the French-ruled island, where the French naval base is settled down and supports the opening of the trade association to strengthen the dimension of geoeconomic aspirations. There are many European countries that have tied up with several nations, and from the security point of view, Indo-Pacific is becoming the naval exercise ground. There are many countries that have strategic partnerships with EU countries to purchase arms and technology. There is also regular naval exercise happening between the states. The EU's economic expansion toward Asian countries is considerable at the global level. The EU and China have trade relationships at a large scale. Thus, the EU is the biggest trade partnership with many Asian countries. The EU member states have free trade cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN and the EU as regional organizations agreed to cooperate together in the areas of good and sustainable governance, multilateralism, and extensive partnership in the Indo-Pacific region (Gillespie, 2021). Japan has deep economic and free trade cooperation with the EU (Hutt, 2021). The research objective highlights the region's economic and strategic significance for the EU. After 2020, the EU has completely moved forward with the establishment of a comprehensive partnership in the Indo-Pacific. The research questions are: why has the EU decided to adopt a strategy for the Indo-Pacific and what would be the EU's key priority sectors for its Indo-Pacific strategy? The qualitative approach of the study answers the research questions to use the primary and secondary data.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indo-Pacific region has tremendous economic and military significance. The EU has shifted their connectivity towards the Indo-Pacific region for wider cooperation in different sectors. There is a deep involvement of the European countries, i.e., France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands in the region, which created the roadmap for the EU to start a heavy presence in the Indo-Pacific region (Grare & Reuter, 2021). The European countries show great interest in participating in the Indo-Pacific region. Many EU countries enthusiastically increased their interest during the ministerial forum for partnership in Paris in early 2022. The ministerial forum decides on a partnership in the Indo-Pacific. This meeting highlights the future coursework and wider diplomatic strategy for the region. The EU is keen to start many projects in the cooperation with member countries. This meeting was attended by the 30 countries from this region. Foreign ministers participate as representatives of various countries, including European countries (Rajagopalan, 2022). According to the European Commission, President Ursula von der Leyen has stated that the EU extends cooperation among Pacific countries to strengthen its availability in the Indo-Pacific region. It is the global approach of the EU to expedite the partnership between like-minded nations. The EU has published the vision document for the Indo-Pacific strategy. Brussels attempts to explore its vision in increasingly significant parts of the globe (Hutt, 2021).

Maritime business and trade routes are growing in importance, and there is a rivalry between China and the United States of America (USA) in the area across the ocean (the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean). Meanwhile, in February 2022, the Ministerial Forum meeting set the landmark example to heavily work in the Indo-Pacific region with the Pacific countries, as individual EU member nations have their own Indo-Pacific strategy in the region. Countries like Germany, France, and the Netherlands have strong ties with the Pacific countries for economic and trade partnerships. The French policy is of a much deeper interest than any other European country. During the EU's Presidency, France shaped stronger cooperation in the region. Now the EU is working there on the multidimensional problems of the region (Bhatia, 2022). Moreover, Europe is making itself an important stakeholder in the region besides the US, China, and Australia in the Indo-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific market attracted the emerging economic player and European exports amounted to about 35 per cent in the Indo-Pacific markets. For the economic and trade purposes, maritime

routes are used by European countries for transit in the Indian and Pacific oceans (Mohan, 2019).

The geopolitics to cope with changing balance of power in Asia has led to the emergence of competing geoeconomic architectures: China's BRI and the US Indo-Pacific Economic Vision. Especially with India on board, the US Indo-Pacific Strategy as a geopolitical construct becomes more credible in responding to China's maritime rise in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, the EU and its member states are very keen on spreading the concept of Asia-Europe connectivity for deeper economic cooperation in the region (Kang, 2020). Pejsova (2019) describes the EU as having capabilities to collectively provide security and extend their support to other Pacific countries. The EU has the technical capacity to deal with maritime security problems. Although, this regional institution has its own mechanisms and past experience in addressing the Oceanic security issues. Apart from security, the EU has a willingness to dominate the entire Indo-Pacific region in the context of strengthening the geoeconomics goal. The EU has a roadmap toward the South Asia region for strategic cooperation. Security is one of the key elements of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, along with trade, economic engagement, and science and technology. India is an important partner of the EU in the region that supports the European approaches in the Indo-Pacific (S.S. Bharti, 2021, p. 12).

An analytical approach to understudying this research in the context of international politics is necessary for discussion in scientific mainstream literature. The various literature on geoeconomics suggests that economy and trade are prime concerns for international actors at the global level. There is a struggle to balance mega-economic policies and geostrategic contentions between the states in a linear approach. During 1960s-1980s, the causal relationship between the states depended on a one-directional model. The leading socio-political scientists talked about the bilateral partnership in theoretical perception. The leading scholars, such as Margaret Doxey, Richard Porter, Klaus Knorr and Johan Galtung, highlighted the changing behaviour of states using the tool of economic coercion to attempt geographical location to extend their geoeconomics enlargement and trade partnership (Doxey, 1972; Galtung, 1967; Knorr, 1977; Losman, 1979; Porter, 1978). The conventional behaviour changed the dynamics of an empirical study of economic statecraft. Further, this attitude significantly changes the haul scenarios which is related to the term 'geoeconomics' at the international level. According to Luttwak (1990), geoeconomics is a tool of the geostrategic which has been used by the economic powers across the world. From an ana-

lytical perspective, geoeconomics strategy does not connect military purposes between the member states and is only concerned with economic issues at the global level, aiming to expand market connectivity for business (Szabo, 2015; Zarate, 2012). According to Mearsheimer, there is a lack of a mechanism at the global level to identify and confront regional powers for the geoeconomics strategies. Extant theories often speculate on a monolithic nature of regional powers (Mearsheimer, 2001).

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The comparative analysis of this research characterises the role of various stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from the EU, there are many European countries that have their own structures and collaboration with the Pacific countries. French politics is different from other EU member countries, as France paved the way for a stronger EU presence in the region. Germany has a greater presence along with the French in the Indo-Pacific region. The consequences of the German-French partnership on the EU's strategy in the region have become a reality for extensive partnership with the Pacific countries. There is a main motto aimed at restricting China's aggression in maritime connectivity (Duchâtel & Mohan, 2020; Grare, 2020; Mohan, 2020). The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas stated in 2019 that the EU should engage in the complete transformation from the geoeconomics capabilities to the geopolitical power in the Indo-Pacific region. The French and German policies support the EU's extensive presence and multidimensional geoeconomics ties between the Pacific powers. Later, Maas discussed the support for transatlantic trade cooperation – it should rise to the core of intercontinental trade and economic partnership towards the Indo-Pacific rising powers (Ulatowski, 2022).

In recent years, the concept of geoeconomics has gained great geographical importance throughout the world. The maritime business routes attract key attention of political authorities. Moreover, the concept of Indo-Pacific has significance for the EU to extend the geographical areas of the region, which is of great importance to accelerating the economic agenda. The theory of hegemony is deeply rooted in the strength and decline of superpowers. There is competition at the external level about secure, free and fair trade in the Indo-Pacific. The well-known rivalry between the US and China attracted the attention of other regional powers to safe and secure economic partnerships in this region.

Gradually, the EU is establishing itself in the region as a stronger competitor and successfully making a good connection between India, ASEAN, Japan, Australia, and the other entities (Zhe, 2013; M.S. Bharti, 2022).

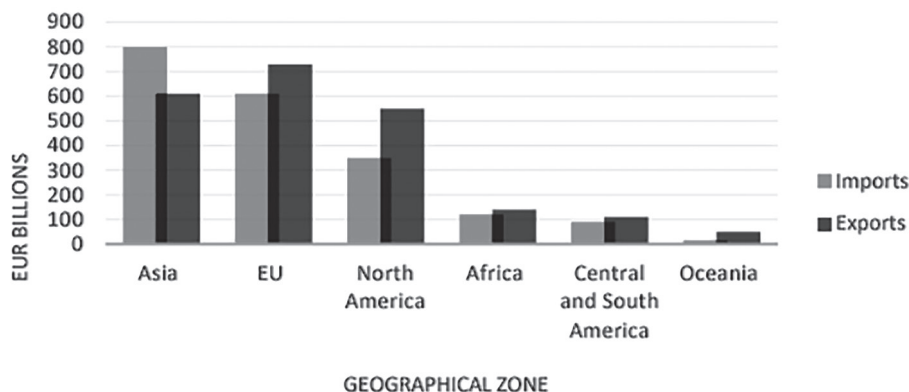
The EU is known for its quintessential geoeconomics strategy in neighbourhood areas. Thus, the EU has strong economic domination across the region and focuses to grab a hegemonic position within its periphery. There is economic stability and security in the region are features that the EU should maintain. Moreover, the EU's involvement in its periphery is to boost the economic development and strengthen the strategy of geoeconomics. It is paving the way for the EU's economic partnership with the Indo-Pacific countries (Le Gloanec, 2011, p. 103).

In the time of the global world order, the economy is a key component of nation-building and nurturing the geoeconomics across the world. According to the Friedrich List, Sergei Witte, Alexander Hamilton, and Gustav Schmoller, economic power is necessary to the establishment of political independence and sovereignty. The EU's vision from the date of its establishment is to get economic sovereignty in the region. Apart from the EU's territory, the EU has wider economic partnerships in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Now the EU seems to have a comprehensive partnership in the Indo-Pacific region (Diesen, 2021). Australia, the UK, and the US jointly participate in a trilateral security partnership in the Indo-Pacific region called AUKUS. The AUKUS agreement does not oppose the interest and objectives of the EU in this region. This security organisation in the Indo-Pacific region is a response to China's expansion and challenge (Perot, 2021).

The EU states have a great hold in the economic sector and it is a major concern in the region. EU maritime trade and investment in the South China Sea exceeds fifty per cent. As a stronger regional organisation, the EU is a global trade and business power and has immense interests in the region as a key stakeholder. The World Economic Forum (WEF) remarks that there are trade exchanges between Europe and Asia that are higher than in any other global geographical region. The trade between India and Europe is growing in the context of economic interdependence in 2020. This is exemplified and shared by the EU's registered trading exchanges (Iuppa, 2020).

In the Indo-Pacific region, for the EU the emerging trend of maritime transportation is ensuring the energy, commodities and food supply. The EU's dependence on exports and imports from this region has increased around the world. The maritime business and trade routes are drivers of the European economy to

boost the economic, social and cultural development between the various states worldwide. The geoeconomic strategy is helping the expansion of territorial reach. The EU's external trade is dependent on sea routes which amount to 90 per cent of total trade through the sea (Neves, Becker, & Dominguez-Torreiro, 2019).



**Figure 1:** The EU's Trade by Geographical Location in 2020

Source: Eurostat (n.d.).

Figure 1 shows that the EU has a large scale of trade in the Asian continent. The EU has a strong mechanism as a regional organisation in Europe and is successful in the economic sector. Similar to other regional organisations, such as ASEAN, which is also successful in East Asia. It is the fastest-growing economy across the world. The overall GDP of ASEAN is US 3 trillion and set to achieve the goal of 6 percent. The European Commission's latest report shows that the EU's economic growth increased from 4.2 percent to 4.4 percent in 2022 in comparison to 2021 (EEAS, 2021). The primary reason for the EU's decision to shape the strategy for the Indo-Pacific region is its trade and economic partnership for economic interdependence. Thus, trade, investment, and supply are the alternative goals to achieve a comprehensive partnership, which is deeply embedded in these sectors and can accelerate the EU's economy at a high level in comparison to any other stakeholder. During 2018–2019, the EU's trade in Asia totaled USD 1.8 trillion and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between the EU and Asia reached USD 107 billion (Morcos, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific region produces around 45 percent of the world's GDP. It generated 60 percent of world economic growth and two-thirds of the global population. The Indo-Pacific is a critical sea business and trade route. It has



covered one-third of global trade. During 2010–2020, overall trade has increased from USD 134 billion to USD 168 billion (Meijer, 2021). The outbreak of COVID-19 has accelerated the importance of geoeconomics across the world. It is a strategic tool to expedite geoeconomics policy which can be rules-based liberal trade and economic cooperation. The EU decides on the interconnectedness in the Indo-Pacific region to build a strong geoeconomics structure. This kind of dynamics could help the EU become a long-term leader that could be able to build global governance and free trade across the region. Stable market power supports the creation of better strategic partnerships in the field of geoeconomics statecraft (Håkansson, 2022).

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Many political commentators articulate that the EU's role in this region would be successful. Because of the earlier undoubted success achieved by the EU in the member states, the EU has the institutional capacity to establish its maritime policy successfully in the Indo-Pacific regions. There is an extensive experience within the EU's institutional functions, which include written principles and sustainable governance in its geographical areas. The EU must face great challenges in the context of security in the entire region of the Indo-Pacific (Beeson & Lee-Brown, 2021).

Amid the war between Russia and Ukraine, the EU is involved on its eastern border. Meanwhile the US announced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). What is more important, the EU has a huge capacity for active participation in the IPEF despite the war and facing a huge number of immigrants in EU territory. The union is involved in trade negotiations with various Pacific countries. The EU is nurturing and strengthening the Global Gateway and Strategy for Partnership in the Indo-Pacific region. That has been deeply associated with said renewable energy and resilient infrastructure sector. Thus, the EU institutions are involved in expediting the cooperation in the proper way and building the EU's advantage in the region (Grare, 2022).

China is still in a dominating position across the Indo-Pacific region because of its deep partnership with its Asian neighbourhood areas. There is no doubt that China is ahead of the EU in the region in terms of rule-making, although EU policymakers have made bilateral cooperation with Asian countries on a larger scale over the last several years. The Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

have set an agenda for broader economic and trade cooperation. But there is a lack of a strong economic foundation in this region. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) was launched to bring about tremendous economic changes, and the US believes it would support the creation of huge differences. There is a possibility of the region's economic transformation through the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The experts at the global level believe that the foundation of IPEF is an alternative for the US to re-associating with the CPTPP. The CPTPP is a platform which can support the EU's economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region (Tamura, 2022). Furthermore, the CPTPP is a better forum where the EU can accelerate its own economic and trade agenda in this region. There are also unbridgeable differences between CPTPP and the EU's trade and economic agenda in the Indo-Pacific region. And CPTPP rules create a gap for the EU's reluctance there.

At the large scale and national level, the EU members have increased their commitment to the region. The French side has a deep-rooted position and a long-lasting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In recent years, the Netherlands and Germany have become strongly entrenched in the region and have adopted their own policies to lay the strong foundation for the EU's extensive approach towards the Asia-Pacific. It is clear that the EU member states have a solid vision for the extensive trade and commerce interest in the region. The member states want the EU High Representative and the European Commission to nurture the policy for this region through the lens of the EU strategy. Through the EU's platform, the member states want strategic cooperation and communication with the Pacific partners.

The EU member states have worked out main issues of cooperation and are divided into three key emerging areas, which are economic, security and diplomatic channels. The diplomatic channel involved to work on a stable Indo-Pacific should be based on democracy, the rule of law, international laws, and human rights. These are key points where the EU member countries united to explore the region and embrace their vision for the Indo-Pacific. The EU is signaling to work on those issues together with the member states to adopt the policy to counter China's expansion and aggression policy in the name of MSRI (Morcos, 2021).

The economy is the principal agenda and running front of the Indo-Pacific partnership. The EU policy is to expand its economic zone and promote interest with the new trade and investment agreement. This trade and economic relationships are starting notably with India, Indonesia, Australia, and New

Zealand. There is trade policy accelerating and diversifying in the region for its supply chains. Research and development (R&D) is the priority area of the EU to promote research, innovation, mobility, and development projects between the Asian countries. Higher education is also a priority sector of the European Union to promote mobility at the university level. The European member states seem to be connected between Europe and Asia. It is also the EU's strategy that there should be an extensive partnership between the Asia Pacific and the EU. It will be a game-changer in the region because China's BRI projects are a major challenge for alternative groups. Despite China's omnipresence in the Indo-Pacific region and its strengthening of economic and business routes, that is what triggers the EU's strategic partnership with the Pacific countries.

The EU is very keen to secure the region and focus on the security and defence sector. Defence and security are priority areas for the EU member states. Because security is a large emerging sector in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a need to work on maritime security in the context of cybersecurity and counterterrorism. The Indo-Pacific region impacted the EU in the context of illegal fishing, non-proliferation, organised crime, and piracy (Iyer, 2022). The EU is focusing on securing free and open sea areas for better communication. European countries seek greater cooperation in their naval presence in the Indo-Pacific through cooperation between European and Asian navies. The EU is aware of the lessons learned from the Gulf of Guinea to establish regional coordination on maritime security. The "Global Gateway" framework is paving the way for the EU to the establishment of a strategic partnership with India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region, which is extending the EU's approach to the border concept and also provides an alternative initiative to China's BRI (Valero & Follain, 2021).

The EU's connectivity towards the Indo-Pacific region ensures rules-based, secure and sustainable, and intelligent partnership. It modernizes existing infrastructure, and its proper development is based on transport, digital, people-to-people connection, and energy. It is an emerging great game between economic power and searching the geoeconomics route through the lens of connectivity. European countries have a great presence in the Indo-Pacific region and want to better tie up with Asian partners which are like-minded countries and can boost the partnership. The EU members want to remove any kind of barriers and conflicts which can pave the way for connectivity (Okano-Heijmans, 2020).

During the COVID-19 outbreak, human security has become a major challenge for the EU. There is an intense rivalry developed between the EU, the US, the UK, and China, and well-known 'vaccine diplomacy' became every

government policy to supply low-cost vaccines to the developing countries from the Indo-Pacific region. Team Europe, including EU member states, had started a vaccination programme in the region. This vaccine diplomacy was initiated under the EU's Horizon Europe programme. The priority and strategy for the Indo-Pacific region is the principal agenda of the EU aimed at extensive cooperation with several states to achieve a stronger presence in the region. Thus, the EU's funding in the Indo-Pacific region takes the necessary steps to integrate important human-related welfare programmes into EU financial instruments (S.S. Bharti & S.S. Bharti, 2021).

In the area of 'Green Transition', the EU's policy envisages a futuristic purpose in this region. The EU seems to strengthen the green transition initiatives and nurture the ambitious Green Alliance with Japan. A serious note has been taken by the EU to limit environmental degradation and climate change and commit to following up the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow. The EU is supporting the countries from this region to build proper mechanisms to face the situation of climate change. The EU member states agreed to spend development funds on the green initiatives. Thus, the EU's interest in the region covers several aspects of human needs and security. The EU's policy is the secure and sustainable development of this region and it wants to safeguard biodiversity and the ocean's resources. It has been continuously working on several issues and protecting the region from illegal activities. For example, there are illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing-related activities in the Indo-Pacific region. The EU has an extensive programme and strategy to participate in the promotion of marine protected areas, and joint work on the issues of marine pollution. The EU has a keen interest in focus on ocean governance in the Indo-Pacific region (Cunningham, 2022). The EU has experience working in the security region in Asia and African countries. Apart from security, there are several programmes organised and run by different allied institutions of the EU for people's welfare (M.S. Bharti, 2022).

The EU's External Action policy connects the Indo-Pacific region, including South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australia. It is the EU's flagship Asia-centric strategy for the establishment of enhanced partnerships in the region. This strategy is an extended policy of the European Commission's 2001 connectivity and communication under the "Asia and Europe" framework. This is focusing on the core elements of strengthening the EU's economic, trade and political presence across the region (S.S. Bharti, 2020). The study characterised the EU's presence as a great opportunity for European countries to accelerate

their economic aspirations in the region. The main objectives of the EU are to successfully ensure stability, security, prosperity, and sustainable development in the region is the ultimate goal. This research assesses whether the US position in the Indo-Pacific region can provide protection against significant security threats. That is why this study indicates that the EU would need support from the US to shape a strong presence in the entire region of the Indian and Pacific oceans. Further, the EU is a leader in the area of democracy promotion within the EU periphery according to the Copenhagen criteria and is involved in third-world countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It can be applied in the Pacific countries as well (Wacker, 2021).

The Ministerial Forum for Cooperation is a key policy of European countries in the Indo-Pacific region. There is a common understanding among European countries that the Indo-Pacific is an opportunity to involve the EU in the region to pursue the economic agenda for cooperation with the Pacific countries. European countries have a common willingness for economic engagement and their model is unique in terms of prosperity and the implementation of a peace process to protect against illegal activities in the region. The cooperation model highlights the core themes, namely, the rule of law and multiracialism, openness, reciprocity, and lays the foundation for sustainability in the Indo-Pacific. The French Island in the region supports and helps European activities. These French Islands are namely Réunion, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia in particular (Consulate General of France in Bangalore, 2022).

The US policy supports the EU's increasing regional role in the Indo-Pacific. The EU has announced its agenda and strategy for partnership in the region with the European countries. The US has been supporting its own approach to intensifying climate work, capacity-building, deployment, training, health, security, and development in the Indo-Pacific region. The EU's extensive policy is supported by the US in the context of building maritime capacity, and awareness in the maritime domain, and expanding its role for people-to-people contact and exchange (The White House, 2022). Meantime, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is creating a situation for European countries to focus on their own territory, because there are uncertainties about the EU's eastern borderline. In 2021, situation on Poland's eastern border was intense because of illegal immigrants accommodated at the Belarus-Polish border who wanted to cross the border into EU territory. The recent Ukrainian crisis has become a major concern for the EU, and their involvement provides shelter to refugees who have arrived from Ukraine. It seems that China is closer to Russia in this war. There is also a division

between European countries about China's activities in the Indo-Pacific region. These kinds of approach of European countries would create difficulty for the EU in the region to go forward (Walters, 2022).

The shaping of the regional balance in the region of Indo-Pacific is a primary approach in terms of the power balance. Establishing basic order in the region is a serious challenge. China's assertiveness and behaviour are unrealistic across the region and create problems for India in South Asia as well as in the Pacific region. There is also a challenge to European norms, in particular peaceful management of various disputes, overflight, freedom of navigation, and sovereignty (Christiansen, 2020).

## THE EU DIGITAL AGENDA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

The EU and its member states have wished to strengthen their digital agenda in the Indo-Pacific region. Digital governance is also a key EU agenda for the Indo-Pacific region. The EU has set out to position Europe as a global digital player, including a global standards-setter. At the global level, it seeks to inspire countries with its digital governance model, notably in the adoption of GDPR-like measures to regulate data governance. The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) is ramping up its operational capacity, setting up an office in Brussels and launching new cybersecurity initiatives that also aim to enhance Europe's 'common situational awareness' (Dekker, Nachiappan, & Okano-Heijmans, 2021).

"The geopolitical and geoeconomic weight of the Indo-Pacific region is expanding at an unprecedented rate. The region has become both the epicentre of global power dynamics and home to fast growing and vibrant digital ecosystems. From digital trade, investments in innovation, connectivity partnerships, critical infrastructures, to supply chains and data flows, the Indo-Pacific is likely to impact global digitalization megatrends across businesses and societies. The European Union and the Indo-Pacific are highly interconnected. This report aims to assess the role of digital governance and partnerships in the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and to understand whether there is a pan-Indo-Pacific digital governance and cybersecurity framework. To this end, this report maps the architecture of digital governance initiatives in the Indo-Pacific and it examines the EU's engagements in the region and potential digital governance synergies. Additionally, the report zooms in on cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific and the EU's approach, and it proposes seven recommendations for the EU's promotion

of multilateralism and (digital) partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. Overall, the report observes that, for the EU to become a stronger digital and cybersecurity actor in the region, it should take a holistic and cross-sectoral approach to digital governance and cybersecurity. The Union should also help develop critical infrastructures and get involved in a wide range of issues, including supply chain resilience, critical infrastructure, data governance, and digital trade” (Csernatoni & Pacheco Pardo, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This research indicates that the EU has an enormous goal to achieve – a stronghold in the Indo-Pacific. The EU’s role in the region is gaining importance thanks to its multi-purpose objectives and strategies. Security issues are a key concern in the region to ensure the economic activities with partner countries. European countries supported the EU’s establishment in the region as a resident player. The socio-economic standards are a key approach for the EU to create comprehensive partnerships in the region with other European countries. The EU’s strategy is to focus on the foundation of a proper mechanism and strengthen the internal structure for the policy implementation. However, the EU’s ‘Global Gateway’ strategy needs to connect various public and private institutions for proper outcomes. This new connectivity needs a deeper connection with the regions’ institutions. There is also the EU’s demand in the region for strategic cooperation among the countries of the region. There are golden opportunities for the EU to invest and run the trade between the Pacific countries.

For the EU, the rise of China is becoming an external threat, and its MSRI framework brings together many Pacific countries. India is emerging as a great aspirant in the context of economic giants in the region, but there is a positive point for the EU that India is a huge supporter of European countries in the Indo-Pacific region. While China is creating security problems for India in the South Asia region, this Chinese security threat pushes Indian diplomacy to engage with the EU and European countries. And on the other hand, the US strategy is to increase connectivity in the region with India to leverage the Indo-Pacific region (Zajączkowski, 2021).

The research concludes with the EU as an emerging player in the Indo-Pacific region. The study focuses on the fact that the EU has huge capabilities to become an engine for the European countries in the region for the establishment of trade

and commerce. The EU has experience in European territory which is how the EU cooperates with member states for economic transition within the EU. Thus, the EU can make a bridge between Asia and Europe connectivity. The EU has great experience from the Eastern Neighbourhood Programme (ENP) and its eastward enlargement process. Thus, as a regional organisation, the EU can make history through its extensive trade and economic partnership in the region. As a result, the study recommends that the EU needs to start and accelerate the partnership through multilateral talks between the Pacific countries. Through the strategic partnership, the EU has to work with the ASEAN member states for a stronghold toward the Southeast parts of the Pacific Ocean. The QUAD and European countries can make differences in the context of security reasons. It is of great significance to the Indo-Pacific region at the international level as the second-largest market outside of the European continent.

The region has great importance in the context of geostrategic location and emerging maritime routes creating better opportunities for the EU. Thus, the European countries are utilizing the sea lanes from the region to reach the inter-continental connection between Asia, Africa, and Europe. Brussels recognizes the importance of the Indo-Pacific region and accepts the new terminology of the region as 'Indo-Pacific' instead of 'Asia-Pacific'. This study suggests that the growing importance of the region is attractive to global players and the Indo-Pacific is the backbone of geoeconomic importance. There is a need for further empirical and rational work on the significance of the region in international politics. This research finds out that the EU is an emerging key actor in the Indo-Pacific region, and the role of the French government is crucial in establishing the EU's position in the region.

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