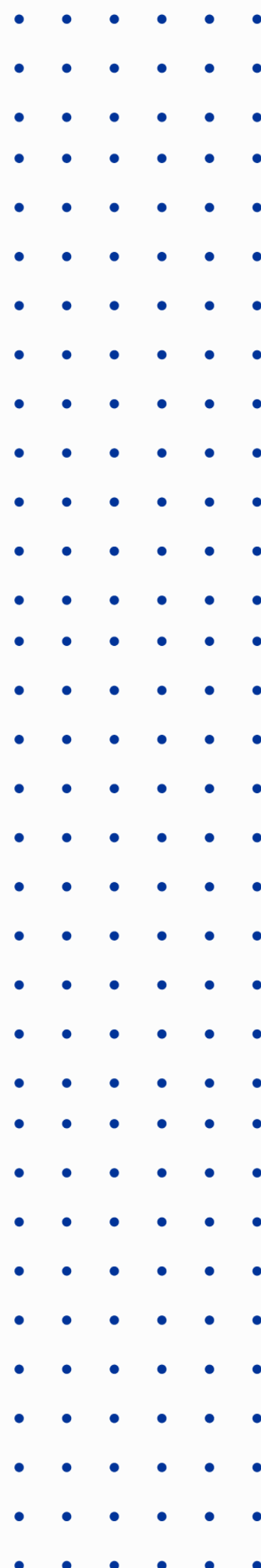


 Report

EU – PACIFIC TALKS: EU – ASEAN RELATIONS: FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE

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Despite of significant geographic distance, the EU and the Indo-Pacific region have been increasingly mutually interconnected and the strategic weight of the Indo-Pacific has considerably grown over the recent years for the EU as well as globally. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific has become a geographic region with continuously rising political tension. However, that doesn't make any kind of obstacle in cooperation between EU and the southeast Asia.

This debate in a series of expert discussions on the EU's relations with the Pacific took place online on Tuesday 27 October. The guest offered their view on how the EU and ASEAN partnership can remain strong and what are the areas these two can strengthen given the ongoing geopolitical challenges.

Lukas Gajdos the Deputy Head of Mission from Delegation of the European Union to ASEAN describes where we are as European union in our relationship with ASEAN and where we are headed. EU and ASEAN associations are the two most successful integration projects in the world that makes them natural partners for cooperation. The strength of the partnership can be measured in economic ties and the fact that EU is ASEAN third largest trading partner can mean only that our partnership is very strong. EU together with ASEAN for example leads policy dialogues, deal with climate change with a green team Europe initiative. EU engages with ASEAN simply because it is necessary for them to be successful and stable. This refers to the geopolitical changes in the world and the growing political tension leading to acknowledgment that EU and ASEAN do not exist in a vacuum and no issues of today can be solved without southeast Asia being in the room.

Stefania Benaglia, associate fellow from CEPS brings Brussels side of view on how the EU-ASEAN cooperation can be brought forward and why it is important to engage. It is all about connectivity such as trade terms, connectivity building and resilient connections. The connectivity for the EU is defined in four pillars: energy, digital, people and infrastructure. An ASEAN defines this connectivity with the same structure. With the only difference that they highlight the regulatory framework and the starter setting as a different pillar. For connectivity it is also very important for Czech Presidency to rebalance the interest back into Indo-Pacific and support efforts to complete negotiations on free trade agreements.

According to Senior Researcher from Institute for International Relations Alicia Kizeková are EU and ASEAN both work in progress, constantly readjusting and sometimes struggling with speaking just with one voice. Individual members of ASEAN are also struggling to live up to ASEAN ideals such as Myanmar where major problems are with human rights. As for Czech presidency gave very positive signal at the beginning of June when there was Indo-Pacific forum happening in Prague bringing more focus on Indo-Pacific issues not only on China as a threat but on other spheres such as endangered species and biodiversity and dealing with waste in Indonesia.

Prof. Masafumi Ishii from Gakushuin University issues developments over the next twenty years. Right now, the only superpower is US but in the 2030s the 3G will emerge. It is supposed to be US, China and India. If in 20 years we try to create new G7 the members would be US, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, Europe and Russia. These members will probably be divided into two groups. One of them would be US, Japan and Europe and the other China with Russia. That would put India and Indonesia in difficult position in choosing one of the sides. Another predicament is that division expand among ASEAN countries. SEA becomes the center of competition over influence among 3G and although most of them will say that they did not choose side it is geopolitically already given. Europeans only choice is to be patient and honor ASEAN's initiative and to carefully prioritize bilateral relationship for that our resources are limited.

“If you missed the debate, you can watch it on the Facebook page of the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, which hosts the EU-Pacific Talks debate.”



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