



Report

EU – PACIFIC TALKS: EU – SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR THE PACIFIC, EU, AND RUSSIA

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Despite the significant geographic distance, the EU and the Indo-Pacific region are now connected even more than ever before and both sides aiming to strengthen their partnership in many areas and security policy is one of the most serious ones right now due to many factors.

This debate took place online on Friday 2nd December as a part of expert discussions on the EU's relations with the Pacific. The guests offered their views on the EU-ASEAN partnership, particularly in which area can EU strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific reflecting the ongoing war in Ukraine and other geopolitical challenges.

Benedetta Girardi, the Strategic Analyst, HCSS - The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, described the willingness to cooperate in Indo-Pacific by the EU and its member states. There are two views on how we can approach this topic from the European perspective. Firstly, by the EU. Secondly, by its member states and its national strategies. EU approach provides a frame. It brings unity and necessary structures. On the other hand, there are national strategies that all contribute to the EU. In order to say a few examples, France's strategy is more straightforward, due to the fact that France has its own territories in the region. Others aim more at trading power, such as Germany. The ongoing crisis in Ukraine was also mentioned. We can perceive the war as an eye-opener for societies and politicians around the world. There is a state that clearly does not respect international law. According to Girardi, there is one country in the Indo-Pacific that can be a candidate for great power aggression. That is China. So, as we can see the war resonates and have a significant impact on the region.

Eva Pejšová, Senior Advisor of the Asia Pacific Research and Advice Network, highlighted the consequences of the war on the Indo-Pacific. Before February 2022 one could estimate that the war will distract European attention from Southeast Asia. But the effect was completely vice versa, and it brought the EU and ASEAN

closer than ever before. Broadly speaking, overall EU engagement in the region is perceived positively by southeast Asia countries. And fair to say the discussion is not only about security. Actually, security is in sixth or seventh position in the talks. Trade, technologies, climate change, cybernetics, and maritime and sea law are also hot topics. Another strong signal that definitely strengthened the partnership was the SWIFT reaction. Basically, it implies that the EU has the potential to be a strong security partner for ASEAN. Nobody could imagine such a reaction before the war and in fact, a lot of Asia partners were concerned about such united and resilient steps toward an aggressor.

Alexandr Burilkov, Associate, [German Institute for Global and Area Studies - GIGA](#), mentioned defence and trade views. EU has a role of a defender of democracy in the region, but the biggest partners for this role are the US – it stands, for the EU as well as for the region. Due to vast due to vast disparity and capability that there is between us and other members of NATO. Since February there is a clear existential danger to democracies and the need for cooperation among them. Economic concerns are prominent and different from the EU's North American partners. It is particularly prominent in Germany where it has led to some more controversial moments recently such as the visit by Chancellor Scholtz to Beijing. Furthermore, there are two following elements that have become increasingly relevant as well. Firstly, the EU does have a mechanism on the security sector or security side of things in order to increase its engagement in Indo-Pacific. The second remark is related to Russia. Lessons from the war will have an impact on a few questions that the EU is facing in the region including e.g.: the Taiwan question or how the EU can contribute to the defence of democracies in the region.

Implications of the Ukrainian crisis for the Indo-Pacific were mentioned as well by Ito Shoichi, Senior Analyst at the Institute of Energy Economics (IEEJ). The ongoing crisis is not only a question of Europe but a certainly broader question. We must be united to face Russian aggression. The crisis brought about disunity among the

Indo-Pacific states, as well as EU member states are not united in sanctions against Russia. However, the incoherence caused by events in Ukraine is a serious problem in the Indo-Pacific for three reasons. Firstly, the region has a number of less developed countries, where the sustainability of daily life is the most serious topic. Secondly, many of the governments in the region are non-democratic or authoritarian political regimes. Many of the leaders do not really understand the necessity and urgency to act against Russia. Thirdly, Chinese influence increased in many states of the region meaning that non-democratic countries in the region have a filling a line with China.

“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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