



EU in Indo-Pacific

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This editorial is based on the article **How Delhi came to see Europe as a valuable strategic partner** which was published in The Indian Express on 09/10/2021. It talks about the developments related to the entry of the European Union in the Indo-Pacific region.

The **European Union (EU)** is set to push for a closer relationship and stronger presence in the **Indo-Pacific**, as released in the **EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**.

The European Commission President said, “If Europe is to become a more active global player, it also needs to focus on the next generation of partnerships.” Besides the Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU is also looking to launch the “Global Gateway” as a scheme to compete with China’s **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.

Recently, members like Germany, France, and the Netherlands have all started embracing the notion of the Indo-Pacific and are also integrating the Indo-Pacific in their own national security strategies. Therefore, these EU member states have been the driving force behind pushing the EU to adopt the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept.

EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy

- **Sustainable Supply Chain:** The primary objective of this engagement with Indo-Pacific partners is to build more resilient and sustainable global value chains.
- **Partnership With Like-Minded Countries:** The EU strategy currently appears to be pointed more towards building on established partnerships and developing new ones with like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific to ensure its role and growing presence in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
- **Willingness to Work With Quad Members:** There is a willingness to work with Quad partner countries, especially on climate change, technology and vaccines.

Given China’s expansionist tendencies in the Western Pacific and its growing footprints in the Indian Ocean, the EU is willing to work with the Quad countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

- The EU is feeling the need to play a bigger role in Asia, to bear greater responsibility and to have an impact on the affairs of this region, whose fate is intertwined with that of Europe.
- Defence and security are important elements of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy that "seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific".

Significance of EU For India as well as Indo-Pacific

- **Denmark**, a country of barely six million people, can establish a **significant green partnership** with India, is a reminder that even smaller countries of Europe have much to offer in India's economic, technological, and social transformation.
 - Tiny Luxembourg brings great financial clout, Norway offers impressive maritime technologies, Estonia is a cyber power, Czechia has deep strengths in optoelectronics, Portugal is a window to the Lusophone world, and Slovenia offers commercial access to the heart of Europe through its Adriatic sea port at Koper.
 - As India begins to realise this untapped potential, there are new openings with the 27-nation EU.
- The EU and the Indo-Pacific are natural partner regions in terms of trade and investment.
 - The EU is the top investor, the leading provider of development cooperation, and one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - Together, the Indo-Pacific and Europe account for over 70% of the global trade in goods and services, and over 60% of foreign direct investment flows.
 - Trade exchanges between the Indo-Pacific and Europe are higher than between any other geographical regions in the world.
 - The Indo-Pacific region hosts major waterways that are of vital importance to EU trade, including the **Malacca Straits**, the **South China Sea**, and the **Bab el-Mandeb Strait**.

Impacts of EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy

- **Contribute to Regional Security:** A stronger Europe with greater geopolitical agency is very welcome in India. India is conscious that Europe can't match America's military heft in the Indo-Pacific. But it could help strengthen the military balance and contribute to regional security in multiple other ways.
 - Europe could significantly boost India's capacity to influence future outcomes in the Indo-Pacific. It would also be a valuable complement to India's Quad coalition with Australia, Japan and the United States.

- **Military Security With Development Infrastructure:** The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is likely to have a much greater impact on the region more immediately and on a wider range of areas than military security.

They range from trade and investment to green partnerships, the construction of quality infrastructure to digital partnerships, and from strengthening ocean governance to promoting research and innovation.

- **Multipolar World:** As the deepening confrontation between the US and China begins to squeeze South East Asia, Europe is widely seen as widening the strategic options for the region.

The perspective is similar in India, which now sees the EU as a critical element in the construction of a multipolar world.

Associated Issues

- Few Asian countries view Europe with strategic suspicion. Many in Asia see Europe as a valuable partner.
- There are other imminent issues which the **Indo-Pacific region** faces that can have an impact on the European countries' own security interests too, like the potential risks of emerging technologies, ensuring supply chain resilience, and countering disinformation.
- Given the bloc's limited joint military capabilities and continued reliability on the US, the military dimension of the security agenda has not been delved deep into.

There has been mention of joint exercises, port calls to ensure freedom of navigation and to combat piracy as France and Germany are already getting engaged in joint exercises with the other Indo-Pacific countries

Way Forward

- EU member states need to further fine-tune their engagement with China and within the region, adding an extra layer of sophistication to the EU's role there.
- EU cooperation with its partners must become concrete and show its value as an alternative sustainable model.
- If the EU is to promote and lead a comprehensive approach in the Indo-Pacific, coherent and coordinated actions with India, ASEAN, Japan, Australia and the UK are the only way forward.

Implementing joint projects to boost digital connectivity could be the first step.

Conclusion

India must welcome the entry of the EU in the region, as Europe with its much greater economic weight, technological strength, and normative power promises to boost India's own quest for a multipolar world and a rebalanced Indo-Pacific.

India's strategy is to “engage **America**, manage **China**, cultivate **Europe**, reassure **Russia**, bring **Japan into play**”. However, there is also a need to emphasize on how to “cultivate **Europe**”.

Drishti Mains Question

Engagement of the European Union (EU) in the Indo-Pacific will strengthen the military balance and contribute to regional security in multiple ways. Discuss.
