



An Emerging Player in the Indo-Pacific

This article is based on [“The EU’s role in the Indo-Pacific”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 15/11/2021. It talks about the way ahead for the European Union to set a strong foothold in the Indo-Pacific region with India as an ally against China.

The world’s economic and political centre of gravity has been shifting towards the [Indo-Pacific](#) for years. The region has **acquired striking salience with the U.S.-China strategic contestation** becoming sharper than before.

Speedy development of the [Quad](#), the emergence of [AUKUS partnership](#) and the emergence of several other minilateral tie-ups themselves provide recognition to the **increasing significance of the Indo-Pacific region**.

With China playing an increasingly dominant role in everything from trade to military power to technology and the **declining American supremacy**, it **becomes crucial for the [European Union](#) to step-in** whose economic future and geopolitical relevance is inextricably linked to developments in Asia.

What India can do is **welcome the entry of the EU in the region and jointly address its common concerns** of increasing competition, power rivalry etc. with the latter.

EU’s Emerging Interests in the Indo-Pacific

- **Age-Old Connection of Europe and Indo-Pacific:** Europe’s Asia-connection is **old, strong and multi-layered**. Asia is viewed and evaluated through national and regional perspectives.
 - At least since 2018, countries such as France, the Netherlands, Germany and the U.K. announced their specific policies towards the Indo-Pacific.
- **EU’s Present Relations with Asia and Pacific:** Brussels sees the EU and the Indo-Pacific as **“natural partner regions”**.
 - The EU is already a significant player in the Indian Ocean littoral states, the [ASEAN](#) area and the Pacific Island states.
 - [EU’s recent Indo-Pacific strategy](#) also aims to enhance its engagement across a wide spectrum.
- **Interests Behind Engagement:** The European Union (EU) is in the process of coping with:
 - The **rise of China and other Asian economies**
 - The **tensions due to China’s aggressiveness** along its periphery
 - **Economic consolidation** through the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership](#), and the [Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership](#).
- **EU’s Recent Initiatives for Indo-Pacific:** The announcement by the Council of the **European Union** of its initial policy conclusions in April, 2021 followed by the unveiling of the [EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#) in September, 2021 are notable.
- **Vision for Indo-Pacific:** EU’s future progress in the region is based on the principles of **“rules-based international order”**; **promoting a level-playing field for trade and investment**, [Sustainable Development Goals](#) & multilateral cooperation; and protecting human rights & democracy.

- It also envisages **cooperation in green transition**, ocean governance, **digital governance and partnerships**, connectivity, **security and defence**, and human security.

Challenges Associated

- The European Union's **security and defence capabilities are quite limited**, as compared to those of the U.S. and China.
- The EU suffers from marked **internal divisions**; Many states view China as a great economic opportunity, but others are acutely conscious of the full contours of the China challenge.
 - They believe that neither China's dominance in Asia nor bipolarity leading to a new Cold War will serve Europe's interests.
- The risks faced by the EU are varied; the immediate neighbour **Russia is a more traditional threat**. It is increasingly on China's side.
 - Hence, the EU should find it easy to cooperate with the Quad. However, the recent **AUKUS partnership has disappointed France**, an important EU member.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Economic Capabilities:** To obviate an imbalance (against US and China) in favour of economic links, EU will need to **give adequate space and support to France** and other EU nations **which have sizable assets and linkages with the Indo-Pacific**.
- **New Alliances:** It also must **forge strategic coordination with the U.K.** as the latter prepares to expand its role in Asia as part of its '**Global Britain**' strategy.
 - As a major economic power, the EU has an **excellent chance of success in its trade negotiations with Australia**, Indonesia and New Zealand; in concluding **discussions for an economic partnership agreement with the East African Community**.
 - To achieve all this and more, the **EU must increase its readiness to share its financial resources** and new technologies with partners.
- **India-EU Cooperation:** India has reasons to be pleased with the EU's policy as its **pivotal position in the region necessitates a closer India-EU partnership**.
 - The recent [renegotiation of the India-EU Comprehensive Trade Agreement](#) and a standalone investment protection agreement are major steps towards improving bilateral ties.
 - **Cooperation in Industry 4.0 technologies is also desirable.**
 - **Consolidating and upgrading defence ties** with France, Germany and the U.K. should also remain a significant priority.
 - With an enhanced focus on their strategic relations and engagement with other like-minded regional players, India and EU can play a significant role in **preserving an open, free, inclusive and rules based order in the Indo-pacific**.

Conclusion

- The EU can create a vantage position for itself in the Indo-Pacific by being more candid with itself, more assertive with China, and more cooperative with India.
- Increasing convergence of interests and shared values offer scope for deepening India-EU cooperation in the region to secure global commons, maintain stability and support economic prosperity in a cooperative manner and together shape a stable multipolar order.

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"With increasing Chinese dominance and declining American supremacy in the Indo-Pacific, the European Union offers a potent ally for India to collaborate in the field of shared interests and concerns". Comment

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