



Report

From Connectivity to Security *EU's Vision for the Indo-Pacific*

CUTS International *Global Affairs*, through its Indo-Pacific Civil Society Forum, hosted a webinar titled "From Connectivity to Security: EU's Vision for the Indo-Pacific" on February 25, 2025. The event brought together experts, policymakers, and scholars to examine the EU's evolving role in the Indo-Pacific region. Discussions centred on the EU's strategic interests, challenges in implementation, and the future of EU-India relations within this framework.

Event Overview

The webinar aimed to analyse the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific, three and a half years after the release of their Strategy document. Key objectives included:

- Assessing the EU's current position and prospects in the Indo-Pacific
- Exploring connectivity and security aspects in light of changing global dynamics
- Evaluating the potential expansion of projects like CRIMARIO II and ESIWA+
- Addressing emerging security challenges and the EU's response
- Charting a way forward for EU-Indo-Pacific and EU-India relations

The event featured a distinguished panel of experts from various international institutions, providing a multi-faceted perspective.

Moderator

- 1) **Shruti Pandalai**, Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Panellists

- 1) **Mohan Kumar**, Former Indian Ambassador and Dean, Strategic & International Initiatives, Jindal School of International Affairs, Jindal Global University
- 2) **Jivanta Schottli**, Assistant Professor, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, Ireland
- 3) **Velina Tchakarova**, Founder of FACE and former Director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy
- 4) **Lauren Dagan Amoss**, Researcher, Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, Israel
- 5) **Kamakshi Wason**, Global COO, Tillotama Foundation



Key Insights

The webinar commenced with (Moderator) Shruti Pandalai, Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, setting the stage by highlighting current global scenarios and challenges from the EU's perspective. She emphasised the critical juncture at which Europe stands, noting that Europe must decide whether to continue relying on an unpredictable ally or take charge of its security future. With concerns over a potential Trump 2.0 presidency, European leaders are reassessing their position in U.S. foreign policy, particularly as the U.S. signals a shift towards a multipolar world.

The recent German elections reflect both an opportunity and a challenge for the EU. The newly elected Chancellor aims to strengthen European autonomy while facing domestic political divides.

The EU's Geopolitical Dilemma

Velina Tchakarova, Founder of FACE and former Director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), addressed Europe's broader geopolitical challenges, emphasising that while the EU remains an economic giant, it lacks the geopolitical influence to compete with systemic players like the U.S., China, and Russia. The resurgence of Cold War-style zones of influence and negotiations over global control underscores Europe's uncertain strategic posture.

"The EU remains a geo-economic giant, but it lacks the geopolitical power to compete with players like the U.S., China, and Russia."

A significant concern raised was the EU's fragmented security approach, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, where key global players — India, China, and the U.S. — are actively shaping the regional order. If the EU fails to develop a cohesive security strategy, its global influence will continue to wane. The discussion also pointed to Washington's perception of Europe as unwilling to provide military strength when needed, which could shape future transatlantic alliances and partnerships.

The Strategic Role of the India-EU Partnership

The panel discussed the importance of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council in enhancing connectivity, economic security, resilient supply chains, and mineral security.

Ambassador Mohan Kumar provided insights into India-U.S. relations and their impact on EU-India dynamics. He highlighted the potential for EU-India cooperation but also pointed out past disappointments, such as the stalled Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations and the recent silence on the Trade and Technology Council. Kumar emphasised:

"The India-EU Trade and Technology Council is vital for connectivity and economic and technological security, resilient supply chains, and mineral security. India and the EU need to get their act together."

Experts highlighted that while the EU views China as a systemic rival, India is a natural partner for strategic hedging in the Indo-Pacific. The stalled FTA negotiations between India and the EU were cited as a significant roadblock, with speakers stressing that both sides must move past minor trade disputes and focus on larger strategic interests.

A pragmatic approach to trade and economic cooperation was highlighted, stressing that failing to seize this geopolitical moment would be a lost opportunity for both sides.

Europe's Indo-Pacific Approach

Jivanta Schottli from Dublin City University addressed the European perspective on the Indo-Pacific, noting that European economic struggles are causing scepticism about its role in the region. While many European nations have shifted their focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, countries like Ireland remain cautious, avoiding deeper engagement due to geostrategic implications.

"The EU has moved from focusing on the Asia-Pacific to fully embracing the Indo-Pacific concept. Ireland, where I'm based, still holds onto the Asia-Pacific deliberately to avoid the geostrategic implications of the Indo-Pacific."

Schottli also raised questions about India's protectionist approach and its impact on EU-India relations and highlighted that if Europe were to retreat from the Indo-Pacific and leave the region solely to U.S. influence, the consequences would be global, impacting India and beyond.

The conversation also touched upon India's growing prominence in European strategic discussions, with an increasing number of think tanks and policymakers recognising its role in shaping the Indo-Pacific order. The need for Europe to acknowledge its challenges and avoid an inward-looking approach was stressed, as India's stability and security have far-reaching implications.

Maritime Security as a Pillar of Cooperation

Lauren Dagan Amoss, a researcher at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, delved into maritime security issues. She highlighted ongoing projects like CRIMARIO II, ESIWA+, and the Sustainable Blue Economic project. Amoss emphasised:

“Maritime security isn’t just about defence; it’s the backbone of global trade, stability, and connectivity. For India and the EU, deepening cooperation in this space is essential.”

Experts noted that maritime security efforts must extend beyond military cooperation to include marine conservation, responsible fishing, and tackling ocean pollution. Developing a sustainable blue economy was presented as a shared goal that would benefit India and the EU.

Kamakshi Wason elaborated on security concerns in the Indo-Pacific, including rising hybrid threats, cyberattacks, maritime piracy, and territorial disputes. The EU is actively enhancing its maritime response capabilities to tackle these challenges.

However, for the EU to be a reliable partner in the region, it must navigate competing influences while fostering trust and collaboration. Speakers posed critical questions about the real impact of EU connectivity and security initiatives, urging a focus on addressing the root causes of instability.

The Q&A session covered a broad spectrum of issues, from the Ukraine war to defining clear partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. A key takeaway was that EU-led connectivity and security projects are fundamental to advancing the EU's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. These initiatives are crucial in strengthening resilient supply chains, focusing on infrastructure development, digital connectivity, and energy diversification.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of extending CRIMARIO II and ESIWA+ to ensure continuity and expand regional cooperation. A potential CRIMARIO III beyond 2025 could tackle emerging threats like hybrid warfare and illicit maritime activities, further strengthening the EU's commitment to regional stability.

Recommendations

The discussions made several suggestions to strengthen the EU's presence in the Indo-Pacific. The EU was called upon to prioritise its Indo-Pacific strategy, particularly in light of the increasing U.S. interest in the region. It was stressed that the EU-India FTA should be urgently concluded, and efforts like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) should be pushed forward.

Some European countries were also requested to redirect their attention from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific and push for greater regional defence cooperation. There was also a focus on the necessity for more sustainable connectivity initiatives and measures to cut carbon emissions in the maritime industry.

Conclusion

The event concluded with a strong message: *“If the EU wants to be a true global player and not just an economic powerhouse, it must take decisive action in shaping its security and foreign policy. Strategic autonomy must be urgently pursued in the Indo-Pacific or transatlantic relations”*.

The India-EU partnership stands at a critical juncture. Both sides must overcome bureaucratic inertia, resolve trade disputes, and focus on shared strategic objectives. As the world order shifts, today's decisions will determine the future of EU-India relations and their impact on global stability.

This event reinforced the urgency of these discussions, setting the stage for deeper engagement and concrete policy measures in the future.

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