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David McAllister

on The EU's Role in
the Indo-Pacific

POLICY INSIGHTS

The EU's Role in the Indo-Pacific

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This article is an edited version of a keynote speech by David McAllister MEP, Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), given at the Korea Europe Center's 2022 Human Security and Development Forum on "The EU and South Korean Strategies for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific" on 23 June 2022.

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The European Union's interest in the Indo-Pacific region is founded in the wish to develop our societies further in an open, democratic and just direction while allowing other societies to do the same. In addition to the democratic framework, we are guided by the principles of openness and transparency. Our goal is a rules-based international order and the promotion of democracy and human rights. Through the EU's foreign policy, we project our core values - human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. This is a powerful and transformative tool. Coherence, the rule of law, reconciliation and solidarity are the foundations. What undermines this? Fragmentation, unilateralism and democratic backsliding.

The Indo-Pacific is of great importance to the EU both because of its many close partners there, and because one of our Member States, France, has overseas territories there. The EU should act decisively, especially as regards the recent tensions between China and Taiwan. This is not a new phenomenon. We have already seen Chinese military belligerence and grey-zone activities, as well as other forms of provocation, such as spying, cyberattacks and talent-poaching, against Taiwan. The EU respects the "one-China policy" but we cannot tolerate unilateral attempts to modify the status quo, and even less so by resorting to force.

To counter the malign influence of autocracies on the global rules-based order we need an assertive and coordinated foreign policy. Until recently, we were busy with the effects of the global pandemic. It was a game changer as well as a risk multiplier and a catalyst of change in the global order. On 24 February 2022, the Russian Federation started a war of aggression against Ukraine in an unprovoked, illegal and brutal move. After the COVID-19 pandemic, this is another dramatic worsening of the international security environment. This war is having a profound and lasting impact on international relations. The EU must further consolidate its engagements with key partners around the globe, in particular in the Indo-Pacific. While we welcome that 14 countries in the region not only voted in favour, but also co-sponsored the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we also have to acknowledge that ten countries in the region abstained.

Against this background, we want to strengthen and enhance cooperation with our partners and like-minded countries - South Korea, Japan, India, Australia,

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New Zealand, as well as Canada and the United States. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Tuesday 7 June 2022, reflecting specifically on how the EU should protect our interests and work more closely with our partners in the Indo-Pacific. The resolution for which I was the rapporteur specifically focusses on the EU and the security challenges in the region.

The Indo-Pacific has become the centre of geopolitical competition and a new rallying point for major global players with the United States and China at the centre of this rivalry. Current dynamics in the region affect not only regional stability but also the prosperity and the security of the EU. The European Parliament underlines the critical importance of preserving peace, stability and the freedom of navigation in this region of growing geopolitical and economic significance. We stress that the region, which is home to 60 percent of the world's population and seven G20 members, is a key global actor and home to increasingly important political, trade and security partners for the EU. We call on the EU to pursue fruitful bilateral relations with partners and countries in the region, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and African Indo-Pacific countries. The EU should also work closely with emerging security structures such as QUAD and AUKUS and promote maritime security and freedom of navigation in full compliance with international law, in particular UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea). It is about fully exploiting our position and reputation as a credible, global actor for peace amid the growing geopolitical competition. A crucial part of the EU's maritime diplomacy has been the launch of the implementation of the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the North-Western Indian Ocean (NWIO) on 21 February 2022. By establishing a Maritime Area of Interest (MAI) covering the maritime area from the Strait of Hormuz to the Southern Tropic and from the north of the Red Sea towards the centre of the Indian Ocean, the EU is stepping up its ambitions to become a real security provider in the region.

The Republic of Korea is a key partner for fulfilling all these objectives. The European Union is a like-minded partner sharing similar values and interests. We have agreements, covering political relations and sectoral cooperation, free trade and crisis management cooperation. These agreements enable frequent, high-level exchanges and concrete cooperation, which have a positive impact. In April 2018, I led a delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee where we visited Tokyo and Seoul. This was a very interesting trip that helped deepen the bilateral strategic partnership and its parliamentary dimension. In November 2019, a South Korean delegation from the National Assembly visited the European Parliament in Brussels for the 21st interparliamentary meeting. Discussions focused on the free trade agreement, climate change, security and technology. In November last year, we held an exchange of views on the situation in the Korean peninsula in the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET). The EU supports a diplomatic solution to the Korean nuclear crisis. The South Korean government seeks to maintain peace on the Korean peninsula by encouraging inter-Korean and US-North Korea dialogue. The EU strongly and consistently backs up international diplomatic and counter-proliferation efforts and works closely with the Republic of Korea on addressing DPRK nuclear and ballistic challenges. In support of the UN Security Council resolutions, the EU has adopted a series of sanctions.

Despite cultural differences and the geographic distance that sets us apart, the Republic of Korea and the EU share the same commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and a market economy. The Korean Unification minister visited Germany last year to attend a ceremony to mark the 31st anniversary

of German reunification at the invitation of the German parliament. He also delivered a lecture on inter-Korean relations at Berlin's Free University. I am glad if Germany can serve to inspire other processes of reunification.

To sum up, the Indo-Pacific is the world's largest and most populous region with increasing political, economic and geostrategic importance. A peaceful, stable and rules-based Indo-Pacific is a vital European interest. Based on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, we have numerous opportunities to strengthen our engagement with the region in a pragmatic, flexible and inclusive manner.



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