The European Union's Emerging Indo-Pacific Presence in Terms of Security Cooperation

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Master's in International Studies

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RESUMO

Nos últimos anos, o Indo-Pacífico tornou-se uma região crítica na geopolítica global, impulsionada pelo crescimento económico, competição estratégica e questões de segurança tradicionais e não tradicionais. Em resposta, a União Europeia decidiu estabelecer-se como um ator global influente na região. A estratégia da UE perante isto reflete a sua ambição de desempenhar um papel mais assertivo na promoção da estabilidade regional, da segurança e de uma ordem internacional regulada. Esta dissertação investiga os esforços da UE para enfrentar desafios complexos de segurança enquanto promove a cooperação multilateral. Através de uma análise qualitativa das estratégias oficiais da UE e dos acordos com os estados do Indo-Pacífico, bem como das parcerias regionais com organizações, esta pesquisa avalia a cooperação de segurança da União em áreas como a segurança marítima, o combate ao terrorismo, as mudanças climáticas e o crime transnacional. Esta investigação também explora os desafios enfrentados pela UE para manter a coesão entre os Estados-Membros, a diversidade da região do Indo-Pacífico e o equilíbrio na competição entre grandes potências. Os resultados indicam que, embora a UE tenha feito progressos significativos ao cooperar na segurança da região, o sucesso futuro depende da adoção de uma estratégia holística que não fortaleça apenas a segurança, mas também promova os quadros multilaterais para aumentar a influência europeia. Por fim, esta pesquisa salienta a importância de uma abordagem colaborativa e coesa, fornecendo perspetivas sobre como a UE pode reforçar o seu papel como elemento estratégico e contribuir para moldar uma região Indo-Pacífico com estabilidade e segurança.

Palavras-chave: União Europeia, Indo-Pacífico, Cooperação em Segurança, Multilateralismo, Geopolítica, Estabilidade Regional.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Indo-Pacific has rapidly become a critical region in global geopolitics, driven by economic growth, strategic competition and critical security issues. In response, the European Union has intensified its engagement with the region, aiming to establish itself as a significant global actor. The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy reflects its ambition to play a more assertive role in promoting regional stability, security and a rules-based international order. This thesis delves into the EU's efforts to address complex security challenges of the region while promoting multilateral cooperation. Through a qualitative analysis of official EU strategies and agreements with Indo-Pacific states and regional organisations, the research evaluates the EU's security cooperation in areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, climate change and transnational crime. The research also explores the challenges the EU faces in maintaining coherence among its member states, the diversity of the Indo-Pacific region and balancing great power competition. The findings suggest that while the EU has made significant progress in security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region in recent years, its future success depends on adopting a comprehensive strategy that not only strengthens security cooperation but also maximises multilateral frameworks to enhance its influence. Ultimately, this research emphasises the importance of collaborative and cohesive approaches, providing insights into how the EU can strengthen its role as a strategic actor and contribute to shaping a stable and secure Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: European Union, Indo-Pacific, Security Cooperation, Multilateralism, Geopolitics, Regional Stability.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ADIZ – Air Defence Identification Zone

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASEM – Asia Europe Meeting

ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy

CMP – Coordinated Maritime Presences

CRIMARIO - Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean

EAS – East Asia Summit

EEAS – European External Action Service

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zones

EPA - Economic Partnership Agreement

EU – European Union

FOIP – Free and Open Indo- Pacific

FTA - Free Trade Agreements

IORA – Indian Ocean Rim Association

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

OECD - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF

QUAD – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

SAARC – South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

US – United States

UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

WMD – Weapon of Mass Destruction

WHO – World Trade Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, Josep Borrell Fontelles, the High Representative for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, delivered an opening speech at the Brussels Indo-Pacific Forum, emphasising the increasing relevance and importance of the Indo-Pacific region (Borrell, 2022). By highlighting the need for greater involvement in the European public discourse, Fontelles remarks that the rising challenges in the Indo-Pacific region are not only a regional issue but a global concern.

The concept of the Indo-Pacific is not new. After falling out of common use, the phrase 'Indo-Pacific' has resurfaced again in recent years as significant shifts in international power relations and changes in global affairs have led to this emerging interest. Factors such as the US's position in maritime security, China's rise to power and regional growth, US-China competition, territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas, rise in nuclear tensions in the Korean peninsula and increased militarization have impacted regional dynamics. These events have resulted in the formation of several regional initiatives, notably the Indo-Pacific ideas. Regional actors such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Australia, Japan and India have all developed their Indo-Pacific conceptions, policies and initiatives. These perspectives reflect their concerns and regional goals, anticipating a power dynamic based on unity, freedom and respect, while pursuing their own objectives. The EU, influenced by its member states, only recently embraced the Indo-Pacific approach to strengthen connections with the region and diversify alliances.

Recognising the interconnected nature of global security challenges, the EU has developed a multifaceted approach that spans various dimensions, including military, diplomatic and economic cooperation. By conducting civilian and military missions aimed at conflict prevention, crisis management, post-conflict stabilisation and addressing not only traditional military threats but also non-traditional challenges such as cyber threats, terrorism and hybrid warfare, the EU aims to protect and promote its citizens and goals (Pardo & Leveringhaus, 2022). In recent years, the EU's security cooperation has extended beyond its immediate borders, including initiatives and dialogues in regions such as the Indo-Pacific, reflecting a commitment to addressing evolving global security challenges and promoting a safer and more secure world. The 'EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' by the EU Council on April 19, 2021, signals the first step of the EU's determination to reaffirm its

strategic focus, presence and activities in the region (EU Council, 2021). This strategic initiative, aligned with the overarching goals of the 'Geopolitical Commission' under President Ursula von der Leyen, represents a comprehensive response to the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. While the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific are not in the European neighbourhood, the direct impacts of these issues significantly affect the EU. The region's growing global importance, increasing tensions, expanding relations with Europe, the dynamics of China's rise and the US - China competition emphasise the need for the EU to establish itself as a vital security actor in this region.

Purpose of the dissertation

The recent interest and increase in discussion of the Indo-Pacific region by various global actors and the possibilities of it influencing international affairs and political dynamics indicates that this area is important and should be studied.

Amidst the intensifying competition in the Indo-Pacific, both regionally and externally, the EU has expressed its motivation to engage actively in the region to tackle emerging challenges and establish itself as a significant actor. However, scepticism remains among scholars and the international community regarding the EU's effectiveness in this region and the outcomes it might achieve. Despite the doubts of the international community, the EU has continued with its enthusiasm in the Indo-Pacific region and has continued its efforts to improve its engagement to act as an effective actor in the region. This research puzzle of whether the EU will be a viable actor in the Indo-Pacific region is particularly interesting and will drive this research to explore whether the EU could play an effective role in security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The research would delve into the challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, exploring potential initiatives to tackle the challenges while analysing the impact of geopolitical shifts and power transitions on the security cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific and how the EU could improve its stance. Additionally, with ongoing changes in the global balance of power, it is important to examine how these changes influence the security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and the EU's role within it.

This research is particularly significant now due to the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific, marked by increasing competition and strategic manoeuvring among regional powers. The Indo-Pacific concept has recently gained prominence, reflecting shifting regional dynamics and the emergence of new challenges that demand immediate

attention and as such it would be interesting to study it for future possibilities. With the world's major economies and trade routes concentrated in this region, security cooperation plays a major role and understanding the current initiatives and responses to insecurity and instability is important for global stability and economic well-being.

Moreover, the Indo-Pacific concept is a subject of ongoing debate, with varying opinions and predictions about its role in global affairs. Despite its recent re-emergence and the diverse perspectives surrounding it, both positive and negative opinions, there is still a gap in research on security cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, particularly that explores the effectiveness of the EU in the region, making it an important area that should be explored.

1.1 Research Goals

The research questions of this dissertation revolve around understanding the impact of geopolitical shifts and power transitions on the security cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. As the global balance of power undergoes significant transformations, it is crucial to examine how these changes influence the security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and the EU's role within it. Additionally, identifying the emerging security threats and challenges in the region and exploring how the EU can effectively address them through security cooperation is vital for promoting stability and prosperity.

Main Research Question:

How viable is the European Union's emerging Indo-Pacific presence in terms of security cooperation?

Sub-Questions:

I. How have geopolitical shifts and power transitions impacted cooperation between the EU and the Indo-Pacific?

II. What are the key security challenges and threats emerging in the Indo-Pacific region?

III. How can the EU effectively address these security challenges and threats through security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to ensure its longevity?

The primary research question focuses on the European Union's increasing presence in the Indo-Pacific and its security cooperation. The purpose of this question is to analyse the feasibility and long-term viability of the EU's initiatives to engage with the Indo-Pacific region and strengthen security cooperation. It seeks to comprehend the potential for long-term collaboration.

The first sub-question evaluates the impact of geopolitical events and changes in power affect EU-Indo-Pacific cooperation. It seeks to explain how changes in global power dynamics, such as the rise of China and the United States presence in the region have influenced the EU's engagement in the region.

The second sub-question discusses developing security issues and threats in the Indo-Pacific area. By looking at both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific region, it aims to assess the complicated security environment as well as the key concerns that threaten regional stability.

The third sub-question examines the EU's effectiveness in tackling the abovementioned security threats and problems in the Indo-Pacific through security cooperation. It will discuss approaches, initiatives and collaborations that the EU could employ to improve regional security while decreasing risks. This sub-question seeks to provide possible insights into how the EU may successfully contribute to addressing the shifting Indo-Pacific security setting.

Objectives:

- Identify the EU's current engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, specifically in terms of security cooperation and geopolitical involvement.

- Identify and study the growing security risks and problems in the Indo-Pacific area.

- Analyse the European Union's possible role in navigating rising security risks and challenges in the Indo-Pacific area.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In approaching this dissertation, I have chosen to examine the dynamics of the European Union's role in the Indo-Pacific through the theoretical lens of security cooperation and multilateralism. This conceptual framework is based on the understanding that security challenges in the Indo-Pacific are complex, interconnected and demand collaborative solutions. Security cooperation, as a theoretical foundation, emphasises the need for states and international actors to work together to address shared security concerns. Multilateralism, on the other hand, is a broader framework that emphasises the importance of collective action, mutual cooperation and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in shaping security outcomes. While security cooperation is a subset of multilateralism, focusing specifically on collaborative efforts to address security challenges, multilateralism is a broader concept where multiple actors work together to address various global issues, not limited to security through international institutions or frameworks. As the EU is a key example of effective multilateralism, multilateralism along with security cooperation will be useful to explore this research and discuss the role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific region. This research will utilize both concepts: multilateralism to elucidate the actions of the EU as an institution and security cooperation to delve into the discussions within the scope of this research.

By using this conceptual framework, the study aims to explore the nuances of the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific, discussing how the principles of security cooperation and multilateralism guide its strategies, actions and interactions with regional partners. These lenses will provide a comprehensive analytical tool to assess the EU's role in fostering stability and addressing security challenges in the dynamic Indo-Pacific region.

1.3 Methodology

The research subject of this study is to investigate the potential of the European Union's rising Indo-Pacific presence focusing on security cooperation and to identify the elements that will determine its longevity. To answer this question, a qualitative research approach will be adopted, which will involve a thorough literature review and narrative analysis of selected discourses on the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

The literature review will explore secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existing studies and key concepts related to the EU's involvement in the region, security cooperation, geopolitical shifts, power transitions and security threats in the

Indo-Pacific. Secondary sources will include peer-reviewed academic journals, book chapters, policy papers, reports from international organisations and government publications. This review will help establish a theoretical framework and contextualize the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy within broader scholarly debates and empirical evidence.

The analysis chapter of this research will focus on primary sources, such as policy papers, reports, speeches, press releases and news articles directly related to the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy and its security cooperation initiatives. Key policy documents and strategies adopted by the EU, along with relevant statements and speeches by EU officials and representatives, will be analysed to discern the motivations, priorities and approaches underlying the EU's engagement in the region. Additionally, primary sources from regional governments, such as policies, memoranda of understanding, collaboration agreements and official statements, to gain insights into the broader geopolitical context and regional dynamics shaping security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific will be examined. With combination of secondary literature review and primary narrative analysis, this research seeks to contribute to the scholarly discourse on the EU's Indo-Pacific engagement while offering insights for policymakers and experts involved in shaping security cooperation in the region.

Content up to the end of 2023 will be utilised for the analysis considering the ongoing nature of the topic. This time frame provides a clear boundary for the study ensuring that the analysis remains current and relevant. By focusing on materials available up to the specified timeframe, the study will capture recent developments and trends in the EU's Indo-Pacific engagement allowing a thorough and up-to-date examination of the subject matter with a more manageable scope of analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, the geopolitical landscape has shifted significantly towards the Indo-Pacific region, which is becoming increasingly strategic and presents complex security challenges. This shift has sparked conversation and initiatives for security cooperation, particularly between the European Union and Indo-Pacific states. Understanding the changing dynamics of this cooperation is critical for understanding recent global security structures and the roles performed by regional and international players. Existing literature discusses the origin of the Indo-Pacific region, different perspectives of the region including the EU's and defines security cooperation and multilateralism.

2.1 The Indo-Pacific Region: Terminology and Current Global Trends

Pardesi (2020) states that, while some researchers describe the Indo-Pacific as a recent concept, it has historical origins and uses. The author further states that the concept fell out of use during the Cold War when Asia was separated into three distinct regions: South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia which lasted nearly two centuries until two significant 19th-century events, the emergence of the British Empire in India and the Great Divergence between the western states and Japan, caused by geographic division (Pardesi, 2020). Pugliese (2023), on the other hand, states that the idea of the Indo-Pacific just recently came about as a strategic narrative for developing a new maritime security policy in the face of evolving regional dynamics. During the late Abe Shinzō's first term as the Japanese Prime Minister (2006-07), the Indo-Pacific macro-area as part of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity was established (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2007). This strategy, planned by prominent members of former Japanese governments, complimented the American Arc of Instability and aimed to offset China's increasing influence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Satake, & Sahashi, 2021). Tokyo aimed to navigate bilateral relations through military, economic and political approaches, focusing on maritime security with China as the major objective (Insisa & Pugliese, 2022).

Scholars have discussed the Cold War era as a significant turning point in the Indo-Pacific region's changing geopolitics and evolving discourse, particularly in terms of economic development and security, marking the beginning of Asian subregions' convergence. The rise of economic giants such as China and India contributed to changing the strategic environment, while traditional players such as Japan, the United States,

Australia and Indonesia began to embrace the Indo-Pacific narrative at different speeds (Medcalf, 2019). Scholars such as Pardesi (2020) have not dismissed the shift from Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, highlighting its significance as a historical revival rather than a mere linguistic change. The term 'Indo-Pacific' has acquired recent popularity among policymakers and strategists, helping to rebalance regional power relations, particularly among middle countries. López-Aranguren emphasises that the adoption of Indo-Pacific principles by regional actors such as Japan, India, Australia and ASEAN, as well as the increased participation of external countries such as the United States and the European Union, highlights the Indo-Pacific region's strategic importance and expanding complexity.

When exploring the fundamental goals and impacts of the Indo-Pacific region, scholarly viewpoints and opinions vary. Some argue that the Indo-Pacific can be viewed as a geopolitical tool to isolate or exclude China and contend that it is a deliberate attempt to create a regional order that does so (Koga, 2020; Insisa & Pugliese, 2022; Medcalf, 2020; Satake & Sahashi, 2021). Denisov et al. (2021) however, highlight complex viewpoints within academic circles and warn against oversimplifying the Indo-Pacific developments as exclusively anti-China as regional dynamics are still being shaped by enduring problems in the Indo-Pacific, particularly China's ascent and how it affects Japan-US relations. A study conducted by Sinkkonen (2019) highlights Japan's careful balancing effort in handling geopolitical difficulties without inadvertently inciting tensions or feelings of isolation where Japan maintains strong economic relations with China while relying on the US for security. As such, this complex interplay between economic and security factors highlights the region's unique dynamics within the larger Indo-Pacific context.

As major marine routes that pass through the Indo-Pacific region are essential to both regional stability and the global economy, territorial conflicts and geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region have global implications. One of the main areas of tension is the East China Sea, where China and Japan face ongoing territorial disputes over the Senkaku Islands (Koga, 2020). In contrast to China's controversial 2013 declaration of its own Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), which specifically covered the disputed zone which received strong international condemnation, Japan established an internationally recognised ADIZ in the area (Sinkkonen, 2019). Similarly, Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam are involved in a territorial dispute over 'ownership' of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea (Pardo & Leveringhaus, 2022). In addition to territorial sovereignty, access to Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) set up by the United Nations Convention on the Law

of the Sea (UNCLOS) among Indo-Pacific states linger (Wirth, 2019). Thus, many players in the region express concerns about maritime security and stability, with a focus on the principle of Freedom of Navigation (Desierto, 2020). The author explains that the principles of freedom of navigation and the UNCLOS are essential for maintaining peace and order in maritime governance. However, there are several difficulties as a result of bureaucratic processes and marine rules, most notably China's inconsistent application of international maritime law (Wirth, 2019). As a result of these conflicting interpretations, there have been several incidents of dispute in the region which highlights the difficulties and complexity related to marine security and governance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Furthermore, as the Indo-Pacific discourse becomes more widespread, a parallel development has emerged: a quasi-alliance known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). According to Kliem (2020), the QUAD, consisting of Australia, India, Japan and the United States, can be seen as a mechanism designed to manage regional difficulties and convey a willingness for cooperation to maintain a balanced power dynamic in the area. The need for this alliance is highlighted by the growing tensions in the South and East China Seas, China's increasing prominence and the creation of initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Kliem, 2020). Japan initially introduced the concept of the Quad in 2007, but it wasn't until a decade later amid growing discussions about the Indo-Pacific region, that this framework gained significant attention and interest (Toropchin, 2022). Authors such as Toropchin, Kliem and Pugliese (2022, 2020, 2023) argue that coordination and engagement of multilateral actors have become necessary due to the dynamics of the geopolitics of the region.

2.2 The views of Indo-Pacific states

Introduced in 2016, Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision was developed out of its geopolitical issue of having to choose between strengthening its alliance with the United States to ensure security or establishing stronger ties with China, a significant economic partner (Koga, 2020). Japan considers the Indo-Pacific as a balanced strategy given its position between these two powers and the potential fall of the United States in the region due to China's rise (Sinkkonen, 2019). The three major objectives of the FOIP are strengthening maritime security, promoting economic growth through regional connectivity and fostering core values including democracy and the rule of law (Koga, 2020). Japan uses

economic, security and diplomatic instruments that are relevant to the FOIP framework to put these principles into effect (Satake & Sahashi, 2021). The long-term success of the strategy and the stability of the region will depend on Japan's capacity to manage diplomatic alliances and make its position on China clear within the FOIP framework (Insisa & Pugliese, 2022).

India's Indo-Pacific position, shaped by elements such as multipolarity, China's growth and economic interests, is consistent with a vision of regional integration and cooperation (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). In 2012, the phrase 'Indo-Pacific' gained popularity in Indian discourse, with its first emphasis being on both domestic and foreign audiences, such as ASEAN, the United States and Japan. In a 2018 address at the Shangri La Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised India's commitment to this idea highlighting the importance of ASEAN and arguing in favour of a free, open and inclusive regional system (Ministry of External Affairs Government of India, 2018). In his address, Modi emphasised the six main tenets of India's Indo-Pacific strategy, with particular emphasis on respect for the rule of law, multilateralism and equity. Notably, India made it clear that its Indo-Pacific policy aims to promote collaboration and stability in the area rather than focusing on any one nation.

Australia's Indo-Pacific policy reflects concerns about evolving regional power dynamics, particularly China's growth, as well as the need to maintain strong connections with the United States (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). In Australia, while this strategy became popular in the middle to late 2000s as regional tasks and security issues changed, it was not until later that due to the growing strains of Australia-China relations, Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy became formally established (Parry, 2022). Australia's Indo-Pacific peace policy places priority on regional stability, a rules-based system and collaboration with the United States (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). Australia is actively involved in fostering economic ties through negotiations to continue Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with major trading partners such as China, Japan, Korea, India and the European Union while emphasising Australia's dedication to regional integration and safety (Parry, 2022).

2.3 The EU's view on the Indo-Pacific region

In the last twenty years, the European Union has referred to the area from Afghanistan to Japan and China to New Zealand, as the 'Asia-Pacific' region (European Commission, 2001). Yet in 2021, the EU redefined the 'Indo-Pacific' as "an expansive area

stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States" (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021). A common topic among scholars who have explored the topic of the Indo-Pacific region or the EU's Asia policies is how the EU viewed the region and their intentions. Medcalf (2019) points out a historical link between the two regions by emphasising that early European colonial maps of Asia referred to the continent in a way that is consistent with the modern concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' area. According to Pardo & Leveringhaus (2022), the EU views the Indo-Pacific as a 'theatre of geopolitical competition' due to its growing strategic and economic importance, making it a crucial arena for global power dynamics. Toropchin (2022) claims that the Indo-Pacific area serves as a vital area in which the EU can increase its authority and sway as a player in international security. However, Odgaard's (2019) analysis looks at an overview of the EU's presence in the Indo-Pacific and claims that historically, the European Union has been relatively slow and lacking in developing a comprehensive strategy for the region until recent years. Despite this, Toropchin (2022) states that this narrative has begun to change with the publication of national strategies by France, Germany and the Netherlands, along with the EU's strategies for the Indo-Pacific region.

López-Aranguren (2022) observes that these national strategies of France, Germany and the Netherlands indicate a growing realisation among the EU countries of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific area and the necessity for a coordinated strategy from the EU. Pennisi di Floristella (2020) similarly argues that with the first Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2018, France sought to strengthen its presence and influence in the region as the policy highlights France's role as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific, intending to promote maritime security, the rule of law and economic cooperation. With time, Germany adopted a similar strategy and López-Aranguren (2022) discusses how Germany aims to strengthen its engagement with the Indo-Pacific area through its 'Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific' released in 2020, with a focus on topics such as economic cooperation, rule of law and climate change. Similarly, Kliem (2022) discusses how the Netherlands published its Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2020, underlining the significance of the region's free, open and rules-based international order. The Netherlands' interests in economic cooperation, security and human rights are highlighted in the policy. The three EU member states' adoption of the Indo-Pacific strategy influenced the EU's overall approach to the region.

That being said, various scholars and authors have noted that the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific region is a topic of ongoing scepticism. In this geopolitically complex region, several experts have questioned whether the EU has the appropriate abilities and strategic focus to be a successful actor (Pardo & Leveringhaus, 2022). In addition, questions regarding the EU's capacity to manage the complex geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific and the EU's ability to keep member states united and coherent while developing and executing Indo-Pacific policy has risen (Toropchin, 2022). Pugliese (2023) states that the potential divergence of member states' interests within EU policies toward the Indo-Pacific is worrisome. López-Aranguren (2022) agrees and further claims that there are unanswered questions about how national agendas fit into the larger EU policies of the region, which emphasises the difficulties to strike a balance between different interests when the EU approaches Indo-Pacific issues. Heiduk and Wacker (2020) emphasise the significant differences in how various nations and circumstances use the phrase 'Indo-Pacific', pointing out that it is politicised by arguing that the European Union's interests in the region, particularly concerning security, are still developing and not clearly defined.

On the other hand, Pardo & Leveringhaus (2021) believe that the European Union can play an important role in supporting stability and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. They however point out that there are various measures that the EU could take to improve and succeed such as using its diplomatic and financial influence to counteract China's increasing assertiveness in the area. The EU's objective for a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' is in line with the objectives of regional partners, which makes the EU an invaluable player in the region (Mohan, 2020). He argues that the EU is in a strong position to support regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific because of its background in multilateral cooperation and its commitment to the international framework based on norms. According to Grare (2021), the EU's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region has the potential to improve the effectiveness of regional organisations and mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) from various challenges they face. Pugliese (2023) further claims that with the EU's experience in strengthening multilateralism and regional integration, the EU can provide vital knowledge and assistance to Asian regional mechanisms and through the exchange of efficient methods in sectors including trade, governance and sustainable development, it can improve the capabilities of the organisations. López-Aranguren (2022) similarly suggests that initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration between the European

Union and its Asian counterparts have the potential to strengthen institutional frameworks and cooperation ultimately advancing peace, stability and prosperity throughout the region.

Apart from economic concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, the European Union's increased attention to the Indo-Pacific region comes from an interest in taking a more proactive stance in maintaining regional security (Mohan, 2020). The EU has a stake in maintaining the stability and security of the crucial maritime routes that cross the Indo-Pacific region because it is the largest trading bloc in the world (Wirth, 2019). Moreover, according to Kliem (2022), the EU is also motivated to become more involved in this area due to the region's growing geopolitical significance, which is characterised by increased great power competition and changing regional dynamics. De Las Heras et al. (2021) argue that the complex security setting in the Indo-Pacific region has attracted the interest of international players looking to influence and coordinate regional dynamics. They further emphasise that the EU is one of these international players that stands out as being able to make a contribution to security in the Indo-Pacific region across a range of disciplines. Pardo & Leveringhaus (2021) points out major security factors such as maritime governance, cybersecurity, organised crime, counterterrorism and nuclear disarmament as focal themes for the EU's security participation and cooperation in the region.

Multiple scholars discuss the maritime activities and security challenges of the Indo-Pacific region as an important aspect of the EU's perspective. Nováky (2022) states that the Indo-Pacific region attracts a increased focus on maritime issues because of the region's key waterways, maritime conflicts and economic significance associated with sea lines of communication and the EU plans to play a more effective and active naval role. The European Union has shown its commitment to fighting piracy, improving understanding of the maritime environment and promoting rules-based maritime governance since the launch of the first-ever EU naval operation in 2008, the ongoing Operation Atalanta off the Horn of Africa and by launching programmes such as the EU Maritime Security Strategy and the EU Naval Force Operation Atalanta in the Gulf of Aden (Larsson & Widen, 2022). De Las Heras et al. (2021) similarly argue that as a result, the EU has the potential to play a key role in the Indo-Pacific region through cooperative naval exercises, information-sharing systems and capacity-building in maritime security with regional partners. Moreover, Mohan (2020) claims that cyber security is another aspect of security in that the EU can play an effective role in the Indo-Pacific region. Vosse (2022) mentions that with threats ranging from cyberattacks on vital infrastructure to cyber espionage and disinformation operations,

cybersecurity has evolved to an essential security strategy and that the Indo-Pacific 'security order' should progress from a primairly maritime security focus to non-traditional security issues such as cybersecurity. Toropchin (2022) argues that the EU is a valuable partner for Indo-Pacific states experiencing cyber threats due to its experience in cybersecurity governance, data protection rules and digital resilience plans as the EU has faced recent cyber-attacks and has had to adapt new safety measures. The EU can reinforce wider security goals in the Indo-Pacific area by improving cyber resilience and reducing cyber threats by encouraging communication, information exchange and cooperative cybersecurity exercises (Mohan, 2020).

Pardo & Leveringhaus (2021) claims that in the Indo-Pacific region, organised crime networks, which engage in money laundering and international criminal activity to the illegal trafficking of narcotics, weapons and people, present serious threats to security and the EU's experience in fighting organised crime through collaborative law enforcement, sharing of intelligence and regulatory frameworks provide valuable insights and guidance for cooperation. Tan (2024) mentions that globally, the threat of terrorism remains a major security challenge, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area where various terrorist organisations operate across borders and have organised attacks in recent years such as in Sri Lanka in 2019, India in 2022, the Philippines in 2023 among others. The Indo-Pacific countries' efforts to combat terrorism and extremism are in line with the EU's comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, which includes prevention, detection, reaction and international collaboration (Mohan, 2020). Pardo & Leveringhaus (2021) add that global security and stability heavily depend on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, especially in areas where nuclear powers and non-nuclear armed nations coexist. The EU's involvement as a proponent of nuclear disarmament and diplomacy is highlighted by its adherence to multilateral disarmament frameworks such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and efforts such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran (Alcaro, 2021). According to Toropchin, (2022), in the Indo-Pacific area, where proliferation threats and nuclear dynamics intersect with regional security issues, the EU could promote dialogues, steps to foster confidence and arms control activities among pertinent parties to assist in lowering nuclear risks and advance peace and security in the area.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This chapter will provide a basis to understand the theoretical background of this research by outlining key concepts and their interrelationships to define the lenses through which the European Union's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region will be analysed. By reviewing how these ideas have been defined and discussed in past literature, the conceptual framework will focus on the concepts of security cooperation and multilateralism which are critical for understanding the European Union's involvement in the Indo-Pacific area.

2.4.1   Security Cooperation

Security cooperation, as defined by Roy (2008), is a fundamental concept within the discipline of international relations, characterised by the collaborative efforts of states and international actors to address common security concerns and promote global peace and stability. Diverging from the traditional notions of national security, which prioritises autonomy and the unilateral accumulation of power, security cooperation is defined by the belief that governments can attain greater security through collaboration. Such cooperation often manifests through both formal and informal partnerships, organisations and agreements, serving as a means to coordinate the collective interests of states.

Dyekman (2007) similarly claims that security cooperation represents governments agreeing to limit their unilateral actions in return for the benefits of collaboration, such as intelligence sharing, conducting joint military exercises and engaging in international peacekeeping missions. Both Roy (2008) and Dyekman (2007) discuss that while combining resources and capabilities improves the effectiveness in tackling shared challenges, it frequently limits national liberties by demanding compliance with cooperative rules and norms. Roy (2008) further elaborates on the challenges of security cooperation, identifying three significant challenges: the first of which is the inherent unpredictability that today's partners may become foes tomorrow, hindering long-term goals and establishing confidence efforts. Second, the costs of security cooperation can be expensive since governments must invest in collective assets, operations and unified policies and finally, the potential loss of national autonomy, as governments must rely on collaborators and follow collective choices, limiting their capacity to act independently in times of crisis (Roy, 2008).

Within the context of the European Union, security cooperation has witnessed significant development since the Cold War, influenced by the objective of enhancing

security and stability while reducing reliance on the United States (Jones, 2007). The EU's security policy, as noted by Janík (2020), encompasses a broad spectrum of social, economic and political factors, addressing contemporary challenges such as globalisation and climate change. The European Union's approach to security cooperation is notably multifaceted, engaging in both civilian and military missions. Pacheco and Leveringhaus (2022) also note that security cooperation includes addressing traditional military threats as well as non-traditional challenges such as cybersecurity, terrorism and trafficking. Historically, the EU has been a persistent advocate of security cooperation, employing both civilian and military means to prevent conflicts, manage crises and stabilise post-conflict regions (Rogers, 2009). The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, as highlighted by Jones (2007), shows this commitment, which was aimed at avoiding violence and fostering long-term peace by deeply integrating European states economically, politically and militarily. He elaborates by stating that the binding strategy put into effect security cooperation in order to establish a stable and harmonious European security environment, emphasising the notion that collective action and shared commitments are significantly more effective in ensuring peace and security than individual and isolated efforts.

Denisov et al. (2021) note that countries in the Indo-Pacific region have developed regional mechanisms such as ASEAN, SAARC and the QUAD to foster regional cooperation and maintain a rules-based order. However, in contrast to the EU, Asian nations have tended to approach security cooperation through more informal regional frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, where consensus-building and non-confrontational dialogue are emphasised (Jones & Jenne, 2016). López-Aranguren (2020) states that as geopolitical tensions rise in the Indo-Pacific, there is a growing recognition among Asian states of the need for more structured and cooperative multilateral security measures to tackle emerging challenges. Bharti (2021) suggests that security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is determined by the diversity of the region and individual states' differing security objectives, with India and Australia prioritising maritime trade routes and tackling Chinese presence, whereas Southeast Asian nations tend to prioritise territorial conflicts in the South China Sea and non-traditional challenges such as piracy and terrorism.

2.4.2 Multilateralism

Multilateralism, as a concept, places great emphasis on collective action and the participation of multiple stakeholders to achieve effective outcomes (Biscop, 2018). John Ruggie's conceptualisation of multilateralism, grounded in regime theory and neoliberal institutionalism, is distinguished by three key principles: indivisibility, diffuse reciprocity and generalised principles of conduct (Ruggie, 1993). The principle of indivisibility states that the benefits of multilateral cooperation are shared among all contributing states, ensuring that no single member receives disproportionate benefits. Generalised rules of conduct provide globally recognised norms and guidelines for state behaviour in multilateral scenarios which involves a commitment to the rules and norms, resulting in a stable and dependable system. Finally, diffuse reciprocity emphasises long-term mutual benefit above immediate as states contribute to the communal good in the assumption that their efforts would be returned over time, creating long-term cooperation and improving collective well-being. Similarly, Patrick (2015) describes multilateralism as having three characteristics: the involvement of multiple nations, the adoption of formalised norms and frameworks and a foundation based on shared objectives and principles, which closely align with Ruggie's concept.

In the context of multilateralism in the European Union, according to Krishnamurthy (2018), the European Union strongly promotes multilateralism in foreign policy, viewing it as essential for addressing global challenges and reflecting its commitment to a rule-based international order although this position may not always be supported by other global actors or even its members. Mohan (2020) highlights the critical role of multilateralism in the EU's integration process, illustrating how the EU collectively addresses both internal and external challenges and emphasises strategic partnerships and joint efforts to confront global issues such as trade and climate change. By participating in international organisations and adhering to global standards, the EU works to expand its global reach to uphold international regulations and demonstrate its commitment to multilateral diplomacy through active participation in organisations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation (Biscop, 2018). Pugliese (2023) notes that to maintain a balanced and inclusive multilateral system through collective action rather than unilateral or bilateral approaches, the EU is involved in plurilateral forums such as the Paris Club, the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)Acronyms which collaboratively address critical issues such as regional security, cybersecurity and economic policy.

As a leading example of effective multilateralism, the European Union has increasingly sought to strengthen its relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific region, reflecting its dedication to addressing evolving global security challenges and fostering a more secure world (Kliem, 2022). The ASEAN Regional Forum, a key multilateral framework within the Indo-Pacific, brings together regional states to discuss security challenges through dialogue and cooperation, playing a vital role in building confidence and preventing disputes, thereby contributing to regional stability (Stubbs, 2019). The Quad, which consists of the United States, India, Japan and Australia, is another significant multilateral framework aimed at enhancing regional security and maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific through collaborative strategic initiatives (Pardesi, 2020). This framework highlights a collective commitment to confronting complex regional challenges and maintaining a rules-based international order, therefore altering Indo-Pacific security dynamics through collaborative diplomacy and cooperative strategic initiatives (Bharti, 2021). Nevertheless, Jones & Jenne (2016) challenge that these multilateral initiatives face obstacles due to the region's diverse security concerns, the principle of non-interference and varying levels of state trust. Wirth & Jenne (2022) highlight the evolving nature of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, where the region's shift from a US-led bilateralism system to a focus on potential regional multilateralism presents new opportunities for EU engagement. The authors argue that the EU's presence in the Indo-Pacific is crucial not only for security cooperation but also for shaping the changing regional order, in which the EU can play a pivotal role in establishing a rules-based system and mitigating the influence of major powers such as the United States and China (Wirth & Jenne, 2022).

Thus, security cooperation involves collaborative efforts by nations or international organisations to address specific security concerns, whether through bilateral, trilateral, or multilateral mechanisms (Rogers, 2009). On the other hand, multilateralism is a broader approach in which multiple nations collaborate within existing structures, such as the United Nations or NATO, to handle global concerns such as security (Patrick, 2015). As a leader of multilateralism, the European Union has recently sought to strengthen its engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, recognizing the need for a comprehensive, collaborative approach to address the region's security challenges (Pugliese, 2023). This dual focus on security cooperation and multilateralism is key to understanding the EU's evolving role in the Indo-Pacific region. By applying both bilateral and multilateral frameworks, the EU aims to reinforce its strategic partnerships and effectively address the region's complex security

landscape (Kliem, 2022). This approach not only underscores the EU's commitment to a rules-based international order but also shows the value of collaboration in an increasingly interconnected and dependent global security environment. As a result, exploring the relationship between security cooperation and multilateralism is critical for understanding the topic of this research which focuses on the EU's changing position in the Indo-Pacific.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC THROUGH THE LENS OF SECURITY COOPERATION

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as a central point of geopolitical interest due to both increased opportunity and the unpredictability of the region that continues attracting external actors' interests, including the European Union. While the Indo-Pacific area has great potential for many prospects, it also faces various challenges regarding security cooperation with the EU. The High Representative and Vice-President Josep Borrell of the EU stated in his speech that they seek to collaborate with the Indo-Pacific region to promote rule-based order, maritime security and to deepen interactions with regional governments to "develop a distinctive role and distinctive offer in the region" due to the "battle of offers" in the region (Borrell, 2022). As a result, the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific has shifted towards security cooperation which would address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. In order to analyse and discuss the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region, especially with regard to security and defence, EU-Indo Pacific strategy reports and speeches will be analysed through the lens of security cooperation in this chapter, using key documents such as the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. These documents give an in-depth overview of the EU's objectives and its approaches in order to strengthen security cooperation in a region of complex and intricate geopolitical dynamics with growing tensions.

3.1 Historical Context and Evolution of EU-Asia Security Cooperation

The EU's engagement with Asia, particularly in terms of security cooperation, has historically been limited while the focus of the EU for many years remained primarily on economic relations, with little emphasis on strategic or security areas (Pardo, & Leveringhaus, 2021). The first EU-Asia Strategy, adopted in 1994, largely reflected this approach, emphasising trade and economic ties while offering minimal attention to security concerns (Pennisi di Floristella, 2020). However, as the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific began to shift, with rising powers such as China gaining greater influence, the EU recognised the need to re-evaluate its role in the region. The 2012 Updated East Asia Policy Guidelines marked a turning point, signalling the EU's goal to contribute more actively to Asian security. This shift was driven by several factors, including the increasing importance

of the region as a strategic axis, the growing presence of other global powers in the region, the national interest of European states towards Asia and the recognition that the stability of the region is linked to international security. The EU's security cooperation initiatives began to expand, although they remained somewhat fragmented and secondary to economic interests.

Similarly, Odgaard (2019) also highlights the EU's initial absence in developing a comprehensive strategy for the Indo-Pacific region which persisted until the late 2010s. However, the author points out that the publication of national strategies by EU member states such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, followed by the EU's own Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2021, indicated a significant shift (Odgaard, 2019). These measures highlight a growing recognition within the EU of the need to assert itself more strategically in the region, not only to protect its economic interests but also to contribute to regional and global security. Japan's role in shaping the Indo-Pacific concept was another significant moment that influenced other global actors regarding the Indo-Pacific region due to the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's 2007 speech on a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' which laid the groundwork for Japan's foreign policy in the region (Satake & Sahashi, 2021). The 2019 EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement further strengthened this relationship by emphasizing maritime security cooperation and aligning Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy with the EU's strategic objectives, motivating the EU to be more active in the region.

3.2 The Importance of Security Cooperation of the EU

Security cooperation is a key element of the European Union's strategy to effectively engage in the Indo-Pacific region amidst the complexities and challenges occurring in the region. As security cooperation is the collaborative efforts of states and international actors to address common security concerns, it is an important initiative that the EU attempts to take in the Indo-Pacific. This section of the chapter will explore why security cooperation is an important initiative for the EU in the Indo-Pacific region before discussing the actions taken by the EU in the region. This importance of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific area is shown through several factors, such as the region's economic significance, the rise of geopolitical tensions, the proliferation of non-traditional security threats and the need for a rules-based international order.

Economic Significance and Security Interdependence

The Indo-Pacific region is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and major global trade routes where countries such as China, India, Japan and South Korea are economic powerhouses as well as key players in international politics. The region contributes significantly to global trade, with crucial marine routes including the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean allowing the movement of goods, energy and other critical resources (Bharti, 2021). The security of these trade routes in the Indo-Pacific region is not only essential for regional economies but also for international markets, particularly those in the EU. The economic interdependence between the Indo-Pacific and the rest of the world, including Europe, is thereby highlighted which demonstrates the importance of security cooperation. Disruptions in the region that can occur due to various reasons such as piracy, territorial disputes or geopolitical conflicts which can have major implications for global trade and economic stability. As one of the world's largest trading blocs, the EU has a keen interest in ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains a secure and stable environment for trade (European External Action Service, 2021a). As a result, security cooperation can be considered a strategic priority in order to protect the economic interests of the European Union and its member states while supporting regional stability and peace.

Geopolitical Tensions and the Strategic Necessity for Security Cooperation

The Indo-Pacific region is characterised by complex geopolitical dynamics, with several states competing for influence which Mr. Josep Borrell, the High Representative and Vice-President of the EU referred to as the 'battle of offers' (Borrell, 2022). The growth of China as a regional and global power in the recent years has had major impacts on the changing Indo-Pacific security environment. China's aggressive policies, notably in the South China Sea, where it has engaged in substantial land reclamation and militarization of disputed territory, have alarmed neighbouring countries and the global community (Koga, 2020). As a result, these activities have escalated tensions and the likelihood of conflict in the region. In response to China's growing influence, other regional actors such as India, Japan and Australia have sought to strengthen their security ties, both with each other and with external actors such as the United States and the EU (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). The formation of strategic alliances and partnerships, such as the QUAD which includes the US, Japan, India and Australia, reflects a broader trend towards enhancing security cooperation to counterbalance China's influence.

For the EU, engaging in security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is not only protecting its economic interests but also about contributing to regional stability and preventing the escalation of conflicts. The EU's strategy states their aim "to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture", which is critical in a region where territorial disputes and power rivalries are frequent (European External Action Service, 2021a). By promoting security cooperation, the EU aims to play a constructive role with regard to growing concerns over the constant changing of geopolitics by mitigating tensions, supporting conflict prevention mechanisms and fostering dialogue among regional actors (European External Action Service, 2021a).

Addressing Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Threats

Of the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, traditional security issues are a main concern for the European Union as they strategise to improve their engagement with the region. The strategic region is affected by territorial disputes, military buildups and the risk of armed conflict, particularly in the South China Sea. The EU's strategy, as outlined in its key documents such as the Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, emphasises the importance of upholding international law, particularly the UNCLOS, to ensure freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). The joint communication also highlights the EU's commitment to addressing these traditional security threats which is evident in its emphasis on enhancing maritime security through coordinated naval deployments and capacity-building initiatives with regional partners (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific further reinforces this approach, highlighting the need for strong security partnerships to counterbalance the growing military presence of other global powers in the region (European Parliament, 2021). As the EU continues to assert its role in promoting regional stability, its focus on traditional security challenges remains integral to its broader Indo-Pacific strategy.

In addition to traditional security challenges, the Indo-Pacific region faces a range of non-traditional security threats which include terrorism, cyber threats, climate change, human trafficking and transnational organised crime that require collective action and international cooperation. The EU's approach to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific recognizes the need to address these multifaceted challenges through comprehensive and coordinated initiatives. Terrorism remains a significant concern in parts of the Indo-Pacific, particularly in

Southeast Asia, where the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) has further complicated the security landscape, with several terrorist groups active in the region and inspiring local militant organisations (Pugliese, 2023). The EU's security cooperation initiatives include efforts to enhance the counter-terrorism capabilities of its Indo-Pacific partners through capacity building, intelligence sharing and joint operations (European External Action Service, 2021a). Cybersecurity is another critical area where the EU has sought to enhance cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries as the region has seen a growing number of cyberattacks, including state-sponsored cyber espionage and criminal activities targeting critical infrastructure. The EU's cybersecurity strategy for the Indo-Pacific focuses on building reliable digital infrastructures, improving cyber defence mechanisms and fostering international cooperation to combat cybercrime (European Commission, 2020). This includes initiatives such as the EU's Cyber Diplomacy Network, which aims to promote cybersecurity norms and facilitate collaboration between the EU and its partners in the region (European External Action Service, 2021a). Additionally, in 2023 the EU held a three-day training course on cybersecurity as part of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in collaboration with the Indo-Pacific partners (European External Action Service, 2023). Another important security issue in the Indo-Pacific is human trafficking which is worsening regional stability and violating the human rights of its citizens. The EU's security cooperation initiatives are critical in tackling this issue, as they improve cross-border collaboration, law enforcement coordination and victim protection programs (European Union, 2021). The EU intends to assist in developing legislative frameworks and regional mechanisms to identify and take actions against human trafficking organisations by closely collaborating with regional actors (European Commission, 2021). This collaborative strategy is critical for combating the complicated and critical security issue of human trafficking affecting the lives of many of the citizens of the region which also shows the EU's commitment to actively engage in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to human trafficking, climate change is another significant non-traditional security challenge in the Indo-Pacific region, which is one of the region's most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming. Rising sea levels, extreme weather crises and environmental degradation threaten the livelihoods of millions of people, worsening resource conflicts and increasing the risk of displacement and migration (Asian Development Bank, 2021). The EU's approach to security cooperation includes supporting the efforts of Indo-Pacific countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as enhancing disaster resilience and

humanitarian response capabilities, with a focus on "human Security: to support healthcare systems and enhance disaster risk reduction and preparedness" (European Commission, 2021). This further highlights the EU's comprehensive strategy, which encompasses various aspects of security, not just traditional security, thereby effectively engaging in the Indo-Pacific region. Transnational organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal fishing also present serious security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. The EU's security cooperation initiatives address these issues by promoting the rule of law, strengthening law enforcement capabilities and supporting regional frameworks for combating organised crime (European External Action Service, 2021a). This includes collaboration with organisations such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum to enhance regional security governance and promote effective responses to transnational threats.

Promoting a Rules-Based International Order

A key element of the EU's security cooperation strategy in the Indo-Pacific is the promotion of a rules-based international order. The EU has consistently advocated for the resolution of disputes through peaceful means and in accordance with international law which is especially relevant in the context of the South China Sea, where overlapping territorial claims have led to heightened tensions and a risk of conflict (European External Action Service, 2020). Thus, making security cooperation with the EU an important approach for the Indo-Pacific due to the positive outcomes it can result in. The EU's emphasis on a rules-based order is not only about upholding international law but also about ensuring that smaller states in the Indo-Pacific are not subjected to coercion or intimidation by the greater powers (European External Action Service, 2021a). Through collaborative measures and promoting dialogue among states while supporting regional institutions such as ASEAN and SAARC, the EU aims to create a more balanced and inclusive security architecture in the Indo-Pacific that aligns with the EU's broader foreign policy objectives of promoting peace, stability and human rights on a global scale. In addition to maritime security, the EU's commitment to a rules-based order covers disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control where the Indo-Pacific region is home to several nuclear-armed states and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains a significant concern. The EU has been an active participant in global non-proliferation efforts by advocating the importance of preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and promoting disarmament through international treaties such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (European Commission, 2020). This highlights the

EU's attempt to take an active role in fostering cooperation with Indo-Pacific states to strengthen arms control and prevent nuclear proliferation in order to ensure regional and global security.

Strengthening Strategic Partnerships

The EU's security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is crucial for strengthening strategic partnerships with key regional actors which includes Japan, India, Australia and South Korea, who are among the EU's most significant partners in the region. To strengthen and improve these relationships, the EU attempts to deepen its security ties with these states through both bilateral and multilateral frameworks.

Japan has emerged as a key partner for the EU in the area of security which can be seen in the 2018 and 2019 EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) which initiated a closer security relationship between the two partners, with a focus on areas such as maritime security, cybersecurity and counterterrorism (European External Action Service, 2019). The EU and Japan share a commitment to upholding a rules-based international order and have collaborated on various initiatives to promote regional stability and security. India is another key partner for the EU in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the context of maritime security and counterterrorism. The EU-India Strategic Partnership, which has been in place since 2004, has evolved to include a stronger focus on security cooperation with conducting joint naval exercises, engaging in counter-piracy operations and collaborating on efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism (European External Action Service, 2021b). The EU's engagement with India is also part of a broader strategy to enhance its presence in the Indian Ocean, a region of growing strategic importance. Australia is a natural partner for the EU in the Indo-Pacific, given their shared values and strategic interests. The EU-Australia Framework Agreement, signed in 2017, includes provisions for cooperation on security and defence, with a particular emphasis on maritime security and counterterrorism (European External Action Service, 2017). The EU and Australia have also worked together on issues such as non-proliferation, cyber security and disaster resilience, further strengthening their security partnership. South Korea, as a key player in East Asian security dynamics, is another important partner for the EU. The EU-South Korea Framework Agreement, which came into force in 2014, emphasises closer cooperation on security issues which include non-proliferation, cyber security and counterterrorism (European External Action Service, 2014). The EU and South Korea have also collaborated on efforts to promote peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, including support for the denuclearisation of North Korea. Through

such strategic partnerships, the EU aims to enhance its security engagement in the Indo-Pacific and contribute to regional stability therefore showing the importance of security cooperation in the region.

3.3 Key Elements of EU-Indo-Pacific Strategy

Maritime Security

Maritime security has emerged as one of the most significant elements of the EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, reflecting on the region's significance as a hub for global trade. As mentioned previously in this research, the South China Sea in which a substantial portion of the world's maritime trade route that has been a point of geopolitical tensions, particularly due to China's assertive territorial claims. The EU, recognising the strategic importance of these sea lanes, has prioritised maritime security cooperation to ensure the stability of global trade routes.

The Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific highlights the EU's commitment to maintaining open and secure sea lanes, a priority due to the necessity of securing global trades and upholding international law, particularly the UNCLOS (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). The EU's approach to maritime security involves not only protecting these critical trade routes but also promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes in areas such as the South China Sea. The Coordinated Maritime Presences concept, introduced by the EU in 2021, exemplifies the EU's proactive approach to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific (European External Action Service, 2021c). The CMP aims to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of European naval deployments in the region, fostering closer cooperation with regional partners such as Japan, India and Australia. This initiative also reflects the EU's broader strategy of contributing to global security by promoting the rule of law, collaborative efforts and supporting multilateral frameworks that facilitate cooperation among regional stakeholders. The EU's involvement in maritime security extends beyond naval deployments to include diplomatic and legal initiatives aimed at conflict prevention and resolution (European External Action Service, 2021d). The EU has consistently supported the ASEAN-led negotiations for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, which seeks to manage tensions and prevent conflicts in this strategically vital area (Wirth & Jenne, 2022). Although the EU is not a direct participant in

these negotiations, it has used its diplomatic influence to advocate for a resolution that respects international law and promotes regional stability.

The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific further emphasises the importance of maritime security, calling for the EU to increase its naval presence and take additional initiatives to increase its cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners on maritime issues (European Parliament, 2021). This includes joint naval exercises, port calls and capacity-building initiatives that aim to strengthen the maritime capabilities of regional partners. By engaging in these activities, the EU not only contributes to the security of critical sea lanes but also reinforces its role as a key player in the region's security architecture.

Addressing Traditional Security Threats

While both traditional and non-traditional security challenges were briefly discussed previously in this research paper in relation to the importance of security cooperation, this sub-section will analyse traditional and non-traditional security challenges as some of the key aspects of EU-Indo-Pacific security cooperation strategy to gain a better understanding of the EU's viability role in the region.

In addition to maritime security which remains a cornerstone of the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific, the region's complex security environment also requires a focus on other traditional security threats, particularly the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and interstate military tensions. The Indo-Pacific region is home to several nuclear-armed states, including China, India and Pakistan as well as North Korea, which poses a unique and constant threat due to its ongoing development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities (Mohan, 2020). The EU has long been a longtime advocate of non-proliferation and disarmament, and its Indo-Pacific strategy reflects this commitment. The EU has actively participated in international efforts to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula, supporting United Nations Security Council resolutions that impose sanctions on North Korea (Fell, 2020). These sanctions were imposed to pressure North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions while minimising the humanitarian impact on the country's population. The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific calls for the EU to intensify its diplomatic efforts to address the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region, particularly in relation to North Korea's nuclear programme (European Parliament, 2021). The EU's approach to non-proliferation in the Indo-Pacific also involves

promoting and supporting international legal frameworks, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (European External Action Service, 2021a). The EU has encouraged Indo-Pacific countries to adhere to these treaties and has provided technical assistance and capacity-building support to help these nations meet their non-proliferation obligations. By fostering adherence to these international norms, the EU aims to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict in the region and contribute to global security. These efforts are part of the EU's broader strategy of building coalitions with like-minded countries to address shared security challenges and become an active and contributing actor in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to the proliferation of WMDs, interstate military tensions are another significant traditional security threat in the Indo-Pacific region. The region's rising military expenditures and growing assertiveness are a result of tensions and disputes among states, particularly with China where the South China Sea remains a critical area for territorial disputes involving several Indo-Pacific member states (Mohan, 2020). These disputes have led to increased military presence and frequent confrontations at sea, raising the risk of escalation into violent conflicts. The EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific recognises the importance of addressing these interstate military tensions through diplomacy, dialogue and the promotion of international law, particularly UNCLOS (European External Action Service, 2021a). The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific emphasises the need for the EU to support the peaceful resolution of disputes and to uphold the principles of freedom of navigation and overflight in the region (European External Action Service, 2022). The EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific includes supporting regional frameworks and multilateral dialogues aimed at reducing military tensions and promoting stability. For example, the EU has supported ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ARF, which serves as a platform for dialogue and confidence-building among regional powers (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2020). The EU also engages in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with key Indo-Pacific countries to promote transparency, build trust and encourage restraint in military activities (European Commission, 2021b). By assisting the Indo-Pacific states to address these traditional security threats, the EU aims to contribute to the Indo-Pacific region to become a successful and effective external actor and ensure its longevity in the region.

In addition to traditional security issues, the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific also aims to tackle a range of non-traditional security threats, including terrorism, cybersecurity and transnational crime. Recognizing the significant threat posed by various extremist groups that have carried out attacks in the region, particularly in Southeast Asia, the EU's strategy emphasises the need for comprehensive counter-terrorism measures in collaboration with regional partners. The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific emphasises the importance of strengthening the EU's counter-terrorism efforts in the region (European External Action Service, 2021a). This includes enhancing intelligence-sharing capabilities, investing in capacity-building initiatives and conducting joint operations with Indo-Pacific countries (European Parliament, 2021). The EU's involvement in regional counter-terrorism initiatives, particularly those led by ASEAN such as the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism, highlights its commitment to a multilateral approach and provides a strong foundation for collaborative efforts aimed at combating extremist threats across the region (ASEAN Secretariat, 2012).

Cybersecurity, another critical non-traditional security concern, has emerged as a significant security focus for the EU in the Indo-Pacific. As the world becomes more interconnected and cyberattacks increase, from state-sponsored espionage to criminal activities such as ransomware, the EU recognises that securing digital infrastructure is critical both for its interests and also for the Indo-Pacific region's stability and security (Mohan, 2020). The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific highlights the importance of cybersecurity as a critical aspect of the global economy's infrastructure (European Parliament, 2022). The resolution calls for the EU to improve its cooperation with Indo-Pacific states on cybersecurity issues such as joint efforts to combat cybercrime, improve cyber resilience and protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks. This approach reflects the EU's broader commitment to cybersecurity, which emphasises the need for a comprehensive and coordinated response to the growing threats in cyberspace as well as the active role the EU could play in the region. A key initiative in this area the EU has implemented is the EU's Cyber Diplomacy Network, which seeks to promote cybersecurity norms and legal frameworks within the Indo-Pacific by facilitating cooperation between the EU delegations and embassies and its partners in the region on issues such as cyber defence, cybercrime and the protection of critical infrastructure (European External Action Service, 2023). By working together, the EU and its partners shared best practises and coordinated

responses to cyber threats and developed common strategies to address the challenges posed by the digital age. The EU's approach to cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific also involves advocating for a rules-based international order in cyberspace. This includes supporting international initiatives such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which provides guidelines for the harmonisation of national laws on cybercrime and offers a framework for international cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of cyber offences (Council of Europe, 2001). The EU has encouraged Indo-Pacific countries to join the convention and has provided technical assistance to help them align their domestic legislation with international standards. Additionally, the EU has been involved in capacity-building programmes aimed at enhancing the cybersecurity capabilities of its Indo-Pacific partners. These programmes include training for law enforcement officials, support for the development of national cybersecurity strategies and assistance with the implementation of cybersecurity practises. By helping its partners build their cybersecurity capabilities, the EU aims to create a more secure and resilient digital environment in the Indo-Pacific, which is essential for the region's development and security.

Transnational crime is another element of the EU-Indo-Pacific strategy that the EU has addressed in the Indo-Pacific region as it poses a significant threat to security and stability, with activities such as human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal fishing undermining governance, economic development and human security. The EU recognises that these issues are not confined to national borders requiring a coordinated, multilateral response and as part of its security cooperation strategy in the Indo-Pacific, the EU aims to actively engage in efforts to combat these transnational crimes (Grare, 2021). Human trafficking is a particularly critical issue in the region, where vulnerable populations are often exploited through forced labour, sexual exploitation and other forms of modern slavery. The EU's security cooperation initiatives aim to tackle this by promoting the rule of law, strengthening law enforcement capabilities and supporting regional frameworks dedicated to combating human trafficking (European External Action Service, 2021a). Collaboration with organisations such as ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum is central to these efforts, enabling the EU to contribute to building more effective regional security governance and enhancing the capacity of local law enforcement to address these crimes. Drug trafficking is another major concern in the Indo-Pacific, where the production and trafficking of illicit drugs have significant social and economic impacts. The EU works with regional partners to improve border security, enhance intelligence sharing and develop joint operations aimed at

disrupting drug trafficking networks (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). These efforts mentioned in the Joint Communication report are complemented by initiatives to reduce demand for drugs through public health interventions and community-based prevention programmes. Furthermore, illegal fishing, often linked to organised crime, also threatens the sustainability of marine resources and the livelihoods of coastal communities in the Indo-Pacific region. The EU addresses this issue through its involvement in regional fisheries management organisations and by supporting initiatives aimed at improving monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing activities (European External Action Service, 2021a). By enhancing cooperation with regional partners, the EU seeks to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, thereby promoting sustainable fisheries management and contributing to the broader security of the region.

Through such multifaceted efforts and key elements, the EU seeks to engage and support the complex security of the Indo-Pacific region, tackling both traditional and non-traditional threats to contribute to a stable, secure and prosperous regional order.

3.4 The Challenges of Security Cooperation

When discussing the initiatives and measures the EU can take for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important to explore whether the EU will face any challenges as an actor in the region and what those challenges are. Hence, this section of the chapter will discuss and analyse the obstacles the EU faces in being active in security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Geopolitical Division and Regional Power Dynamics

One of the most significant challenges to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is the region's geopolitical division as the Indo-Pacific region consists of a range of diverse countries, each with its own strategic interests, security concerns and historical disputes. This diversity makes it difficult to establish a unified approach to security cooperation as regional actors often have conflicting objectives and priorities (Barthwal-Datta & Chacko, 2020). The rise of China as a dominant regional power has worsened these divisions as its assertive policies in the South China Sea have led to heightened tensions with neighbouring countries (Desierto, 2020). China's growing influence has also created a sense of unease among other regional powers such as India, Japan and Australia who have responded by strengthening their own security ties and seeking closer cooperation with external actors such as the EU and

the United States (Insisa & Pugliese, 2022). However, the differing approaches to managing China's rise, ranging from engagement and cooperation to containment and deterrence, pose a challenge to developing a coherent security strategy for the Indo-Pacific. As a result, for the EU it is important to navigate these complex power dynamics carefully which requires a delicate balancing act. On one hand, the EU seeks to engage China as a key economic partner and global actor, while on the other hand, the EU must address the security concerns of its Indo-Pacific partners, many of whom view China's actions with suspicion (Toropchin, 2022). This dual approach complicates the EU's ability to build trust and foster effective security cooperation in the region, as it must constantly reconcile its economic interests with its commitment to ensuring security of the region.

Differing National Interests and Priorities

Another significant challenge to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region is the conflicting national interests and priorities of the region's countries. The Indo-Pacific is not a single entity but rather a collection of bilateral and multilateral ties each with its own distinct characteristics, which can limit efforts to build a shared security agenda since countries often prioritise various elements of security cooperation based on their own geopolitical objectives (Pugliese, 2023). For example, while maritime security is a top priority for island nations and countries with extensive coastlines such as Japan, Australia and the Philippines, landlocked countries or those with a focus on continental security such as India, Nepal and Mongolia may prioritise other security issues such as border security and counterterrorism (Medcalf, 2020). Similarly, while some countries in the region may be more concerned with traditional security threats such as military aggression and territorial disputes others may place greater focus on non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity and transnational crime. These differing priorities can lead to a lack of coherence in regional security cooperation efforts as countries may be reluctant to commit resources and political capital to initiatives that do not align with their national interests (Pardesi, 2020). For the EU, this presents a challenge in terms of designing security cooperation frameworks that are both inclusive and effective. The EU must find ways to accommodate the diverse security needs of its Indo-Pacific partners while ensuring that its own strategic objectives are met.

Institutional Limitations and Coordination Challenges

The EU's ability to engage in effective security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is also constrained by its own institutional limitations. The EU's security and defence policy is governed by the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which while providing a

framework for military and civilian missions requires consensus among member states (Krishnamurthy, 2019). This need for consensus of member states can slow down decision-making processes and limit the EU's ability to respond quickly to emerging security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the EU's security and defence capabilities are still evolving and there are disparities in the military capacities and strategic priorities of its member states. While some EU countries such as France have a strong military presence and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, others may be less inclined to invest in the region due to geographic distance or different security concerns (Kliem, 2020). This lack of alignment among EU member states can complicate the development of a unified and comprehensive security strategy for the Indo-Pacific. Coordination between the EU and its member states is also a challenge when it comes to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The EU's external action is complemented by the national foreign policies of its member states, many of which have their own bilateral relationships and security agreements with countries in the Indo-Pacific (Odgaard, 2019). While this variety of relationships can be an asset which could allow for a diverse range of engagements, it can also lead to fragmentation and duplication of efforts reducing the overall effectiveness of the EU's security cooperation initiatives.

The Evolving Nature of Security Challenges

Another major challenge of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific for the EU is the interconnectedness of security challenges in the Indo-Pacific which was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic not only strained public health systems but has also exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, increased economic inequalities and heightened social tensions. The EU's response to the pandemic included efforts to support its Indo-Pacific partners through initiatives such as vaccine distribution and economic recovery programs (European Commission, 2021c). While the EU assisted the states of the region during the security crisis of the pandemic, the interconnectedness of the security issues and their evolving nature emphasised the need for quick and effective actions as well as improved preparedness. Moreover, while the pandemic has also underscored the need for greater resilience and preparedness in the face of future crises, the importance of strengthening and developing global health security mechanisms as a new type of security emerged.

Balancing Economic and Security Interests

A recurring challenge in the EU's security cooperation efforts in the Indo-Pacific is the need to balance economic and security interests. The region is of immense economic importance to the EU, with strong trade and investment ties strengthen its relationship with

key Indo-Pacific countries. However, the pursuit of economic opportunities can sometimes conflict with security objectives, particularly in the context of relations with China (López-Aranguren, 2022). China is the EU's largest trading partner in the Indo-Pacific and the economic relationship between the two entities is both deep and complex (Medcalf, 2020). However, China's actions in the South China Sea, its human rights record and its approach to international law have raised significant security concerns and discourse (Satake & Sahashi, 2021). The EU's challenge is to navigate this delicate balance by engaging China economically while addressing the security concerns of the Indo-Pacific region and concerns of its other member states. This balancing act is further complicated by the differing approaches of EU member states towards China. While some countries advocate for a more confrontational stance others prefer a more cautious and cooperative approach (López-Aranguren, 2022). These varying views can lead to inconsistencies in the EU's security policy and complicate its efforts to present a unified front in the Indo-Pacific.

The challenge of balancing economic and security interests is not limited to China. The EU must also navigate its relationships with other regional powers such as India, Japan and the United States, each of which has its own strategic interests and priorities (Toropchin, 2022). For example, the EU's efforts to enhance security cooperation with India must be balanced against its desire to expand economic ties with the country while also considering India's strategic rivalry with China. Therefore, these complex relationships present a challenge to the EU in its attempt to be active in security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure its longevity.

The Role of External Actors

The presence and actions of external actors in the Indo-Pacific, particularly the United States add another challenge to security cooperation in the region for the EU. The US has long been a dominant security actor in the Indo-Pacific with a network of alliances and partnerships that have shaped the regional security architecture. The EU's engagement in the region must therefore be carefully coordinated with that of the US, to avoid duplication or contradiction of efforts and to ensure complementarity (Schweisgut, 2021). However, the EU's relationship with the US in the Indo-Pacific also presents with its challenges. According to Schweisgut (2021), while both actors share common values and strategic interests, there are also areas of differences, particularly in their approaches to China. The US has adopted a more confrontational stance towards China, particularly under the Trump administration, while the EU sought a more balanced approach, balancing diplomatic engagement with

defensive measures. This difference in approach can create challenges for coordination and cooperation between the EU and the US in the Indo-Pacific.

In addition to the US, other external actors such as Russia also play a role in the Indo-Pacific's security landscape. Russia's actions, particularly in the context of its relationship with China, can have significant implications for regional security dynamics (Dominguez & Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2021). The EU must therefore consider the influence of these external actors as it seeks to build effective security cooperation frameworks in the Indo-Pacific.

Building Trust and Overcoming Historical Animosities

One of the most critical challenges to security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific for the EU is the need to build trust among regional actors. The region's history is marked by colonialism, territorial disputes and conflicts which have left deep scars and fostered long-standing animosities. These historical grievances can hinder efforts to build cooperative security frameworks as countries may be reluctant to engage in partnerships with former colonisers, opponents or perceived rivals. For the EU, overcoming these historical animosities requires a patient and nuanced approach as it is highly important (European External Action Service, 2021a). It requires building relationships based on mutual respect, transparency and shared interests. The EU's emphasis on a rules-based international order and its commitment to multilateralism can serve as important tools in this regard by helping to foster a sense of trust and predictability in its interactions with Indo-Pacific partners (European External Action Service, 2021a). However, building trust is a long-term process that requires sustained engagement and confidence-building measures. The EU must be prepared to invest time and resources in this effort, recognising that progress may be slow and incremental. Moreover, the EU must be sensitive to the historical and cultural contexts of its Indo-Pacific partners, ensuring that its actions are perceived as genuine efforts to promote regional stability and security, rather than as self-serving initiatives.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION THROUGH THE LENS OF MULTILATERALISM

The European Union's engagement in the Indo-Pacific reflects its greater commitment to multilateralism which is central to its foreign policy. As the EU attempts to broaden its influence and tackle difficult geopolitical issues, it sees multilateralism as an essential ‹tool for developing collaboration, promoting stability and preserving a rules-based international order. Multilateralism, for the EU serves as both a guiding principle and a strategic framework for addressing the complex geopolitical dynamics and security challenges globally, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. As the EU has expressed its interest to expand its influence and deepen its partnerships in this critical region, understanding its multilateral strategy is key to comprehending the broader implications of the EU's Indo-Pacific policy. The EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, as outlined in the 2021 Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (European Commission & High Representative, 2021), emphasises the importance of multilateralism in maintaining stability and fostering cooperation. This chapter examines the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific through the lens of multilateralism, exploring how the EU's multilateral strategy is implemented and the challenges it faces in achieving its objectives.

4.1 The Importance of Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific area is known for its geopolitical complexity, economic growth and strategic relevance as it consists of more than 60% of the world's population as well as some of the world's major economies such as China, Japan and India (European External Action Service, 2021a). The region's strategic significance is further shown by the presence of key maritime trade routes which are vital for global trade. Multilateralism is an approach in which multiple countries collaborate to address common issues or achieve shared goals, typically through international institutions or agreements (Biscop, 2018). It differs from security cooperation because it emphasises broad, inclusive engagement and collective decision-making instead of the targeted, often bilateral or regional partnerships that define security cooperation. Thus, it is evident that in addition to security cooperation, multilateralism is also important for managing the region's complexities by promoting dialogue, cooperation and collective action among states as the two concepts complement one another to ensure the EU longevity in the Indo-Pacific region.

For the EU, multilateralism is not only a normative preference but also a practical necessity in the Indo-Pacific. The EU's commitment to multilateralism is based in its own experience as a supranational organization that has successfully navigated diverse interests and conflicts of European states through cooperative frameworks (Krishnamurthy, 2018). This experience shapes the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific, where it aims to promote a rules-based international order, strengthen regional governance structures and foster security and stability. The Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (European Commission & High Representative, 2021) outlines the EU's vision for the region, which includes a strong emphasis on multilateralism. The document highlights the need for 'effective multilateralism' as a means of addressing global challenges such as climate change, maritime security and sustainable development. The EU's strategy emphasises the importance of multilateralism the idea that no single country can address these challenges alone and cooperative approaches are essential for ensuring peace and stability in the region.

4.2 The EU's Multilateral Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region

The EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific is multifaceted and includes a wide range of initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation, promoting global governance and establishing the EU as a global actor in the region. This strategy is implemented through a combination of diplomatic engagement and economic partnerships, focusing on a range of security issues with maritime security and climate change as key focal points. The EU's approach is also characterised by its efforts to align its policies with those of collaborators with similar objectives such as the United States, Japan, Australia and India, while also engaging with regional organisations such as ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

Diplomatic Engagement

Diplomatic engagement is a key component of the EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific region where the EU has sought to strengthen its relationships with regional actors through high-level dialogues, strategic partnerships and participation in multilateral forums. These efforts are aimed at building trust, fostering cooperation and promoting a rules-based international order (European Parliament, 2021). The EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, established in 2020, is an example of the EU's commitment to multilateralism in

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the Indo-Pacific which aims to enhance cooperation in areas such as trade, security and sustainable development, reflecting the EU's broader goal of promoting regional stability and security (European External Action Service, 2020). ASEAN, with its commitment to multilateralism and regional diplomacy, serves as a natural partner for the EU as both share common values and goals in strengthening governance and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (Pugliese, 2020). In addition to its partnership with ASEAN, the EU is also actively engaged with other regional organisations such as the IORA which is another important forum for the EU's multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific. In 2023, the EU was confirmed as an IORA dialogue partner and highlighted its commitment to be a reliable partner in the region and to strengthen cooperation in areas such as maritime security, trade and disaster risk management (Indian Ocean Rim Association, 2023). The EU's engagement with IORA is part of its broader effort to enhance its presence in the Indian Ocean, which is a vital part of the Indo-Pacific region and is of strategic importance due to its key maritime trade routes. The EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific also involves building coalitions with like-minded partners by strengthening its diplomatic relations with key Indo-Pacific countries such as Japan, India, Australia and South Korea (Odgaard, 2019). These partnerships are built on shared values, including a commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement for example, provides a framework for cooperation on a wide range of issues, including security, trade and climate change (Satake & Sahashi, 2021). Similarly, the EU-India Strategic Partnership is focused on enhancing cooperation in areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism and cyber security.

Another important aspect of the EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific region under the scope of diplomatic engagement is its commitment to promoting global governance. The EU has been a strong advocate for international norms and rules, particularly in the areas of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, human rights and environmental protection (Pugliese, 2023). The EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific is guided by its commitment to upholding these norms and promoting a rules-based international order (López-Aranguren, 2022). This commitment is reflected in the EU's support for multilateral institutions such as the UN and the WTO as well as its efforts to promote the implementation of international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change (Mohan, 2020).

Economic Partnerships

Economic partnerships and its implications on the security of the Indo-Pacific region is another vital aspect of the EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific. The region's economic prospects provide significant opportunities for the EU to expand its trade and investment ties and as such the EU has pursued a series of FTAs and EPAs with key Indo-Pacific states to deepen economic ties and promote a rules-based international trading system (European Parliament, 2022). The EU-Japan EPA which entered into force in 2019 is a key element of the EU's economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific. While the EU has EPA agreements with other Indo-Pacific states such as with South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam, the agreement with Japan stands out for its depth and the strategic partnership it fosters (European Commission, 2019). This agreement has enhanced trade and investment between the EU and Japan, serving as a model for the EU's approach to economic cooperation in the region. It reflects the EU's commitment to promoting open and fair trade, as well as its broader goal of fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth which contributes to the security and stability in the region.

In addition to its trade agreements, the EU has also sought to promote economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific through its development assistance programmes. The EU has provided significant financial support to Indo-Pacific countries through initiatives such as the EU-ASEAN Cooperation Programme, which focuses on areas such as sustainable development, climate change and disaster risk management (Kennes, 2015). The EU's development assistance programs are part of its broader effort to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region, in line with its commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, the EU has also supported regional economic integration initiatives, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). The EU's support for these initiatives is part of its broader strategy to promote economic cooperation and regional integration in the Indo-Pacific, in line with its commitment to engage with security cooperation in the region and to be an active actor in the region (European Commission & High Representative, 2021).

Maritime Security

Maritime security is a key focus of the EU's multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific due to its importance to global trade, with key sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca

and the South China Sea operating as vital routes for international trade. However, the Indo-Pacific's maritime territory is also a source of high tension and conflict, with disputes over territorial claims, illegal fishing, piracy and other security challenges posing significant risks to regional stability (López-Aranguren, 2022). As mentioned in the previous chapter of this research, the EU's approach to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region is based on its commitment to upholding international law, particularly the UNCLOS. The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy emphasises the importance of ensuring the freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law (European External Action Service, 2021a). The EU consistently supports efforts to promote maritime security in the region, including through its participation in multilateral initiatives such as the ARF and the IORA and its support for capacity-building initiatives. By advocating for shared norms and cooperative frameworks, the EU enhances collective capabilities to address maritime threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, and human trafficking. Furthermore, the EU's commitment to multilateralism is evident in its capacity-building programs, which empower regional partners to develop their maritime security frameworks, thereby promoting a stable and secure maritime environment in the region (Crimario, 2021). The EU has also sought to enhance its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region through the EU's CMP, a key element of the EU's strategy which is an initiative aimed at enhancing coordination among Member States' naval and air assets in key areas of interest. This multilateral initiative allows the EU to act collectively as a reliable partner while assets remain under national command rather than being part of a Common Security and Defence Policy mission (European External Action Service, 2021e). Through the CMP tool, the EU aims to increase the EU's naval presence in key maritime regions, specifically the Indo-Pacific region, through coordinated deployments of naval assets by EU Member States. The CMP concept reflects the EU's recognition of the importance of maintaining a credible and active presence in the region while to support its maritime security objectives.

Climate Change

Climate change is another major security issue in the Indo-Pacific region and it is a key element of the EU's multilateral engagement in the region. As mentioned previously in this research, the Indo-Pacific region is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change with many countries facing increasing risks from rising sea levels, extreme weather events and other climate-related threats. While security cooperation focuses on addressing traditional and non-traditional issues, multilateralism explores the EU's approach of fostering

collaboration with multiple regional and international partners to tackle complex, transnational challenges such as climate change. The EU's approach to climate change in the Indo-Pacific is based on its commitment to the Paris Agreement and its broader goal of promoting sustainable development through a range of multilateral initiatives such as providing financial support to Indo-Pacific countries to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change, including through the Green Climate Fund and other climate finance mechanisms (European External Action Service, 2021a). The EU has also supported capacity-building initiatives to help Indo-Pacific countries develop and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. In addition to financial and technical assistance, the EU has also sought to promote climate diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific through forums such as the Asia-Europe Meeting and the Pacific Islands Forum (European Commission, n.d.). The EU's climate diplomacy efforts are part of its objective in fostering cooperation on security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and become a successful and impactful actor in the region.

4.3 The Role of Regional Organisations in Promoting Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific Region

Regional organisations play a key role in the EU's strategy of the Indo-Pacific region as they provide platforms for dialogue, cooperation and collective action and they are essential to address the complex and interconnected security challenges of the region. The EU's, as a regional organization, engages with other regional organisations based on the recognition that these organisations are crucial to promoting regional stability and fostering cooperation on a wide range of issues (Krishnamurthy, 2019).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is the most prominent regional organization in the Indo-Pacific region and is central to the EU's multilateral strategy as its commitment to multilateralism and its role as a hub for regional diplomacy makes it a natural partner for the EU. The EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership, established in 2020, reflects the importance of this collaboration as it aims to enhance cooperation in areas such as trade, security and sustainable development (European External Action Service, 2020). Such acts make the EU more active and engaging in the Indo-Pacific region which can result in the longevity and positive participation of the EU. The EU's engagement with ASEAN is multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of initiatives aimed at strengthening regional

cooperation. In particular, the EU has supported ASEAN's efforts to promote regional stability through initiatives such as the ARF and the EAS where the ARF, in particular, provides a platform for dialogue on security issues, including maritime security, counterterrorism and disaster management (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2020). The EU's participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum shows its interest in and commitment to engaging with security issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to ASEAN, the EU is also actively engaged with other regional organisations such as the IORA which is another important forum for the EU's multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The EU is an IORA dialogue partner and has worked to strengthen cooperation in areas such as maritime security, trade and disaster risk management (Indian Ocean Rim Association, 2023). Furthermore, the EU's engagement with regional organisations of the Indo-Pacific region is not limited to ASEAN and IORA. The EU is also involved in other regional initiatives, such as the SAARC, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The EU encourages regional stability, economic development, and cooperation in the South Asia with collaboration with SAARC on key issues such as climate change, trade, and security (European Parliament, 2024.) ASEM provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe, while the PIF focuses on issues related to sustainable development and climate change in the Pacific region. The EU's participation in these initiatives reflects its commitment to promoting multilateralism and fostering cooperation on a wide range of issues in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, it is evident that by actively participating with other regional organisation of the Indo-Pacific region, the EU seeks to foster dialogue, collaboration and a shared understanding among member states on critical security challenges that affect the stability and prosperity of the region and ensure its stable participation.

4.4 Challenges of Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific Region

While the EU actively increases its participation and engagement in the Indo-Pacific region with multilateralism and its comprehensive framework, there are several major challenges in the Indo-Pacific region that the EU will have to face and navigate. The Indo-Pacific region's complex geopolitical dynamics, diverse interests and shifting security landscape pose significant challenges to developing and promoting multilateral cooperation (Stubbs, 2019). In addition, the rise of great power competition, particularly between the

United States and China, poses significant challenges to the EU's efforts to actively engage and become an effective actor in the Indo-Pacific.

The Security Environment of the Indo-Pacific Region

One of the key challenges the EU and its multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific region must navigate is the region's complex and fragmented security environment. The Indo-Pacific has several long-standing territorial disputes, including in the South and East China Sea as well as emerging security challenges such as cyber threats and terrorism (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). These issues are further complicated by the region's diverse political systems and strategic cultures, which make it difficult to build consensus on security and governance issues (Wirth & Jenne, 2022). Therefore, the EU faces difficulties in coordinating multilateral frameworks that suit and satisfy the nations of the Indo-Pacific region further limiting the EU's participation in the region. Another major challenge to the EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific is the rise of great power competition which is evident in the strategic rivalry between the United States and China that has created a polarized environment in the region, with countries increasingly aligning themselves with one of the two great powers (Schweisgut, 2021). This competition poses significant challenges to the EU's efforts to promote a rules-based international order and foster multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (European Parliament, 2022). Thus, the EU must navigate this complex environment while maintaining its commitment to multilateralism and avoiding the perception of taking sides in the great power rivalry. In addition to these geopolitical challenges, the EU also faces practical challenges in implementing its multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Pugliese (2023) states that the region's vast geography, diverse political systems and varying levels of economic development make it difficult to implement a general approach that would accommodate every state. As a result, the EU must tailor its engagement to the specific needs and priorities of each country and region, while also ensuring that its initiatives are coherent and aligned with its broader strategic goals.

The European Union's Coherence

Another key challenge that the EU's strategy in the Indo-Pacific also faces is related to its own coherence and capacity. The EU's engagement in the region is shaped by the diverse interests and priorities of its Member States, which can sometimes lead to fragmented or inconsistent policies (Krishnamurthy, 2019). Ensuring that the EU's multilateral strategy is

coherent and aligned with the broader strategic goals of the Union is a constantly challenge due to the constant changing global affairs such as the war on Ukraine and the different levels of commitment and resources among Member States (European Parliament, 2022). In addition, the EU's ability to hold power and influence in the Indo-Pacific is constrained by its limited military and economic capabilities compared to other great powers in the region such as the United States or China (Mohan, 2020). This disparity significantly impacts the EU's capacity to engage in pressing security initiatives and assert its interests effectively, making it challenging for the EU to establish a strong presence to foster meaningful and long-term partnerships in a region of complex geopolitical dynamics and rapidly evolving security challenges. Moreover, while the EU has made significant improvements in enhancing its presence and influence in the Indo-Pacific, its ability to shape outcomes in the region is often limited by its reliance on soft power and diplomatic engagement rather than military or economic leverage (Council of the European Union, 2021). Thus, achieving coherence in its policies and actions remains a challenge as the EU must navigate diverse interests among its member states while aiming to present a unified front in addressing the multifaceted security and geopolitical issues of the Indo-Pacific region.

Regional Alliances

Navigating the complex network of regional alliances and multilateral forums of the Indo-Pacific region is an additional crucial challenge for the EU to manage when effectively engaging in the region through multilateral methods. The region is home to a variety of overlapping and sometimes competing multilateral initiatives such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the EAS and the QUAD. Each of these forums has its own membership, agenda and strategic focus which can make it difficult for the EU to effectively coordinate its participation across the region (Odgaard, 2019). The EU's commitment to working with multilateral forums in the Indo-Pacific is evident in its strategy documents, including the Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). However, the challenge lies in aligning the EU's objectives with those of regional actors who may have different priorities and perspectives on security issues. For example, while the EU emphasises the importance of a rules-based international order, some regional actors may prioritise their own strategic interests over collective security, leading to potential conflicts and challenges in achieving consensus. Additionally, the EU's efforts to engage with multilateral forums in the Indo-Pacific are complicated by the region's shifting alliances and power dynamics with the emergence of

new security arrangements, such as the AUKUS trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, which introduced new variables into the regional security equation (Dominguez & Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2021). While the EU has expressed its solidarity with France over the lack of prior consultation on AUKUS, as noted in the European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, it also recognizes the importance of engaging with these new security frameworks to ensure its strategic interests are represented (European Parliament, 2022). As such, we see the various challenges the EU has to navigate in the Indo-Pacific region as it seeks to engage in the critical security issues of the region and to establish itself as a contributing actor. These challenges require careful navigation and strategic approaches to ensure that the EU can effectively influence and collaborate within this complex geopolitical landscape. Ultimately, the EU's success in overcoming these obstacles will depend on its ability to foster coherent policies, strengthen partnerships and adapt to the evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region, thereby securing its role as a meaningful player in the region's security framework.

5. DISCUSSION

The European Union's growing interest in actively participating in the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region reflects its strategic intent to strengthen its influence and address the emerging challenges in this increasingly important area. The previous analytical chapters focused on two lenses through which the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy can be studied: security cooperation and multilateralism. This chapter will discuss the key findings from these analyses, exploring how these two concepts intertwine and contribute to the EU's overall strategy in the Indo-Pacific. It will also address the challenges identified in the earlier chapters in order to propose recommendations to enhance the EU's effectiveness in the region. The discussion will also reflect on the research questions, particularly the implications of the EU's engagement through these dual lenses and why it was important to examine both concepts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific.

5.1 Interconnectedness of Security Cooperation and Multilateralism

Security cooperation of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is driven by the region's complex security landscape which includes traditional and non-traditional security issues. Traditional security threats, such as territorial disputes, military conflicts and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction coexist with non-traditional threats such as terrorism, cybersecurity challenges and transnational crime. The EU's approach to these challenges has been multifaceted involving diplomatic engagement, capacity-building initiatives and active participation in regional security forums and dialogues. The importance of security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific cannot be overstated, especially as key maritime routes, such as the South China Sea are vital to global trade and any disruption could have significant global economic and security implications. The EU's efforts to promote maritime security through initiatives such as the CMP concept and its support for capacity-building programmes such as the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) highlight its commitment to assist maintaining stability in these critical areas (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). These initiatives reflect the EU's recognition that security cooperation is essential not only for the stability of the Indo-Pacific but also for global stability and security. Moreover, the EU's focus on non-traditional security threats such as cybersecurity and counterterrorism highlight its understanding of the evolving nature

of security in the 21st century. The European Parliament's resolution on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region emphasised the need for enhanced cooperation with regional partners to address these emerging threats (European Parliament, 2022). This approach aligns with the EU's broader security strategy, which seeks to address not only immediate threats but also the underlying factors that contribute to insecurity such as poverty, weak governance and environmental degradation.

While security cooperation provides the operational tools for the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific, multilateralism is the strategic framework within which these tools are applied. Multilateralism, defined as the practice of multiple countries working together on a given issue, is deeply embedded in the EU's foreign policy. Furthermore, Multilateralism as defined by John Ruggie, involves three key characteristics: indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct and diffuse reciprocity (Ruggie, 1993). In applying Ruggie's definition of the previously discussed EU's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific, it becomes clear that the EU's approach to multilateralism aligns well with the characteristics mentioned by Ruggie. First, indivisibility, which refers to the notion that issues are addressed collectively and the benefits are enjoyed by all states rather than being concentrated to a single actor can be seen in the EU's commitment to security through regional frameworks such as ASEAN and the IORA. The EU has worked to promote collective security measures, such as its CMP initiative, which aims to safeguard key maritime routes in the Indo-Pacific through joint efforts rather than isolated national actions. Second, the EU's emphasis on generalized principles of conduct describes that international behaviour should be guided by common rules rather than ad hoc decisions which is reflected in the EU's support for international law, such as the UNCLOS. The EU's promotion of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in high-tension areas such as the South China Sea, reveals its commitment to this multilateralism. Lastly, diffuse reciprocity, which emphasises long-term benefits rather than immediate quid pro quo exchanges can be seen in the EU's long-term strategic partnerships with countries such as Japan, India and Australia. These relationships are not based on immediate returns but on building lasting ties that contribute to regional stability and mutual prosperity. Therefore, we can see the EU's multilateral approach, as aligned with Ruggie's framework, demonstrates its commitment to fostering long-term cooperation and collective security in the Indo-Pacific. By embedding these principles into its foreign policy, the EU not only strengthens regional ties but also positions itself as a key actor in the evolving security dynamics of the region. However, the EU's effectiveness is sometimes limited by the

challenges of aligning its diverse member states' interests under a unified strategy, which can undermine the indivisibility of its multilateral efforts. Despite these challenges, the EU's adherence to Ruggie's principles underscores its potential as an effective and impactful contributor to the Indo-Pacific region, even as it navigates the complexities of regional and global politics.

Analysing the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy through the dual lenses of security cooperation and multilateralism demonstrates how these two concepts are deeply interconnected. Security cooperation provides the practical mechanisms and tools with which the EU engages with the region while multilateralism provides the strategic foundation and a broader context for the engagements. This cross-analysis shows that the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific is not one-dimensional but rather based on an integrated approach that they are integrated into a broader multilateral framework. For instance, the EU's efforts to enhance maritime security in the Indo-Pacific are not pursued in isolation but rather they are integrated into a broader multilateral framework. The EU's participation in regional security dialogues such as the ASEAN Regional Forum allows it to coordinate its maritime security initiatives with regional actors, ensuring that its efforts are aligned with broader regional strategies (European Commission & High Representative, 2021). This integration of security cooperation within a multilateral framework enhances the effectiveness of the EU's actions and helps to build a more cohesive regional security architecture. The decision to analyse the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy through both security cooperation and multilateralism was important for several reasons. First, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the EU's engagement in the region by considering both the practical and strategic dimensions of the EU's actions and it provides a more comprehensive insight into how the EU is positioning itself in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, this dual analysis highlights the interdependence of security cooperation and multilateralism in the EU's strategy as it shows that the EU's ability to effectively address security challenges in the Indo-Pacific is closely linked to its success in promoting multilateral cooperation.

5.2 Recommendations

The Indo-Pacific is marked by a complex and fragmented security environment with territorial disputes, military tensions and non-traditional security threats, further complicated by diverse political systems and strategic cultures. Internal challenges within the EU also

pose obstacles to the implementation of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Moreover, conflicts in regions closer to Europe such as in the Gaza Strip and between Russia and Ukraine further strain the commitment of EU member states to the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, the EU's limited military and economic capabilities compared to the great powers in the region constrain its ability to project power and influence in the Indo-Pacific (European Parliament, 2022). To address such challenges and enhance the effectiveness of its Indo-Pacific strategy and the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific region, the EU must consider several recommendations.

Improving Internal Coherence

One of the most important is that the European Union must prioritise improving internal coherence among its Member States to effectively implement its Indo-Pacific strategy. Given the diverse economic, political and security interests of its 27 member states, achieving a unified approach is often challenging. However, the success of the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific depends on presenting a cohesive and consistent policy front which can be facilitated through more specific coordination mechanisms within the EU, such as the establishment of regular high-level dialogues specifically focused on the Indo-Pacific region. These dialogues could serve as platforms for Member States to align their national policies with the broader strategic objectives of the Union, ensuring that differing national interests do not undermine the EU's collective approach. Moreover, the EU should consider creating a dedicated Indo-Pacific task force within its existing institutional framework. This task force could be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, identifying areas where Member State policies diverge from EU goals and proposing methods to reconcile these differences. By fostering a more unified approach, the EU can enhance its strategic autonomy and present a stronger more consistent presence in the Indo-Pacific, which is essential for maintaining credibility and influence in the region. A coherent internal strategy would also enable the EU to act more swiftly and decisively in response to emerging security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, further solidifying its role as a key player in regional affairs.

Strengthening Partnerships

In addition to enhancing internal coherence, the EU must continue to strengthen its multilateral partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The region's complex geopolitical landscape requires a collaborative approach and the EU's success will largely depend on its ability to build and sustain strong partnerships with states and regional organisations. ASEAN remains

vital to the EU's multilateral strategy in the Indo-Pacific and as such strengthening ties with ASEAN is crucial as it serves as a central platform for regional diplomacy with significant influence on security and economic policies across Southeast Asia (Stubbs, 2019). The EU should further deepen its engagement with ASEAN by participating more actively in ASEAN-led initiatives such as the ARF and the EAS. Furthermore, the EU should explore the possibility of establishing new partnerships with emerging regional powers such as South Korea, Indonesia, New Zealand and Singapore that share the EU's commitment to a regional stability and security. These partnerships could be formalised through strategic agreements that focus on areas of mutual interest such as trade, security and sustainable development. Moreover, the IORA presents another important aspect where the EU has been an IORA dialogue partner since 2001 and as such this relationship should be further developed to address the growing security and economic challenges in the Indian Ocean. By building on its existing partnerships and seeking out new opportunities for collaboration such as with SAARC and PIF, the EU can enhance its influence in the Indo-Pacific and contribute to a more stable and cooperative regional order. This in turn would make up for the EU's absence in the region until recently and increase the EU's ability to protect its interests in the region while promoting global governance and regional stability.

The EU's Soft Power

To effectively address the multifaceted challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the EU should leverage its soft power as a key strategic tool. By emphasizing diplomatic engagement, cultural exchange and development assistance, the EU can foster collaboration and build trust among regional partners, ultimately contributing to long-term stability and security. While the EU already employs soft power effectively on the global stage as a primary instrument of its foreign policy, greater emphasis should be placed on its use in the Indo-Pacific, where it is particularly useful in tackling non-traditional security challenges. The region faces a range of security issues such as cybersecurity challenges, transnational crime and terrorism, all of which require a coordinated and multifaceted response (Vosse, 2022). The EU has already made attempts at leveraging its soft power to address these issues but there is potential for further expansion and enhancement of its soft power initiatives. Expanding capacity-building programmes in cybersecurity is one area where the EU can make a substantial impact. By providing technical assistance and training to Indo-Pacific countries, the EU can help these nations strengthen their cyber defences and resilience against cyberattacks. This not only contributes to regional stability but also protects the EU's

own digital infrastructure from being compromised by vulnerabilities in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, the EU can enhance its efforts in combating transnational crime by working closely with regional partners to improve law enforcement capabilities and promote the rule of law. This could involve offering support for the development of regional frameworks for addressing human trafficking, drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime. Moreover, the EU's soft power can be further leveraged through cultural diplomacy and educational exchanges, which help to build long-term relationships and mutual understanding with Indo-Pacific countries. By investing in people-to-people connections, the EU can foster goodwill and strengthen its influence in the region. These efforts are particularly important in countering the influence of other global powers that may prioritise hard power approaches over cooperative and inclusive strategies. Through these initiatives, the EU can position itself as a partner of choice in the Indo-Pacific, contributing to regional stability while advancing its own security and economic interests.

The U.S – China Rivalry

Navigating the great power competition between the United States and China is one of the most significant challenges the EU faces in the Indo-Pacific. The EU's approach to this competition should be characterised by a commitment to neutrality, where possible and a focus on promoting a rules-based international order. Rather than aligning itself too closely with either actor, the EU should emphasise its role as an independent actor that seeks to uphold international law, human rights and multilateralism. To effectively balance the competition, the EU could adopt a more nuanced strategy that involves promoting confidence-building measures between the United States and China. This could include facilitating dialogue on key security issues such as maritime security and nuclear non-proliferation which can cover the interests of all parties. By acting as a mediator, the EU can help to reduce tensions and prevent the escalation of conflicts that could destabilise the region. Additionally, the EU should work to strengthen its strategic autonomy by deepening its ties with other regional powers such as Japan, India and Australia. These countries share the EU's commitment to a rules-based international order and can serve as important partners in counterbalancing the influence of the United States and China. Moreover, the EU must consider establishing new partnerships and strengthening existing ones with other Indo-Pacific states, such as Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, New Zealand, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, particularly those with strong ties to China. Engaging with these states will not only broaden the EU's influence in the region but also provide a balanced

approach to its Indo-Pacific strategy. Furthermore, the EU's emphasis on economic diplomacy can play a crucial role in balancing great power competition. By promoting trade and investment agreements that are based on fair and transparent practises, the EU can offer an alternative to the economic strategies pursued by the United States and China which would allow the EU to maintain its economic interests in the region while avoiding competing with the two great powers. Ultimately, the EU's ability to navigate this competition will depend on its capacity to assert its values and interests without becoming entangled in the geopolitical rivalries of other powers.

Increase the EUs credibility

Finally, the EU must work to increase its visibility and presence in the Indo-Pacific to effectively implement its strategic objectives as a stronger presence in the region will not only enhance the EU's ability to influence regional developments but also demonstrate its commitment to the Indo-Pacific as a key area of interest. The EU can achieve this is by expanding the EU's naval presence in the region, particularly through initiatives such as the CMP concept. By increasing its naval presence, the EU can better support its maritime security objectives, such as ensuring the freedom of navigation and protecting critical sea lanes. In addition to expanding its naval presence, the EU should also enhance its diplomatic and economic engagement with regional partners. This could involve establishing more EU delegations in Indo-Pacific countries, increasing high-level visits by EU officials and participating more actively in regional forums and dialogues. By strengthening its diplomatic presence, the EU can build stronger relationships with regional partners and gain greater influence in shaping the regional agenda. Furthermore, the EU should invest in public diplomacy efforts to raise awareness of its activities and initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. This could include launching targeted communication campaigns, engaging with local media and supporting cultural and educational exchanges. By increasing its visibility in the region, the EU can build a positive image making it a more attractive partner for Indo-Pacific countries.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to explore the European Union's emerging role in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly with regard to security cooperation amidst the shifting geopolitical dynamics of the region. The choice of this case study was due to its importance and relevance in current global affairs as the Indo-Pacific has rapidly emerged as a critical region in global geopolitics. Thus, making it an ideal case study to analyse the EU's evolving foreign policy and its efforts to assert itself as a global actor. The region's complexities, ranging from traditional security challenges such as maritime disputes to non-traditional issues such as climate change and transnational crime, require nuanced and multifaceted approaches, making it crucial to assess how the EU navigates this landscape.

The research goals aimed to discuss how achievable the EU's increased engagement in the region would be while also addressing how geopolitical shifts and emerging security threats affect the EU's strategy. To answer the main research question of how viable the European Union's emerging Indo-Pacific presence in terms of security cooperation is, this thesis discussed the EU's actions and the challenges it faces as it seeks to navigate the increasingly complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. The first research sub-question examined how geopolitical shifts, particularly the rise of China and the influence of the United States, have impacted EU-Indo-Pacific cooperation and the analysis showed that in response, the EU has to assert itself as a global actor through actively participating in initiatives and partnerships with regional organisations such as ASEAN and other states in the region. The second sub-question of this research explored the key security challenges emerging in the Indo-Pacific, reviewing both traditional and non-traditional security issues, of which the analysis showed that while the EU has responded to these multifaceted threats through security cooperation, gaps in coordination among the EU member States and with regional actors, the diversity of the Indo-Pacific region and historical context hinder a fully comprehensive approach. The final sub-question examined how the EU can effectively address Indo-Pacific security challenges through cooperation, concluding that a multilateral approach is essential for maintaining influence. While partnerships with regional organisations such as ASEAN and IORA enhance the EU's role, exploring new partnerships with Indo-Pacific states and organisations as well as resolving internal divisions among EU member states is vital to ensure a unified and effective presence.

The conceptual framework of this research was based on the two core concepts of security cooperation and multilateralism. While these concepts differ in scope and

operational tools, they are deeply interconnected in the EU's approach. Security cooperation is more focused on direct, targeted engagements such as counterterrorism, maritime security and disaster relief, whereas multilateralism refers to broader efforts such as forming alliances with regional organisations to promote stability and collective action. The interplay of these two concepts is important as the EU cannot act alone or rely solely on unilateral partnerships in a region dominated by complex power dynamics and great power competition. This research, through its in-depth analysis, emphasises the importance of a balanced strategy with multilateral initiatives focused on security cooperation to strengthen the EU's standing in the region and to contribute to shaping a stable, secure, and rules-based Indo-Pacific order.

The findings from the security cooperation analysis chapter revealed that the EU has made progress over the recent years in addressing both traditional and non-traditional security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. To address maritime security issues, a critical concern in this region, the EU's efforts to strengthen its naval presence through initiatives such as the Coordinated Maritime Presences in the Indian Ocean were discussed, which aims to ensure freedom of navigation and secure vital trade routes, especially in regions marked by territorial disputes and military tensions. Other traditional security issues the EU's security cooperation focuses on are counterterrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction through partnerships and dialogues with states and organisations. To address non-traditional security issues, the EU has made efforts to combat climate change and transnational crime, which are increasingly recognized as critical security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the challenge remains for the EU to balance its economic interests, such as maintaining strong trade relations, with its security priorities. The findings suggest that despite these initiatives, traditional and non-traditional challenges remain due to the difficulties in coherence among EU member states as well as in fostering effective coordination with regional actors. The EU's attempts to engage with the Indo-Pacific in terms of security cooperation have been relatively successful but obstacles such as limited naval capabilities, internal divisions and resource constraints have delayed its effectiveness.

The chapter analysing multilateralism highlights that multilateralism plays a key role in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. The EU's diplomatic engagement and partnerships with regional organizations such as ASEAN and IORA underscore its reliance on multilateral frameworks to increase security cooperation. The analysis also emphasized how these partnerships are not only a means of promoting regional stability but also for the EU to enhance its influence in a region of intense geopolitical competition. By aligning with

regional actors through multilateral agreements, the EU is able to project itself as a legitimate and non-coercive actor, differentiating its approach from that of major powers such as China and the U.S., who often take more unilateral or bilateral approaches. Despite the EU's commitment to multilateralism, the research also identified several challenges that impact the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. One key challenge is the geopolitical division within the Indo-Pacific, where regional actors have different views on multilateralism and different priorities. This study also found that while organizations such as ASEAN advocate for an inclusive and cooperative Indo-Pacific, states tend to prioritize national interests and objectives over multilateralism creating tensions in multilateral forums, which the EU. Additionally, the EU itself faces institutional limitations and coordination challenges that impact its ability to act cohesively in multilateral settings while also adapting to the evolving nature of security issues.

Ultimately, the thesis provides not only an overview of the EU's current strategies but also recommendations suggesting that its success in the Indo-Pacific region depends on a cohesive and collaborative approach. With rising tensions between global powers, growing security challenges and the impact of climate change, there is a role for the EU to play as a mediator, partner, supporter and leader in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics, the EU's ability to adapt, engage and lead through both security cooperation and multilateral frameworks will determine its role and longevity.

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