



Report



EU-PACIFIC TALKS | CHARTING THE COURSE FOR UKRAINE: REASSESSMENT OF THE INDO-PACIFIC

Zuzana Augustová

January 2024

About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Introduction

Another debate from the **EU-Pacific Talks series** hosted by EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy focused on **Charting the course for Ukraine: Reassessment of the Indo-Pacific**. Experts who joined the debate were **Benedetta Girardi**, a Strategic Analyst at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, **Takashi Kurai**, the Former Ambassador of Japan to Ukraine, and **Benjamin Tallis**, a Senior Research Fellow from the German Council on Foreign Relations.

Over 600 days have passed since Russia invaded Ukraine, and many countries have demonstrated their willingness to aid in Ukraine's recovery. In light of greater engagement in the region, the question of whether the Indo-Pacific region remains the **primary battlefield for significant power competition arises**. With 2024 being the super-election year with elections worldwide, including the US presidential and European Parliament elections, panellists debated changing focus with potential election results.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

Mr. Takashi Kurai spoke about how the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has been one of the impulses **to reconfirm the world's importance of the region**. Several elements were pointed out that could have resulted from the war, such as further strengthening the relationship between Russia and China. He also expressed concern about the significance of the Taiwanese issue in the Chinese-Russian relationship, which he believes to be of great importance. Ms. Benedetta Girardi argued that the war did not divert attention from the Indo-Pacific region but strengthened its focus by reintroducing great power competition. She then pointed out that while the US's focus remained unchanged despite the conflict, the EU shifted towards the Russian and Ukrainian front. However, the Indo-Pacific was not forgotten as **the EU continued efforts to strengthen regional alliances**.

GLOBAL TRADE

Ms. Girardi highlighted the interconnectedness of **Europe and the Indo-Pacific regions regarding trade**. She stated that most global trade moves via sea, with 80 % of all international trade by volume and 70 % by value. Therefore, this trade depends on safe passage through selected checkpoints such as the South China Sea and Suez Canal, which could be highly vulnerable to disruption, especially by geopolitical risks, if a great power war erupts in the Indo-Pacific region. Ms. Girardi stated that two issues in Europe make it challenging to safeguard these points and trades: the long distance involved and Europe's limited maritime capabilities.

EUROPEAN SECURITY

Mr. Tallis emphasised **the importance of democracy**, quoting Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Lipavský, who said that democracy is the need to stand up for each other - in this case in Ukraine and Taiwan. Later, he stressed the need for Europe to address its geopolitical vulnerabilities, especially the ongoing dependence on China and Chinese companies. In his opinion, Europe should step up in two ways. The first is to get the geoeconomic relationship right with a straightforward, assertive approach. Secondly, he thinks Europe should step up militarily since Europeans should get their front covered by giving Ukraine the military needs and weapons that Ukraine demands. According to Mr. Tallis, there will be **no stable European security order without a victory of some kind in Ukraine**. During a discussion, Mr. Kurai stated that supporting Ukraine is essential for many reasons. He explained that if a country like Russia can achieve its objectives through military means, it could upset the established international order. He emphasised that the world does not want any country to succeed through military aggression.

NUCLEAR POLICY

During the debate, Mr. Kurai expressed his opinion on nuclear policy. He initially stated that the world should aim for a peaceful future without the need for nuclear weapons. However, he later suggested that if Ukraine had nuclear weapons, it would not have been attacked. Currently, Ukraine receives support from nuclear countries such as the US and the UK, which prevents Russia from using nuclear weapons against them. Therefore, Mr. Kurai suggested that if nuclear power is the only way to avoid war, then all countries should possess it. He concluded that **the world and decision-makers should think more seriously about nuclear sharing.**

LAST REMARKS

During the last part of the debate, Ms. Girardi highlighted the importance of all elections, specifically the US presidential elections. Mr. Tallis supported her point by stressing the importance of Europe to start thinking about the potential outcome of the polls. In conclusion, all experts agreed that a community of allies is needed to support Ukraine fully and that the EU and its relations with **the US and Indo-Pacific should be critical topics on all agendas now.**