



National Convention on the EU

The EU relations with the Indo-Pacific from the Czech perspective

Dr. Tereza Novotná
Alexandra Visnerová

June 2022

“The world's centre of gravity is moving towards the Indo Pacific, both in geo-economic and geo-political terms. The futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are interlinked. The EU is already the top investor, the leading development cooperation partner and one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Our engagement aims at maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific for all, while building strong and lasting partnerships to cooperate on matters from the green transition, ocean governance or the digital agenda to security and defence.”

Josep Borrell, 16 September 2021¹

¹ Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference on the Joint Communication introducing the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, 16 September 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_4704.



Introduction

Despite their significant geographical distance, the European Union (EU) and the Indo-Pacific have been increasingly mutually interconnected and the strategic weight of the Indo-Pacific has considerably grown over the recent years for the EU as well as globally. At the same time, however, the Indo-Pacific has become a geographic region with continuously rising political tensions that bring a greater security risk for the Czech Republic and the entire EU. From the security point of view, the Indo-Pacific has been marked by China's mounting geopolitical and economic influence and a more aggressive rhetoric and behaviour by Chinese authorities towards Taiwan, Hong Kong and the South China Sea area, as well as by other conflicts, such as in Myanmar/Burma, Afghanistan and the Korean peninsula. Moreover, as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it remains to be seen whether and how not only China but also other Indo-Pacific states will react to the Russian aggression, including their compliance with sanctions against the Russian Federation.

The United States (US), the EU as a whole and several member states (e.g. Germany, France and the Netherlands) have responded to international political changes in the Indo-Pacific by publishing their own strategies for this region. The Czech Republic has been working on such a strategy; nonetheless, with the upcoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, the situation in the Indo-Pacific is one of Czechia's main priorities. Given the reasons above, the following issues should be discussed at the National Convention:

- 1. How will the war in Ukraine impact a new geopolitical context in the Indo-Pacific, including relations with China, and how should the EU react?*

In 2019, European institutions characterised China as the EU's negotiating partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. Since then, however, bilateral relations have deteriorated (see freezing of the EU-China agreement on investment and the mutual imposition of sanctions as well as economic coercion against Lithuania). During the same period of time, military activities in the South China Sea have been on the rise, while human rights and freedoms in Hong Kong and Xinjiang have been further restricted. Moreover, as a result of the war in Ukraine, a new realignment of forces based on shared values emerges with not



only China but also, for instance, India and several ASEAN countries that insist on their 'neutrality' while they neither condemn the Russian aggression nor support international sanctions. What impact might these changes have on the world order and relations between the EU and the Indo-Pacific? How should the EU react in case the security situation in the region deteriorates, especially around Taiwan? How could the Czech Republic contribute to reshaping the European strategy towards China? To what extent can the European strategy counter China's influence in the region by sufficiently strengthening the EU's relations with India?

2. What other partners should the EU cooperate with and which should the Czech Republic focus on as a priority during its Presidency of the Council of the EU?

The Indo-Pacific is an area of many opportunities for closer cooperation. In the context of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, a series of events has been planned in Prague and partner countries with partners from the Indo-Pacific. In addition, the anniversary EU-ASEAN Summit will take place during the Czech EU Presidency in December 2022. It is therefore evident that some countries must be prioritised. At the same time, the Czech Republic maintains very good relations with South Korea, Japan and India, whereas Cambodia is one of the project countries for Czech development aid. Moreover, negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and New Zealand will likely be concluded during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. Last but not least, the Czech Republic is one of a few countries with diplomatic representation in the DPRK. Which of these countries, or groups of countries, should be strategically targeted? How can the Czech Republic contribute to the development of cooperation between the EU and ASEAN as well as other partners in the Indo-Pacific?

3. Which sectors within the framework of its Indo-Pacific strategy should the EU primarily focus on and which sectors should the Czech Republic prioritize during its Presidency of the Council of the EU?

The EU Indo-Pacific strategy identifies a number of sectors where the EU could collaborate more deeply with its Indo-Pacific partners: from sustainable development and the fight against current and future pandemics through foreign trade and connectivity (including its follow-up Global Gateway Strategy) up to cooperation on digitalisation and cybersecurity. Which of these sectors should the EU focus on? Which of these areas should the Czech Republic prioritise during its



Presidency of the Council of the EU, or in tandem with other countries within the Presidency Trio?

How will the war in Ukraine impact a new geopolitical context in the Indo-Pacific, including relations with China, and how should the EU react?

In the opening quote from a press conference marking the publication of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in September 2021, High Representative Josep Borrell outlines a shift in "the world's centre of gravity... towards the Indo-Pacific, both in geo-economic and geopolitical terms." High Representative Borrell then discusses possible areas for cooperation with the Indo-Pacific partners which is the subject of the following two sections of this briefing paper. From a geopolitical perspective, however, the Indo-Pacific is not only an area of many opportunities, but also a region with rising political and security tensions that are closely linked to the mounting economic and political clout of the People's Republic of China (PRC)/China and a geopolitical competition with the United States. This aspect will be addressed in this first section.

In February 2022, the United States published its Indo-Pacific strategy.² Apart from global issues such as combating climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic and nuclear proliferation, the strategy identifies China as the central challenge both for the Indo-Pacific and other parts of the world. It is however the Indo-Pacific where the PRC's aggression and coercion are felt most acutely which is why the US Indo-Pacific Strategy aims not at changing China, but transforming the strategic environment in which Beijing operates with the help of partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. According to the US strategists, building a free, open, connected, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific is creating a counterweight to the attempts by the Chinese leadership to make the region a sphere of Chinese influence.

By explicitly targeting China in its US Indo-Pacific strategy, the Biden administration follows on the previous – Trump – administration, but with a crucial difference: Biden's team seeks to bring all of its allies – in the Indo-Pacific, Europe

² Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States [online]. In: The White House. February 2022: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>. See particularly p. 5, 6 and 18.



and elsewhere – to its side. Regarding China, and by extension the Indo-Pacific, we can therefore observe a relatively high degree of continuity between Biden and Trump, rather than Biden and Obama³ or other Democratic predecessors, in the White House, even though Obama's failed attempts to create transatlantic and transpacific trade zones were partly motivated by a desire to curb Beijing's growing economic influence through setting standards of trade that the PRC would have to follow.⁴ In any case, there is clearly a bipartisan consensus in the US Congress⁵ that orients US foreign policy towards competition with China and to the Indo-Pacific in particular. The EU, and therefore the Czech Republic, will have to tackle in the future this diverging point of view on the Indo-Pacific, including in the context of transatlantic relations.

On a practical level, in addition to the release of its Indo-Pacific strategy, the US has focused on creating new alliances and blocs within the Indo-Pacific. On the one hand, the so-called Quad, or a 'Group of Four' (i.e. a quadrilateral security dialogue between the US, Australia, India and Japan), aims to counter China's political and economic expansion but also, for instance, provide a billion of covid-19 vaccines to the Indo-Pacific states and therefore to curb China's 'vaccine diplomacy' in the region. On the other hand, in September 2021, the so-called "AUKUS"⁶ deal between Australia, UK and the US was agreed upon where Australia will build nuclear-powered submarines based on technology provided by the US. However, as a result of the AUKUS, Australia unilaterally and unexpectedly terminated its previous contract on supplying submarines by France whose officials and politicians were not informed in advance by their Australian counterparts about the cancellation of the multi-billion dollar transaction, leading to a rift in trilateral ties. Although relations between Presidents Biden and Macron have since been mended, France nevertheless does not see Australia as a credible

³ NOVOTNÁ, Tereza. The European Union and Korea between the US and China: geopolitical aspects of connectivity from the soft to hard power approaches, *Ordnungspolitische Diskurse*, Vol. 11/2021, May 2021 <http://ordnungspolitisches-portal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-11-Novotna-pdf>

⁴ MORIN, Jean-Frederic, Tereza NOVOTNÁ, Frederik PONJAERT a Mario TELÒ. *The Politics of Transatlantic Trade Negotiations: TTIP in a Globalized World*. London: Routledge, 2016. ISBN 9781315554181

⁵ Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States [online]. In: The White House. February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>. p. 5.

⁶AUKUS: UK, US and Australia launch pact to counter China [online], BBC. 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837>



and transparent partner and has therefore removed Australia from its list of the key allies in the Indo-Pacific.⁷

Although the European Union, through the words of European Council President Michel,⁸ has stood up for France, it is neither in the interest of the EU as a whole nor the Czech Republic to escalate relations with Australia any further, partly given Australia's role as a like-minded partner in the Indo-Pacific and partly given Australia's tough stance on China which has imposed an embargo on imports of Australian beef and other products following the Australian Government's call for an international investigation into the origin of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in China. Moreover, the EU is negotiating a free trade agreement with Australia that should not become a victim of the split between France and Australia. A possible improvement in bilateral relations could follow after the federal elections that had been called by Australian Prime Minister Morrison for 21 May 2022,⁹ should a new government be elected.

By emphasizing a free and open Indo-Pacific as a counterbalance to the PRC, the US Indo-Pacific strategy differs from both the EU strategy and similar documents by France, Germany and the Netherlands that had preceded the European strategy. While the German strategy from summer 2020 makes several references to the US-China competition¹⁰ and the need to avoid having to choose sides, the French strategy alludes to geopolitical changes in the Indo-Pacific with references to China's growing power and the rivalry with the US¹¹. The Dutch strategy then warns against the Indo-Pacific becoming a pawn, or spoils, to the Sino-US competition. However, unlike the US document, neither of the European strategies mentions China as one of the main reasons why one country, or the other, or the entire European continent, should focus on the Indo-Pacific.

⁷ NUSSBAUM, Ania. *France Drops Australia From List of Key Indo-Pacific Partners* [online]. Bloomberg, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-22/france-drops-australia-from-list-of-key-indo-pacific-partners>

⁸HAYNES, Danielle. *Top EU leader Charles Michel calls for 'transparency' after AUKUS sub deal* [online]. UPI, 2021. https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2021/09/24/eu-charles-michel-general-assembly/9801632503805/

⁹WORTHINGTON, Brett a Georgia HITCH. *Scott Morrison calls federal election for May 21, setting up battle with Labor's Anthony Albanese* [online]. ABC News, 2022. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-10/may-21-election-scott-morrison-anthony-albanese-coalition-labor/100903580>

¹⁰ Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region: Germany – Europe – Asia: shaping the 21st century together [online]. In: The Federal Government of Germany. September 2020, p. 9, 35 and 56 <https://rangun.diplo.de/blob/2380824/a27b62057f2d2675ce2bbfc5be01099a/policy-guidelines-summary-data.pdf>

¹¹France's Indo-Pacific Strategy [online]. In: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France. 2022, p. 9. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf



The European Indo-Pacific Strategy builds on the EU's previous strategy towards China from March 2019 which classifies the PRC as simultaneously "a negotiating partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival."¹² The Indo-Pacific Strategy views China's role in terms of synergies in issues of common interest, such as climate change, but also in terms of the need to seek answers in areas where the EU and PRC positions fundamentally diverge, particularly with regard to protection of human rights.¹³ In another section, the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy points out that a progress in ratifying the Europe-China Agreement on Investment (CAI) is in the interest of both Europe and China.¹⁴

This investment agreement (CAI) with Beijing was negotiated by the European Commission with input from the German EU Presidency in December 2020. However, in March 2021, a European version of the "Magnitsky Act" was passed and the EU imposed targeted sanctions on four Chinese citizens and one entity for human rights abuses against Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang.¹⁵ In retaliation, the Chinese government decided on much more extensive sanctions against several members of national and the European parliament, including the chair of the EP Delegation with China, the entire EP Subcommittee on Human Rights, the Political and Security Committee consisting of 27 ambassadors of EU Member States and several experts on China, including a specialised Berlin think tank.¹⁶ In response, the EP adopted a resolution that the CAI should not be concluded under such circumstances.¹⁷

Although the PRC proceeded to ratify several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on forced labour in April 2022¹⁸ that could potentially apply to the situation in Xinjiang, the CAI treaty will not be approved by the EP until the

¹²EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *EU-China Strategic Outlook: Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council (21-22 March 2019)* [online]. https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en

¹³EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific [online]. In: EEAS and European Commission. 19.04.2021, p. 4. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en

¹⁴ EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific [online]. In: EEAS and European Commission. 19.04.2021, p. 7: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en

¹⁵ EUR-LEX. *COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2021/478 of 22 March 2021* [online]. March 2021. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0478>

¹⁶*China's sanctions over EU officials and entities are justified and timely: Global Times editorial* [online]. Global Times, March 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202103/1219143.shtml>

¹⁷ MEPs refuse any agreement with China whilst sanctions are in place [online]. European Parliament, May 2021. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04123/meps-refuse-any-agreement-with-china-while-sanctions-are-in-place>

¹⁸ *ILO welcomes China's move towards the ratification of two forced labour Conventions* [online]. International Labour Organization, April 2022. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_842739/lang--en/index.htm



Chinese side removes its sanctions. This was also brought to the attention of Chinese President Xi Jinping by Commission President von der Leyen and President Michel during the EU-China summit in early April 2022.¹⁹ Nonetheless, due to the US-China "phase one" trade deal from January 2020,²⁰ reaching a level playing field on the Chinese market would be beneficial both for the Czech Republic and the EU.

The EU-China summit also included two other topics: the PRC's coercive measures against Lithuania and Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The former issue pertains to the imposition of Chinese trade embargo on all Lithuanian products because Lithuania allowed to open a 'Taiwan', rather than 'Taipei', representative office in Vilnius. In the meantime, the European Commission has brought a case before the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against the Chinese measures in order to protect not only an EU Member State, but also the European single market given the fact that the PRC has threatened with secondary sanctions to businesses from other European countries that were using Lithuania-made parts in their products. The Lithuanian case shows the need to reflect on a situation in which China would start using trade as a means of coercion against other countries, or the EU as a whole, whether in relation to Taiwan or other issues. From the point of view of the Czech Republic, it is interesting to compare the reaction to the trip of the President of the Czech Senate, Miloš Vystrčil, to Taiwan in August 2020, during which Chinese Foreign Minister Wang threatened the Czech Republic that it would pay a heavy price for the visit.²¹ Nonetheless, the situation eventually ended with mutual summons of ambassadors and cancellation of a delivery of Petrof pianos²² from the Chinese side. At that time, the Czech Republic received a direct backing by the German and French foreign ministers and a general cooling off of the Czech-Chinese relations ensued.

The attitude towards the war in Ukraine was the most important topic of the EU-China summit and is an issue that may influence both European and Czech relations with China and other Indo-Pacific countries for a long time ahead.

¹⁹EU-China summit: Restoring peace and stability in Ukraine is a shared responsibility [online]. European Council, April 2022. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/04/01/eu-china-summit-restoring-peace-and-stability-in-ukraine-is-a-shared-responsibility/>

²⁰Julia Friedlander, 2020. Furor Over Europe's Investment Agreement with China is Overblown." <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/furor-over-europe's-investment-agreementchina-overblown-175397>

²¹ BLANCHARD, Ben a Yew LUN TIAN. Czech senate speaker will pay 'heavy price' for Taiwan visit, China says [online]. Reuters, August 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-czech-china-idUSKBN25R059>

²²Prague must show goodwill to mend market confidence [online]. Global Times, 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1200059.shtml>



Whereas some countries such as Australia, Japan, Indonesia and Singapore have clearly taken the side of Ukraine and international sanctions against Russia, other states such as South Korea have joined the anti-Russian sanctions only gradually and under pressure while others, like the majority of the ASEAN countries,²³ are only calling for an end to the conflict through diplomatic channels. Similarly, India insists on its "neutrality"²⁴ and seeks to create a payment mechanism that would circumvent the anti-Russian sanctions to continue buying a cheap Russian oil.²⁵ The position of India and countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines is partly baffling because India expects the support of the US and other countries in its border disputes with China and, besides, India is an American ally in the Quad. Similarly, states in the South China Sea expect Western backing in their maritime disputes with China which is violating their sovereignty, but they are not at the moment willing to support Ukraine, a country whose sovereignty has actually been flagrantly violated by the Russian invasion. This raises clear questions of reciprocity, whether a new realignment of forces based on shared values as a result of the war in Ukraine emerges and to what extent it is possible to rely on certain alliances.

A partial response to why some Indo-Pacific states are reluctant to clearly side with Europe and others in the war in Ukraine may stem from their desire not to provoke China which has neither condemned the Russian aggression nor supported the international sanctions. During the vote in the UN General Assembly on resolution condemning the Russian aggression and demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine in early March 2022, 35 countries abstained, including the PRC (141 states were in favour, 5 against it),²⁶ which was interpreted both in positive and negative terms. Apart from that, Chinese officials were asked by their Russian counterparts for economic and military assistance. In early April 2022, during an EP debate on the EU-China summit, HRVP Borrell stated that Foreign Minister Wang had assured him that the PRC had no plans to provide any military assistance to Russia and that Russia's use of weapons of mass destruction was a

²³ JAIPRAGAS, Bhavan. *Ukraine invasion: Singapore's condemnation aside, rest of Asean's ambivalence is 'shocking'* [online]. This Week in Asia, February 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3168419/ukraine-invasion-singapores-condemnation-aside-rest-aseans>

²⁴ KIRBY, Jen. *Why India isn't denouncing Russia's Ukraine war* [online]. Vox, March 2022. <https://www.vox.com/22982698/india-russia-ukraine-war-putin-modi>

²⁵ VERMA, Nidhi. *India says focus is on stabilising economic ties with Russia* [online]. Reuters, April 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/india-says-focus-is-stabilising-economic-ties-with-russia-2022-04-07/>

²⁶ GRANITZ, Peter a Joe HERNANDEZ. *The U.N. approves a resolution demanding that Russia end the invasion of Ukraine* [online]. NPR, March 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/02/1083872077/u-n-set-to-hold-vote-that-would-demand-russia-end-war-in-ukraine?t=1650491222349&t=1650525513112>



red line for Beijing - which could, according to Borrell, be potentially used in discussions about another UN resolution.²⁷

China nonetheless keeps siding with Russia in its domestic media and foreign propaganda and has sent a special envoy, Ms Chu, a former ambassador to the Czech Republic and Romania, to Central Europe, including Czechia, to clarify "misunderstandings" about China's position on the war in Ukraine.²⁸ Moreover, from the point of view of the Indo-Pacific, it is important to observe what lessons the PRC will learn both from how the Russian attack on Ukraine has been progressing on the ground and from reactions to this aggression in Europe, the US and elsewhere with a view of a possible invasion of Taiwan in order to unify the island with mainland China. Such an invasion would significantly escalate the situation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly if it was to take place at the time of an ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. It would therefore be advisable to prepare in advance for such a theoretical possibility and discuss any potential alternative responses.

Which other partners should the EU cooperate with and which should the Czech Republic focus on as a priority during its Presidency of the Council of the EU?

Despite growing political tensions, the Indo-Pacific is primarily an area of many opportunities for a closer cooperation. In 2019, trade in goods between Europe and the Indo-Pacific reached €1.5 trillion, or 70% of global trade in goods and services, while the EU remains one of the most important sources of foreign investment and development aid for the region. However, in addition to geopolitical tensions, the Indo-Pacific also faces environmental and energy problems, the consequences of urbanisation and challenges with protection of human rights and rule of law.

From the historical perspective, the "Indo-Pacific" as a term was adopted only in the last decade when it gradually replaced the previously prevalent concept of

²⁷ *EU-China Summit: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP plenary*[online]. EEAS, April 2022. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-summit-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

²⁸ XIN, Liu. *Veteran Chinese envoy heads CEEC visit, to clarify misunderstanding over Ukraine*[online]. Global Times, April 2022. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1259758.shtml>



"Asia-Pacific".²⁹ The Indo-Pacific debate in Europe was initiated by French President Macron who commissioned the first regional strategy in 2018. What is special about the French perspective is that a part of its overseas territories and departments is located in the Indo-Pacific where about 1.65 million French citizens live.³⁰ In addition, France has around 7,000 troops permanently stationed in the Indo-Pacific. France is therefore the only EU Member State which is a resident power in the Indo-Pacific. France was followed by Germany and the Netherlands that published their strategies during 2020. As export-dependent countries, both Germany and the Netherlands consider the Indo-Pacific to be an important zone because of its maritime trade routes and as a market for their products.

The European Union first adopted the Council conclusions in April 2021, asking the European Commission and the High Representative to present an EU Indo-Pacific Strategy. This strategy was indeed presented by President von der Leyen and High Representative Borrell in September 2021. The EU strategy puts forward a series of principles for cooperation (e.g. promoting the rules-based international order, access to open markets) to contribute to building a stable and secure environment in the Indo-Pacific and lists seven main European priority areas: sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnerships, connectivity, security and defence and human security in the context of combating the current and future pandemics.³¹

From the geographical perspective, the EU strategy emphasises the centrality of ASEAN as an advocate of an effective multilateralism, while the other Indo-Pacific strategies (German, French, Dutch and partly American) have a similar approach. The EU's relationship with ASEAN was founded more than 40 years ago and it was upgraded to a strategic partnership at the end of 2020 - the first strategic partnership between the EU and another international organisation and the EU's fifth in Asia (apart from China, India, South Korea and Japan). Moreover, during the upcoming Czech EU Presidency, an anniversary EU-ASEAN Summit will take place in December 2022. It would therefore be beneficial for the Czech Republic to focus more closely on relations with ASEAN, particularly since Czechia has good bilateral

²⁹ WACKER, Gudrun. Europe and the Indo-Pacific: comparing France, Germany and the Netherlands, ARI 29/2021, Elcano Royal Institute, 09.03.2021, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/researcher/gudrun-wacker#publications>

³⁰ France's Indo-Pacific Strategy [online]. In: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France. 2022, p. 17. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf

³¹ Questions and Answers: EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific [online]. In: European Commission. 16.9.2021, p. 3. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_21_4709



relations with individual ASEAN countries: Cambodia is one of project countries for Czechia's development aid, the People in Need is a very active and well-known NGO both in Myanmar/Burma and Cambodia, while the Czech Republic also has good bilateral relations with Vietnam, especially thanks to a large Vietnamese minority permanently residing on the Czech territory.

From the trade perspective, the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy also seeks to strengthen relations with various ASEAN countries, for example by completing or restarting free trade negotiations with Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and, later on, with the ASEAN as such, or by concluding partnership and cooperation agreements with Malaysia and Thailand. However, New Zealand is closest to the finishing line for a successful completion of FTA negotiations with the EU which is likely to happen during the Czech EU Presidency. But the EU also looks to restart trade negotiations with India, implement the Connectivity Partnerships with India and Japan and strengthen research and innovation cooperation under the Horizon Europe programme with Australia, Japan, South Korea and Singapore. In the context of the Czech EU Presidency, it is therefore possible to prioritise other countries. For instance, the Czech Republic could also take an advantage of the fact that newly elected South Korean President Yoon will assume his office in early May 2022 and invite him to Prague in the second half of 2022, thus strengthening already good bilateral and EU-Korean relations. In this respect, the Czech Republic has always been in a special position because it is one of six EU member states with a diplomatic representation in the DPRK, maintaining long-term relations with the Northern part of the Korean peninsula.

Which sectors within the framework of its Indo-Pacific strategy should the EU focus on and which sectors should the Czech Republic prioritize during its Presidency of the Council of the EU?

In terms of sectoral policies, the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific proposes to implement the strategy in the following sectors: negotiations of free trade and partnership and cooperation agreements (see above); creation of Green Alliances and Green Partnerships to protect climate and biodiversity and a closer cooperation with countries considered to be the largest emitters of CO₂;



strengthening the ocean governance, including the fight against illegal fishing; creation of new digital partnerships, e.g. with Japan, South Korea and Singapore (where it is possible to build on a German centre for combatting disinformation); cooperation in research and innovation; support for health systems and pandemic preparedness; expanding the naval presence of EU Member States in the Indo-Pacific (here it is also possible to build on a patrol and training mission of the German frigate Bayern which sailed through the Indo-Pacific in August 2021) and strengthening the European connectivity and investment in the Indo-Pacific infrastructure.

The implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy has been the most concrete yet in the last point where a new connectivity – "Global Gateway" – strategy³² was approved in December 2021 which plans to mobilise €300 billion of investments between 2021 and 2027 to "strengthen smart, clean and secure connectivity in the digital world, energy and transport, and to strengthen health, education and research systems worldwide". The Global Gateway follows on the previous EU connectivity strategy in Asia,³³ which was a kind of response to the Chinese New Silk Road (Belt and Road) initiative³⁴ that has however led in many cases to indebtedness and subsequent dependence of beneficiaries of the financial support on China. Thanks to its ambitions, the Global Gateway is better understood in a broader and more general perspective³⁵ and should lead to "investments that promote democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green, clean and safe infrastructure and catalyse private sector investment."³⁶

When it comes to preferences for any favourite sector under the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, it is not easy to choose. However, today when Europe faces the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the areas of security and defence and the related energy security are more than topical. The EU's objective is to create strategic partnerships with entities and organisations in the Indo-Pacific that share

³² *Global Gateway: up to €300 billion for the European Union's strategy to boost sustainable links around the world* [online]. Brussels: European Commission, December 2021. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6433

³³ *Connecting Europe & Asia: The EU Strategy* [online]. EEAS, September 2019. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en

³⁴ NOVOTNÁ, Tereza. The European Union and Korea between the US and China: geopolitical aspects of connectivity from the soft to hard power approaches, *Ordnungspolitische Diskurse*, Vol. 11/2021, May 2021 <http://ordnungspolitisches-portal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-11-Novotna.pdf>

³⁵ OKANO-HEIJMANS, Maaïke. *GLOBAL GATEWAY: POSITIONING EUROPE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE* [online]. Clingendael, February 2022. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/global-gateway-positioning-europe-sustainable-future>

³⁶ See footnote 33.



the same values and principles and with whom it will be possible to apply common procedures in order to combat challenges in the international security, cyber security, maritime security, disinformation, extremism, terrorism, etc. A cooperation within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), i.e. EU missions and operations, should be increased. Therefore, the Czech Republic should focus on supporting participation in the ADMM+ (ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus) within the ASEAN security architecture which would send a positive signal from the EU side and would highlight its effort to play the key role in the Indo-Pacific, while it could at the same time strengthen the Czech emphasis on relations with ASEAN.

On the other hand, free trade should remain a priority sector for the EU and the Czech Republic as it falls under the heading of a sustainable and inclusive prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. For the EU, it is all about building sustainable and resilient value chains whose fragility was demonstrated particularly during the first months of the covid-19 pandemic, but it also comes into play in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In this regard, the Czech Republic could also push for a closer cooperation with Taiwan, especially in the area of semiconductor supply chains, but it should also focus on a possible conclusion, or at least progress, in negotiations of free trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia. The Czech Republic, as a member of the Visegrad Group (V4), can also benefit from a good cooperation of the group with Japan with V4-Japan summits taking place in 2018 and 2019. In addition, the EU has built a full-scale contractual framework of mutual relations with Japan (apart from an FTA, the EU also has a Strategic Partnership Agreement and a Connectivity Partnership Agreement with Japan). Given the fact that Japan was the first country in the world to establish the post of Minister for Economic Security, a cooperation in this area represents another potential segment for development of mutual relations.

Conclusion

This briefing paper for the roundtable of the National Convention on the EU has outlined basic themes for a discussion on the EU relations with the Indo-Pacific from the Czech perspective, what opportunities for cooperation these relations offer and what challenges they will have to face. The paper focused both on a broader geopolitical context and specific opportunities for collaboration with the Indo-Pacific partners in particular sectors.



The Indo-Pacific is also one of the priorities for the upcoming Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Czech Republic has been working on its own strategy for the Indo-Pacific which should be adopted this year. The Czech strategy will primarily underscore economic and trade relations but will, nonetheless, highlight the security aspects in relation to China's growing influence not only in the Indo-Pacific but also in the world.³⁷ A successful presidency will therefore depend not only on well-organised meetings, but also on what new policy initiatives the rotating presidency brings to the table and how it will be able to steer the debate on EU cooperation with the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific topic is therefore a good theme for the Czech Republic because it is an area which will advance the future of European relations with the most dynamically developing region in the world that the United States are also directly interested in. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific will enable the Czech Republic to show that even a country with no immediate geographical ties is capable of bringing new ideas, applying previous experiences and good bilateral relations with the regional states and transferring them to the EU level, as it might eventually be illustrated by, for instance, a deepening cooperation with the ASEAN. Apart from that, the Indo-Pacific provides an occasion for the Czech Republic to work closely with France within the Presidency Trio and possibly with other countries that have a strong interest in the Indo-Pacific, such as Germany, the Netherlands and, more recently, Spain, so that Czechia can build other coalitions and alliances than the V4 at the European level which might become a suitable alternative also for other topics in the future.

From a broader perspective, if the Czech EU Presidency successfully manages the Indo-Pacific agenda, it may in fact contribute to strengthening of the EU strategic autonomy, or sovereignty, and to the geopolitical role of the EU in the world, having a major impact on not only the future of the EU but also on the international world order during the coming decades. We can only hope that this will indeed be the case in a few months' time and that these plans will not be thwarted by an unexpected international, or domestic, crisis as it happened at the beginning of the first Czech EU Presidency in 2009.

³⁷ SEKTOROVÉ AGENDY PŘEDSEDNICTVÍ ČR V RADĚ EU 2022: Sekce pro evropské záležitosti Úřadu vlády ČR na základě vstupů členů a členek Výboru pro EU na pracovní úrovni [online]. In: Vláda ČR. květen 2021, p. 7. <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/evropske-zalezitosti/predsednictvi-cr-v-rade-eu/aktuality/Sektorove-priority-predsednictvi-CR-v-Rade-EU-2022.pdf>



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.

[More about us.](#)

Contact

Web: europeum.org

Prague Office address: Staroměstské náměstí 4/1, 110 00, Praha 1

Tel.: +420 212 246 552

E-mail: europeum@europeum.org

Brussels Office address: 77, Avenue de la Toison d'Or. B-1060 Brusel, Belgie

Tel: +32 484 14 06 97

E-mail: brussels@europeum.org

More publications can be found on our [website](#).

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by the
Citizens, Equality, Rights and
Values Programme (CERV)