

Youth Perspective on the Indo-Pacific

Joint Outcomes from the Young Indo-Pacific Conference (26–28 November 2021)



Forward-looking perspectives on the
EU Indo-Pacific Strategy



About the Young-Indo Pacific (YIP)

We, the three organising think tanks – [European Guanxi](#), [STEAR](#) and [Polis180](#) –, with support from several other youth organisations and think tanks, organised the Young Indo-Pacific Forum from the 26th to the 28th of November 2021 to bring young voices into the political discourse regarding the Indo-Pacific Guideline of the European Union. Together with over 300 students and young professionals from around 40 countries, we discussed the goal to create a new platform for Asian-European cooperation with our panellists.

The Indo-Pacific region represents an important geopolitical weight in terms of economic and strategic significance. We aim to promote a broader understanding of the EU's interactions with the Indo-Pacific region, and to look ahead at the direction in which key relationships between the EU and Indo-Pacific states will develop. Moreover, we believe in an increasingly inclusive and interactive exchange between stakeholders and the young generation between both continents.

Contributing Organisations

Polis180 is a Berlin-based grassroots think tank aiming to empower young people in European and global policy debates and to make their voices heard. The programme, 'connectingAsia', aims to foster discussion on a wide variety of topics related to countries in Northeast, South and Southeast Asia. Our think tank offers a young perspective to diverse topics from the foreign policy dimension in Germany and within the EU to intra- and interregional issues of diplomacy, security, trade, civil society and culture as well as historical and technological transformation processes within this increasingly interconnected and globalised space.

The Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations (STEAR) is a youth think tank aiming to strengthen ties and deepen cultural understanding between the two billion people living across Europe and Asia. STEAR works on the basis of policy publications, cultural cooperation and capacity building events to provide a bridge between the two continents and to strengthen multilateral cooperation and international prosperity.

European Guanxi is a network of young European professionals, scholars and students with the objective of discussing and analysing EU-China relations to better understand the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. This involves a commitment to connecting young people with one another in the domain of EU-China relations, providing these people with an avenue to express themselves and share their thoughts and ideas. In this vein, European Guanxi also provides a broader platform for debate, discussion, and analysis of EU-China relations to take place.

The conference was held with support from: Agora, Australia China Youth Association, Boyma Institut, Foraus, the Open ThinkTank Network, the Young SEAkErs and Waseda IR Association.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. Security and Geopolitics	9
2. Climate Change and Green Recovery	12
3. Technology and Digitisation	16
4. Human Rights and Migration	20
5. Trade and Beyond	23
Final Remarks	26

Executive Summary

The Indo-Pacific region represents an important geopolitical weight in terms of economic and strategic significance. We aim to promote a broader understanding of the EU's interactions with the Indo-Pacific region, and to look ahead at the direction in which key relationships between the EU and Indo-Pacific states will go. This initiative was born from the cooperation of three European think tanks, believing in a more inclusive and interactive exchange between stakeholders and the young generation of both continents. With the support from seven other youth-led think tanks, we hosted multiple panel discussions on topics regarding the European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy. In particular, these encompass the following areas: security and geopolitics, climate change and green recovery, technology and digitalisation, human rights and migration, and trade and economic co-operation.

Our aim with the conference was to create a dialogue on the newly announced strategy of the European Union, to promote a broader understanding of the EU's interactions with the Indo-Pacific region, and to look ahead at the direction in which key relationships between the EU and Indo-Pacific states and stakeholders will go. Moreover, we want to give students and young professionals from both regions a voice in international politics and foster a new platform for enhanced Asia-Europe cooperation.

The challenges concerning the Indo-Pacific region are plenty, many of which intersect with the EU's interests at home and abroad. In order to respond to these challenges, we put forward a set of recommendations to promote understanding between youth in the two regions by:

- Providing funds for initiatives like the Young Indo Pacific Forum; strengthening the link between EU and the Indo-Pacific region could involve the creation of an interregional umbrella network led by youth representatives to encourage and provide funding to local initiatives, and creating formats like an EU-ASEAN funded program for a yearly Young Indo-Pacific Forum.
- Creating a long-term plan such as an Youth Engagement Strategy for an EU institution that connects youth networks and youth civil society organisations whose missions and objectives are focused on EU-Asia relations.
- Establishing a Youth Sounding Board or a Youth Task Force that enables youth working on the improvement of the EU-Asia relationship to advise political stakeholders in participatory and effective processes; Development of Co-creation processes such as dialogues with Members of the respective parliaments to connect youth and political representatives from ASEAN and EU.

The following is a brief summary of each of the panels:

Panel 1 - Security and Geopolitics

Our first panel focused on the geopolitical reality in the Indo-Pacific in terms of securitization and shed light on new EU strategic partnerships with Indo-Pacific states, maritime security, EU intervention for the protection of human rights, and internal divisions within the EU that challenge a common approach to the Indo-Pacific and the concept of strategic autonomy. The European Union is facing its greatest security challenges since the end of the Cold War. As a Russian invasion of Ukraine is underway, the EU and NATO are confronted with a crisis not seen in decades. Yet, while we face a crisis at home, we must continue to look ahead at the security circumstances and challenges of tomorrow: a resurgent China; democratic collapse in Myanmar; and decreasing Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea, just to name a few.

Main recommendations

- Ensure greater oversight of social media conglomerates, in order to tackle the decentralisation of truth and extant disinformation on social media. Unity is paramount to the EU's ability to function in times of security crises, and this requires a common perception of reality.
- Create an EU institution that connects youth networks and civil society organisations who are focused on strengthening EU-Asia relations, create more spaces for interregional youth dialogue, and fund projects by European youth organisations who work towards improving cooperation with relevant actors in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Expand educational exchanges between the leading military academies of EU member states and military academies of key Indo-Pacific partner countries. This is to learn from their expertise, particularly vis-à-vis China, and thus to enhance military ties with our regional partners.
- Establish a Joint EU Naval Squadron that is to be the EU's leading military presence in the region, replacing the existing ad hoc naval deployments by individual EU member states. It should be tasked with conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), joint naval exercises and counter-piracy operations.

Panel 2 - Climate Change and Green Recovery

The biggest takeaway from the *Climate Change and Green Recovery* Panel regarding our joint green recovery is that youth in both regions recognize the gravity of the situation, and demand enhanced climate action. In particular, we centred our discussions and policy recommendations around three specific issue areas: youth advocacy and activism,

sustainable financing of green initiatives and ideas, and the duty of international organisations as role models.

Main Recommendations

- Visibility of climate initiatives is key. We urge both regions to showcase their projects and initiatives to the wider public and better communicate with both internal and external stakeholders.
- More specificity in broader issues such as connectivity, for which there are no clear criteria for initiating, managing, and funding projects identified by the EU Member States. We urge policymakers to actively involve themselves in discussions to tackle more sector-specific and tangible allocation of green investments.
- Develop opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and advice towards decision-makers such as a Youth Sounding Board or an interregional umbrella network to encourage and provide funding to local environmental initiatives led by young individuals and creating formats like an EU-ASEAN funded program for a yearly Young Indo-Pacific Forum.
- International fora like COP-26 already saw the participation of youth advocacy organisations for the environment, however, more action is needed by policymakers in involving youth stakeholders, especially those from affected regions in the Indo Pacific, into decision-making processes.

Panel 3 - Technology and Digitisation

The panel *Technology and Digitisation* discussed current trends and threats in the field and found significant potential for the EU and the Indo-Pacific in terms of cooperation regarding technological exchange and cybersecurity. However, it has also been highlighted that this potential has not yet been realised to its full extent and several possible challenges as well as opportunities have been mapped out.

Main Recommendations

- We encourage scientific cooperation and exchanges between universities to strengthen the technological connectivity between the two regions on a youth level.
- Additionally, we believe that an awareness of and healthy interaction with digitisation will remain a central challenge for youth in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. We therefore strongly recommend inter-regional initiatives supported by the EU between universities, student think tanks and youth organisations that foster sensitivity and a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities attached to digitisation.
- Lastly, the EU should adopt a more unified approach to the topic while continuing to invest in established and future projects with countries of the Indo-Pacific to innovate and improve digital infrastructures, seek further cooperation with

like-minded countries in the field of semiconductors, as well as advance efforts towards Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs),

Panel 4 - Human Rights and Migration

The panel *Human Rights and Migration* discussed current and future challenges and problems arising from migration and the state of human rights in countries of the Indo-Pacific and the EU. The main results of the panel indicated that the EU could improve the opportunities for young women, especially in regards to gender equality and considering the human rights situation of young migrants in the Indo-Pacific region.

Main Recommendations

- Violence against women seems to have been intensified by the pandemic. Therefore, we urge awareness campaigns and law enforcement, supported by the EU, and capable of preventing and countering episodes of violence and reaching schools, households, and civil society.
- Structural issues of the education sector were exacerbated through the pandemic. We suggest the allocation of subsidies and funding, along with the enhancement of EU-sponsored projects to make education affordable for all and support access to schooling for girls and young women in the Indo-Pacific countries.
- Migrant rights have also further deteriorated. We see that the EU can have a significant impact on creating a counter-narrative to the detrimental and damaging negative narratives that are currently equated with migrants.

Panel 5 - Trade and Beyond

Trade and economic cooperation are among the most promising avenues in fostering mutually beneficial relationships between the EU and the Indo-Pacific region. High-quality trade agreements foster human rights and environmental protection and contribute to fair labour standards. Concluding further agreements with key partners and improving the take-up of these instruments by businesses and consumers can amplify their positive effects.

- The EU should promote research and evidence-based communication on the potential impact of high-quality trade agreements in areas such as labour rights and environmental protection.
- When negotiating new trade agreements, the EU should reassess provisions that have raised controversy in the EU and beyond, especially Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).
- The EU should continue advocating for reform efforts such as the Multilateral Investment Court and launch open-ended consultations with its partners. This should include the possibility to split trade and investment concerns into separate agreements.

- The EU should help subnational actors, regions and businesses to make the most out of the EU-Indo-Pacific economic relations, leveraging multi-level partnerships such as city and regional partnerships and university cooperations with non-critical partners and broadening youth exchange beyond the current Young Leaders formats.
- The EU and the Indo-Pacific region should foster the role of region-to-region partnerships, with an additional youth-exchange platform.
- Together with private and institutional investors, the EU and the Indo-Pacific region should initiate an EU-Asia Startup incubator that has a special focus on digital technologies and the green transition.

1. Security and Geopolitics

Without a doubt, the security challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region are plenty, many of which threaten EU interests at home and abroad: a resurgent China; democratic collapse in Myanmar; decreasing Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea; and diplomatic faux pas as AUKUS excluded France. Furthermore, we have seen the Taliban reclaim Afghanistan, potentially destabilising the Indo-Pacific's Western borders; China and Russia continue to expand their Joint Sea naval exercises, conducted this year in the waters surrounding the main island of Japan; and China develop its own, cutting edge hypersonic missiles, as well as its first carrier-capable stealth fighter, expected to be deployed on the People's Liberation Army Navy's next-generation aircraft carrier, due for launch as early as spring 2022.

At the same time, the EU is threatened at home. As the Russian Federation displays a level of aggression in Eastern Europe unseen since the Second World War, both Russia and China are finding anti-democratic allies within the EU, who are willing to stonewall joint European action and divide it from within. While it is true that the EU has shown unexpected unity in the face of recent Russian aggression, there is no guarantee that this will be maintained outside of a crisis setting. Considering the work still to be done to ensure the European Union's security, we have come up with the following recommendations for a more sustainable and integrated EU Indo-Pacific Strategy:

1.1 Educational Exchanges Between Military Academies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific

Over the past few decades, Chinese military academies have gradually opened up to foreign students. Today, a significant number of military personnel in the Indo-Pacific region has been educated wholly or in part at Chinese military institutions, creating closer ties between China and neighbouring militaries' leadership. For the EU, such exchanges constitute both a risk, because it may put emphasis on interests that do not align with those of the EU, and an opportunity, because of the insights into Chinese strategic thinking and military strategy these Chinese-educated officers might be able to bring to Europe.

Both may be addressed through new and numerous educational exchanges between the leading military academies of EU member states – e.g. France's l'École de Guerre, the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) or Germany's Bundeswehr Command and Staff College – and military academies of key Indo-Pacific partner countries, particularly Vietnam, India and Malaysia. Educational exchanges between ranking officers from the EU and Indo-Pacific states would enable European military leaders to learn from regional partners, and cultivate ties between EU and regional militaries at both an ideological and personal level, thereby increasing Europe's knowledge of regional military capabilities and affinities.

1.2 European Union Freedom of Navigation Preservation Initiative (EU-FONAPI)

The EU's engagement with the Indo-Pacific in the domain of maritime security has been limited and spontaneous. Individual frigates deployed to the South China Sea, while important to show Europe's commitment to the preservation of Freedom of Navigation, is little more than symbolism. The EU's maritime strategy lacks consistency, leading to insecurity and increasing risks of strategic miscalculation. One way in which these shortcomings may be addressed is through a joint, EU-wide initiative, which would bring together a coalition of the willing to form a Joint EU Naval Squadron. Composed primarily of frigates and other similarly capable vessels, this Naval Squadron would be the EU's leading joint military presence in the region and replace the existing, ad hoc naval deployments by individual EU member states. It would be tasked with conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), joint naval exercises with regional partners, and counter-piracy operations.

1.3 Focus on Strengthening Democracy at Home

Democracy worldwide has experienced a recession in recent years, and the EU has not been left unaffected. Russian and Chinese influence is on the rise in Eastern Europe in particular, posing significant threats to the unity of the EU and its ability to act as a unified bloc. Bot farms infiltrating social media and conducting information campaigns are ubiquitous in today's online landscape and are perhaps the number one threat to European democracy. Meanwhile, as Chinese influence grows through coercive diplomacy and disinformation campaigns, these tools pose very real risks to the integrity and objectivity of information accessible by the public within the EU. Therefore, it is paramount that the EU focuses significant efforts on strengthening democracy at home and reestablishing common European approaches to the challenges it faces today. This pertains not only to the relationships between EU member states, but also to the relationships between EU member state governments and the public. While the cyber threat may be reduced by more strongly regulating social media companies and by enhancing cyber security efforts in the civil domain, faith in democracy can only be reinvigorated through constructive and continuous dialogue between EU member states and civil society.

1.4 Listen First, Act Second

Somewhat counterintuitively, it may be best for its position in the Indo-Pacific if the EU focused less on what it wants and more on what its partners need; the AUKUS debacle is a good example of this. As much as the European Union feels a responsibility to strengthen its presence in the Indo-Pacific region, its partners may not entirely agree with or in fact want a significant European presence. This does not mean that the EU should stop all military cooperation with the region, but it does point to the fact that the EU needs to reconsider the degree of its involvement. As some ambassadors from the region have been reported saying,

perhaps the best Europe can do for Asian security is to get its own house in order first. As war has returned to the continent and COVID-19 beats down on Europe, the EU might reconsider military deployments in far off regions and instead focus on strengthening NATO's position along its eastern flank.

1.5 The Geopolitics of Connectivity and Youth

Beyond the military dimension, the EU has increased its involvement in the Indo-Pacific. The field of connectivity, in particular, has changed significantly in recent years. It is no longer framed in terms of opportunities and social progress, but rather in terms of geopolitical competition. This has to be understood in the context of a battle of narratives between the US and China in particular, and the perception that the EU is falling behind its competitors when it comes to promoting its own model of international development. Nonetheless, the partnerships concluded with countries in the Indo-Pacific, specifically those with Japan in 2019 and with India in 2021, represent concrete efforts for cooperation. Additionally, the EU Indo-Pacific strategy identifies other potential partners; South Korea, the United States, Canada, and Australia, who, together with ASEAN, indicate the direction in which the EU's current and future efforts in the region will go.

Considering the potential synergies that could emerge from the approach adopted by the EU in the region, we propose the following recommendations to strengthen cooperation between the EU and the Indo-Pacific countries: (1) *Create an umbrella EU institution that connects youth networks and youth civil society organisations whose missions and objectives are focused on EU-Asia relations.* A preliminary group of actors that could provide a strong basis for channelling dialogue in the region are the three leading organisations of this conference, STEAR, Polis 180 and European Guanxi, together with partners that have contributed to its success. (2) *Create dialogue platforms between young people, based on pre-existing institutional relations between European and Indo-Pacific universities.* This could give European youth the chance to take a more active role within the process of strengthening the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific. (3) *Fund projects led by youth European civil society organisations, who work towards improved cooperation between the EU and relevant actors in the Indo-Pacific region.* This could include not only the present conference, which led to this joint communiqué, but also the organisation of seminars, workshops, and summer schools by civil society and youth organisations that regularly take place in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Climate Change and Green Recovery

The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy sits at the nexus of the issues facing our generation: climate change, global health, economic recovery, institutional changes, supply chain dynamics, trade tensions, and collective security. The EU prides itself on being a bold climate leader with the aim of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. As stated by Commission Vice-president for the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič, this involves a *“realistic perspective of a climate-neutral Europe by 2050, backed by ambitious policies set in binding legislation. The EU has ensured that all sectors contribute to the transition.”* In the EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the EU's vision regarding climate change coupled with its increased engagement with the region is stated as follows:

- Contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, to addressing climate change and environmental degradation on land and in the ocean, and to supporting sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development.
- Engage in bilateral and multilateral cooperation with partners to meet the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity

The Young Indo-Pacific (YIP) Forum welcomes these signals. In light of the 13th ASEM (Asia-Europe) Summit held on the 25th and 26th November 2021 in Cambodia, which aimed to propel the recovery of both regions in a green and sustainable manner, we believe that now, more than ever, is the time for change. The biggest takeaway from the YIP Forum regarding our joint green-recovery is that youth in both regions recognize the gravity of the situation, and demand enhanced climate action. In particular, we centred our discussions and policy recommendations around three specific issue areas:

2.1 Youth Advocacy and Activism - Connections Between Both Regions

Youth advocacy has had a primary role so far in driving an initial dialogue towards the need for immediate action towards climate change – and it keeps gathering strong resonance. Young people's activism for the environment is particularly present in the Asia-Pacific region, which is one of the most directly affected by climate change. According to UNFCCC statistics, more than 60% of young people in the Indo-Pacific region perceive climate change as a major emergency.

Young people are taking action by organising informative events and raising awareness on social media. Organisations like Youth Co-Lab and the Movers Programme, in particular, are active in the Indo-Pacific to raise awareness on sustainability and the SDGs. Many other organisations such as the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), Pacific Climate Warriors, Jo-Jikum are leading the dialogue on the urgency to address climate change. Other small environmental groups, and individual activists, act on a more local level by concretely helping out their communities and raising sensitivity towards the issue. An interregional

cooperation lens along the same lines from the perspective of policymakers in the EU would therefore be both desirable and effective in reaching a large number of stakeholders and in creating otherwise underrepresented dialogues.

Moreover, the creation of umbrella organisations such as Youth Co-Lab which adhere to international principles and the official SDGs has been a positive and effective initiative in creating an interregional dialogue on shared objectives.

We as the young generation from Europe and the Indo-Pacific demand from the EU and ASEAN institutional bodies to develop opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and advice towards decision-makers such as a Youth Sounding Board for the African continent by the DG INTPA. The YSB advises on an ad-hoc basis and meets four times a year with Commissioner Urpilainen. We would welcome having a similar advisory body for youth from the ASEAN and EU region to strengthen international relationships and pursue a participatory and effective approach.

Young advisors from diverse countries can become role models in the question of how there are areas for possible cooperation, intersection and a greater understanding which can help support bringing sustainability into the fields of job creation, innovation, digitisation and pharmaceutical manufacturing in the Indo-Pacific.

2.2 Sustainable Financing of Green Initiatives and Ideas

In our exchange with experts in the sustainable investment space, we have viewed the strategy from the climate financing lens. In this endeavour, we highlight how the existing competitions between China and Western countries are being introduced into development sector financing programs, but also that many opportunities from investors are resulting from these competing programmes. In this regard, we agree that a healthy level of competition on green technologies is both feasible and desirable, providing incentives for market actors to drive down prices and innovate. We urge the decision-makers of today to stay within the scope of healthy and fair competition; the climate crisis and its disastrous effects can only be avoided together. We also emphasise the need for the EU to embrace politically isolated countries in the provision of financing opportunities. Widespread mobilisation of funding, including from the Global Europe's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, the Kiwa Initiative, as well as from the public and private sectors was also indicated.

2.3 The Duty of International Organisations as Role Models

The participants of the Young Indo-Pacific Forum (YIP) are also certain that if the EU projects itself as a global leader in climate change initiatives, the cooperation with youth in affected

countries in the Indo-Pacific is vital. Due to the fact that the Asia-Pacific region is more vulnerable based on its high dependency on agriculture and natural resources, it is the duty of decision-makers of the European Union to support adaptation strategies and help the countries in the region to overcome the dilemma of climate-related poverty while at the same time trying to raise living standards by economic growth such as e.g. in Vietnam and Indonesia. In addition, the states in the Indo-Pacific face the immense challenge to change their climate policies, adhere towards internationally agreed climate standards and cope with the environmental effects of catastrophic heatwaves and floods.

ASEM was one prime example to bring heads of states in exchange with young representatives, but it is also necessary to offer climate knowledge platforms for young participants from both regions that are directly affected by the climate crisis to foster the exchange with their counterparts and learn from their experiences in an institutionalised framework. International Organisations must play a key function as role models. The High Representative Josep Borrell mentioned that the EU will be the global frontrunner in the fight against climate change in terms of the Fit for 55-Initiative. This will not be done if international organisations focus on geopolitical alliances such as AUKUS but by stressing the need to expand Europe's role in digitisation throughout the Indo-Pacific and cooperating in so-called Green Alliances and Partnerships as described in the strategy for the region.

2.4 Recommendations

We urge the EU and the ASEAN to take the climate crisis more seriously, and this requires a huge investment in terms of sustainable infrastructure, knowledge transfer in technology, especially for the diversification of food production and clean energy. As the YIP, we are convinced that youth can improve our generational engagement more systematically by breaking barriers keeping youth from running from political offices, to overcome differences and encourage mutual understanding.

1. The YIP Forum welcomes the extended scope of sustainable financing, however would like to caution that finalising and allocating funding for the agenda will need to be done through consultations with various stakeholders inside and outside the EU. We urge policymakers to actively involve themselves in discussions to tackle more sector-specific and tangible allocation of green investments.
2. Visibility of climate initiatives is key. We urge both regions to showcase their projects and initiatives to the wider public and better communicate with stakeholders - youth actors in both regions need to know they are not facing this challenge alone. Additionally, when there is a lack of measurable results, such as visible connectivity projects, third parties may think there is no need to adopt European standards.
3. We would also be grateful for more specificity in broader issues such as connectivity, for which there are no clear criteria for initiating, managing and funding projects

identified by the EU Member States. We believe a strategic approach, which is in line with the interests of innovative and green European businesses, could create projects to promote green and sustainable growth, as well as workers' rights and other forms of European standard-setting.

4. We as the young generation from Europe and the Indo-Pacific demand from the EU and ASEAN institutional bodies to develop opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and advice towards decision-makers such as a Youth Sounding Board for the African continent. Young advisors from diverse countries can become role models in the question of how there are areas for possible cooperation, intersection and a greater understanding which can help support bringing sustainability into the fields of job creation, innovation, digitisation and pharmaceutical manufacturing in the Indo-Pacific.
 5. International organisations have to take responsibility and use their power to generate funding for youth forums such as the YIP. This will have a multiplying effect on developing climate-related solutions together because our lives depend on it. A further initiative in order to strengthen the link between EU and the Indo-Pacific region could involve the creation of a similar interregional umbrella network to encourage and provide funding to local environmental initiatives led by young individuals. and creating formats like an EU-ASEAN funded program for a yearly Young Indo-Pacific Forum
 6. COP-26 saw the participation of youth advocacy organisations for the environment, such as YOUNGO (UNFCCC constituency of Youth Non-Governmental Organisations) and YEE (Youth and Environment Europe). However, more action is needed by policymakers in involving youth stakeholders, especially those from affected regions in the Indo Pacific, into decision-making processes. Young activists from both regions have been at the forefront of bringing the climate crisis to the attention of governments and heads of states. Therefore, it will be a necessity of politicians to use the creativity and the knowledge of young minds around the globe in the process to find sustainable solutions.
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3. Technology and Digitisation

Recent clashes between Meta Platforms Inc. (formerly and more well known as facebook Inc.) and the EU administration coming down to the company refusing to adhere to European data regulations have highlighted the actuality of technology and digitisation issues. In the case of the EU, this is not only demonstrated by digitalization being one of the top two EU forward-looking internal policy priorities¹, but also mirrored in its Indo-Pacific strategy: With “digital governance and partnerships” and “connectivity”, two out of the seven priority areas relate to technology. Furthermore, the EU not only seeks to “*formalise [such] partnerships through Digital Partnership Agreements*”², but is also considering “*proposing an EU-ASEAN approach covering digital connectivity and science, research, technology and investment in innovation*”³.

The Young Indo-Pacific (YIP) Forum welcomes the EU's initiative to deepen digital partnerships with the Indo-Pacific region. One of the biggest takeaways from the YIP Forum in terms of technology and digitization, regarding cybersecurity and technological exchange, is the significant potential of this area of cooperation for the EU and the Indo-Pacific, which has not been fully realised given current policies and partnerships. Thus, we identified the following main areas of interest and concern on which we want to focus our recommendations to advance the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy from a youth perspective:

3. 1 Connectivity, Technological Exchange and Scientific Cooperation

The economically and technologically thriving Indo-Pacific region constitutes an ideal partner for cooperation in the areas of science and innovation. In the “Strategy for connecting Europe and Asia” from 2018, the EU stated that it “should address the transport, energy and digital links between Europe and Asia, while taking into consideration the rapid technological change, which has a strong impact on connectivity”.⁴ However, as the AUKUS pact (consisting of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States) makes clear, the EU is not the only external actor seeking stronger ties with the Indo-Pacific in the area of technology. In contrast to the EU, AUKUS rather focuses on cooperation in military capacity building and thus technology such as nuclear-powered submarines, cyber security or quantum cryptography.

With its approach focused on connectivity and cooperation between universities and scientific institutions, the EU constitutes a welcomed partner to the Indo-Pacific region in the field of technology. This is not only the case for bilateral relations with single countries, but also for cooperation with multilateral organisations based in the Indo-Pacific, notably ASEAN. In the face of the tensions between the US and China, the EU and ASEAN have the

¹ [SPFUSA: The EU’s Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#)

² [European Commission: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, p.10](#)

³ [European Commission: The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, p.10](#)

⁴ [European Commission: Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy, p.3](#)

opportunity to strengthen their strategic relationship in areas of technology or digitalization without further raising tensions in the region.⁵ Also, scientific and academic cooperation with like-minded, democratic states in the Indo-Pacific can foster the values of freedom of speech and liberty to express critical opinions. Looking at its “strategy for connecting Europe and Asia” from 2018, the EU has already taken an important step in increasing technological cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region. Further, the EU’s global gateway initiative which was announced in December 2021, builds on top of this strategy and emphasises the need for technology in the attempt to increase global connectivity, which includes the Indo-Pacific. **We urge the EU to further increase its engagement with governments, civil-society stakeholders and universities in the Indo-Pacific on issues concerning technology, connectivity and digitisation.**

3.2 Raising Digital Awareness and Establishing Data Security Standards

The digital sphere is ever-changing. Countries like China are simultaneously promoting a new model for the internet by changing the architecture of the internet itself, introducing new ways of navigating the internet through new Internal Protocol addresses (IPs) and trying to set international standards in which the central role is played by states at the expense of companies and citizens. The future international arena is going to be digital, yet, the general European population does not have enough knowledge or a strong awareness of technology and digitalization - many youth included. This lacking knowledge of technology and its influence on society provides a dangerous space for misinterpretation and manipulation. As mentioned already, the concept of a state-centred cyberspace differs much from European ideas. In the approach chosen by China, informatisation means not only the introduction of computers and IT solutions but the whole process of data production, gathering, storing, security, and use by both institutions and people. This could potentially give government-controlled institutions an enormous tool to influence and shape society, economy, and politics and creates opportunities for power abuses. Attempts to promote this model seen in recent years pose a clear challenge to the idea of free and open Internet. **In-depth research is needed to better understand the norm-setting Chinese approach to digitalization and the Internet to develop own conciliating policies which can counter China and will educate EU-citizens in this regard.**

3.3 Achieving a Unified Approach

The agreement of all of the 27 EU member states on the development of the Indo-Pacific guidelines might be perceived as a success. However, particularly the field of technology and digitization is undermined by a significant lack of consensus by all member states, ultimately jeopardising the success of the strategy. The technological priorities of the member states as discussed in an article published by the European Council on Foreign Relations in September 2021 reveals a discernible pattern: Without any observed geographical concentration

⁵ [China Observers: EU Indo-Pacific Strategy Under the Shadow of the AUKUS](#)

principal areas of cooperation in the field of technology such as research and development or cyber-security rank as top priority for some countries while at the same time as lowest priority for others. Similarly, more than half of the EU member states regard the issue of 5G as important within Europe but only two countries put the establishment of 5G partnerships as their top priority.⁶ Taking the (data) privacy and independence of all EU member states within the EU into consideration, we do recognize the sensitivity of this issue. As youth however, we require long-term solutions that ensure a safe and elaborate internet. Therefore, **we call for a clearer and more unified approach concerning the future of technological cooperation between the EU and the Indo-Pacific.**

3.4 Semiconductors and Rare Earths

We welcome the recent developments regarding the European Chips Act⁷. The current shortage of semiconductors will not be a short-term interference but rather a permanent question of European security and sovereignty. Hence, we appreciate that the European Union fosters its research and production capabilities to produce advanced semiconductors by their own national businesses. However, despite the high demand for semiconductors, the market size for high-technology chips is still rather small. As the mega-fabs have a relatively short production time in respect to their construction and running costs and as they require a giant technological infrastructure, the economic feasibility for this endeavour is rather limited. **Therefore, a stronger cooperation and integration into the European Chips Act with the USA, Australia, South-Korea, Japan and Taiwan is needed to make the project feasible and sustainable in the long-run.** An exchange of technical capabilities and know-how will lead to a healthy degree of interdependence. The importance of this sector for Taiwan's economy and security as well as the fragile geopolitical situation in the region should also be taken into account.

As the semiconductor industry, together with many other technological products, requires a huge array of very scarce materials, the EU should develop a common **rare earths strategy** together with the abovementioned like-minded states. As the extraction and processing of those materials is very cost-intensive and pollutive, it is the only realistic way of achieving this goal.

3.5 Blockchain

The soaring capabilities of Blockchain and Cryptocurrency technologies have made something called Decentralised Autonomous Organisation (DAO) possible. Blockchain governance is not an abstract design problem anymore, it has become an applied social problem which the European and Indo-Pacific youth will have to face in the long-run. With their own Decentralised Finance (DeFi), currencies, and legislative infrastructure of smart contracts, it could become possible for any actor to operate across borders around the

⁶ [European Council on Foreign Relations: Moving closer: European views of the Indo-Pacific](#)

⁷ [European Commission: European Chips Act](#)

national jurisdictions. This can quickly turn into a risk for any state. Thus, it is one of the sectors where a thorough cooperation with the whole Indo-Pacific region is recommended, to implement unified standards and integrate the smart contracts from the DAO's into the national jurisdictions, by providing a legal structure right from the beginning. The sooner the European Union finds a common agreement, the greater the chance becomes to set the global legal standards in this regard. Even if it will be rather difficult to fully regulate DAO's in a unified manner, spreading the debate about the problem within our society can help as well, for now. **Hence, we urge for a unified legislative attempt to implement homogenous standards on DAO and its underlying smart contracts.**

As one of the first jurisdictions, the US state of Wyoming has implemented a DAO law with Wy. Stat. § 17-31-101 through 17-31-115, which helps to lay the foundation for this growing sector by establishing formal requirements for the recognition of smart contracts in unincorporated groups: they must be modifiable, updatable and upgradeable. Thus, DAOs that take advantage of Wyoming's LLC law still need to maintain some degree of centralization and human control. Blockchain technology can bring other benefits as well, for instance in cryptography; these potentials should be explored further. It can be used for cryptographic certificates.

3.6 Recommendations

The EU needs to present itself as a reliable and unified partner within the area of digitisation and technological cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. To achieve this, the EU should make use of its unique values to not only build sustainable digital partnerships in the region but also communicate, set and enforce democratic guidelines based on international norms. Strategic partnerships with countries of the Indo-Pacific region should vary based on different areas and degrees of security interests. Technology and digitisation has presented itself as an important part of a future youth should take a stance on, therefore we as the YIP put forward the following recommendations to ensure a better digital and technological future and successful cooperation for both regions:

1. We encourage the EU and the countries in the Indo-Pacific area to foster scientific cooperation and exchanges between universities to strengthen the technological connectivity between the two regions on a youth level.
2. The EU should continue established projects and start new ventures together with countries of the Indo-Pacific to innovate and improve digital infrastructures. As stated in the EU's Global Gateway strategy, these technologies should include digital networks and infrastructure, such as 5G access, submarine and terrestrial fibre-optic cables but also cloud and data infrastructure.
3. We believe that an awareness of and healthy interaction with digitisation will remain a central challenge for youth in Europe and in the Indo-Pacific. We therefore

recommend inter-regional initiatives between universities, student think tanks and youth organisations that foster sensitivity and a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities attached to digitisation.

4. We recommend strong cooperation with like minded countries such as the USA, Australia, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan regarding the semiconductor industry and a rare earths strategy.
 5. In our opinion, the implementation together with the Indo-Pacific region of homogenous standards on DAO and its underlying smart contracts is vital for the technological future of Europe.
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4. Human Rights and Migration

In the past decade, the global refugee population has more than doubled, with countries in both Asia and Europe experiencing an influx of refugees and migrants. The panel *Human Rights and Migration* discussed current and future challenges and problems arising from migration and the state of human rights in countries of the Indo-Pacific and the EU. The EU Indo-Pacific Guideline mentions “*preventing trafficking, tackling migration and managing mobility*” as one of their goals.

While we welcome these goals, we see numerous challenges for a successful realisation.

The discussion at the fourth panel of the YIP indicated that the EU can improve the opportunities for young women especially in regards to gender equality and considering the human rights situation of young migrants in the Indo-Pacific region.

4.1 Improving Gender Mainstreaming in the Indo-Pacific

Gender equality is an essential human right: the efforts to reach it are fundamental for the growth of the region, since the empowerment of women coincides with the development of a country. The Indo-Pacific is a wide region, with many and different realities. For this reason, gender inequality is connected to various issues, namely women trafficking, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, education accessibility, employment discrimination, and much more. Despite some progress - for instance women’s representation on boards increased all over the region in the past decade -, the overall efforts conducted to tackle gender-related issues remain inadequate. WHO data show that over 37% of women in South Asia, 40% of women in Southeast Asia and 68% of women in the Pacific have experienced violence at the hands of their partners. Also education is a sector where gender discrimination is visible and rampant, and the pandemic has further exacerbated the issue: according to UNICEF data, 20% percent of girls in East Asia and the Pacific, around 40 million of them in total, could not access online learning during COVID-19, and many of them might not be able to return to school once the pandemic will be definitely over.

The role of the youth – both young women and men – in the fight for gender equality is fundamental. The EU Indo-Pacific Strategy stresses that the EU will keep supporting women’s and girls’ rights by fostering their involvement in civic and political decision-making and contributing to the elimination of violence against them. In view of the above, we put forward a complementary set of recommendations – marked by a young and proactive perspective – aimed at protecting, defending, and empowering the rights of women in the region.

4.2 Human Rights Situation of Young Migrants and in terms of Forced Migration

Our discussion highlighted the complex interplay of drivers for migration and the areas of concern regarding the human rights situation of young migrants. During the discussion it became clear that the traditional drivers of forced displacement such as persecution, conflict, and safety are increasingly connected to environmental degradation and climate change. Furthermore, this change of the traditional drivers puts many young migrants at risk of discrimination, marginalization, trafficking, exploitation, and violence. These circumstances also put these migrants at risk of the denial of their personal, civic, political, economic and social rights through arbitrary detention or torture, which has seen an increase in the region.⁸

Therefore, we emphasise a more youth-oriented and inclusive approach of the EU towards the human rights situations of young migrants. UNICEF reports that two out of five child migrants are from Asia. Child migrants are part of the most vulnerable group as they are the primary target of smugglers and traffickers.⁹ We hold that youth participation can help identify drivers for migration and enhance strategies and policies of the EU to increase. Moreover youth can help with national youth protection strategies. As migration has become an imminent challenge for the EU during the refugee crisis in 2015 or nowadays during the Ukraine crisis, youth engagement between both regions need to shed light on policies and practices to safeguard human rights. This engagement could be amplified through youth forums to tackle common problems and create shared solutions. Moreover, the EU can have a significant impact on creating a counter narrative to the damaging narratives that are currently associated with migrants in many contexts.

4.3 Increase Youth Participation and Opportunities by Focusing on Cross-Cultural Migration

Tackling the drivers of migration and the protection of human rights necessitates an understanding of the cultural and historical roots of youth in the ASEAN and the EU. Contemporary aforementioned approaches pave a new way in European migration policy, yet need European and Asian youth to understand the cultural circumstances and boundaries that influence decision-making in this controversial policy area. Recent youths have participated in studying and interning in this region, and thus consider cross-cultural exchanges and increased funding for these exchanges as a vital factor to improve our understanding of the region.

⁸ [Amnesty International Asia-Pacific 2020/2021 Report](#)

⁹ [UNICEF Migration: Protecting children affected by migration](#)

While there are programmes in Europe such as Erasmus+ and increasing opportunities in the ASEAN such as the SHARE scholarship for intra-ASEAN mobility or EU-ASEAN mobility, meaningful exchange scholarships in the Indo-Pacific region should be increased. Our generation grew up without borders in Europe and we see the positive effects in EU-cooperation and the importance of interregional frameworks. In terms of global challenges such as climate-related migration and migration for educational purposes, it is necessary to build up opportunities to enable youth to exchange with their Asian counterparts. Therefore, it would be a huge step forward to establish regional focal points for educational exchanges and a youth advisor for the exchange with the Indo-Pacific within the Directorate General for International Partnerships of the EU Commission. This already exists for the African continent. Ms. Bitania Lulu Berhanu works as the first Special Adviser on Youth to European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen. She focuses on youth engagement and inclusion to bring insightful expertise to the EU-Africa partnership. This could be done for EU-Asia relationships in terms of a partnership officer who leads a youth advisor group for Indo-Pacific.

4.4 Recommendations

- We urge the launch of awareness campaigns and law enforcement, supported by the EU, and capable of both preventing and countering episodes of violence. We suggest the creation of stable partnerships with organisations active in the region to promote the launch of social media campaigns and events targeting the Indo-Pacific youth. The aim is to curb the cultural acceptance of the issue in most Indo-Pacific countries, and to avoid that most cases of violence go unreported or unpunished by the government.
- As stressed before, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the learning gap between young women and men in many world regions, Indo-Pacific included. We encourage a direct involvement of the interested party - namely, girls and young women of the region - through the help of locally-based women rights organisations: by asking young women to identify the main challenges and issues they encounter in their educational path, it will be easier to allocate specific and targeted foundings aimed at helping local governments lift financial obstacles which impede an easy access to education and in some cases their return to school.
- We encourage to create a counter narrative to the detrimental and damaging negative narratives that are currently equated with migrants such as deep seated attitudes and behaviours of prejudice or xenophobia.
- We recommend to increase the participation of the youth to identify drivers for migration and enhance strategies and policies of the EU. This engagement could be enhanced through youth forums and an increased cooperation for young people in the UN and EU and through cultural exchange programmes.

5. Trade and Beyond

The last few years have shown that trade is no longer attractive to European societies “just for trade’s sake”. In the context of trade liberalisation, there is an increasing demand to incorporate other concerns such as environmental standards and labour rights in order to ensure that trade outcomes are benefitting all partners to the largest extent possible while limiting harm to the planet. The EU has made this a constant part of its trade priorities since 2005 by incorporating clauses related to these issues into its trade agreements. We, the Young Indo-Pacific Forum, appreciate that these concerns are strongly reflected in the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy under the heading “Sustainable and inclusive prosperity”, stressing the inherent link between economic policy in the region and the EU’s own core values. Future action should be guided by this thinking, but also adopt a broad outlook that links the technicalities of trade agreements with their uptake by companies, consumers, and society at large and fosters the political and cultural exchange of the youth. Hence, we have worked out the following recommendations, to advance the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy from a youth perspective:

5.1 Creating a New Narrative on EU-Asia Trade

New research has shown that labour rights clauses in trade agreements have a strong positive impact on labour rights outcomes in partner countries, especially if they are complemented by capacity building mechanisms, as in the EU’s case, and that they can help increase trade volumes in relation to the agreement at issue. Concluding ambitious agreements with key EU partners such as ASEAN and India thus presents great potential for economic and social development.

However, in the current political environment, there remains a gap in perceptions about these clauses: In partner countries, they are often seen as unwelcome interference in internal affairs and disguised protectionism clad in universalist terms. In Europe, they are seen as too weak to have an actual impact on conditions in partner countries. These challenges can only be overcome by strong and evidence-based communication efforts in both regions, accompanied by capacity building. We recognise that such efforts will need to be tailored to local situations and needs. **The EU has to show that all stakeholders have much to gain from these agreements, and especially workers in developing partner countries.** This would not only facilitate the conclusion of trade agreements, but also signal to European consumers that they can choose products from partner countries without any hesitation about labour or environmental standards, thus maximising the positive impact of the trade agreements. This approach could help develop synergies with other ambitious trade agreements in the region such as the CPTPP and set an example for new multilateral initiatives.

In the light of these potential benefits, the EU should reassess some of the other aspects in its agreements that have raised controversy in the EU and beyond. **This is most salient for the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**, which is viewed negatively not only in EU public opinion, but also in many potential partner states. Furthermore, the EU should continue advocating for reform efforts such as the Multilateral Investment Court and launch open-ended consultations with its partners on these issues. This should include the possibility to split trade and investment concerns into separate agreements, as exemplified by the agreements between the EU and Singapore.

5.2 Bringing Together Businesses and People - New Formats and Fora

Inter-state agreements can only be part of the bigger picture. In order to leverage the enormous potential for mutual gain, the **EU should strive to help subnational actors, regions and businesses to make the most out of the EU-Indopacific economic relations.** This approach would also allow the EU to play out its strengths by fostering connections between societies and communities, thereby promoting dialogue in a region that is seeing increasing great power competition. Trade and economic exchange would greatly benefit from some of the horizontal programmes proposed earlier, **such as an increase in university cooperations with non-critical partners and broadening youth exchange beyond the current Young Leaders formats.** The future success of EU-Indo-Pacific economic connections hinges on the two regions' ability to include a broad variety of stakeholders and to bring these connections as close to citizens' everyday life as possible.

Based on these considerations, we see an important role for region-to-region partnerships, bringing together European and Asian regions that share interests and challenges. Formats like the Asia-Berlin Forum or the Hamburg Summit are successful examples in leveraging the role of regions and metropolises that could be taken up elsewhere. **A specific youth angle would add further value to these formats, making these conversations more inclusive and more centred on the opportunities and challenges of tomorrow.**

5.3 Towards an EU-Asia Startup Incubator

The EU and Asia are among the world's most innovative regions. While innovation in itself knows no borders, current promotional instruments are often designed in ways that make cross-regional collaboration difficult and reinforce existing knowledge silos. **An EU-Asia Startup Incubator could help address this issue by bringing together emerging talents from the two regions in areas of common interest,** such as digital technologies or the green transition, with private and institutional investors. To be a sustainable investment, the incubator needs to be equipped with a long-term funding strategy which can provide enough liquidity to finance the successful projects. Past experience has shown that the EU is very good at providing the academic infrastructure to nurture innovative people and ideas

but has severe problems with keeping and financing them due to a lack of risk capital in the later investment rounds, and there is great potential in connecting European investors with Asian emerging markets.

5.4 Recommendations

Due to an increasingly tense geopolitical environment, backlash against globalisation in many contexts and the increasing complexity of trade agreements, it has become more difficult to foster new trustful economic partnerships between the two continents. As this will not change in the near future, we need to support more regional partnerships, especially involving youth. By starting new platforms and forums with civil society actors of the EU and Indo-Pacific region an exchange can still grow.

EU-Asia trade is as much the future as we youth are, therefore we as the YIP put forward following recommendations:

1. The EU should promote research and evidence-based communication on the potential impact of high-quality trade agreements in areas such as labour rights and environmental protection.
 2. When negotiating new trade agreements, the EU should reassess provisions that have raised controversy in the EU and beyond, especially the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS).
 3. The EU should continue advocating for reform efforts such as the Multilateral Investment Court and launch open-ended consultations with its partners. This should include the possibility to split trade and investment concerns into separate agreements.
 4. The EU should help subnational actors, regions and businesses to make the most out of the EU-Indo-Pacific economic relations, leveraging multi-level partnerships such as city and regional partnerships and university cooperations with non-critical partners and broadening youth exchange beyond the current Young Leaders formats.
 5. The EU and the Indo-Pacific region should foster the role of region-to-region partnerships, with an additional youth-exchange platform.
 6. Together with private and institutional investors, the EU and the Indo-Pacific region should initiate an EU-Asia Startup incubator that has a special focus on digital technologies and the green transition.
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Final Remarks

Our goal for the cooperation between youth-led think tanks in Asia and Europe focusing on the Indo-Pacific was the establishment of a platform to strengthen the inclusion of youth in this interregional relationship, and to show what we expect from our political leaders for the future. What we wanted to achieve is to also show how the different topics intersect and depend on each other. Our future aspirations are tied to our recommendations. We want to create sustainable structures that not only create exchange between youth in both regions but also advise and direct our demands to decision-makers in political institutions. We want to build up permanent cooperation with the EU institutions to make this conference a platform of opportunity to better understand each other and shape the future of Euro-Asian relations together.

Initiatives like the Young Indo-Pacific Forum need sufficient funds to strengthen the link between the EU and the Indo-Pacific region. Our network showed how the cooperation of different youth-led institutions would profit from the creation of an interregional umbrella network. Youth representatives could encourage their counterparts in both regions to create a long-term plan such as an engagement strategy. The ideas from youth and civil society organisations whose missions and objectives are focused on EU-Asia relations, could be the backbone of smart policies in the future. This could be supplemented by establishing a Youth Sounding Board or a Youth Task Force that advises political stakeholders in participatory and effective processes and co-creates solutions for the challenges of our generation in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

We want to thank all the panellists for sharing their expertise with us and the cooperating organisations for the huge effort during the period of organisation, implementation, and finalising this document of recommendations.

If you want to be part of this journey, you can contact us through our respective websites:

Polis180

- Link: <https://polis180.org/>

STEAR - Student Think Tank for Europe-Asia Relations

- Link: <https://www.stearthinktank.com/>

European Guanxi

- Link: <https://www.europeanguanxi.com/>

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