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Germany's and European Union's Indo-Pacific Stance: Towards a Value-Based Pragmatism



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Abstract

Introduction. The growing use of the Indo-Pacific concept in the European and German discourses necessitates a closer scrutiny of its implementation. The author's hypothesis, founded on the assumption of Germany's central role in the European Union's security and defence policy, consists in that Berlin, together with Paris, has been playing the role of a key contributor to the preparation and implementation of the European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The research is aimed at defining Germany's and European Union's stance with regard to the Indo-Pacific region.

Materials and Methods. The methodology involves qualitative narrative analysis as well as elements of discourse analysis in addition to conventional approaches such as scrutinising a number of sources to draw the underlying trends. The study is based on Germany's and European Union's official documents pertaining to the Indo-Pacific.

Results. The article shows that the transregional cooperation between Germany and the Asian nations is currently undergoing a transition stage from primarily economic cooperation to interaction in more sensitive spheres such as security. All of this is happening against the backdrop of increasingly pronounced securitisation processes in the region caused in no small measure by the US vs China face-off.

Discussion and Conclusion. Both German and European stances can be characterised by a whimsical combination of pragmatism and value-based rhetoric. Among the values listed in the official documents are liberal freedoms including press freedom, civil society, free trade etc. Albeit having arguably less at stake in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis France, Germany has also exerted a considerable influence on the development of a joint European Union vision of the Indo-Pacific that was ulteriorly materialised in a formalised strategy. The paper contributes to the literature by revealing the peculiarities of Germany's and European Union's Indo-Pacific policies.

Keywords: Germany, European Union, Indo-Pacific, European Union Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Policy Guidelines in the Indo-Pacific

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Индо-Тихоокеанская политика Германии и Европейского союза: к прагматизму, основанному на ценностях

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Аннотация

Введение. Актуализация Индо-Тихоокеанского концепта в европейском и немецком дискурсах обуславливает необходимость тщательного рассмотрения его реализации. Предположительно Германия совместно с Францией играет ключевую роль в разработке и имплементации Индо-Тихоокеанской стратегии Евросоюза. Цель исследования – определить особенности политики Германии и Европейского союза в отношении Индо-Тихоокеанского региона.

Материалы и методы. Методология включает в себя качественный нарративный анализ, а также элементы дискурс-анализа в дополнение к конвенциональным подходам, к которым относится анализ источников для определения ключевых трендов. Работа основана на официальных документах Германии и Европейского союза в отношении Индо-Тихоокеанского региона.

Результаты исследования. Показано, что трансрегиональное сотрудничество между Германией и азиатскими державами в настоящее время находится на переходном этапе от преимущественно экономической кооперации ко взаимодействию в ряде «чувствительных» сфер, таких как безопасность. Данные тенденции проявляются на фоне усиливающихся процессов секьюритизации в регионе, во многом вызванных противостоянием США и Китая.

Обсуждение и заключение. И немецкий, и европейский подходы могут быть охарактеризованы как причудливое сочетание прагматизма и риторики, основанной на ценностях. К последним, перечисленным в официальных документах, относятся либеральные идеалы, включая свободу печати, гражданское общество, свободную торговлю и др. Несмотря на то, что Германия имеет принципиально меньшие ставки в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе в сравнении с Францией, она также оказывает существенное влияние на развитие совместного видения исследуемого региона со стороны Евросоюза, которое было в конечном счете материализовано в виде формализованной стратегии.

Ключевые слова: Германия, Европейский союз, Индо-Тихоокеанский регион, стратегия Европейского союза по сотрудничеству в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе, основные ориентиры политики в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе

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Introduction. During the past decade, the concept of “*Indo-Pacific*” has been penetrating both scholarly and official discourses, eventually becoming ubiquitous – or at least hard-to-ignore. Indeed, this attribute has been employed on a par with – and at times even replacing – the well-established term “*Asia-Pacific*”. Major powers such as the United States (US) or Canada have developed their *Indo-Pacific strategies*. European nations are no exception too, France predictably being the pioneer with its respective strategy announced by President E. Macron as early as in May 2018. In some other European Union (EU) countries, Indo-Pacific policy is only limited to *Guidelines*, which is still a considerable manifestation of their vivid interest in the region, duly embodied in the diplomatic practice. Germany, one of the founding nations of the European integration structures and largest European economy, definitely belongs to this cohort. Berlin appears to be going in line with the other US allies in gradually replacing the term “*Asia-Pacific*” in favour of “*Indo-Pacific*”. While the names are being changed, the approaches to the regional policies are undergoing the process of alteration as well.

The adoption of the *Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*, or *Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik*, in the original language, on September 2nd, 2020, has been a vital milestone in establishing Berlin’s accentuated policy towards the region¹. In this paper, the document is further referred to as the *Guidelines* and *Leitlinien* interchangeably. In approximately a year, on September 16th, 2021, the *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* (hereinafter also called the *EU Strategy* for the sake of brevity)² was made public as well, approved by the EU Council on April 19, 2021 and subsequently clarified in a factsheet on February 21st, 2022. The adoption of Germany’s Strategy on China, or *China-Strategie der Bundesregierung*³ on July 13th, 2023 epitomised a certain clarification with regard to Germany’s stance towards the region. The term “*Indo-Pacific*” has been used repeatedly in speech acts by both the incumbent *Chancellor* O. Scholz⁴ and the *Foreign Minister* in his government A. Bärbock⁵ as well as other officials.

Taking into consideration the enumerated input data, it is possible to put forward the research hypothesis: “Thanks to its central role in the EU, Germany – in duo with France – contributed in no small part to the formation of a relatively unified European Indo-Pacific policy”.

The goal of the research is to determine the current policy approach(es) undertaken by Germany towards an increasingly competitive and securitised Indo-Pacific in the early 2020s. The aforementioned supposition has led the author to formulating the following research objectives:

¹ Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik. Deutschland – Europa – Asien. Das 21. Jahrhundert gemeinsam gestalten. Auswärtiges Amt. 2020. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2380500/33f978a9d4f511942c241eb4602086c1/200901-indo-pazifik-leitlinien--1--data.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2024).

² The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. European Commission. 16 September 2021. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0024> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³ China-Strategie der Bundesregierung (Federal Government’s Strategy on China). Auswärtiges Amt. 2023. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2608578/810fdade376b1467f20bdb-697b2acd58/china-strategie-data.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁴ Bundeskanzler Scholz in Südostasien. Internationale Ordnung und Handelsbeziehungen stärken. Bundesregierung. 14 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/scholz-in-sudostasien-2142324> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁵ Bärbock A. Rede der Bundesministerin des Auswärtigen, Annalena Baerbock, zu Klima und Sicherheit in Palau am 10. Juli 2022 in Palau. Bundesregierung. 10 July 2022. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/rede-der-bundesministerin-des-auswaertigen-annalena-baerbock--2061884> (accessed 01.10.2024).

- Finding out how the adoption of the *Guidelines* and subsequent documents has influenced Germany's policy towards the region;
- Defining the role Berlin plays in determining the EU stance in the Indo-Pacific as well as the prevailing narratives of Germany's Indo-Pacific vision and how they correlate with those of the EU;
- Revealing the underlying approaches in Germany's policy towards the macroregion;
- Delineating Berlin's stance towards diverse minilateral initiatives (*Quad*, *AUKUS* etc.) and integration projects in the region, as well as the prospects of Germany joining these formats in any role (e.g. as an observer).

Literature Review. A selection of the corresponding publications can be structured contingent upon the authors' origin as well as the dimensions of the problem touched upon.

Germany's presence in the region was a subject of scrutiny in the Russian scholarship. V. Gulevich⁶ presents an overview of Berlin's original interests in the Asia-Pacific, i.e. before the "Indo-Pacific" was voiced as an international project. T.V. Arzamanova mentions Germany's balancing approach in the Indo-Pacific directed at the intraregional cooperation while striving for the "containment" of the PRC [1]. I.A. Konovalov compares the strategic documents pertaining to the Indo-Pacific adopted by the UK, France and Germany, discriminating the latter as delegating China's containment to the US and their allies [2]. A.V. Kupriyanov cites K. Haushofer's vision substantiating the need for Germany to align with the regional powers, namely, Japan, China and India⁷.

The transition of the European (and German, in particular) officials from the term "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific" is meticulously inspected by F. Heiduk and G. Wacker⁸. P. Bordoloi⁹ presents an account of German's Indo-Pacific vision primarily from an economics standpoint. The ideological and political-economic foundations of European policies towards the Indo-Pacific, in contrast, are described by G. Pugliese [3] in a critical manner: the author illuminates the mercantile nature of EU's relations with the regional players. R. Ulatowski [4] explains Berlin's stance in the Indo-Pacific rather from a neoliberal institutionalist perspective, stating that the defence of the liberal order in the macroregion is a priority for Germany. A more recent paper by the same author explores the country's role in the region against the background of superpower rivalry, i.e. an increasingly tense relationship between China and the US [5]. Middle power theory is utilised in one more study to show how adherence to norms influences Berlin's stance in the Indo-Pacific [6]. G. Wacker¹⁰, in turn, offers a comparison of several cases explaining national policies of the European countries towards the Indo-Pacific. These

⁶ Gulevich V. [German-Australian Partnership in the Asia-Pacific]. The International Affairs. 10 September 2016. Available at: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/15946> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁷ Kupriyanov A.V. [The Indo-Pacific Region: An Indian Outlook]. IMEMO RAS. 30 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/ru/events/2020/30092020/30092020-TEZ-KUP-001.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁸ Heiduk F., Wacker G. From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific. SWP Research Paper. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020RP09>

⁹ Bordoloi P. Germany's Indo-Pacific Strategy. International Finance. 1 April 2021. Available at: <https://internationalfinance.com/magazine/economy-magazine/germanys-indo-pacific-strategy/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹⁰ Wacker G. Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Comparing France, Germany and the Netherlands. Elcano Royal Institute. 9 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/europe-and-the-indo-pacific-comparing-france-germany-and-the-netherlands/> (accessed 01.10.2024).



involve – in addition to Germany – France and the Netherlands, which can be attributed to the fact that the mentioned actors have adopted their respective official strategies or guidelines.

As for the transregional interaction, H. Su¹¹ analyses what practices in the European communities could be adopted by the Asian integration blocs. A. Narlikar and J. Plagemann¹² dwell upon the particularities of strategic partnerships between Germany and the Asian nations in a prescriptive way. A more recent review of the state of affairs in this field is provided by W. Hilz¹³. Still, Sino-German relations remain the most well-researched out of the bilateral ties, as can be proven by the publications similar to the one by I. Ezran and J. Vaughan¹⁴. The shifting nature of the attitude of the general public in EU, including Germany, to China is disclosed in other works¹⁵. Regarding other directions, I. Driesmans¹⁶ focuses on the role of ASEAN for EU's Indo-Pacific strategy. R. Vlahutin, in turn, draws upon the EU's experience with regard to conceptualising the EU's Indo-Pacific vision¹⁷. Other papers cited below also make it possible to get an idea of the state-of-the-art in the area investigated.

To summarise, the scholarly literature only spotlights various fragments of the problem(s) stated in the introduction. As such, a larger synthesis of the accumulated knowledge would be in order to fill the research gap.

Materials and Methods. The methodology of the investigation is largely determined by the research hypothesis and research objectives stated in the introductory section. Apart from the conventional methods (most of all, *traditional descriptive approaches* to track the prevailing narratives as well as conducting a *literature review* as demonstrated above), which are quite widespread in the sphere of international relations (IR) as a discipline, the study draws upon interdisciplinarity, combining a number of areas determining the multidimensional nature of transregional ties. These include but are not limited to exposing the key areas characteristic of German and European views of the Indo-Pacific as well as scrutinising statistical data, in particular pertaining to economics and trade.

To ensure the robustness of the analysis, the paper also relies on a variety of sources from doctrinal documents to official speeches made by country representatives.

¹¹ Su H. *European Dream and Reluctant Integration in the 21st Century: Lessons for Ongoing Asian Regionalism*. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press; 2020.

¹² Narlikar A., Plagemann J. *Making the Most of Germany's Strategic Partnerships: A Five-Point Proposal*. GIGA Focus Global. 2016;6. Available at: <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/making-the-most-of-germany-s-strategic-partnerships-a-five-point-proposal> (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹³ Hilz W. *Strategische Partnerschaften der EU*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 2020. Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-europalexikon/177287/strategische-partnerschaften-der-eu/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹⁴ Ezran I., Vaughan J. *Sino-German Relations in the Era of Global Interdependence*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. 4 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/sino-german-relations-era-global-interdependence> (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹⁵ Silver L., Huang C., Clansy L. *Negative Views of China Tied to Critical Views of Its Policies on Human Rights*. Pew Research Center. 29 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/29/negative-views-of-china-tied-to-critical-views-of-its-policies-on-human-rights/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹⁶ Driesmans I. *ASEAN at the Centre of EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy*. EEAS: The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. 19 April 2021. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/asean-centre-eus-indo-pacific-strategy-opinion-article-eu-ambassador-igor-driesmans_en (accessed 01.10.2024).

¹⁷ *Europe's Global Gateway towards the Indo-Pacific*. Observatory Indo-Pacific. 30 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/observatory-indo-pacific/europes-global-gateway-towards-the-indo-pacific/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

Document analysis can assist in creating a bigger picture in relation to the paramount fields of cooperation between Germany and Europe in general and the regional players, along with highlighting major stakeholders in the region both for the federal government and for the EU. Using certain elements of *discourse analysis* (e.g. with regard to the formal addresses by German officials), the article aims at defining the key elements of German policy towards the macroregion. At the same time, the peculiarities of the scholarly narratives can be tracked thanks to reliance on a wide selection of related publications.

Results. *EU and Germany: A Look into Security in the Indo-Pacific.* At first glance, the EU – and Germany in particular – has very few reasons to be solicitous about the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Still, the sheer fact of piracy and other threats to trade routes [7], as well as illicit trafficking in conjunction with related factors aggravate the concerns of the Europeans for that matter. Although rarely voiced publicly, one more potential point of tension is Djibouti: it is this African nation that hosts military bases of Washington and Beijing, Tokyo, and Paris. The country is located in the immediate proximity of the Gulf of Aden and Bab-el-Mandeb, another bottleneck of the Red Sea, by analogy with the Suez Canal, a gateway to the Mediterranean.

Discursively, both the EU and Germany's Indo-Pacific documents are predated by not only French, but also the US *Indo-Pacific Strategy* conceptualised during D. Trump's first term. Washington's proactive role in the region in the face of the US' multidimensional conflict with China cannot but have a direct impact on Brussels' and Berlin's positioning in the region. This competition is unequivocally mentioned in Germany's *Strategy on China* while Beijing's nuclear and conventional military modernisation is implicitly criticised¹⁸.

Despite the universalising efforts in producing *Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)* like the *European Army* project, the EU can only boast limited actual military capacity (being preoccupied at present with the challenges on the continent itself), which has a restraining impact on its presence in the region. Same is even truer of Germany, due to historical reasons as well as lawfully restrictions preconditioned by law (e.g. those stipulated by the *Two Plus Four Treaty*). Nonetheless, Berlin has had a visible influence on the overall European security posture in the Indo-Pacific, though to a lesser extent than France owing to absence of overseas territories and the above-mentioned legal limitations in the defence sphere.

Germany's *Ministry of Defence* has a separate commitment with a view to the region, with no sizeable contradictions to the posture proclaimed by the *Foreign Ministry*¹⁹. Some nuances touching upon the geography are not uninteresting as well: as such, the east coast of the African continent is included in the Indo-Pacific by definition, much like the western shores of both Americas. The *Ministry of Defence* stresses the risks connected with the presence of nuclear weapons states and de facto nuclear powers; conventional arms race and militarisation. At the same time, the declarative *Zeitenwende* speeches by Chancellor O. Scholz, substantiating the growing defence spending, do not comprise any hints on Asian or Indo-Pacific security²⁰.

¹⁸ China-Strategie der Bundesregierung. P. 48.

¹⁹ Engagement im Indo-Pazifik. Bundesministerium der Verteidigung. 18 July 2023. Available at: <https://www.bmvg.de/de/themen/dossiers/engagement-im-indopazifik> (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁰ Scholz O. Reden zur Zeitenwende (Speeches of the Epochal Shift). Die Bundesregierung. 2022. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/992814/2131062/78d39dda6647d-7f835bbe76713d30c31/bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-reden-zur-zeitenwende-download-bpa-data.pdf> (accessed 01.10.2024).



In spite of these abridgements, the EU and Germany keep pursuing capacity building in the realm of maritime security [8], with the intention of guarding the sea lanes and trade routes. As to concrete actions, those are predominantly limited to participating in joint missions by sending the warships as a way to show the interest in the security dimension. *Bundeswehr* officers have been taking part in French naval missions in the region since 2016. Moreover, Germany is also proactive to this end, as the journey of the *Bayern* frigate is a showcase for this purpose [9]. It was deployed in the region from August 2021 till February 2022, and its activities were chiefly predetermined by tracking the implementation of the sanctions regime against North Korea and joint drills with Japan's *Self-Defence Forces*. Germany was among the EU member states that invoked *Indian Ocean Working Group*, *Critical Maritime Routes Programme (CRIMARIO)* and *CRIMARIO II* initiated to raise awareness in the region. Berlin also allocates some of its financial resources to latently promote the introduction of the corresponding standards in the Asian militaries: Germany funds the *Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA)* programme jointly with France.

At the same time, Germany and the EU push forward another crucial concept, namely interoperability. As an illustration, the EU Naval Forces' *Operation Atalanta* was directed at preventing piracy in the waters surrounding the African Horn, with India, Japan, and Republic of Korea (ROK). EU *CSDP* missions have been deployed in Australia, New Zealand, ROK and Vietnam²¹.

Along with these developments, strenuously advertised in the media and analytical pieces, Germany also organised short visits of some vessels representing its fleet to Japan and ROK. This even affects air force²², as *Luftwaffe's Eurofighters* took part in *Pitch Black* exercise in Australia in August and September 2022²³.

Even if Germany aims at absconding from a conflict with China, it could not escape some contiguity on that occasion. Berlin's request to dock the said *Bayern* frigate in Shanghai was denied in September 2021 due to lack of mutual trust and transparency. This failed port call does not cancel the fact that *Bayern* was the first German warship to enter the South China Sea (SCS) since 2002. Berlin's involvement in actual operations in the SCS would manifest another level of stepping-in, serving at the very least as a declaration of interest helping Germany to indicate its presence. A changing PRC is a recurrent theme in the 2023 *Strategy on China*, substantiating Berlin's attitude towards its counterpart. China is simultaneously labelled as a partner, competitor and systemic rival²⁴, perceived as a challenger to the Indo-Pacific order.

To affirm the seriousness of its intent, Germany has even been considering limited military presence in the Taiwan Strait, two ships making a brief transit in its waters in September 2024. However, the developments in Ukraine make it possible to hypothesise that Berlin's depletable resources are more likely to be distributed in the European theatre.

As for the minilateral groupings abundant in the Indo-Pacific (e.g. *AUKUS* or *Quad*), Germany's interaction with those is quite sporadic. Berlin was not affected by the formation

²¹ Partnerships. EEAS: The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. 3 October 2022. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/partnerships_en (accessed 01.10.2024).

²² Engagement im Indo-Pazifik.

²³ Pittaway N. Germany deploys Eurofighters to Exercise Pitch Black. Australian Defence Magazine. 19 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.australiandefence.com.au/defence/air/germany-deploys-eurofighters-to-exercise-pitch-black> (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁴ China-Strategie der Bundesregierung. P. 8.

of the AUKUS alliance directly like France was, both reputation-wise and financially. Germany was a part of the 2022 *The Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC)* exercise led by the Quad nations²⁵, but such ad hoc cooperation is hardly to be contemplated as a rule. Given Germany's status as an extraregional player as well as a certain degree of exclusivity pertaining to these formats, it is difficult to imagine Berlin joining them even as an observer in the short-term run, as even France has not entered these groupings.

Taking into account the facts expounded, one could come to a conclusion that the defence dimension between Germany and the EU – on the one hand – and the Indo-Pacific – on the other hand – is developing, boosted by the recent happenings, but is on the whole constrained by the considerations of expediency.

The EU and Germany: Trade and Economic Relations with the Indo-Pacific. EU is the largest investor in the Indo-Pacific region and a key trading partner for major regional economies. Germany, the enduring locomotive of the European prosperity, has simultaneously been a beneficiary of the tight commercial ties with the Indo-Pacific. Berlin is clearly aimed at securing its trade interests as a major economy and an industrial power which additionally accounts for special interest of the European states in maritime security. Berlin keeps reorienting itself to the region bearing in mind the trade conflict between the EU and the US and an urgent need to expand to the markets beyond the EU.

The EU itself has several free trade agreements (FTAs) in force with such regional players as the ROK, Japan, Vietnam, and Singapore. The negotiations geared to concluding further similar agreements are either in the preparation phase or ongoing with Australia, India and New Zealand as well as some ASEAN countries, namely, Malaysia and Thailand²⁶. Still, the set of FTAs between the EU and Indo-Pacific nations has hardly had any colossal influence on Germany's gross imports and exports: not a single nation out of those named above in this paragraph was on the list of Berlin's top 10 trading partners as of 2023²⁷.

The PRC, however, has remained Berlin's top trading partner for years [10], only outpaced by the US in terms of exports and unrivalled in imports²⁸. And vice versa, Germany has long been the PRC's most important economic counterpart in the EU [11]. From other Indo-Pacific nations, only Japan and ROK account for more than 1% each in the overall pool of destinations. A closer look at the trade statistics reveals a disparity in Germany's exports and imports dynamics with China: in 2022, this indicator reached €84 billion²⁹. As the situation does not seem to be quite balanced, this only keeps increasing

²⁵ London B. World's Largest Naval Exercises to Include all 4 Quad Nations and 5 South China Sea Countries. CNN. 1 June 2022. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/31/politics/rimpac-navy-exercises-intl-hnk-ml/index.html> (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁶ Current Free Trade Agreements. Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. 2023. Available at: <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Artikel/Foreign-Trade/ongoing-negotiations-on-free-trade-agreements.html> (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁷ Foreign Trade. German Federal Statistical Office. 2023. Available at: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Economy/Foreign-Trade/_node.html#sprg481802 (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁸ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (2023). Germany (DEU) Exports, Imports and Trade Partners. The Observatory of Economic Complexity. Available at: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/deu?yearlyTradeFlowSelector=flow1> (accessed 01.10.2024).

²⁹ German Exports to China Decline in January Despite Lifting of Lockdown. Reuters. 21 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/german-exports-china-decline-january-despite-lifting-lockdown-2023-02-21/> (accessed 01.10.2024).



for the *Bundesrepublik* in course of time³⁰. Politically, Berlin is sometimes reproached for becoming dependent on the China, including by the EU, which expedites a quest for alternative pathways of engaging with other regional players. It is not in vain that the *Federation of German Industries*, or *Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V. (BDI)*, the most influential entity uniting large corporations, in one of its strategic papers published in 2019, referred to China as a “*systemic competitor*”³¹.

As for the ways of solving the trade deficit problem, Germany seems to have set its sights on diversification as opposed to decoupling³². Berlin has been trying to institutionalise this shift by creating a milieu conducive to business activities, holding conferences and other events for entrepreneurs³³. While the “*Wandel durch Handel*” concept³⁴ did not lead to any kind of softening in *Zhongnanhai*’s position, this bidirectionality proves that the metaphor of “*hot economics, cold politics*” can indeed be applied to the relations between Germany and China.

The complicated nature of the issue can be confirmed by bumpy negotiations on the *Comprehensive Agreement on Investment* with the PRC³⁵ concluded in principle on December 30, 2020 under Germany’s presidency of the *EU Council*. Disregarding this, Germany’s foreign investment to China was at its peak in the first half on 2022³⁶. Such a trend is palpable in relative terms as well: Berlin’s foreign direct investment (FDI) in China increased from just around a third in all of Asia to almost a half (46.5%) in a decade.

Communications lines, infrastructure and logistics form another prominent angle of Germany’s and the EU’s involvement in the region. The strained logistics between Europe and Asia due to sanctions against Russia threaten the idea of convergence between *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)* and *Eurasian Economic Union* directed at building bridges throughout Eurasia as a whole. Berlin is facing the dilemma of either pitching in with the *BRI* or competing with it while evading an unambiguous choice. For the avoidance of being accused of connivance at China’s appetites, Europe and Germany have been banking on so-called *Middle* (Central Asia and the Caucasus) and *Southern* (Mediterranean and the Middle East) *transport corridors* instead. The importance of sea routes in the Indo-Pacific is underlined further in the *Strategy on China*³⁷.

To sum up, China keeps playing a stunningly preponderant role in the economic relations between the EU and the macroregion even under the conditions of the US-China

³⁰ China Remains Germany’s Main Trading Partner for Seventh Year. Reuters. 8 February 2023. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/china-remains-germanys-main-trading-partner-seventh-year-2023-02-08/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³¹ China – Partner und systemischer Wettbewerber. Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.V. 1 October 2019. Available at: <https://bdi.eu/publikation/news/china-partner-und-systemischer-wettbewerber> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³² German Strategy on Asia Pacific: Diversification but no Decoupling from China. VietnamNews. 16 November 2022. Available at: <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/1396166/german-strategy-on-asia-pacific-diversification-but-no-decoupling-from-china.html> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³³ Becker A. German Business. Deutsche Welle. 31 October 2012. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/asia-is-of-growing-importance-for-german-trade/a-16345022> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³⁴ Ezran I., Vaughan J. Sino-German Relations in the Era of Global Interdependence.

³⁵ EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment. European Commission. 2020. Available at: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement_en (accessed 01.10.2024).

³⁶ German Dependence on China Growing “at tremendous pace” – IW. Reuters. 19 August 2022. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/german-dependence-china-growing-tremendous-pace-iw-2022-08-19/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

³⁷ China-Strategie der Bundesregierung. P. 49.

trade war, and Germany's dependence on these bilateral ties with the PRC is only becoming more obvious in the early 2020s. This leads both Brussels and Berlin to a risk management approach, Germany partly yielding its right to negotiate with *Zhongnanhai* to the European diplomacy.

Other Major Fields of Cooperation. In the political realm, Berlin sticks to multilateralism as a key principle of dealing with the Indo-Pacific [12]. Rules-based order and freedoms (i.e. of navigation) form the core values listed in both the *Leitlinien*³⁸ and the *EU Strategy*³⁹. Berlin's approach is supplemented by mentioning liberal freedoms of press, speech, trade etc.⁴⁰ Germany plays a key role in the *EU Global Gateway* connectivity strategy⁴¹ in implementing manifold infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific, e.g. road construction, water pipes maintenance etc.

The EU and Germany possess a certain degree of attractiveness in terms of projecting their soft power to the Indo-Pacific nations. Culture and education are among the most fruitful avenues for such collaboration, particularly with university consortiums and student exchange programmes. E.g. Erasmus+ is available to the countries of Regions 5 and 8, i.e. Asia and the Pacific⁴². Specifically for Germany, one could mention the transregional initiatives of the *Federal Ministry of Education and Research* mostly on a bilateral basis, in contrast to its pan-African projects⁴³. *German Academic Exchange Service*, or *Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst (DAAD)*, has also been zeroing in on the Indo-Pacific, continuing to facilitate the transregional collaboration among the scientists and offering a number of individually tailored projects⁴⁴. More instances of academic collaboration include the functioning of *Vietnamese-German University*, *Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance* in Thailand etc. Other cases illustrating transregional cooperation entail exchange of ideas between think tanks, for instance with Australia⁴⁵. These formats empower Germany in terms of promoting its vision through Track 2 and 3 diplomacy, joint seminars, round tables and other activities among various research institutes, potentiating the dialogue and crosspollination of ideas.

Apart from using the described instruments, interregional formats like *Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM)* assist in facilitating intercultural exchange and people-to-people contacts. Close grassroots ties are backed by the population composition, among other things: as of late 2021, roughly 172,000 Indians and around 146,000 Chinese expats lived in the Federal Republic⁴⁶. Exemplary is the bottom-up movement of town twinnings

³⁸ Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik. Deutschland – Europa – Asien. Das 21.

³⁹ The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

⁴⁰ Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik. Deutschland – Europa – Asien. Das 21.

⁴¹ Europe's Global Gateway towards the Indo-Pacific.

⁴² Eligible Countries. Erasmus+. 2023. Available at: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁴³ Cooperation with the Asia-Pacific Region. Federal Ministry of Education and Research. 2023. Available at: https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/en/international-affairs/worldwide-networking/cooperation-with-the-asia-pacific-region/cooperation-with-the-asia-pacific-region_node.html (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁴⁴ Indo-Pazifik-Region im Fokus. Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst. 6 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.daad.de/der-daad/daad-aktuell/de/80690-indo-pazifik-region-im-fokus/> (accessed 01.10.2024).

⁴⁵ Gulevich V. [German-Australian Partnership in the Asia-Pacific].

⁴⁶ Foreign Population by Place of Birth and Selected Citizenships. Statistisches Bundesamt. 2023. Available at: <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Population/Migration-Integration/Tables/foreigner-place-of-birth.html> (accessed 01.10.2024).



a.k.a. the institute of sister cities with the German municipalities (Gwangmyeong and Suwon in South Korea, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, and even on a district level in case of Seoul – Songpa and New Taipei).

Tourism remains a promising industry in promoting cultural exchange, even if it has been badly stricken by COVID-19 pandemic [13], from which the domain is now recovering as travel bans have been lifted even in China. Technology transfer and cooperation with Germany, including in critical technologies vital for strategic spheres, matters for initiating and advancing *Industry 4.0* projects⁴⁷ in the rapidly developing and modernising regional economies that have also benefitted from the expertise possessed by indigenous highly qualified specialists educated in Germany. As to the evidence pertaining to concerted efforts embracing radically new spheres, this concerns EU's bilateral agreements on digital partnerships with Japan and Singapore, as well as dialogues on cybersecurity etc.

Shifting to the humanitarian dimension, Berlin has been using humanitarian aid to promote the country's presence in the region and as an incentive to reinvigorate the relations with the regional players. This is especially visible in case of smaller Pacific island nations (e.g. in the cause of tackling climate change), also famously assisted by Australia, China and other international donors. On the European scale, F. Timmermans has continuously served as a liaison high-level official who promoted the EU vision on climate change in interaction with the Indo-Pacific. Germany, for its part, has been allotting its financial resources to combat deforestation and ensure water supply in some of the Pacific states⁴⁸. As for the development assistance, in addition to securing the access to promising markets, this direction is linked with cultivating a positive image of the country in the Global South.

Discussion and Conclusion. The ongoing tectonic processes in world politics launched – or exacerbated – by the COVID-19 pandemic and escalating hostilities around Ukraine imminently influence the transregional interaction of Europe and the Indo-Pacific in a lot of ways, from recalibration of supply chains to increasingly prominent militarisation. Germany's transregional cooperation with the Indo-Pacific is no exception in this situation, graphically reflecting the trends peculiar to Europe.

Although equating German and European approaches to the region could rightly be battered as an oversimplification, it has been found that there is a positive correlation between the wordings used in the *EU Strategy* and the *Leitlinien*. European and German Indo-Pacific stance is of a reactive nature not only because it was formed later than in the US in terms of the sequence of events, but also due to a certain degree of adoption of the language – though furnished with inherently attractive notions of multilateralism and inclusivity. In that sense, Berlin is not exactly repeating the directly divisive rhetoric of the US that contributes to the continuous securitisation of the region. While the EU and Berlin's postures towards the region are more than merely a derivative of Washington's policy, it remains to be seen if both Brussels and Berlin are capable of implementing an independent, self-sustaining course in the region in practice. Judging by the lack of structural

⁴⁷ Bordoloi P. Germany's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

⁴⁸ Director-General of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Liu Jinsong Holds a Video Consultation with Director-General for Asia and the Pacific of the German Federal Foreign Office Petra Sigmund. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 9 January 2021. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/gjhdq_665435/3265_665445/3296_664550/3298_664554/202109/t20210902_9169319.html (accessed 01.10.2024).

changes in the bodies responsible for foreign affairs, European and German Indo-Pacific policies are not nearly as institutionalised as those of the US. Besides, actual efficiency of bureaucratic structures and roadmaps or declarations of intent is questionable to some critics. Still, the degree of coherence between the potential will and actual capacity of the EU might be crystallised in the upcoming years as the strategy is being implemented.

German posture toward the Indo-Pacific can be regarded as pragmatic – though hardly bordering on *Realpolitik* – but concurrently wrapped in a (neo)liberal, value-based packaging all the same, in contrast to zero-sum thinking. That said, the EU and Germany's projections are tangibly underpinned by a normative approach determined by the self-positioning of Brussels and Berlin in the region and globally. Such a stance clearly contains an ambivalence: theses grounded on rules as declared in the official documents coexist with the down-to-earth consideration of narrower interests demonstrated *de facto*. Moreover, there remains an open question of whether the described value-based approach is met with reciprocity or is at least accommodated by the Indo-Pacific regional powers other than Australia, Japan or ROK. Indeed, the European actors may concentrate on exporting rules and norms, but the question is how expedient it might be if those are copied blindly without any adaptation to local realities.

Conceptualisation of the Indo-Pacific as a framework of action is an unceasing, multispeed process influenced by a number of variables (e.g. geopolitical fluctuations, internal struggle etc.) The process of gradual strengthening of the Indo-Pacific narratives in Germany and the EU can be traced back to the turn of the 2010s and 2020s. In Germany it was initiated two years later than in France, but this shift gave an impetus to a larger Indo-Pacific vision of the EU. Germany – together with France – has been acting as a centripetal force in forming Europe's Indo-Pacific vision, and this adhesive power was sufficient to conceive an all-EU view with regard to the region in a matter of months. Indeed, the synergy known as “*le couple franco-allemand*” has long been defining the European integration processes, and this unity (regardless of setbacks like the announcement of *AUKUS*) can be defined as an important part of the chain reaction in the European Indo-Pacific practice. Germany's involvement in the Indo-Pacific exemplifies the role of not only great but also middle powers in advancing such narratives, analogously to Australia and Japan in the region itself.

Germany's and the EU's approaches to the region rest upon not so much a polycentric world model but rather a multilateral network structure. Even though it is not overtly propagated as a mission, Europe – and Germany in particular – has been striving for creating an attractive and viable alternative to dilute a bipolar choice between Beijing and Washington hanging over the regional powers. This can be interpreted as an attempt to move away from a binary choice, though in reality neither Brussels nor Berlin are as apt in avoiding taking sides as ASEAN member states.

Another potential point of convergence possibly consists in the lessons learnt from Germany's central role in the region which did not prevent it from participation in building the multilateral European order. As H. Su argues, this experience can, in turn, be embraced by China, pointing at some geopolitical and historical commonalities between the two countries and their neighbours⁴⁹. Moreover, the success story of European integration

⁴⁹ Su H. European Dream and Reluctant Integration in the 21st Century: Lessons for Ongoing Asian Regionalism. P. 403.



is seen as inspiring by some Asian politicians extrapolating these schemes (sometimes in a mechanistic manner) to foster regionalism in the Indo-Pacific.

The palpable overall securitisation of the IR discourse in the region in the recent years manifests itself *nolens volens* in German Indo-Pacific policy. The idea of seamlessness in maintaining stability of the global regions presupposes an interconnection between seemingly distant parts of the world. From a systems thinking point of view, events in one part of the globe inevitably influence the state of affairs in another, quite similar to U-shaped vessels. This thesis can be illustrated by former Japanese *PM* F. Kishida's utterance that security of Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific are undivided⁵⁰.

Germany's ex-*Foreign Minister* H. Maas raised the issue of remoteness of Asia from Germany and Europe in general, claiming that "The Himalayas and the Malacca Strait may seem a long way away"⁵¹. Notwithstanding the so-called tyranny of distance and pronounced differences in business culture, Germany's relations with the Indo-Pacific represent one of the most indicative examples of transregional cooperation.

Further work should involve a more in-depth scrutiny of the Asian view, including the corpus of texts in the corresponding languages, as well as the reliance on a country-based approach so as to mark out similarities and differences in how the US' traditional partners view the Indo-Pacific. In terms of content analysis, monitoring the dynamics in a reverse direction (e.g. parsing Asian leaders' speech acts with regard to Germany) could be of interest as well. Likewise, an exhaustive discourse analysis of the leading German media – perhaps, with the application of data mining and/or Big Data technologies to automate the process – would also be sought after. More prospective linguistic approaches include reviewing the modalities to discern the division/cohesion between the descriptive and prescriptive elements; surveying the documents as performative speech acts; employing the toolkit of quantitative and qualitative content analysis to scrutinise the context surrounding the predominant ideologemes in more detail; and paying individual attention to the implicatures.

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⁵¹ Foreign Minister Maas on the Adoption of the German Government Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific Region. Auswärtiges Amt. 2 September 2020. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-indo-pacific/2380474> (accessed 01.10.2024).

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Доступность данных и материалов. Наборы данных, использованные и/или проанализированные в ходе текущего исследования, можно получить у автора по обоснованному запросу.

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