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NAVIGATING GREAT-POWER RIVALRY:
AN INDO-PACIFIC PLUS STRATEGY
FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Navigating Great-Power Rivalry: An Indo-Pacific Plus Strategy for the European Union

As transatlantic tensions deepen, the European Union faces a geopolitical environment increasingly shaped by great-power rivalry rather than stable multilateralism. At Davos 2026, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney warned that the rules-based order is weakening and that middle powers must respond through cooperational coalition-building rather than passive reliance on inherited institutions. Canada's subsequent strategic tariff arrangement with China and the United Kingdom's pragmatic reset with Beijing illustrate a broader trend of strategic hedging under US assertiveness. For the EU, the central question is whether to react with its own unilateral pivot, or to actively implement a coordinated Indo-Pacific coalition strategy that preserves resilience and strategic autonomy without drifting into dependency on either Washington or Beijing.

The European Union entered 2026 confronting an increasingly fractured geopolitical environment in which long-standing assumptions about NATO cohesion and overall transatlantic partnership are no longer as [reliable](#) as they were. Transatlantic relations, historically the cornerstone of Europe's security and prosperity, are under visible strain during Trump 2.0. Trade tensions between Washington and European capitals have intensified, with [renewed and repeated](#) tariff disputes and threats of economic retaliation. On security, debates over NATO [burden-sharing](#) and the future trajectory of support for [Ukraine](#) have further deepened the [uncertainty](#). Former European Commission President José Manuel Barroso recently [described](#) Europe-US relations as being at their "lowest moment" since NATO's founding, reflecting a shift from shared-value alignment to interest-driven transactionalism. This deterioration does not necessarily mean the transatlantic alliance is collapsing. It does, however, suggest we can no longer take certain fundamentals for granted and that a structural [transformation](#) may be underway: geopolitics is becoming more coercive, more competitive and more explicitly hierarchical. The return of what some describe as "[imperial thinking](#)", where great powers openly leverage economic integration, financial systems and security guarantees as instruments of pressure, marks a decisive departure from the post-Cold War narrative of rules-based convergence. These perceptions become increasingly logical, especially after the US strike on Venezuela or current tensions between the US and Iran, followed by Marco Rubio's February Munich Security Conference speech, [viewed](#) as neo-imperial in its nature. The second Trump administration has accelerated this dynamic, combining assertive economic nationalism with an unpredictable diplomatic style that often places pressure on allies as much as on competitors.

It is precisely this rupture that Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney addressed in his [2026 Davos speech](#). Carney [declared](#) that the "rules-based international order" is no longer a stable foundation for middle powers, [understood](#) as states that occupy an intermediate position in the global hierarchy. They [lack the material capabilities](#) to dominate the

international system but possess sufficient economic weight, diplomatic reach, and institutional engagement to influence international outcomes. Rather than [relying](#) primarily on coercive power, these states typically [exercise](#) influence through multilateral diplomacy and cooperational coalition-building. Carney [warned](#) that multilateral institutions are weakening under the weight of great-power rivalry and economic coercion. His message can be [interpreted](#) in two ways. First, strategic autonomy is becoming a necessity rather than a choice. Second, the answer cannot be a world of isolated fortresses. Instead, middle powers must engage in coalition-building, which he framed as “value-based realism”, to preserve sovereignty while stabilising interdependence. Carney’s remarks were not theoretical. They were accompanied by a visible recalibration of Canada’s external economic strategy. In response to escalating US tariffs and mounting trade friction, Ottawa [concluded](#) a new strategic partnership with China, including a tariff arrangement covering electric vehicles and agricultural products. The agreement, which [lowers Canadian tariffs](#) on Chinese electric vehicles in exchange for Chinese reductions in tariffs on canola and other exports, is thus an example of strategic hedging in line with the Davos message.

The United Kingdom has followed a comparable path. After Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s state visit to Beijing, London announced a “[reset](#)” in economic relations with China, [securing tariff adjustments](#), investment commitments and expanded market access. Like Canada, the UK has [framed](#) its approach as pragmatic engagement, seeking [economic benefits](#) while maintaining a cautious security stance. Together, these moves may be interpreted as a broader trend among Western middle powers: diversification without rupture, hedging without formal abandonment of transatlantic ties. For the European Union, these [developments](#) would therefore raise a fundamental strategic question: how should Europe position itself in a more contested order without rupturing the transatlantic relationship? The dilemma is sharpened by mounting US pressure in trade and security policy, growing fragmentation of global governance, and intensifying [US–China](#) rivalry centred on the Indo-Pacific.” At the same time, the EU is deeply [exposed](#) to Indo-Pacific dynamics through trade flows, critical raw materials, maritime supply routes and technological value chains.

The risk for the EU is twofold. First, it may [drift](#) into reactive policymaking, oscillating between tighter alignment with Washington or cautious accommodation with Beijing, depending on immediate pressures. Second, it may interpret the hedging behaviour of partners such as Canada and the UK as a signal to pursue its own unilateral recalibration. Both responses would be [strategically insufficient](#). Picking sides in a binary logic of great-power rivalry [would deepen](#) European vulnerability. Acting alone would also [weaken Europe’s influence](#) over the rules that shape global interdependence. Canada’s recent recalibration should not be seen as a “betrayal,” but as a sign that when multilateral frameworks erode, middle powers seek flexibility. Diversification does not have to [mean](#) disengagement; it can mean reducing overdependence while [preserving](#) cooperation. This creates space for a more coordinated response involving Europe, Indo-Pacific partners and Canada.

The core question, then, is how the EU can respond to geopolitical friction without sliding into unilateral hedging or passivity in the context of the Indo-Pacific region. This brief argues that instead of a solo pivot, toward China or exclusive US alignment, the EU should [pursue](#) an Indo-Pacific Plus (IP+) strategy built on practical and cooperational coalition-building. Anchored in cooperation with Canada and like-minded Indo-Pacific partners, such an

approach could foster rules-based economic resilience, reduce exposure to coercive leverage, whether from Beijing or Washington and allow Europe to [act proactively](#) rather than reactively in the epicentre of contemporary geopolitics.

Coalition-building and the logic of “like-minded” partnerships

The European Union’s Indo-Pacific engagement is formally [anchored](#) in the 2021 Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The document defines the Indo-Pacific as a region of [“increasing strategic significance”](#) for Europe and stresses that the futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are [“inextricably linked”](#) through trade, investment, supply chains and shared global challenges. The strategy explicitly commits the EU to reinforcing the rules-based international order, [promoting democracy, rule of law and open markets](#), and strengthening partnerships across seven priority areas ranging from connectivity and digital governance to security and defence.

At its core, the EU’s approach rests on [coalition-building among “like-minded”](#) partners. In the EU [context](#), “like-minded” partners generally refer to states that [share](#) a broad commitment to multilateral cooperation, open markets, peaceful dispute resolution and elements of the rules-based international order, even if their domestic political systems or strategic priorities differ. European Indo-Pacific strategies, both at the EU level and among member states, consistently emphasise concepts such as a [“rules-based order,” “free and open”](#) sea lanes, and cooperation with partners that share normative commitments. At the same time, like-mindedness should not be interpreted as institutional or ideological uniformity. Many Asian partners [operate](#) through different strategic cultures and institutional logics, often prioritising pragmatic economic development, flexible [regionalism](#) or state-led economic coordination.

In several sectors, particularly supply-chain governance, digital innovation and industrial policy, the EU may therefore find itself learning from regional partners as much as promoting its own regulatory approaches. The EU currently [maintains](#) strategic partnerships with key regional actors, including Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and ASEAN, and has concluded comprehensive trade agreements with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam and India. These instruments can provide a dense institutional web upon which deeper coalition-building can be constructed. However, organisations such as ASEAN should [not be downplayed](#) as monolithic actors. ASEAN itself [encompasses](#) significant political, economic and strategic diversity among its member states, reflecting the broader heterogeneity of Southeast Asia. Yet, coalition-building is no longer an optional diplomatic preference; it is becoming a structural necessity, as global politics are increasingly [defined](#) by competing networks rather than formal alliances. The [Indo-Pacific strategy](#) explicitly frames EU engagement as partnership-based rather than bloc-based. However, it also [recognises](#) rising geopolitical competition, military build-up in contested maritime zones, and increasing economic coercion. The Indo-Pacific therefore emerges not merely as a space of economic opportunity, but as a theatre of systemic [contestation](#).

From the perspective of Indo-Pacific partners, deeper engagement with the European Union is not primarily about alignment, but about diversification. Countries such as Japan and South Korea, while remaining closely tied to the United States in security terms, have increasingly [faced](#) uncertainty linked to shifts in US foreign and economic policy. At the

same time, reliance on China continues to offer economic opportunities, but also exposes them to potential political and economic leverage. In this context, the EU may represent a complementary partner: it offers access to large and predictable markets, high-standard trade frameworks and regulatory stability, without the same degree of geopolitical conditionality. For [ASEAN](#) countries in particular, the EU's emphasis on [open regionalism](#), economic cooperation and institutional dialogue aligns with their own preference for strategic autonomy and balanced external relations. Rather than choosing sides, many Indo-Pacific actors are actively [shaping](#) a more diversified external engagement strategy. This creates an opportunity for the EU to position itself not as an alternative bloc, but as a stabilising partner within a broader network of cooperation.

EU-China relations within the strategic landscape

At this juncture, the evolution of EU-China relations complicates the strategic landscape. The bilateral relationship has [changed](#) dramatically in recent years as cooperation with China continues to offer significant economic opportunities, while diverging strategic interests and perceptions increasingly risk undermining the effectiveness of dialogue. The relationship stands at what has been [described](#) as a “crossroads,” shaped by mutual interdependence but also by mounting [friction](#) over trade, security, governance standards, [digital space](#) and geopolitical alignments, mainly in relation to Russia. At the same time, last year official Chinese narratives [emphasised](#) the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties as a “new starting point,” highlighting record trade volumes, expanding two-way investment and a shared commitment to multilateralism, while urging the EU to [avoid](#) politicising economic relations and to respect China's core interests.

The coexistence of deep economic interdependence and growing strategic divergence encapsulates the current state of EU-China relations: neither rupture nor partnership in the traditional sense, but a structurally ambivalent relationship that compels the EU to pursue de-risking, diversification and cooperational coalition-building simultaneously.

US-EU relations and the risk of fragmentation

The logic of cooperational coalition-building cannot be analysed in isolation from transatlantic dynamics. While the EU and the United States share broad concerns about Chinese assertiveness and supply-chain vulnerabilities, their strategic methods [diverge](#). The US Indo-Pacific [approach](#) has been more overtly securitised and alliance-driven, centred on groupings such as the Quad and AUKUS. In contrast, the EU's strategy [emphasises](#) inclusive multilateralism, economic connectivity and normative frameworks. At the same time, although US and European interests and policy preferences have diverged in areas like trade or governance, the US remains the EU's central security partner through NATO, which makes any form of strategic de-risking in the transatlantic relationship more complex. First, a more transactional and assertive US policy, particularly under conditions of renewed economic nationalism, can put [pressure](#) on individual EU member states, incentivising bilateral arrangements over coordinated EU-level responses. Second, excessive alignment with US hard-balancing strategies could [erode](#) the EU's ability to present itself as a distinct and credible partner to Indo-Pacific states seeking diversification rather than bloc confrontation.

The Indo-Pacific has become the epicentre of [shifting geopolitics](#) and fragmented [interdependence](#). Stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of the Americas, the region [encompasses](#) South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and Oceania and hosts more than half of the world's population. The region [accounts](#) for 60% of global GDP and hosts key maritime chokepoints vital to European trade, including the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. Approximately 40% of the European Union's external trade [passes](#) through the South China Sea alone, [underscoring](#) the extent to which European prosperity depends on the [stability](#) of Indo-Pacific sea lanes. Beyond trade flows, the region is [central](#) to global supply chains for semiconductors, critical minerals and advanced manufacturing components that underpin Europe's digital transformation, green transition and defence industries. At the same time, the EU finds itself [navigating](#) between two distinct yet interconnected structural pressures. On the one hand, the United States is [intensifying](#) efforts to consolidate alliance-based balancing mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific, reinforcing security partnerships and encouraging closer strategic alignment among its allies and partners, including Japan, Australia, and South Korea among others.

On the other hand, China continues to [expand its flexible partnership networks](#), using economic diplomacy, connectivity initiatives and multilateral engagement to reshape norms and influence the architecture of global governance. Through initiatives such as [infrastructure financing and strategic investment](#), Beijing has been able to [translate](#) economic interdependence into political leverage across parts of the Indo-Pacific and beyond. In this evolving environment, the European Union's comparative advantage lies [not in military power](#) but in its economic, regulatory and [institutional leverage](#). The EU [remains](#) one of the world's largest trading actors and investors, and a major provider of development finance and connectivity initiatives across the Indo-Pacific.

[Through trade agreements](#), regulatory standards, development assistance and infrastructure initiatives such as Global Gateway, the EU is able to [incentivise](#) cooperation by [offering market access](#), investment, technological partnerships and support for sustainable connectivity. These instruments position the EU as a partner capable of shaping economic governance and supply-chain resilience, creating the foundations for deeper plurilateral cooperation frameworks such as an Indo-Pacific Plus partnership. If the EU were to allow itself to be strategically fragmented in this environment, whether as a result of selective US economic pressure or through differentiated Chinese leverage over individual member states, its collective bargaining power could [diminish](#) significantly. Given the Indo-Pacific's [growing weight](#) in global economic governance, technological supply chains and maritime security, maintaining a coherent European position in the region is therefore not only a question of external engagement but of preserving the EU's own strategic autonomy.

Europe's structural vulnerabilities

The urgency of a coherent cooperational coalition strategy stems from Europe's structural exposure. [The Indo-Pacific strategy](#) underscores the depth of EU and Indo-Pacific interdependence as the region hosts four of the EU's ten largest trading partners and accounts for over [70% of global trade flows in goods and services](#). European prosperity depends on secure [maritime routes](#), diversified supply chains and stable digital and technological ecosystems. However, this [interdependence](#) is asymmetrical in critical sectors. Europe remains heavily [dependent](#) on Indo-Pacific sources for rare earths, critical minerals,

semiconductors and other strategic technologies. Maritime disruptions in the South China Sea or the Malacca Strait would have immediate economic [repercussions](#). Moreover, the rise of economic coercion and sanction regimes demonstrates how economic interdependence can be [weaponised](#). In this context, a simple “[balancing](#)” approach, choosing either US alignment or selective accommodation with China, [would](#) be strategically insufficient and potentially destabilising. Aligning uncritically with US economic decoupling measures risks collateral damage to European industry. Pivoting unilaterally toward China would [expose](#) Europe to normative and technological dependencies that contradict its own regulatory model.

Why does de-risking require coalition tools?

The EU has increasingly [framed](#) its China policy in terms of “[de-risking](#)” rather than decoupling. Yet de-risking cannot be [achieved](#) through unilateral diversification alone. Supply-chain resilience, critical mineral access and technological standard-setting require coordinated frameworks with trusted partners. Systemic rivalry is increasingly [conducted](#) through networks of standards, infrastructure and diplomatic alignments rather than formal alliances. Likewise, pragmatic coordination among revisionist actors can [challenge](#) the liberal international order in Southeast Asia. These dynamics illustrate that fragmented responses from Europe would only amplify external leverage. Therefore, de-risking must be [embedded](#) within structured but flexible cooperational coalitions of like-minded partner states that share interests in open trade, diversified supply chains, maritime security and digital governance. The EU’s existing trade agreements and strategic partnerships may provide a starting point, but these must be operationalised through economic security coordination, critical raw material partnerships and shared early-warning mechanisms. In this context, cooperational coalition-building [offers the only viable pathway](#) to balance the negative externalities of both US unilateralism and Chinese hegemonic ambitions.

From Hedging Signals to Coordinated Agency: Why the EU Should Avoid a Solo Pivot

Recent policy adjustments by [Canada](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) could be interpreted not as geopolitical realignments but as responses to systemic stress within a weakening multilateral order, [addressed](#) by Carney at Davos. In the context of [intensified](#) US-China rivalry and more frequent recourse to economic coercion, both countries have pursued limited diversification while maintaining their transatlantic security orientation. The implication for the EU is clear: isolated hedging increases exposure when institutional predictability erodes. This lesson is particularly salient amid renewed transatlantic volatility.

A more transactional US administration could deepen trade frictions, potentially pushing the EU toward reactive [recalibration](#). Yet a unilateral [pivot](#) toward China would simply replace one dependency with another. Closer alignment without coordinated safeguards would heighten [vulnerability](#) to regulatory and technological asymmetries, while automatic alignment with Washington would constrain Europe’s strategic autonomy. The alternative is that there may be a coordinated agency. Carney’s intervention was a call for structured middle-power cooperation, and the Indo-Pacific offers the most viable arena for the EU to operationalise this principle. Thus, Europe should [consolidate](#) its regional partnerships under conditions of shifting US policy. Building on its extensive network of trade agreements

and strategic partnerships, the EU should integrate Indo-Pacific partners and Canada into [structured coordination](#) on trade resilience, digital governance and supply-chain security.

The Alternative: Indo-Pacific Plus (IP+) Coalition-Building

If the previous sections have demonstrated the risks of fragmented hedging and unilateral recalibration, the logical alternative for the European Union is structured cooperational coalition-building in the Indo-Pacific. But not as a bloc formation, but rather a stabilising framework for rules-based economic cooperation. An “Indo-Pacific Plus” (IP+) approach would [consolidate](#) Europe’s existing trade architecture with like-minded partners and link it more explicitly to economic security coordination, resilience and regulatory cooperation. In this respect, Mark Carney’s [Davos message](#) can align with European interests. His call for middle powers to craft new coalitions in response to weakening multilateral enforcement is not a departure from transatlanticism but a reinforcement of it through diversification. Canada’s own deep economic [integration](#) with the EU under [CETA](#) may demonstrate the viability of advanced, rules-based economic partnerships among democratic middle powers. Incorporating Canada more structurally into EU-Indo-Pacific coordination could therefore not dilute the transatlantic relationship but rather modernise it by extending it into the region where global interdependence is more intense.

The EU does not need to construct this coalition from scratch. It already possesses a dense network of high-standard agreements across the Indo-Pacific. With [Japan](#), the Economic Partnership Agreement and Strategic Partnership Agreement have underpinned a [deepening](#) strategic alignment, recently reinforced through initiatives on competitiveness, supply chains and critical minerals. With [South Korea](#), a long-standing FTA and an upgraded security partnership provide a robust basis for [cooperation](#) in trade, digital governance and geopolitical coordination.

[Australia](#) represents another key [partner](#) in safeguarding the rules-based trading system amid rising tariff pressures, with [the conclusion of EU-Australia FTA](#) negotiations signalling renewed momentum in the EU’s diversification agenda despite persistent sensitivities around [agricultural market access](#). [New Zealand](#)’s FTA with the EU, in force since 2024, [reflects](#) a shared commitment to open markets and enforceable sustainability standards. In Southeast Asia, the [EU-Singapore](#) FTA and the newly [entered-into-force](#) [Digital Trade Agreement](#) signal an ambition to shape global digital rules, enhance legal certainty for businesses and prohibit unjustified data localisation. The recent [upgrade](#) of [EU - Vietnam](#) relations to a [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) further anchors the EU in a key manufacturing hub, with explicit emphasis on supply chain diversification, critical raw materials and secure digital infrastructure.

At the interregional level, the [EU - ASEAN](#) Strategic Partnership, elevated in 2020, is built on shared commitments to multilateralism, regional integration and maritime security. ASEAN’s practice of [“open regionalism”](#) and its centrality in Indo-Pacific supply chains make it a natural pillar of any IP+ framework. Rather than creating an anti-China bloc, its purpose would be to stabilise rule-based economic cooperation amid [fragmented interdependence](#). By aligning trade agreements, digital standards, connectivity projects and investment frameworks, the EU and its Indo-Pacific partners could create a networked economic space that reduces vulnerability to coercion from any direction. ASEAN’s own interest in [balancing](#) the US-China rivalry and preserving multilateralism makes deeper [EU-ASEAN](#) coordination

particularly promising. Economically, IP+ would reinforce Europe's diversification strategy. The Indo-Pacific is [central](#) to global manufacturing, clean-tech processing and digital innovation.

Consolidating high-standard FTAs and digital agreements with partners such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand would strengthen trusted corridors for trade and investment, while [engagement](#) with Indonesia and broader ASEAN economies would expand access to critical minerals, green technologies and growing consumer markets. Crucially, this approach could also [renew](#) transatlantic cooperation more functionally. Rather than waiting for US policy shifts, the EU could [coordinate](#) with other partners within shared supply chains and standards frameworks. IP+ would therefore act as a bridge between Europe's Indo-Pacific strategy and a modernised transatlantic economic architecture.

Deliverables: From Vision to Operational Coordination

For the Indo-Pacific Plus (IP+) framework to move beyond declaratory ambition, it must translate cooperational coalition logic into concrete instruments of economic resilience. The emerging Europe-Canada-Indo-Pacific dialogue has been described as the embryonic architecture of a "[Third Space](#)": not a geopolitical bloc, but a regulatory and economic space designed to reduce exclusive dependence while preserving openness. Its purpose is not confrontation, but diversification with [predictability](#). At the same time, under renewed US volatility, the EU must [go beyond "business as usual"](#) and consolidate partnerships through tangible, coordinated action in the Indo-Pacific. Two deliverables are therefore central. First, economic security coordination should be institutionalised among IP+ partners. The [increasing weaponisation](#) of trade, technology, and finance has rendered economic and strategic security inseparable. IP+ should establish early-warning mechanisms for coercive trade measures, joint monitoring of supply-chain vulnerabilities, and structured alignment on trade defence tools and sanctions circumvention.

Such measures [would align closely with EU interests](#). Second, critical minerals and clean-tech value chains must anchor industrial cooperation. Resilience in sectors such as semiconductors, critical raw materials and clean energy lies at the core of the "[Third Space](#)" [concept](#). Operationally, this could mean linking Canada's resource base with Indo-Pacific processing hubs and European industrial capacity to build "trusted value chains" under shared environmental and transparency standards. Such integration could reduce single-source dependencies while strengthening the EU's capacity to shape global norms in sustainable mining, digital trade and green technologies.

In practice, this cooperation could be supported by flexible regulatory mechanisms already [embedded](#) in EU trade and sustainability policies. For instance, the phased implementation of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism ([CBAM](#)), transitioning from a reporting period to full pricing from 2026, [allows](#) partner countries time to align their carbon pricing or decarbonisation strategies while maintaining access to the EU market. Similarly, the EU Deforestation Regulation ([EUDR](#)) includes staggered enforcement timelines, with large and medium operators now expected to comply from December 2026 and smaller operators from mid-2027, [providing](#) a transitional window for partner countries to [adapt](#) supply-chain monitoring and certification systems. Corporate sustainability due diligence requirements under the [CSDDD](#) also [incorporate](#) proportionality and risk-based implementation, [focusing](#)

primarily on the largest companies and [allowing](#) simplified procedures for actors further down the value chain. Taken together, these illustrate that EU regulatory tools are not only constraints but also potential cooperation platforms, enabling partners to gradually align standards while benefiting from stable market access and participation in resilient value chains.

Conclusion

By embedding these measures within existing agreements and partnerships, IP+ would remain flexible and inclusive. It would shield Europe from systemic volatility, whether stemming from US unilateralism or Chinese centrality, without forcing binary alignment. In doing so, the EU would shift from reactive balancing to proactive cooperational coalition-building in the epicentre of global economic competition. Taken together, these steps point toward a more deliberate European strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Rather than oscillating between alignment and adjustment, the EU can use IP+ to strengthen its resilience while remaining open and cooperative. By coordinating economic security tools and building trusted value chains with Canada and key Indo-Pacific partners, Europe would not be forming a bloc, but reinforcing the foundations of rules-based interdependence. In a more fragmented global order, this approach offers the EU a way to reduce vulnerability, preserve strategic autonomy and shape the environment in which great-power rivalry unfolds.

From the perspective of Indo-Pacific partners, deeper engagement with the European Union is not primarily about alignment, but about diversification. Countries such as Japan and South Korea, while remaining closely tied to the United States in security terms, have increasingly faced uncertainty linked to shifts in US foreign and economic policy. At the same time, reliance on China continues to offer economic opportunities, but also exposes them to potential political and economic leverage. In this context, the EU represents a complementary partner: it offers access to large and predictable markets, high-standard trade frameworks and regulatory stability, without the same degree of geopolitical conditionality. For ASEAN countries in particular, the EU's emphasis on open regionalism, economic cooperation and institutional dialogue aligns with their own preference for strategic autonomy and balanced external relations. Rather than choosing sides, many Indo-Pacific actors are actively shaping a more diversified external engagement strategy. This creates an opportunity for the EU to position itself not as an alternative bloc, but as a stabilising partner within a broader network of cooperation.



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The logo for EIAS, featuring the letters "EIAS" in a bold, serif font. Above the letters is a thin, curved line that arches over the "E" and "I".