The EU and the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by David McALLISTER (EPP, DE) on the EU and security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

The EU defines the Indo-Pacific region as an area spanning from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island states. The region has 60% of the world's population and seven G20 members and is a key player in the international order.

The recently adopted Joint Communication on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region reflects a deep and necessary shift in the way the EU views its interests, opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and its ambition to play a more decisive role in this region of growing geopolitical and economic importance.

EU response to security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region

Welcoming the joint communication on an EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, the report called on the EU to use the strategy as a tool to effectively increase its presence and influence in the region through furthering strategic ties and deepening all-inclusive dialogue and cooperation on security and defence-related matters with like-minded countries and organisations in the region.

Members are concerned that Chinese leaders have not clearly condemned Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine. They called on the Chinese leadership to live up to its responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and not only condemn Russia's blatant violation, but also use its contacts with the Russian President to urge him to put an immediate end to this violent aggression.

Members welcomed the overwhelming support expressed by the countries of the Indo-Pacific region for the UN General Assembly's vote on 2 March on the resolution deploring Russia's aggression against Ukraine. However, they regretted that, in addition to China, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Laos, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam abstained on the final text and encouraged these countries to reconsider their position.

The report stressed the need to ensure the **EU's unity** as a precondition for achieving the Union's ambition of open strategic sovereignty in the context of the recent Russian aggression against Ukraine. It called on the Council of the European Union to show greater unity in taking action to **respond to China's undemocratic policy and aggressive behaviour**, which endangers the sovereignty of its neighbours and the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. Noting that the growing US involvement in the Indo-Pacific region has implications for European security, Members reaffirmed the need for a capable European Defence Union.

Strategic sovereignty based on multilateralism and the rules-based international order

Members are concerned about the threat posed by the current tensions in the region to global security, peace and stability, as well as to free and open communication in the maritime, air, space and IT fields. They encouraged the relevant services of the European External Action Service to analyse the impact of

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and to consider how the Union could respond to a deterioration of the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region, reaffirming that the Union could play a stabilising role in the region.

Concerned about the rapid build-up of military forces in China, Members stressed that the **EU's approach to China must be unified, pragmatic, multidimensional and principled**. It should be based on cooperation on issues of common interest and global concern, such as the fight against climate change, and compete with China in offering alternative economic, political and strategic options to third countries and oppose or even sanction it on issues such as respect for democracy and human rights.

Stressing the **importance of connectivity cooperation** for the EU and the Indo-Pacific region to meet new security challenges, the report called for concrete and visible projects in the areas of cybersecurity, digital connectivity and critical infrastructure, security of the global internet infrastructure including undersea cables, climate security and sustainable development. Members recommended defining the Indo-Pacific region as a **region of key strategic interest for the EU** when developing the EU's Strategic Compass.

Enhancing partnerships with regional organisations and democratic countries

Members called for existing partnerships with regional actors to be strengthened and for new ones to be established. They called on the EU to anchor and extend its presence in the region by deepening cooperation with ASEAN and its members. They welcomed the close coordination with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. They called on the EU to improve its strategic cooperation with India.

Members strongly refuted any attempt by Chinese propaganda to draw similarities between the Russian war in Ukraine and **Taiwan's** overall security situation. They stressed the need for closer co-ordination with like-minded partners in order to preserve peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, reiterating that China and Taiwan should adopt a constructive attitude based on dialogue in their relations.

Freedom of the global commons: the fundamental basis for EU-Indo-Pacific relations

The report called on the EU to step up its external action, in particular its diplomatic efforts, to enhance the rule of law offshore and also to improve maritime cooperation with the countries in the Indo-Pacific. The EU should ensure a permanent and credible European naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

Members also called on the EU and NATO to align their respective strategies to provide adequate **responses to cyber-attacks and disinformation from the region**. They proposed the creation of an independent EU strategic communications centre for the Indo-Pacific region. They also asked the EU to develop regional and global partnerships with democratic regional producers of critical technologies.

Lastly, the EU and like-minded partner countries are urged to strengthen their cooperation on nuclear security and non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and to support the implementation and universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty in the Indo-Pacific region.