Why, how and to whom is the European Union signalling in the Indo-Pacific? Understanding the European Union's strategy in the Indo-Pacific in the epicentre of multipolar competition

Willigen, N.J.G. van; Blarel, N.R.J.B. van

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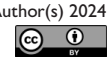
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Why, how and to whom is the European Union signalling in the Indo-Pacific? Understanding the European Union's strategy in the Indo-Pacific in the epicentre of multipolar competition

Niels van Willigen and Nicolas Blarel

Abstract

In September 2021, the European Union officially launched its Indo-Pacific strategy. Its announcement raised a series of questions over the nature, objectives, and audience of the European Union's strategic communication. In addition, there were some doubts over whether the European Union could credibly and effectively signal as an autonomous actor in a distant geopolitical region. This article aims to address these questions by building on theoretical insights from the foreign policy signalling literature. This article offers an analysis of the European Union's Indo-Pacific strategy and related documents, as well as its follow-up presence and actions in the region since 2021. We conclude that the European Union deliberately opted for ambiguous signalling in a context of heightened audience heterogeneity. Furthermore, the European Union has both used its signalling strategy to position itself as a credible alternative to the United States and China, but also to mobilise and coordinate member states' actions in this pivotal region.

Keywords

EU foreign policy, European Union, Indo-Pacific, multipolarity, signalling, strategic autonomy

Introduction

When launching the 'EU Joint Communication on the EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' in September 2021, the EU High Representative on EU Foreign Policy (HR) Josep Borrell stated the following:

Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Corresponding author:
Niels van Willigen, Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, Postbus 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands.
Email: willigen@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

> 'The world's centre of gravity is moving towards the Indo Pacific, both in geo-economic and geo-political terms. The futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are interlinked. Our engagement aims at maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific for all, while building strong and lasting partnerships to cooperate on matters from the green transition, ocean governance or the digital agenda to security and defence' (European Commission, 2021).

At the same occasion, the President of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen said: 'With today's proposals, and guided by our values, we are offering a strengthened partnership to advance trade, investment and connectivity, while addressing common global challenges and reinforcing the rules-based international order' (European Commission, 2021).

Both statements are instances of signalling, a mechanism through which an actor, here the EU, purposefully and strategically reveals information about intent, resolve, and capabilities, aiming to influence the decisions of other international actors to improve the chances that an outcome desired by the EU is reached (Gartzke et al., 2017). Signalling is a type of foreign policy behaviour which is normally undertaken by states (and by great powers in particular). As a regional organisation, with both intergovernmental and supranational characteristics, the EU is a different kind of foreign policy actor and has generally been neglected as a case by the existing signalling literature. However, in this article, we argue that the EU can be a signalling actor as well. Considering the Indo-Pacific Strategy (hereafter Strategy), as well as related and following statements and declarations, and the concrete actions (and non-actions) resulting from the Strategy as illustrative evidence, we analyse the EU as a signalling actor in the Indo-Pacific since the launch of the Strategy in 2021. The first aim of the article is to offer a conceptually informed analysis of EU signalling in the Indo-Pacific, which could have broader implications for signalling theory, notably in the specific and overlooked context of regional organisations performing as signalling actors.

We also aim to evaluate the Strategy as an attempt to signal the EU's strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific. The concept of 'strategic autonomy' was introduced in 2013 by the European Council in an attempt to strengthen the European defence industry (European Council, 2013). The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016 used the term to express the EU's ambition to further strengthen its security and defence policy (Council of the European Union, 2016b). Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further accelerated the EU's ambitions in this field (Haroche and Brugier, 2023). Although strategic autonomy was initially framed as an ambition in the realm of security and defence, it also took on a broader meaning. Strategic autonomy, or 'European sovereignty' as it is also called, has also gradually included other issue areas like climate change, the economy, health, migration, and technology (Damen, 2022; Puglierin and Zerka, 2022; Tocci, 2021). We therefore expect to find instances of signalling on several of these policy fields.

Before we elaborate on the concept of signalling and analyse the EU Indo-Pacific strategy as signalling behaviour, we highlight some preliminary observations. First, the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy is not exclusively about signalling. It contains policy recommendations and compromises which resulted from negotiations among various political, bureaucratic, and societal actors, which were not always explicitly meant as signalling to audiences in the Indo-Pacific. Signalling is also one instrument of foreign policy making among others at the EU's disposal, including common positions, joint actions, sanctions, and trade agreements. We will explain that these instruments can only be considered signalling if they are specifically intended as a signal. The next section therefore elaborates

on signalling as a concept and clarifies what we consider to be signalling and what might fall out of this conceptual category.

Second, when reflecting on the EU as a signalling actor, we also need to acknowledge of the importance of the different levels of EU governance. The layered institutional set up of the EU brings certain challenges which are unique to EU foreign policymaking. At least in non-crisis settings, EU foreign policymaking is characterised by a cumbersome and slow decision-making process, the one-voice problem, and coordination issues (Muller et al. 2021; Smith, 2006; Christiansen and Tonra, 2018). That does not necessarily prevent the EU from effectively signalling under certain conditions (Van der Veer, 2020). Moreover, signalling by the EU is very much connected to the discussion over what kind of power the EU aims to project externally (as explained further below).

Third, there are also challenges related to studying the Indo-Pacific as a concept and geographical space, which the Strategy has defined as 'a vast region spanning from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States' (Council of the European Union, 2021). Even though the region has seen economic, political, and military developments that directly affect the EU's interests, the Indo-Pacific is distant from the EU's traditional geographical priorities. Furthermore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has put security on the European continent back on top of the EU's foreign policy agenda. The risk of the EU being preoccupied with security issues on the European continent has also been recognised by the EU's partners in the Indo-Pacific. Japan, for example, has been pushing for more European involvement since it took a leading position in framing the Indo-Pacific as a challenging region from 2013 onwards (Koga, 2020). Similarly, India has developed an Indo-Pacific vision as an extension of its traditional Indian Ocean and Look East policies and to expand its footprint across the region, while facing significant capability and capital constraints. In this context, it has placed partnerships, both bilateral and multilateral, with France, Japan, the United States, and increasingly the EU, at the core of its strategy (Baruah, 2020).

Fourth, it is important to determine *who* is at the receiving end of the EU's signalling strategy. The EU, as a regional organisation, operates in a context of heightened audience heterogeneity consisting of various constituencies across the EU (Van der Veer, 2020), residential actors in the Indo-Pacific, and another influential extra-regional actor, namely, the United States. The development of the Indo-Pacific as the epicentre of great power competition, with increasing systemic pressures to take sides, raises then the need to carefully explore the question of whom the EU is signalling to.

The questions this article aims to answer are therefore the following: how and to whom is the EU signalling to in the Indo-Pacific? The article is structured as follows. In section 'Signalling', we discuss theoretical insights from the signalling literature relevant to this article. Signalling is a well-studied topic in foreign policy analysis and international relations, but often limited to crises and security contexts. Moreover, the signalling actors are generally states and not regional organisations. By studying signalling from the EU standpoint, we aim to make an original contribution to the broader signalling literature. In section 'Determining the nature and intensity of EU signalling in the Indo-Pacific', we elaborate on what kind of signalling can be expected from the EU. The answer to this question is closely linked to the broader discussion of what kind of power the EU is (or wants to be) in its external relations. In section ' What is the European Union signalling and to whom is its strategy addressed?', we focus on the EU as an aggregated actor that signals simultaneously to different actors in the Indo-Pacific, and not always in a coherent

fashion. At the same time, we observe instances in which individual member states signal on behalf of the EU. We also try to determine whether the EU has aimed at projecting itself an alternative in the context of the growing rivalry between the United States and China. We conclude that the EU falls short of achieving meaningful strategic autonomy and instead seems to be hedging by sending signals which generate ambiguity (See also: Higgott and Reich, 2021; Lim and Cooper, 2015). Finally, we reflect on the broader scholarly contributions of this study in our conclusion.

Signalling

Signalling is an oft-studied concept, but to the best of our knowledge, the concept has not been used to explain EU foreign policy (barring notable exceptions such as Van der Veer, 2020). Moreover, the international relations literature has looked at instances of signalling by states during international security crises. Our article focuses therefore on non-crisis signalling executed by a non-traditional international actor. We also define foreign policy signalling as 'a form of foreign policy that communicates, through both language and behaviour to alter the perception and actions of one or several other states' (Plagemann, 2024, this issue). Signalling, therefore, is a form of strategic communication, which can be executed not only during specific crises, but also as part of a long-term grand strategy (Fearon, 1997: 69).

The literature emphasises several important characteristics of signalling. First, signalling involves costs on behalf of the signalling actor. Signalling without costs is generally considered to be mere 'cheap talk' (Farrell and Rabin, 1996; Iida, 1993; Morrow, 1994; Sartori, 2007) and to lack effectiveness, in the sense that it fails to shape the behaviour of the target audience. Costs can be political, financial, reputational among other. However, the key element here is that signalling has a 'direct (and negative) effect on the sender's well-being' (Sartori, 2007: 10). Costly signals are made by tying one's hands and/or by sinking costs (Fearon, 1997). First, a signalling actor ties its hands by making promises that cannot easily be broken without generating audience costs. Audience costs are the penalty a signalling actor must pay ex post when it backs down. The theory behind audience costs postulates that domestic audiences will not accept a signalling actor to back down after it tied its hands (Fearon, 1994). Second, sunk costs are costs that are made ex ante before a crisis occurs. NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement, for example, is an example of sunk costs as the stationing of American nuclear weapons in European NATO member states signals to potential aggressors that the United States will be committed if NATO is attacked.

In practice, tying hands and sinking costs are two signalling strategies which are often combined (Kydd, 2015). The question is how applicable the tying of hands assumption is to the EU, because there only is an indirect accountability relationship between EU institutions and various national European audiences as compared to a national government and its domestic audience. We assume that the most plausible situation under which audience costs emerge for the EU is when the European Parliament (EP) opposes any reversal of an expressed European foreign policy position. However, even though the EP can be considered as the most democratic EU institution, and thereby the most directly accountable to the European population, it still holds less legitimacy than most national parliaments in the EU when one considers the very low turnouts during elections (European Parliament, 2019) or its effective policy leverage vis-à-vis the EC, especially on foreign policy decisions. Therefore, we consider it unlikely that the EU would be able to use a

tying-hands signalling strategy as effectively as a state. Sinking costs is theoretically less problematic as it could be operationalised through the explicit commitment of material capacities, such as maintaining a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific for instance.

Second, signalling is assumed here to be intentional (Plagemann, 2024, this issue). Signalling presupposes the presence of an actor that can convey its intentions to other actors with a certain purpose in mind. When an actor holds an intention, 'he will act, to the best of his abilities, towards ensuring the conditions of satisfaction of the intention' (Newton, 2017: 1–2). The intentional nature of signalling implies that, in order to count as signalling, a foreign policy action must include the objective to communicate a message to one or several audiences. Therefore, not all foreign policy actions are necessarily cases of signalling. We first have to determine if a foreign policy action is intended to be a signal by the sender and whether it is interpreted as such by the receiver (Keren, 2014). This is further complicated in the context of heterogeneous audiences (Yarhi-Milo et al., 2018). Cases in which foreign policies are not explicitly intended as signalling, but are nonetheless interpreted as such by foreign actors, are not considered to be cases of signalling as they lack intentionality.

Third, foreign policy signals can be of a public nature, but also covert. Most signalling actions are public, but covert actions can be used to communicate resolve to allies and adversaries (Carson and Yarhi-Milo, 2017). Given the lack of access to evidence of covert signalling, we focus in this article on cases of public signalling. Public foreign policy signalling typically involves multiple audiences. In the case of the EU, a signal is addressed to the EU's multi-level governance structure (member states and various EU institutions) as well as to external parties. Of course, dyadic signals with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific (such as India, Japan, or Republic of Korea) might be sent, but in the context of a broader regional strategy such as the Indo-Pacific, multiple audiences are supposedly targeted. For example, Borrell's emphasis on the fact that 'the futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are interlinked' (European Commission, 2021) signals to both EU member states and to the countries in the region that EU has long-term interests, stakes and thereby a policy on the Indo-Pacific.

Plagemann (2024, this issue) distinguishes three different types and intensities of signalling: the signalling of threats, alliance signalling and status signalling. These types of signalling are not mutually exclusive and can occur together. First, threat signalling is often linked to crisis situations, but can also occur in non-crisis situations. Typically, it involves warnings and threats to force an external actor to undertake action or – inversely – not to undertake action. It is therefore an important component of deterrence and compellence. NATO's signalling to Russia that the alliance will show resolve in defending its territory, is an example of signalling of threats. Similarly, Vladimir Putin's warnings that too much involvement of Western countries in the war in Ukraine will result in 'consequences greater than any [of] you have faced in history' is another example (Harding et al., 2022). Economic threats, such as threatening with sanctions, are also part of signalling threats.

A second form of signalling is alliance signalling which takes place between allies or partners. What matters is that 'rather than coerce an adversary into a certain behaviour, alliance signalling seeks to advertise a state's value and attractiveness as an ally or communicate expectations a state has towards actual or potential allies' (Plagemann 2024, this issue). NATO's military enforcement of its Eastern flank, for example, signals to East European member states that, if needed, their territorial integrity will be defended collectively. We argue that alliance signalling is not necessarily limited to the military

dimension, as political, economic, and cultural signals, aiming to strengthen and diversify ties, can also be part of alliance signalling (Dian and Meijer, 2020; Henke, 2019; Kliem, 2020; Liff, 2019). Also, alliance signalling can be extended to potential allies and partners as well. There is no need for an already existing formal relationship as alliance signalling can also be undertaken to craft new relationships. A good example are the security assurances offered by the United States to Sweden and Finland during their application to become NATO members. By offering these assurances, the United States signalled that both countries were considered allies even before their membership would be official (*Reuters*, 2022).

A last type of signalling is status signalling, which is about defending or challenging the existing hierarchy structure among the actors involved in (in this case) the Indo-Pacific. It is obvious that the hierarchy structure in the Indo-Pacific is shifting. This shift is notably evidenced by the increased rivalry between China and the United States. From the perspective of realism, the rise of China and its increased assertiveness mean that the United States is challenged in its role of post-Cold War hegemon in the region (Åberg, 2016; Liu, 2020; Mastro, 2014; Stevens, 2023). Studying status signalling in the Indo-Pacific is therefore relevant to understand the emerging multipolar world order. According to Pu, status signalling therefore involves strategic communication efforts aimed at changing or maintaining a special type of 'status belief among relevant political actors' (Pu, 2017: 149). This could take the form of various types of signals, such as demonstrating and committing material and military capacities in the region, via naval deployment, but also via the provision of public goods and services.

Determining the nature and intensity of EU signalling in the Indo-Pacific

Signalling is linked to the question of what kind of international actor the EU intends to be, and of what kind of power the EU can exercise in its foreign policy. Well-known conceptualisations of the EU's actorness in international relations include the EU as a: civilian power (Duchêne, 1972); normative power (Manners, 2002); trade power (Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2006); and/or as a regulatory power (Young, 2014). A recent overview of Young and Ravinet showed that there are no less than 16 conceptualisations, including their own framing of the EU as a 'knowledge power' (Young and Ravinet, 2022). Theoretically, and depending on the policy fields, signalling by the EU can be linked to different conceptualisations of EU's actorness. Signals about the importance that the EU attributes to human rights, for example, can be linked to its identification as a 'normative power Europe', whereas signalling the readiness to conclude a trade agreement links to the EU presenting itself as a trade power. Therefore, for the purpose of our analysis of the EU's signalling in the Indo-Pacific, we consider the actorness of the EU to be pluriform and subject to change. We expect to find four characteristics of EU signalling.

First, the question needs to be posed of whether the EU, as a non-traditional state actor, can signal at all, and whether the concepts and approaches derived from the foreign policy signalling literature can effectively be applied to the EU. The main question here is whether the EU can act as a unitary actor with an independent voice to commit resources over the long-term in the Indo-Pacific or whether its signalling is the result of aggregation and rationalisation of national signalling strategies. The war in Ukraine has shown that the EU was capable of signalling, but it does so at different levels. For example, Von der Leyen signalled early on that Ukraine is part of Europe and has the perspective to join the

EU (Anderson, 2022). This signal was an example of alliance signalling. However, at the level of the member states, there has been more reluctance to make swift steps towards supporting a potential Ukraine candidacy. The Netherlands, for example, was initially very critical about Von der Leyen's statement and emphasised that the path towards membership was a long process (Herszenhorn, 2022). Building on this, we expect to observe similar multi-level signalling and coordination problems when it comes to the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Second, we assume that the EU is vulnerable to cheap talk and therefore risks being ineffective in its signalling. As discussed above, we do not expect that audience costs are an issue for the EU as there is no domestic constituency akin to the one directly holding a state accountable at the. National level. We also assume the public to be mainly unaware of the Indo-Pacific strategy and the signals made by the EU. And finally, it is generally argued that audience costs are mainly relevant in a crisis-situation, which is not directly the case with the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Third, we intend to observe signalling taking place outside the context of an immediate crisis. As explained by Plagemann (2024, this issue) and as mentioned above, signalling theory was mainly developed through the analysis of crises involving brinkmanship and the threat of war. By contrast, EU signalling in the Indo-Pacific involves long-term strategic communication. We therefore expect that there is more time to adapt the signalling as compared to crisis situations.

Fourth, signalling is part of broad strategy that includes many different policy fields, beyond security, such as economic, environmental, and cultural cooperation. The EU attempts to boost its strategic autonomy in all relevant domains, which makes the potential scope of EU signalling quite large. Furthermore, we expect the EU to signal its traditional commitment to cooperation and multilateralism, but also to observe evidence of an acknowledgement of the reality of growing geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific and an emerging multipolar order.

The multi-level governance structure of the EU, the vulnerability to cheap talk, the long timeframe in which signalling takes place and the many policy fields involved all mean that we expect the EU's foreign policy signalling to be ambiguous and not always interpreted in the same way by all 27 member states. Furthermore, building on these assumptions, we expect to simultaneously identify in the EU Indo-Pacific strategy instances of (a) hard power signalling (in a non-crisis setting without involving a concrete threat), (b) alliance signalling towards countries in the Indo-Pacific and the United States, and (c) status signalling in the context of the order transition in the region.

What is the European Union signalling and to whom is its strategy addressed?

The Indo-Pacific is a new area of concern for the EU. It was neither mentioned in the 2003 Security Strategy, nor in the 2008 Report on the Implementation of the Security Strategy (Council of the European Union, 2003; Council of the European Union, 2008). The EUGS only cited the Indo-Pacific once and specifically stated in this context that the EU would 'promote human rights and support democratic transitions such as in Myanmar/Burma' (Council of the European Union, 2016b: 38). Over the last decade however, various European member states have increasingly referred to the intensifying geopolitical, military, economic, and technological competition between the United States and China as one of the main structuring factors in international politics. As a key European player

in the region, France has stepped up its presence and relationships across the Indo-Pacific region, and other countries, like Germany and the Netherlands, have also designed region-specific strategies or guidelines in recent years (French Government 2018; German Federal Government 2020; Dutch Government 2020). In all three national strategies, it was emphasised that developments in the Indo-Pacific were having a pervasive impact on the structure and future of international order, norms, and institutions and upon Europe's own geopolitical and security architecture. The recent war in Ukraine has been a direct example of these interconnected developments. Without China's implicit political support, Russia's war on Ukraine, and its ability to withstand international sanctions, would arguably be much harder to sustain (*BBC*, 2023).

Building on this, the first substantial act of EU signalling towards the Indo-Pacific was in April 2021 when the Council of the EU adopted its 'Conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' (Council of the European Union, 2021). Half a year later, 'The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' was published (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021). The process of EU signalling in the Indo-Pacific has been complicated by the fact that the EU strategy has been largely building on the national strategies of France (2018, 2019, 2021), Germany (2020) and the Netherlands (2020). Nonetheless, it has designed to function as a unique and aggregated EU document, and to signal a cohesive EU strategy (Wacker, 2021). Therefore, the EU's ability to clearly signal in the Indo-Pacific has largely depended on coordination within the EU, in order to commit an extensive set of capabilities in key areas, including trade, technology, but also, potentially, security and defence.

Hard power signalling

Ever since the Council adopted its Conclusions, the EU has worked on crafting a more strategic approach to the region. Security and defence have been essential elements of this signalling approach to actors in the Indo-Pacific. The EU Council conclusions of April 2021 started with the statement that 'the EU should reinforce its strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific with the aim of contributing to the stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development of the region' (Council of the European Union, 2021: 2). The EU further admitted in its Strategy document that there were regional hotspots that had a direct impact on European security: 'the EU will continue to protect its essential interests and promote its values while pushing back where fundamental disagreements exist with China, such as on human rights' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 4).

The September 2021 Strategy for EU Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific outlined seven priority areas and security and defence ranked high among them. More hard power signalling was to be found in paragraph 4.6 of the EU Indo-Pacific strategy which stated that: 'the EU seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 13).

In addition, the EU Strategy made it clear that security and defence cooperation, in combination with trade and economic relations, were the key means through which to manage intense competition in the region, especially the significant military build-up of China. In this respect, the EU had also publicly acknowledged the unanimous 2016

ruling against China for its claims and militarisation in the South China Sea and the Philippines (Council of the European Union, 2016a). The EU further signalled its intention to stand ready to support and help implement the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Relatedly, the EU has also signalled its interest in preserving the sea lanes of communication and the protection of subsea critical infrastructure. Support for UNCLOS has also historically been a major element of the EU's maritime security strategy (Council of the European Union, 2014; Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2023).

The EU has also noted that maritime tensions had driven a need to increase its maritime surveillance capacities in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the Mozambique Channel and the Pacific Islands region have emerged as maritime hotspots over the last decade. In recent years, an insurrection in northern Mozambique has led to disruption in the Mozambique Channel, a key global shipping route where the EU has key interests, including territory (Brewster, 2021). Recently, China has stepped up its presence and influence in the South Pacific region, signing a security and infrastructure deal with the Solomon Islands which has led the EU to publicly admit it also needed to step up its security involvement in the Pacific region (Corlett and Catton, 2022).

As a result, the drivers for greater EU engagement in maritime security have been clear and signalled accordingly: supporting freedom of navigation, assisting like-minded partners to secure critical infrastructure, and engaging in intelligence sharing in the maritime domain. However, a related question is how committed and credible the EU has been when supporting these security goals and roles. In the Strategy, hard power projection has been signalled as primarily being realised in an indirect way; notably through indirect (capacity-building) support to countries in the region. Concrete areas of support mentioned have been maritime security capacity building and cyber security (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021).

We consider some EU responses to be instances of hard power signalling and potential areas with sunk costs because these have involved military deployment and military capacity building of countries in the region. The EU also referred to 'essential interests' that need to be protected. This reference has been in line with statements by Borrell and Von der Leyen that the EU should become a geopolitical actor (Borrell, 2022; Von der Leyen, 2019). The EU's Strategic Compass also underlined this point in Borrell's foreword titled 'Europe's geopolitical awakening' (Council of the European Union, 2022a).

On maritime security, capacity-building has also happened. In practical terms, deepening functional maritime security cooperation and sharing of EU experiences with key partners, notably with India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam, has been part of the Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) initiative since 2020. Building the capacities of smaller regional countries in addressing functional maritime security challenges – such as seaborne crime, unregulated fishing, border management, and law enforcement – through bilateral initiatives as well as through existing multilateral initiatives (ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) has been an effort to enhance the EU's regional credibility in the long term.

At the same time, in section 4.6 of the Strategy, the EU also explicitly stepped up its signalling on military security. Specifically, two new signals were emphasised: the EU presented itself as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific and emphasised the importance of maritime security in the form of naval presence. Regarding the new framing of the EU as

a resident power, the Strategy argued that 'The EU outermost regions and overseas countries and territories, constitutionally linked to its Member States, are an important part of the EUs approach to the Indo-Pacific' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 1). Since Brexit, France has become the only member state that can make the claim of being a resident power. Its territorial interests (which are a legacy of its colonial past) have centred around several islands in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific and its corresponding exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the region is 93% of France's total EEZ (Meijer, 2021: 6). The adoption of the resident power identification at the EU level demonstrated that the EU has been signalling a territorial interest in the region with potential consequences for its security role and commitment to the region (Duchâtel, 2023).

Concerning maritime security, the document mentioned indirect power projection like maritime security capacity building, broadening partnerships, but it also cited 'a meaningful European naval presence' through naval deployments by its member states (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 13). Unlike many other foreign policy signals, naval diplomacy, and deployment in distant theatres of operation is not cheap, especially in terms of financial costs and domestic politics. Naval diplomacy has therefore been a credible means of signalling. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific built on concrete examples of cooperation on security and defence. For example, since 2016, there have been regular joint naval exercises performed by naval forces under EU command and the navies of India, Japan, Republic of Korea, and since 2023 with the United States (European External Action Service, 2023b). The EU has sought to develop strong security and defence relations with close like-minded partners, such as Japan. The EU–Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement has allowed much closer security coordination, dialogue, and information exchange (European External Action Service, 2019).

The naval deployments were initially meant for anti-piracy operations, but also to 'protect freedom of navigation' and to ensure the 'resilience' of the EU's supply chains (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 6 and 13). The EU has conducted naval operations since 2008 which were aimed to fight piracy (Atalanta, since 2008), to disrupt human trafficking in the Mediterranean (Sophia, from 2015 to 2020), and to implement the UN arms embargo against Libya (IRINI, since 2020). Building on that experience, the EU has gradually extended its maritime security architecture by launching a new concept in February 2022: Coordinated Military Presence (CMP). The CMP can be seen as a 'flexible Common Foreign and Security Policy tool' and, different from the naval missions mentioned above, is not a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission (Nováky, 2022). In fact, the CMP has coordinated the presence of naval assets of EU members in a specific area that is designated as Maritime Area of Interest (MAI). The CMP has been aiming to increase the EU's situational awareness and stimulate exchange of information between naval assets of EU members which happen to be present in the MAI (Interview 1). As result, in order to appear credible in the region, the EU has carefully communicated an objective of incremental naval presence.

After a pilot launched in 2021 in the Gulf of Guinea, the CMP concept was applied to the Indo-Pacific in 2022. In February of that year, the Council of the EU decided to launch a new CMP in the North-Western Indian Ocean (NWIO) (Council of the European Union, 2022b). The NWIO is part of the Indo-Pacific (as defined by the EU and most other actors involved) and an area in which the EU has already been present with the EUNAVFOR

Atalanta mission. Moreover, several EU members have contributed to the (French-led) European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) mission and its military dimension Agenor. By declaring a MAI and starting the CMP, the EU has been signalling that it wanted to contribute to maritime security in the region. The EU's ambition, its credibility and commitment were further supported by the new mandate given to Atalanta in February 2022 which included the ambition to cooperate closer with AMISOH/Agenor and to become a maritime security provider in the Western Indian Ocean (Council of the European Union, 2022c).

Arguably, declaring the NWIO as MAI was a low-hanging fruit in terms of signalling as the EU was already present and the area was less politically sensitive compared to, for example, the South Chinese Sea. However, at the level of individual EU member states, there has been signalling in that area as well. Notably, the three members with national Indo-Pacific strategies, namely, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, have started or increased their naval deployments in the Indo-Pacific since 2021. The French deployments are the most substantive and naval assets are present on a structural basis, as French ships have been transiting the region two to three times a year (Pejsova, 2023). In 2021, Germany sent a frigate (the 'Bayern') to the region for the first time, a visit that received much media attention. The lengthy deployment of the frigate has had few implications for the operational capacities in the region, but it certainly had signalling effects. Similarly In the same year, the Netherlands deployed a frigate (the HNMLS Evertsen) as part of the UK Carrier Strike Group 21 (CSG) (Pejsova, 2023). The Dutch frigate Evertsen was the least expensive ship to deploy with the CSG to the Indo-Pacific, but it was nonetheless a costly signal. The deployment of the frigate was significant in terms of the portion of the Netherlands' defence effort, namely, a fourth of its frigate capacities (Caverly, 2023). In addition, during the port call of the Evertsen to Tokyo, the Dutch were keen to signal to Japan that they were effectively implementing the Dutch Indo-Pacific strategy (Interview 2). Although these are instances of signalling which were not framed specifically as EU involvement, and therefore should be attributed to the strategic communication of these individual EU member states, these are nevertheless clear instances of diplomatic signalling to the region.

The European signalling efforts in terms of naval deployment have been small in comparison to the US presence. The US navy has been patrolling the area daily through its freedom of navigation operations (FONOP). Moreover, US signalling is of a different nature as it is part of a strategy of deterrence. By comparison, European hard power signalling is not aimed to deter, but to communicate that the EU has an interest in regional military security. However, European powers' increased security presence has nevertheless been interpreted as more offensive than intended by China. For instance, the Bayern was denied a port visit in Shanghai, a gesture which can be interpreted as a Chinese protest (Pejsova, 2023: 7).

Based on the updated European Maritime Strategy of 10 March 2023, it can be expected that more individual EU member states will contribute to naval operations in the future and that actions and coordination at the EU level will increase as well. The EU aims to 'step up activities at sea' including 'designating new maritime areas of interests [sic] for the implementation of the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept' (European Commission, 2023: 1). It is conceivable that in the future, parts of the South Chinese Sea could be designated as a MAI. It would be the least provocative action, at least compared to United States' FONOP signalling, because the MAI and CMP would not effectively change the EU's maritime assets in the region (Interview 1). Fully in line

with its ambition to have a naval presence, and the goal of cooperating with partners, the EU and the United States held their first ever joint naval exercise in the region in March 2023 (European External Action Service, 2023b).

The above shows that the EU has been involved in hard power signalling, but there have also been limitations with regards the security and defence role it can effectively play in the Indo-Pacific. The most obvious example relates to the lack of European naval capabilities deployed in the region. To the extent that the EU can signal any naval power in the Indo-Pacific, it does so on the backs of European navies, such as France, and to a lesser degree Germany and the Netherlands, and through its existing naval operations Atalanta, Sophia, and IRINI. Most militaries in the EU are geared towards land and air warfare, and this will likely not change in the context of Russia's war on Ukraine. More pooling of personnel and the opening of platforms to a wider range of navies could signal a readjustment of priorities over the long term. However, without enlarged naval capabilities, the EU risks becoming less credible in its signalling in the Indo-Pacific and in its potential for building partnerships.

Alliance signalling

In line with past EU foreign policy initiatives, the Indo-Pacific strategy has emphasised cooperation with partners and multilateralism. The Council Conclusions stated that: 'The EU's engagement should contribute to enhancing its strategic autonomy and ability to cooperate with partners in order to safeguard its values and interest' (Council of the European Union, 2021: 3). It is important to note that China has been framed as a potential partner (European Commission, 2021). By contrast with other cases of foreign policy signalling in the region, including the AUKUS and QUAD initiatives, the EU Indo-Pacific strategy has not been directly aimed against China, neither explicitly, nor implicitly. For example, Von der Leyen's statement that 'we are offering a strengthened partnership' was aimed to signal to the entire Indo-Pacific region, including China. Furthermore, Von der Leyen's stated preference for 'de-risking' the relationship with China, rather than 'de-coupling', showed that China has been considered to be a potential partner (Von der Leyen, 2023). China might be framed a partner, but it is hardly considered as a like-minded partner, a term which has been reserved in the Strategy for other countries in the region. The list of like-minded countries has however been flexible and varies depending on the policy field and the national strategies of different EU Member States.

The basis of cooperation in the region is to be found in the interests which are shared by the EU and its partners. The Conclusions notably stated that: 'The EU and the Indo-Pacific are natural partner regions in terms of trade and investment' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 1) and that 'it is essential for the EU to reinforce cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 1–2). In that respect, the EU has been signalling restraint above anything else, and has been careful to not appear as directly antagonising China. For instance, the Strategy has mostly included non-military initiatives, such as reinforcing a rules-based order, ocean governance, building partnerships, addressing global challenges, and increasing connectivity. In its Strategy, the EU also did its utmost to present itself as a civilian or normative power, in line with past signalling practices (Aggestam, 2008; Hyde-Price, 2006; Manners, 2002).

.Confirming this restrained alliance signalling posture, the EU has joined multilateral endeavours such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+) forum, which brought together 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members and non-ASEAN partners. ASEAN continues to be a useful multilateral platform to discuss and build capacity on functional maritime security concerns (illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, piracy, and environmental and marine natural hazards). Here, the EU played a key role as a founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which gave it the unique opportunity to raise security challenges within ASEAN. In addition, while the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has been currently on hold due to the geopolitical tensions with Russia, the EU and its Indo-Pacific partners have resumed multilateral engagement through the Ministerial Forum on Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific which brings together the 27 EU member states and 30 partners from across the Indo-Pacific to discuss issues such as UNCLOS and other security and defence matters (European External Action Service, 2022; European External Action Service, 2023a).

Alliance signalling is also very clearly present in the content of the Indo-Pacific strategy. The EU defined seven priority areas: sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnerships, connectivity, security and defence, and human security. To address the challenges associated with these themes, the EU emphasised its readiness to engage with different partners. The EU has remained reluctant to fully embrace a paradigm of great power competition and has continued to work towards inclusive forms of multilateral governance even as it has recognised challenges along that path. For example, the visits to China from the German Chancellor in November 2022 and from French President Emanuel Macron and Ursula Van der Leyen (along with several members of the French and German business community) in April 2023 have led to calls for greater cooperation with Beijing on several global issues where interests converged (trade, climate). While the EU has held a stated policy of supporting multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, the realities of its security and defence engagement with the region and some bilateral, like-minded partners have been sending different signals.

Status signalling

The EU has signalled that it aimed to be an important actor in the Indo-Pacific region. As explained above, EU actorness is complex as it involves both member state level initiatives and EU level initiatives. There has also been an ongoing scholarly discussion over a possible change in the EU foreign policy approach 'towards a more interest-driven policy for dealing with pressing perceived or real security threats to the EU, while simultaneously trying to uphold a principled foreign and security policy objective' (Rieker and Riddervold, 2022: 2). This would seem to indicate a departure from normative power signalling (Manners, 2002). Given these constraints and evolving realities, what is the type of status the EU has been communicating in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the light of the increasing United States–China competition in the region?

First, there has been much debate over what the move to a more autonomous EU would imply for the future of United States–EU relations. While some scholars have argued the effort to signal a more autonomous EU foreign policy could weaken transatlantic ties (Riddervold and Rosén, 2018), others have argued that the efforts towards European strategic autonomy could actually rebalance and strengthen these relations (Tocci, 2021). In parallel, the EU has been readjusting its approach towards China towards

a more critical outlook (Brattberg and Corre, 2020). For instance, the EC and the HR already described China in 2019 as simultaneously being a negotiation partner, economic competitor and systemic rival (European Commission and HR/VP, 2019). In both the Council Conclusions and the Strategy, the EU has expressed concerns regarding the geopolitical situation in the region and outlined the increased tensions within the domains of trade, technology, politics, and security. While the EU documents have never explicitly mentioned the Sino–US rivalry, it has been indirectly argued that great power competition would affect the EU's position and thinking (Simon, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific signalling of the EU has relied on its traditional strengths in global politics such as its regulatory and market powers when conducting trade deal negotiations to shape norms in the region. The Strategy has highlighted the need for the EU to implement and finalise trade deals with partners and together to set global standards and regulatory priorities (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 6). The Strategy for instance argued for 'enhancing cooperation on and interoperability of standards for emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, based on democratic principles and fundamental rights' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 10). Two strong normative priorities for the EU in its Strategy have been the promotion of data protection regimes (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 11), and the push to build and promote connectivity with the EU's Indo-Pacific partners (building here on the earlier 2018 EU-Asia Connectivity communication). In her 2021 State of the European Union speech, Von der Leyen presented the new Global Gateway initiative, which has been perceived as a way of countering and rivalling China's Belt and Road initiative (Lau, 2023). Since 2021, the EU has more proactively emphasised its connectivity strategy and identified Japan, India, Singapore, The Republic of Korea, Australia and ASEAN, as its connectivity partners (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 12).

Finally, in line with the traditional focus of the EU on inclusive multilateralism, the very title of the EU strategy, namely, 'Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', signalled a strongly cooperative approach. This emphasis on cooperation is also strongly noted in the Council's Conclusions, which have underlined the importance of reinforcing the EU's role as a partner to the Indo-Pacific states (Council of the European Union, 2021: 2–3), as well as enhancing bilateral, regional and multilateral relations in order to 'promote the rules-based international order and access to open markets and ensure a stable trading environment' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 2). The Strategy also emphasised value- and principle-based cooperation to strengthen multilateralism, promote a level-playing field in trade and investment, and to meet the obligations of the Paris Climate agreement. Using a normative approach, the Strategy stressed that the EU would work with like-minded Indo-Pacific states in international fora to push back against human rights violations (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 3). The Strategy also discussed how the EU has been seeking to work with its Indo-Pacific partners to set global standards, notably to ensure the respect of international trade regimes, and the move to a green transition, notably through 'green alliances' with like-minded partners (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 6–9).

As result, the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy clearly emphasised a normative approach, and has thereby built on the EU's more traditional functional approach to special partnerships. The Strategy also indicated that the EU would 'remain a consistent defender of human rights and democracy and continue to use all tools at its disposal: political, and human rights dialogues and consultations, trade preferences and the mainstreaming of human rights considerations in all EU policies and programmes' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021: 3). This normative signalling may be seen as supporting the EU's approach to strategic autonomy (Palm, 2021). Yet, as discussed in the section on hard power signalling, the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific region has also followed the principled pragmatism turn of the EUGS (Rieker and Riddervold, 2022) and suggested a more interest-based policy.

Within the parameters set by Sino–US competition in the Indo-Pacific, the EU has found it more difficult to clearly signal a distinct and hierarchical status. Since 2021, the EU has attempted to mainly stay outside of the bipolar rivalry, but this careful hedging game has regularly been tested by developments in the Indo-Pacific and by pressures within the EU itself. The EP has demanded a tougher stance on China, especially after China's sanctions against European researchers and member of the EP (MEPs), and has argued that the ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) 'cannot begin until China lifts sanctions against MEPs and EU institutions' (European Parliament, 2021). Similarly, some member states have supported a closer alignment with the United States, while others have expressed a willingness to hedge between the United States and China. As a result, some member states interpreted the new Indo-Pacific strategy as a way to demonstrate support for the United States and thereby managing the transatlantic alliance, while others have read it as a way of affirming the EU's goal of strategic autonomy (Grare and Reuter, 2021).

Conclusion

Our analysis shows that EU has opted in its Indo-Pacific strategy for ambiguous signalling. Ambiguity is relevant for some signal senders who benefit from keeping intentions and doctrines opaque (Gartzke et al., 2017), but in the case of the EU's strategic communication in the Indo-Pacific, credible signalling is considered to be crucial if the EU aims to show it has a unique voice, notably in context of a rapidly changing international environment increasingly characterised by multipolarity. In the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, we also see a clear case of signalling to commit and to rhetorically bind EU member states into further coordinated actions. The EU's use of signalling as a mobilising and coordinating mechanism in a context of audience heterogeneity is important, especially given its lack of independent capability as a regional organisation. In its communication, the EU has deliberately built on existing EU member states' initiatives in the Indo-Pacific but also encouraged further actions. Therefore, we argue that ambiguity has been less a deliberate strategy to give EU policymakers freedom of action, as generally expected in the signalling literature, than a product of the gradual and aggregated nature of EU signalling.

This very specific case of ambiguous signalling can be mainly explained by the two following factors. First, ambiguity is a direct result of the process that led to the Indo-Pacific strategy. Based on the national strategies of France, Germany and The Netherlands, the strategic signalling exercise was a bottom-up process which included selective and

bargained 'copy and pasting' from the three national strategies. Even though there is much overlap between the French, German and Dutch perspectives, compromises had to be made and it was important in this article to evaluate how these varying national positions affected credible signalling. For instance, focus on hard power signalling, notably naval security and especially on naval presence, was more clearly signalled in the French strategic documents (Duchâtel, 2023). In parallel, the EU documents have also expressed a willingness to develop partnerships and support capacity-building to promote maritime security, a preference expressed in the German and Dutch national strategies. In addition, new Indo-Pacific strategies from individual member states, such as those from Lithuania and the Czech Republic, have also been perceived by EU policymakers as further building blocks of an evolving common European approach and help further clarify how different EU members can individually contribute and commit to the Strategy (Interview 4; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2023). Second, the Strategy stemmed from the attempt to forge a substantial and relevant European role in the Indo-Pacific, gaining support from the region without offending China. For instance, when one looks at instances of hard power, alliance, and status signalling, the EU has remained reluctant to fully embrace a paradigm of great power competition and has continued to work towards inclusive forms of multilateral governance (Interview 4).

In the context of hard power signalling, the EU has focused on highlighting the expansion of its naval capacities, on maritime capacity building, and the CMP concept in the Indo-Pacific. The European naval presence has been implemented through the CMP and MAI concepts and naval deployments by individual member states. So far, the initiative has been judged based on its performance in the Gulf of Guinea, and over the next 2 years it will be applied to the North-Western Indian Ocean. Not only would CMP in these regions allow the EU to play a more substantive role but it would allow the EU to initiate a maritime relationship with like-minded partners such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the EU Strategic Compass have also called for more naval exercises and port calls. However, these initiatives have been insufficient alone to signal a long-term commitment, which is why alliance signalling has been important as well.

In its alliance signalling, the EU has been careful in what it signalled and promoted as multilateral action in the Indo-Pacific, while also being conscious of the limitations of multilateralism. In some respects, the EU has not yet engaged with minilateral formats which have been proliferating due to the limitations of multilateral organisations. The EU's alliance signalling has prioritised multilateralism over effectiveness of cooperation in security and defence. Any steps to promote multilateralism in security and defence in the Indo-Pacific is likely to come up against broader geopolitical and geoeconomic trends such as the deterioration of free trade, economic de-coupling, and targeted measures related to semiconductor and chip security of supply. Overall, US-China competition has imposed parameters on the EU's alliance signalling strategy and its ability to promote multilateralism. In this sense, the EU should recognise that its security and defence interests could be met by cooperation in minilateral settings, which fit with the EU's gradual and cautious hard signalling strategy and have generally been welcomed by actors in the region looking for committed signals from the EU. The risk with this approach, of course, is that prioritising effectiveness over inclusion may exclude or possibly alienate certain actors like China, and thereby complicate the EU's status signalling strategy. The EU should be aware of the signalling that the promotion of multilateralism

entails in the region. Some EU partners might interpret the calls for multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific as a way to include China, even when this signalling not welcomed by actors in the region.

The EU's status signalling has aimed at indicating to the United States that its Strategy would not undermine the United States' own pivot to the region, notwithstanding the fall out of the AUKUS announcement which happened simultaneously with the public presentation of the EU Indo-Pacific strategy in September 2021 (Interview 3). The EU's ambiguous signalling is aimed at managing the political pressures from and expectations of three types of audiences: EU members, Indo-Pacific actors, and extra-regional actors like the United States. This may lead the EU to de-compartmentalise its signalling in the Indo-Pacific to target different audiences. For example, in North-East Asia, the EU has been confronted with a very volatile security context of territorial disputes and military modernisation (for example Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands). In this part of the Indo-Pacific, the EU can develop partnerships with like-minded security partners to bolster existing fora such as ASEAN or develop new multilateral formats. Rather than offering an exclusive balancing alternative to China or the United States, the EU seems to have signalled a hedging option to regional powers.

Also, Russia's war on Ukraine has raised serious questions about the EU's strategic signalling and commitment to engage in the Indo-Pacific in the short term. Faced with a revisionist and aggressive Russia, the EU has been focusing its short-term security and defence efforts on its eastern neighbourhood. The EU's provision of equipment to the Ukrainian armed forces and its sanctions on Russia have been evidence of this re-prioritisation. At the same time, it seems that the war in Ukraine has also not completely undermined the EU's involvement in the Indo-Pacific. During their presidencies of the Council of the EU between February 2022 and May 2023, France, the Czech Republic and Sweden have continued to organise ministerial meetings on the Indo-Pacific. Also, in 2022, the Czech Republic, and in 2023, Lithuania, have published their own national strategies on the Indo-Pacific. Interviewed policy makers have in fact confirmed that the war in Ukraine has strengthened rather than lowered the EU's interest, and the need for signalling, in the region (Interviews 3 and 4). More specifically, Russia's revisionist foreign policy was seen as reflecting broader global developments with implications for the Indo-Pacific, notably because of China's support to Russia, and given perceptions that China has been looking at and learning from the Ukraine war when considering its own Taiwan strategy (Interview 4; Goldstein and Waechter, 2023; Singleton, 2023). In addition, the war in Ukraine has convinced EU diplomats of the need to further develop ties and find support among like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific to condemn the Russian aggression (Interviews 3 and 4).

There is evidence that signalling in the Indo-Pacific has also led to rising expectations in the region and demands for the EU to clearly articulate an overall crisis response strategy for the region. For example, Indo-Pacific partners have been pressing the EU to be clear about the possible contribution they would make in case of any Chinese aggression towards Taiwan (Lee and Schreer, 2022). Here also, a signal from EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell who called on European navies to patrol the disputed Taiwan Strait was meant to demonstrate the EU's commitment to freedom of navigation (Lau, 2023). Another question is whether a more credible commitment to security provision in the region would also imply a need to think about the potential delivery of lethal arms and equipment to Taiwan through the European Peace Facility (EPF) and a potential naval response for the delivery of arms and equipment. In any case, the EU's recent signalling

demonstrated an ongoing strategic debate with regard to sanctions towards China in case of aggression and continued European naval deployments to the region.

The final remaining question is whether the rising expectations could be matched by the EU's capabilities. This relates back to a classic discussion about the EU's expectations–capabilities gap. The gap refers to the difference between what is expected from the EU and what it can deliver and has primarily been studied within the context of the Transatlantic relationship (Hill, 1993). A study done before the Strategy was published showed that several Indo-Pacific countries expected very little from the EU (Lai et al., 2023). Future research would therefore have to investigate in the different Indo-Pacific states whether the expectations in the region have indeed been rising and to what extent these expectations have been met by the EU.

Interviews

1. Interview with a policy official from an EU member state, 8 March 2023.
2. Interview with a policy official from an EU member state, 7 April 2023.
3. Interview with two policy officials from an EU member state, 15 September 2023.
4. Interview with a policy official from the EU, 22 September 2023.

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ORCID iD

Niels van Willigen https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7940-0717

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