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To: Delegations

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Subject: EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific
- Council conclusions (16 April 2021)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on an EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, approved by written procedure on 16 April 2021.

Council conclusions on an**EU Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**

1. The Council considers 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, based on the promotion of democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law.
2. The EU intends to reinforce its role as a cooperative partner in the Indo-Pacific, bringing added-value to relations with all its partners in the region. The EU and its Member States are already working together comprehensively in the region, significantly contributing to development and humanitarian assistance, tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, concluding ambitious free trade agreements, and contributing to the upholding of international law including human rights and freedom of navigation. Cooperation with the region is crucial for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The EU and the countries of the Indo-Pacific also share the common task of addressing the devastating human and economic effects of the COVID19 crisis for many countries and the need to ensure a sustainable and inclusive socio-economic recovery and improve resilience of health systems.
3. The Council notes however with concern the current dynamics in the Indo-Pacific that have given rise to intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas. The universality of human rights is also being challenged. These developments increasingly threaten the stability and security of the region and beyond, directly impacting on the EU's interests.

4. The Council underlines that the EU's strategic approach and engagement with the region should be principled with a long-term perspective, contributing to the EU's capability to act as a global actor. It should foster a rules-based international order, a level playing field as well as an open and fair environment for trade and investment, reciprocity, the strengthening of resilience, tackling climate change and support connectivity with the EU. It should aim to secure free and open maritime supply routes in full compliance with international law, in particular UNCLOS, in the interest of all. 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.
5. The Council underlines that this renewed commitment to the region is inclusive of all partners wishing to cooperate with the EU, building upon already adopted EU strategic documents concerning the region. The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy is pragmatic, flexible and multi-faceted, allowing the EU to adapt and build its cooperation according to specific policy areas where partners can find common ground based on shared principles, values or mutual interest. The EU will deepen its engagement on the Indo-Pacific in particular with those partners that have already announced Indo-Pacific approaches of their own.
6. The Council agrees that the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, encompassing the geographic area from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States, will provide a new impetus by:

6.1. *Working with our partners in the Indo-Pacific region:*

- a) The EU will pursue a broad-based agenda within the region communicating and entering into dialogues about its new strategy with its Indo-Pacific partners. The EU will work with third countries for mutual benefit, including through its future international cooperation financial instrument and concrete national and regional Team Europe initiatives. It will reinforce cooperation with multilateral and regional organisations, as well as with other stakeholders, not least with Small Island Developing States, drawing on the support of the EU's outermost regions as well as overseas countries and territories in that regard. The EU will aim to promote effective rules-based multilateralism. It will especially engage with the ASEAN-led regional architecture as well as promote and pursue its objectives in its bilateral summits and at the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). In this respect, the EU reiterates its support for ASEAN centrality and looks forward to the ambitious realisation of its new EU-ASEAN Strategic Partnership. The EU will also aim at finalising modernised Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Malaysia and Thailand and negotiating a new PCA with the Maldives.
- b) Develop a coherent overall approach to the Indian Ocean built around a concept of cooperation with key partners in both Africa and Asia. The Joint Communication *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, the June 2020 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions and October 2020 European Council Conclusions on Africa serve as a good basis for the EU's priorities in the Western Indian Ocean. The EU will support partners in the Indo-Pacific in strengthening regional governance, promoting regional economic integration and growth, ensuring the safety and security of maritime and aviation routes, preventing trafficking, tackling migration and managing mobility as well as ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, including marine resources, especially with the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

- c) Build the EU's political partnership in the Pacific Ocean based on the envisaged Partnership Agreement with its Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) partners and its Pacific Protocol that will succeed the Cotonou Agreement, as well as the EU's Economic Partnership Agreement with Pacific partners. It will step up its political and strategic engagement and closely monitor geopolitical developments in the region. The EU will continue to cooperate in regional fora including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific and the Pacific Community, as well as bilaterally with partners in areas where its contribution would bring greatest impact. This would include fighting climate change and the biodiversity crisis, strengthening ocean governance, assisting natural disaster recovery, encouraging trade and promoting security through fighting transnational organised crime at sea such as piracy, environmental crimes, cybercrime and trafficking in persons, arms and drugs.

6.2. *Supporting the international community's global agenda:*

- a) The EU will cooperate with Indo-Pacific partners in the protection and promotion of human rights, including raising the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, reasserting that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The participation of civil society is essential in building inclusive and prosperous societies. The EU aims at enhancing its dialogue with the Indo-Pacific countries both bilaterally and in multilateral fora in order to strengthen these values. Working together, the EU and the like-minded Indo-Pacific partners can have a greater impact on the global human rights agenda.
- b) Forge specific cooperative initiatives such as Green Alliances and Partnerships in support of the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity, aiming at high environmental goals and standards, sustainable management of natural resources, including water, moving to climate-neutral, clean and circular economies. With its partners, the EU will develop ambitious climate and biodiversity policies and long-term decarbonisation strategies while strengthening sustainable finance. Implementing the international aspects of the EU's new climate adaptation strategy as well as its biodiversity strategy for 2030 will focus on those Indo-Pacific partners most in need, in line with the Green Deal.

- c) Take forward EU action on ocean governance, notably for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological resources. This will be ensured by EU membership and active participation in relevant fisheries bodies, including Regional Seas Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, and the creation of Sustainable Fisheries Partnerships. This will contribute towards improved fisheries governance and coastal development in our partner countries, including small-scale fisheries, contributing to the sustainability of food throughout the value chain and by tackling Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing. Accompanying initiatives will include the establishment of Marine Protected Areas, dealing with marine pollution, coastal erosion, developing sustainable blue economies and promoting ocean observation and research.
- d) Continue its disaster risk reduction work in the Indo-Pacific to reduce hazard risks exacerbated by climate change and build resilience amongst vulnerable communities including forcibly displaced persons in areas that are highly exposed to natural and man-made disasters. Cooperation on research and innovation as well as satellite services such as Copernicus is under consideration to facilitate these specific objectives.
- e) Prioritise the health sector as a new crucial area for cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of multilateral cooperation in this key area. The EU should ensure safe and diverse pharmaceutical and health-related industrial supply chains for enabling access to safe, effective and quality medicine and health products. There should be an exchange of best practices in health systems, including crisis management and pandemic prevention policies, reciprocity in managing travel and open borders as well as close cooperation leading to fairer, healthier and environmentally friendly food systems. The EU is supporting Indo-Pacific partners, including through the COVAX Facility, the global collaboration aiming to secure access to the COVID-19 vaccine in low and middle-income countries. Ensuring EU Consular protection for our own citizens in times of crisis will remain a priority.

6.3. *Advancing our economic agenda and protecting our supply chains:*

- a) The EU will continue to promote key EU economic interests, principles and objectives including on sustainable development towards ensuring a strong, balanced and inclusive socio-economic recovery and growth as well as sound macroeconomic policies, institutional capacity building and support for regional integration. The EU will foster dialogue with likeminded countries of the Indo-Pacific region by crafting forward-looking growth-enhancement strategies for a resilient and sustainable rebound of our economies. Diversification of supply chains should contribute to the resilience of the European economy, especially for the most sensitive industrial ecosystems, and to the reduction of strategic dependencies on critical raw materials. The EU will also cooperate with Indo-Pacific countries to reform the WTO towards a sustainable and effective multilateral trading system.
- b) The EU will need to strengthen its strategic trade position and level the playing field in the Indo-Pacific, given recent significant regional agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It will continue to explore and negotiate ambitious trade and investment agreements in the region such as those concluded with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Vietnam. It will aim to conclude free trade agreements with Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand and take further steps towards the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China. The EU will continue to explore deepening economic relations with India. It reaffirms the EU's ambitious agenda on trade and sustainable development and will strengthen its efforts on the implementation of these agreements. The EU will continue to support eligible countries in the region through its Generalised Scheme of Preferences to eradicate poverty, stimulate growth and jobs, promote respect for human rights and labour rights and integrate them into global value chains.

6.4. *Playing our part in the field of security and defence:*

- a) The EU will further develop partnerships and strengthen synergies with likeminded partners and relevant organizations in security and defence. This will include responding to challenges to international security, including maritime security, malicious cyber activities, disinformation, as well as from emerging and disruptive technologies, countering and improving resilience to terrorism, violent extremism and hybrid threats, countering organised crime and illicit trafficking, in full compliance with international law. Other priorities should be nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and control of dual use technological exports. Cooperation should be increased in the framework of CSDP missions and operations through dedicated agreements, the *Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia* project as well as an active involvement in key security-related fora in the region such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The EU will also aim at concluding new Framework Participation Agreements with partners in the region in line with the May 2018 *Council Conclusions on Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia*, encouraging greater participation by these countries in CSDP missions and operations.
- b) Within the framework of a strengthened mandate and extended area of operations of EUNAVFOR Atalanta, the Council welcomes the contributions of Asian partner countries' naval forces to help counter acts of piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia and calls for more joint exercises and port calls in that area. Building on its experience of protecting critical maritime routes in the Indian Ocean through maritime domain awareness, the EU has taken the decision to extend the geographic scope of its CRIMARIO II activities from the Indian Ocean into South and Southeast Asia with a view to contribute to safer sea lanes of communication with the EU. It will explore the possibility of replicating the CRIMARIO experience in the Southern Pacific.

- c) Assess the opportunity to establish Maritime Areas of interest in the Indo-Pacific, taking into account the lessons learned from and first assessment of the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept. In line with the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan, the objectives of coordinating EU maritime presences, based on voluntary contributions from Member States, could be, inter alia, to cooperate with partners' navies, and build their capacities where relevant, to establish comprehensive monitoring of maritime security and freedom of navigation, according to international law, in particular UNCLOS, and taking action to ensure environmental security in the area. While being distinct from CSDP missions and operations, the concept could contribute to addressing the existing security challenges in the region. Member States acknowledge the importance of a meaningful European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific.

6.5. *Ensuring high quality connectivity:*

- a) The EU will continue advancing its quality and sustainable connectivity priorities and actions in the region, in particular through EU institutions and Member States cooperating practically with partners on the ground who share the principles of quality and sustainable connectivity based on international norms and standards and a level-playing field. This requires setting clear priorities addressing all dimensions of connectivity – digital, transport, energy, human - promoting quality infrastructure projects consistent with the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, and the highest standards of transparency, green and digital transition. This would aim at boosting economic growth and long-term benefits in line with the ongoing work to move towards an EU global approach to connectivity, while incentivising private capital and involving EU businesses, where feasible using the EU's future international cooperation financial instrument. This should take into account priorities set in programming exercise, including the European Fund for Sustainable Development+, and other financial instruments. Strategic communication needs to be undertaken to improve the visibility of the EU's engagement.

6.6. *Advancing our collaboration in the field of research, innovation and digitalisation:*

- a) The EU will enhance cooperation on higher education, science and technology with like-minded Indo-Pacific partners, notably via Horizon Europe, to tap into the exceptional technological expertise in the region in key enabling technologies to stimulate green growth, including advanced manufacturing, advanced materials as well as life science, nano- and recycling technologies. Erasmus+ will support higher education mobility and capacity building activities. The EU will seek synergies in these fields with the EU's future international cooperation financial instrument programming, with the aim of creating a comprehensive European policy of regional cooperation. The EU will seek to ensure reciprocity and a level playing field in line with the Global Approach to Research, Innovation, Education and Youth. The EU will also promote people-to-people contacts and strengthen student researcher and staff mobility.
 - b) The EU will engage with like-minded partners to promote digital governance through more ambitious global standards and regulatory approaches, including on artificial intelligence, in line with international law, including EU values and principles on privacy, data protection and security, while supporting open trade and cross border data flows. The EU will work with like-minded partners to promote security and resilience of critical infrastructure, including security of supply chain of 5G networks. It shall recognize the importance of a global, open, free, stable and secure cyberspace for the continued prosperity, growth, security, connectivity and integrity of our free and democratic societies and stress the importance of protecting the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms in cyberspace. A coherent approach to engage with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region will be key to unlocking the full potential of digitalization in the region. In particular, the digital divide needs to be bridged by investment in improved digital connectivity, promoting convergence on norms and values.
7. The Council invites the Commission and the High Representative to present a Joint Communication on the *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* by September 2021.