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Germany in the Indo-Pacific: Potential for collaboration on climate change and biodiversity

The second edition of the Indo-Pacific Roundtable underscored the need for targeted and innovative cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific

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In September Germany released its Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific and thus entered its bid to engage with this fast-evolving region and to shape the narrative accompanying it. Having acquired a stake in this global political enterprise, it will have to be prepared for close scrutiny of its activities in the seven key areas defined by the guidelines: multilateralism, climate change, security, rule of law, free trade, digitalization and education. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) jointly host an Indo-Pacific roundtable series to promote the political exchange on Indo-Pacific policy with stakeholders from the German Bundestag, line ministries, embassies and policy think tanks.

The global fight against climate change hinges on the Indo-Pacific

The second edition of this roundtable was centred on climate change and biodiversity. To set the framework of the event, the Director-General for Climate Action of the European Commission gave an input on Europe's cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region with regard to climate change. The speakers representing the German Federal Government, the Federal Parliament as well as The Energy and Resources Institute in India and the German-Japan Energy Transition Council then discussed various angles of the fight against climate change and the efforts to preserve biodiversity in the region, highlighting examples for good cooperation but also challenges for Germany in its partnerships with Indo-Pacific nations.

The Indo-Pacific is the most important region with regard to tackling climate change and preserving biodiversity. Indo-Pacific nations may not see Europe as a major actor, but in many ways it is known as a trusted and reliable partner, as well as a bulwark of values and principles. As such, Europe can bring investment, technologies, knowledge and support in various policy areas. Moreover, Southeast Asia continues to be a growing economic power, with which Europe should strengthen its trade and investment links.

Five of the Indo-Pacific nations – India, Indonesia, China, Japan and South Korea – are the world's top emitters of greenhouse gases, which is due to their rise in population, economic growth, as well as high demands in the energy, transport, and industry sectors. Adaptation to climate change urgently needs to receive more attention as the consequences of climate change become increasingly clear. To this end, there are some positive developments in the region. Several countries have come up with long-term commitments to reducing greenhouse

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gas emissions. China announced that it would become carbon-free before 2060, duly followed by Japan and South Korea.

One of Germany's focuses in the Indo-Pacific lies in the energy sector. Germany aims to promote a combined approach of preserving biodiversity, ecosystem-based adaptation, ecological protection and waste management. There are two important pillars of cooperation: strengthening the cooperation with ASEAN as a regional multilateral institution, as well as strengthening existing bilateral partnerships, for example with Indonesia and Vietnam.

Indo-German Cooperation

India looks at the Indo-Pacific at a massive scale with far-reaching implications. To collaborate on fighting climate change and preserving biodiversity, India and Germany can build upon a strong strategic partnership as well as several cooperation agreements between the two countries. The Indo-German Environment Forum, which has been in place for three years, promotes discussions through its environment and energy programs. The combined portfolio of the Federal Ministries for the Environment (BMU) as well as for Development Cooperation (BMZ) make Germany a crucial European partner for India. In the upcoming government consultations, the environment, biodiversity and climate change are expected to be high on the agenda.

To enhance Germany's and India's cooperation, a few key areas for collaboration and investment in sustainable solutions were identified: Germany could redouble its support in implementing India's offshore wind energy efforts, especially in the installation phase. India and Germany could also come together on enhancing data collection in the forest and marine aspects of biodiversity. Germany has signaled its interest in the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region and is considering joining the International Solar Alliance. Therefore, there should be a push for implementation- and source-based organizational collaborations.

German-Japan Energy and Climate Cooperation

Since 2016 the German Japan Energy Transition Council has been serving as the platform for bilateral cooperation in the fields of energy and climate. The council has capacities to conduct in-depth practical research, including comparative analyses of long-term scenarios, the social-cultural aspect of the energy transition, as well as digitalization and the energy transition, policy monitoring and reviews. The council is now primarily focusing on decarbonizing energy-intensive industries, long-term scenario analyses up to 2050, distributed energy systems and enhancing the performance of batteries.

Germany and Japan face many common challenges and opportunities, for instance both countries aim to be carbon neutral by 2050. Both countries should step up their efforts for cooperation in third countries in the Indo-Pacific, and work towards maintaining a level playing field in the region. Furthermore, Germany and Japan need to take into account the differing realities regarding the availability and sourcing of energy as well as different national priorities within the 17 SDGs; for example, in China the fight against climate change ranks only at the 15th priority.

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Outlook for Germany's economic and development cooperation

The challenges in the environment and climate are defining factors for Germany's international development policy. In Germany it has become clear that voters demand a clear way of dealing with environment and climate challenges from the government. Germany's multilateral efforts, such as financial support to the Green Climate Fund, need to be accompanied by targeted bilateral cooperation to address challenges ranging from low emission mobility in India, keeping pollution of the oceans in check, and preserving and protecting the Indo-Pacific's rainforests. More innovative approaches will be needed, such as the hydropower partnership between Germany and Australia, which integrates security and technology aspects. Germany has a responsibility to support the region in its efforts to limit climate change. To do this task justice, Germany needs cater to the different technological, financial and security needs of individual countries in the region.

Conclusion

The roundtable generated four main insights: 1) There is no shortage of platforms for cooperating on fighting climate change and preserving biodiversity. A good way forward for Germany may be to focus on targeted trilateral cooperation with close partners such as Japan. 2) Germany and Europe need to be cognizant that their interpretation of the SDGs is not shared around the world, and policies and expectations need to take into account different national priorities. 3) There needs to be serious debate around the economics of energy transition. Where possible Germany should consider and enable flexible financing mechanisms. 4) The global efforts towards a more sustainable future will be shaped by great power rivalry. It will be up to all actors to collaborate in an expedient manner that benefits the world in the long run, and not the vested interests of single actors.

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