



Potential for Indo-European/German cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

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Event Report

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To mark the arrival of the German Frigate *Bayern* in Mumbai as a symbol of European and Germany's pivot towards the Indo-Pacific, the Observer Research Foundation, the National Maritime Foundation and the India Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung organised this virtual symposium. The arrival of the German naval frigate Bayern F217 at the Mumbai port on 20 January 2022 marks a turning point not just in India-Germany defence relations, but also in Germany's approach to the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region. The developments initiated by Germany and other European states are seen as a major signal to their systemic rival China as the arrival of Bayern in Mumbai highlights Germany's desire to strengthen its own Indo-Pacific policy and Berlin identifies New Delhi as one of its key partners in the Indo-Pacific strategic framework.

The virtual symposium began with welcome remarks by Dr. Samir Saran, President, Observer Research Foundation which was soon followed by introductory remarks by Mr. Peter Rimmele, Resident Representative to India, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. The opening remarks was followed by a brief address by H.E. Dr. Tobias Lindner, Minister of State, Federal Foreign Office of Germany. Minister Lindner began his intervention by elucidating on the history of maritime navigation as 2022 marks the 500th anniversary of the Magellan expedition, first recorded circumnavigation of the Earth. He laid special emphasis on the arrival of Bayern which constitutes an integral element of the Germany Defence and Foreign Policy in safeguarding its interest beyond its territories. Additionally, *Bayern* also affirms Germany's posture in the Indo-Pacific where it supports and aims to foster rules-based order by adhering to the basic principles of international law. Germany and the European Union (EU) in the recent past have realized that the centre of geopolitical attention has shifted to

Indo-Pacific hence requiring a strategic approach to the region aiming to intensifying their relationship with other like-minded partners in a cooperative, inclusive and value-based way. Furthermore, Germany and the EU also support Green initiative in the region and India is a key partner in the region. The seven-month long journey of Bayern comes to an end in Mumbai thereby marking the end of the Indo – Pacific journey for Bayern after the Indian Navy welcomed Bayern in the Indian Ocean last year. The Minister concluded his remarks by expressing India's centrality in Germany's and the EU's Indo-Pacific Policy and the upcoming Indo – German Intergovernmental Consultations will provide further means to intensify Indo – German Strategic Partnership.

Minister Lindner's address was followed by a message by H.E. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India. The secretary welcomed *Bayern* to India and expressed his confidence in the milestone achieved by *Bayern* as it will help Germany's sustained and active engagement in the Indo-Pacific by contributing towards reaffirming a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific. The region is the new epicentre for geopolitics as it is home to more than 60 percent of the world's population and accounts for more than two-thirds of the global economic output. For India, the region has been of prime importance for centuries as it perceives the region as a free, inclusive region which embraces all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity as encapsulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi by using the term 'SAGAR' which signifies 'Security And Growth for All in the Region'. The Indian belief in achieving prosperity and security forefronts dialogue at the helm by respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality of all nations involved. Mr. Shringla emphasised on India's history of respecting territorial boundaries in accordance with international law by citing the examples of India's delimitation of its maritime boundaries with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Furthermore, he called upon the strong interdependence between Europe and Indo – Pacific as strong trade and investment ties between the EU and Indo – Pacific regional actors can elevate European economies. Moreover, collaborative efforts in the region should aim at promoting linkages rather than entangling in economic dependencies and debt traps. The new coalition government in Germany offers a new ray of hope towards intensifying their engagement in the Indo – Pacific region as Berlin's prioritises strengthening multilateralism, rule of law and democracy in the region. Similarly, counterterrorism is an area of utmost focus for both India and Germany vis a vis the Afghanistan crisis which poses serious implications for both parties, hence requiring an urgent, unambiguous and undivided collective response. Mr. Shringla offered an invitation to Germany and other European partners to join India's Indo – Pacific Oceans Initiative announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 14th East Asia Summit in 2019. The Foreign Secretary concluded his message by reiterating the necessity of cooperation and collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region to achieve the vision of a free, open, transparent and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

The next session had H.E. Petra Sigmund, Director General for Asia and the Pacific in the German Federal Foreign Office in conversation with Prof. C. Raja Mohan, Visiting Professor, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. Prof. Mohan began the conversation by asking the rationale behind sending *Bayern* to the Indo-Pacific. H.E. Sigmund responded that by signalling Germany's national interest to ensure peace, stability and rules-

based international order in the Indo-Pacific is maintained, hence the Frigate reaffirms Germany's commitment in the Indo – Pacific which also encompasses the EU's Indo – Pacific Strategy assisted by other member states such as France and the Netherlands. Furthermore, Germany now began exercising leadership in the Indo – Pacific as it realises that there are greater threats that could affect Europe besides those originating in the European neighbourhood. Such systemic challenges require detailed and meticulously crafted strategies such as the EU's Indo – Pacific Strategy which allows Europe to be a global actor henceforth. The Global Gateway strategy allows Europe to link with its allies in the Indo – Pacific to become stronger to counter against their systemic rival. The conversation further moved towards focusing on other major threats posed by Russia to Europe at the Ukrainian front but H.E Sigmund reiterated the importance of the EU as a global actor which requires handling of multiple issues at once rather than focusing solely on a region-based problem. China's economic presence and debt trap diplomacy has deterred multiple countries hence Europe attempts to look at alternatives for trade purposes and engaging in a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) offers a genuine hope of a free and open Indo – Pacific region. Europe and India can not only collaborate in Asia but also extend their expertise in Africa as both parties have common priorities. Prof. Mohan concluded the session by highlighting three takeaways from H.E. Sigmund's intervention – rise of China and its economic interdependency has caused a conundrum therefore requiring alternatives; the Indo – German and Indo – European synergies can be expanded in newer areas; and, the arrival of *Bayern* is just the beginning of a long extended maritime romance between India and Germany.

The German Ambassador to India, H.E. Walter J. Lindner extended his greetings at the virtual symposium by sharing his personal experience of welcoming the Frigate in Mumbai which was followed by a panel discussion consisting of Mr. Roderich Kiesewetter (Member of Parliament, Germany), Ms. Priyanka Chaturvedi (Member of Parliament, India), H.E. Ugo Astuto (Ambassador of European Union to India), H.E. Emmanuel Lenain (Ambassador of France to India). The panel was moderated by Vice Admiral (Retd.) Pradeep Chauhan (Director General, National Maritime Foundation). Ms. Priyanka Chaturvedi began the panel discussion by reflecting on the history of Indo – German alliance and how the arrival of *Bayern* further broadens the relationship between India and Germany. H.E. Ugo Astuto brought out the similarities in India's and the EU's Indo – Pacific Strategy with major point of convergences being strong emphasis on multilateral cooperation, respect for international law (UNCLOS) and ensuring stable and rules-based order in the Indo – Pacific. H.E. Astuto reflected on the need for greater engagement between India and EU after a joint naval mission between the Indian Navy and the EU Atlanta on the Somalian coast was conducted last year. The EU Ambassador to India concluded his remarks by laying the focus on the renewal of India – EU Free Trade Agreement negotiations. The French Ambassador to India, H.E. Emmanuel Lenain expressed his delight at the increasing European footprint in the Indo – Pacific especially when France considers itself as a country of the region as the French Overseas territories in the Indo – Pacific hosts 1.5 million people and France also has the second-largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the world. France developed its own Indo – Pacific Strategy in 2018 and the EU's adoption of the strategy now extends Europe's footprint beyond its territorial confines. H.E. Lenain also brought in the French perspective in context of its Presidency of the Council

of the EU and the Indo – Pacific Forum on 22nd February which will lead towards concrete outcome for the future of the region. The last speaker on the panel, Colonel Roderich Kiesewetter accentuated on the solidarity shown by fellow European member states in welcoming *Bayern* in Mumbai. The EU, in its recent past, has witnessed multiple challenges such as Brexit, the migration crisis across the Mediterranean, natural gas crisis and threats from Russia. However, the arrival of *Bayern* and its acceptance by fellow Europeans portrays the EU's desire to be a global power as the bloc is not focused on its regional challenge but factors in various non-regional threats as well. Colonel Kiesewetter concluded his remarks by stressing on the need to strengthen and further empower the Indo – German Strategic Alliance. Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan deliberated on the usage of the term 'holistic maritime security' and not solely using military maritime security. His deliberation factored in natural threats such as cyclone, tsunamis or any natural disaster and if India or any other state uses the seas for connectivity or to promote blue economy- then both natural and human-made causes should be factored in under holistic maritime security. The panel discussion was followed by a Q & A session in which questions were related to issues such as Indo – European cooperation, Indo – German cooperation in renewable energy, underlining the French and German definition of a rules-based order, envisioning a plausibility of a quad plus and the role played by non-governmental organisations in strengthening the Indo – German and Indo – European Cooperation.

The virtual symposium was drawn to its conclusion by Captain Sarabjeet S. Parmar (Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation). The concluding assertion from the virtual symposium lays India at the centrality of Europe's Indo – Pacific Strategy and that India not only allows Europe to create links based on like-mindedness but also nullifies the debt traps in the region. The arrival of *Bayern* in India is one of Germany's and EUs attempt at fulfilling its Indo – Pacific Strategy as Brussels now attempts at achieving Strategic Autonomy which could further allow the EU to strengthen its footprint in the Indo – Pacific.

Compiled by: *Rahul Kamath, ORF*