

Seizing the Momentum

Avenues for EU-India Maritime Cooperation in a Connectivity Context

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This paper has been written in the context of the EU-India Think Tank Twinning Initiative 2018-2019, funded by the EU. The views in this paper are however the authors', and its content their sole responsibility.

Introduction

In recent years, rising competition in the maritime spaces have pushed many actors to critically rethink their policies towards the security and governance of the high seas. In the Indian Ocean Region, China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) as part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been central to this growing sense of competition. New, and potentially conflicting connectivity approaches are the result of this changing dynamic in the maritime domain. This has made it imperative to understand how the competing narratives are feeding into the existing policies and actions at the national, regional and global level. Amidst the growing strategic competition, the EU and India are exploring various options to not only strengthen their cooperation to tackle security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), but also to take the relationship forward based on mutually shared norms on connectivity.² In this backdrop, this policy brief seeks to analyse how the evolving policy approaches of the EU and India with regard to connectivity in the IOR affect potential maritime cooperation and initiatives, and which potential avenues for cooperation open

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²For elaboration on the convergence of norms, see: Garima Mohan and Darshana M. Baruah, "Charting EU-India Cooperation on Connectivity," EU-India Think Tanks Twinning Initiative Paper (Berlin, Delhi: Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Carnegie India, January 2019), <https://euindiathinktanks.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EU-India-connectivity-GPPI-and-Carnegie.pdf>.

up in this changed policy context. For this purpose, the paper employs a two-pronged approach by looking at avenues for cooperation in the economic and security field through a bilateral and institutional lens.

Maritime Cooperation: A key area of Convergence

In recent years, the maritime domain has emerged as the key area of EU-India engagement. The concept of connectivity has come to dominate the agenda and has strengthened the prospects of cooperation between these actors in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). Connectivity is seen as one of the key tools of “enhanced engagement” between EU and India, especially in the backdrop of China’s growing global maritime footprint.³ As Beijing’s MSR envisages connecting Southeast Asia with Europe through the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, it has forced both India and the EU to prioritise connectivity as one of the core elements of bilateral engagement. The EU’s India Strategy, published in November 2018, also points to the common principles which the EU and India share vis-à-vis connectivity; sustainability, transparency and preserving the rules-based international order being the most pressing.⁴ China’s MSR initiatives are seen to potentially challenge these norms. The recently held track 1.5 workshop on EU-India maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region also attests to the growing attention for this subject.⁵ With China’s MSR expanding, the IOR has only become a more complex maritime space with rising geopolitical and security tensions. In addition to the competition among regional powers, maritime security in the IOR is challenged by a variety of non-traditional threats, such as piracy, transnational organized crime, terrorism, illegal fishing, and pollution, which can be managed to a great extent through promoting connectivity between countries and island states in the IOR.

Based on the converging views of the EU and India vis-a-vis the freedom of navigation, rule of law and order of the high seas, both the EU and India are strong promoters of the respect for international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and committed to securing sea lines of communications as the huge majority of their trade relies on maritime transport. While this subject has been under discussion since 2004, concrete engagement between New Delhi and Brussels still had to take off. The differences primarily were at the level of perceptions, strategic divergence and operational postures. Indian policy makers believed, until very recently, that there is a lack of consensus among the EU member states owing to their varying national interests on strategic issues in general and the IOR in particular and a lack of urgency when it came to fostering bilateral cooperation. The EU, on the other hand, was

³“Elements for an EU Strategy on India,” Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council (Brussels, November 20, 2018), 12–13, https://cdn5-eeas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/MJxuGXlelnF8rvfq4cRLxzC1mUacEWgyfout13dMi4o/mtime:1542708985/sites/eeas/files/jc_elements_for_an_eu_strategy_on_india_-_final_adopted.pdf. “Press Release: EU-India Workshop Discusses Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region” (New Delhi, EU/ NMF/ SIPRI, February 13, 2019), https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india_en/57689/EU-India%20to%20discuss%20maritime%20security%20in%20the%20Indian%20Ocean%20regio.

⁴iiiEU & high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy (2018), Joint communication to the european parliament and the council : Elements for an EU strategy on India, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/jc_elements_for_an_eu_strategy_on_india_-_final_adopted.pdf

⁵“Press Release: EU-India Workshop Discusses Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region” (New Delhi, EU/ NMF/ SIPRI, February 13, 2019), https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india_en/57689/EU-India%20to%20discuss%20maritime%20security%20in%20the%20Indian%20Ocean%20regio.

sceptical of India as a 'responsible power' prepared to lead the region.⁶ Also, the EU's security strategy approach has been more principled and less strategic in nature. While India's stance has been more towards containing threats in South Asian waters, both conventional and unconventional kinds, and building influence among the littoral and island states of the region, the efforts by the EU have been predominantly in the form of counter-piracy operation 'Atalanta' of the EU Naval Force, capacity building on land in East Africa, improving maritime governance and promoting sustainable development of marine resources.⁷

As the conversation between the EU and India receives new stimulus, both sides have found newer areas of convergence. The EU-India Strategic Partnership could for example function as reliable platform for linking the Indo-Pacific. Through EU Operation Atalanta and the naval officers' Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings in Bahrain, many East Asian actors such as Japan and South Korea are already involved in maritime initiatives in the IOR.⁸ The two sides aim to further identify concrete projects, which can deal with the challenges, mainly of non-conventional kinds, in the region. India can in fact gain a lot of technical expertise from various EU member states in its pursuit of strategic connectivity goals in the IOR. Also, in the light of the Trump administration's uncertain policies towards Asia, there is a greater chance for the EU to emerge as a credible and stable security provider in the region. The EU increasingly sees India as a partner in promoting connectivity and governance norms in the Indian Ocean Region. The perceptual change vis-à-vis the EU on the Indian side can be best explained by two key factors: First, the overall change in the geo-strategic environment fuelled by China's rise led New Delhi to diversify its strategic partnerships, in the context of which the EU is currently seen as an important player. Second, at the domestic level, the active advocacy promoted by the Indian Navy and think tanks like the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) has been instrumental in propelling the diplomatic engagement with the EU. Another added value of this engagement is that it acts as a means to reduce India's excessive dependence on the superpowers along with providing opportunities to both India and the EU⁹ to jointly carve out an alternative framework or counternarrative on connectivity in the region.

Economic Aspects of Cooperation: the Blue Economy

The first avenue for EU-India bilateral and institutional maritime cooperation this paper will look into in the economic sphere is the blue economy. Blue economy initiatives potentially spur the development of physical connectivity in the region through for example port development, enhancing information sharing and monitoring networks, and strengthening connections between coastal areas and the hinterland.

As the use of oceans has broadened from a medium of transport to that of a wellspring of resources, the focus on blue economy has acquired gradual recognition as an economic potential in maritime space. Blue economy, can be understood as harnessing marine resources for sustainable use, port modernisation, hinterland connectivity, ocean economy development and

⁶ Singh, A. "Towards an India-EU security partnership in the Indian Ocean", April 6, 2017, ORF Commentary, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/towards-an-india-eu-security-partnership-in-the-indian-ocean/>

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⁸The author is grateful for this point, that was made by one of the interviewees upon revision of the initial text. For elaboration of involvement of Asian actors in counter-piracy missions, see: *Susanne Kamerling and Frans-Paul Van der Putten, "Enhancing Maritime Security Governance: European and Asian Naval Missions Against Somali Piracy," in The Asia-Europe Meeting: Contributing to a New Global Governance Architecture. The Eight ASEM Summit in Brussels, ed. Sebastian Bersick and Paul Van der Velde (Amsterdam University Press, 2010).*

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preservation of the marine ecosystems. The concept gained currency in 2012 at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), when a number of UN-led initiatives have been directed at the oceans, seas and their sustainable development. The Indian Ocean, by the division of seas, is the third largest in the world and covers an area of more than 70 million square km that includes extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of different countries and a variety of island states. A majority of these littorals are developing countries and they rely extensively on marine resources for food and livelihoods. It is the increasing pressure on the marine resources that led to the growing public concerns about the health of the oceans and its resources.

Globally several countries and multilateral bodies have evolved strategies that focus on developing maritime resources and blue economy in particular as outlined in goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). India too has its Blue Economy agenda and has been clearly outlined in the 2016 Maritime India Summit. The first of its kind, the summit not only demonstrates India's maritime vision but also clearly lays out the priority sectors for India's Blue Economy ecosystem.¹⁰ They include shipping, ports, roads, rails, coastal connectivity, shipbuilding, technology, training of personnel and tourism. The EU for its part has launched its own Blue Growth Strategy in 2012, which prioritises aquaculture, marine renewable energy, marine mineral mining, marine biotechnology, and coastal tourism as key drivers of blue economy.¹¹ It therefore presents a promising area of cooperation in India-EU relations with respect to port development, fisheries, protecting biodiversity, marine pollution and ocean energy; the key constituents of blue economy. The concept also neatly fits the new connectivity approaches in the IOR, as investments in improving physical connections in Asia through infrastructure projects and capacity development of littoral and island states would vastly benefit the growth potential of blue economy initiatives and sustainable and inclusive growth for the regional countries in question. Further, these would support offshore projects such as oil and gas development and create employment opportunities in the ports, roads and shipping sectors. The cooperation between India and the EU on blue economy can therefore be operationalized at two levels:

i) Bilateral Level

The Indian understanding of blue economy differs from the European approach. The EU has a broader definition of blue economy which encompasses all sectoral and cross-sectoral economic activities related to oceans, seas and coasts, including those in the EU's outermost regions and landlocked countries, whereas India lacks a holistic approach to the concept and the idea appears in spurts in policies and initiatives of the government. Despite the differences, both India and the EU fully endorse the concept as a new pillar of economic activity and highlight the importance of sustainable tapping of maritime economic activities to improve people's livelihoods, also in the IOR. There are at least four issues that can contribute to India-EU cooperation in this context:

1. The first relates to the sharing of expertise and knowledge for the development of blue economy. This can be done through research, training and outreach involving government bodies, corporate sectors and NGOs;

¹⁰ Sakhuja, V & Narula, K (2017). Perspectives on Blue Economy, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi: Vij Books Publishers.

¹¹ Library Briefing, "Blue growth Sustainable development of EU marine and coastal sectors", May 6, 2013 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130522/LDM_BRI\(2013\)130522_REV1_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130522/LDM_BRI(2013)130522_REV1_EN.pdf)

2. The second is encouraging the EU's participation into India's major port development initiative 'Sagarmala' in ship building, port modernisation, design of cruise vessels, and in developing information sharing networks in the ports;
3. The third relates to the area of technology transfer for deep-sea exploration and management of resources in the region.¹² Given India's long coastline, and resource rich exclusive economic zone (EEZ), New Delhi is increasingly looking to exploit the deep-sea resources. Although it has made significant headway in this area, it however lacks the knowledge and proper methodology to assess geological, meteorological and biological factors;
4. The fourth relates to fisheries in which the EU and India can jointly develop a short- to medium term strategy to institute accountability and monitor illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) fishing in the region.

ii) Institutional Level

The challenges facing blue economy have been recognised by the regional body, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), who carries out many programmes in fisheries, climate change and food security. In fisheries, IORA has established two relevant programs: the Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer and the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU). Also, specialized engagement in blue economy at ministerial levels of participating countries along with workshops and conferences are part of the activities. The EU and India can therefore jointly contribute to the ongoing projects of the centre and develop initiatives to promote fishing cultivation as well as reforms in the fishing industry. Also, the normative framework emphasising sustainable development of marine resources laid down by the 2013 Perth Communiqué of IORA, 2015 Mauritius Blue Economy Declaration and 2017 Jakarta Concord, largely points to the congruity of approach between the EU and India on blue economy, thereby, providing scope for them to push joint projects and initiatives at the regional level.

As the concept rapidly percolates into other regional groupings like ASEAN, BIMSTEC and SAARC, the prospects for EU-India to cooperate through an institutional mechanism become higher. These regional forums not only lend more strategic neutrality and inclusiveness to the projects but also enhance the scope for international involvement. The EU being a natural partner to ASEAN can lead the way by providing both financial as well as innovative solutions to expand Blue Economy-related business in which the European Investment Bank (EIB) can play a key role in financing projects as well as offering support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region. Similarly, in BIMSTEC and SAARC, the EU and India can provide joint leadership for combating marine crimes (trafficking, illegal fishing, piracy etc.) in line with the EU CRIMLEA programme under the aegis of the EU MASE programme.¹³

Security Aspects of Cooperation: Building on Counter-Piracy

The second avenue for EU-India maritime cooperation this paper examines through a bilateral and institutional lens is the maritime security domain. Although not physical connectivity, maritime security cooperation addresses so-called 'soft connectivity' as it has the potential of strengthening

¹²Mohanty, S.K., Dash, P., Gupta, A & Gaur, P. (2015), *Prospects of Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean Region*, RIS, http://www.ris.org.in/pdf/Final_Blue_Economy_Report_2015-Website.pdf

¹³ Banerjee, Somen (2018), "Emerging India European Union Cooperation in Western Indian," Vivekananda International Foundation, January 11, 2018, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2018/january/11/emerging-india-european-union-cooperation-in-western-indian-ocean>.

certain (security) governance norms, connectivity approaches and multilateral architecture in the region.

Working together in maritime security has been high on the agenda of the EU-India Strategic Partnership for years, and although the EU and India have worked side-by-side in combating piracy in the Western Indian Ocean since 2008, cooperation in this field has not yet reached its potential. Although the strategy and plans are there now, concrete projects need to be implemented. There is momentum on both sides however, and small but symbolic steps have been taken recently to grasp this. In October 2017 the first maritime naval passing exercise was held between the Indian Navy and the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR). In December 2018 the Indian Navy escorted a humanitarian aid shipment of the World Food Programme (WFP) to Somalia in support of Operation Atalanta for the first time, responding to a request by EUNAVFOR.¹⁴ Consequently, in January 2019 a high-level visit of a delegation of EU military representatives to Delhi and Mumbai took place at the occasion of the port visit of the French destroyer Cassard to Mumbai that hosted the EU delegation.¹⁵ The EU Military Staff (EUMS) also visited the recently launched Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) of the Indian Navy in Mumbai, which has established links with the EU's Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSC-HOA). This EU maritime diplomacy initiative was clearly an effort to promote the EU as a security actor in the IOR and was welcomed by India. This has strengthened the sense in Brussels that their counterparts in India are ready and willing to engage.¹⁶

Also the EU's Strategy on India acknowledges, "cooperation on the Indian Ocean should be developed, notably on security and governance, building on counter-piracy activities, and promoting respect for the international law of the sea."¹⁷ It also seeks to strengthen military-to-military contacts. Looking at the regional architecture to further cooperation in the region fits the connectivity and maritime strategies of both the EU and India in the largely ungoverned IOR. At the same time India is reviving multilateral institutions and fora in the IOR and increasing its commitment to maritime multilateralism to foster ocean governance in the region. Delhi shares with the EU a certain reluctance to rely solely on power projection by major actors for governing the maritime space of the IOR.¹⁸ The relative weakness of the security architecture in the region should spur India and the EU to work together in the regional multilateral forums not only to strengthen these platforms but also to institutionalize their cooperation and enhance dialogue and building trust. The cooperation can be operationalized at two levels:

¹⁴"Indian Warship Escorts World Food Programme Vessel," Eunavfor (blog), January 8, 2019, <https://eunavfor.eu/indian-warship-escorts-world-food-programme-vessel/>. China did the same in February 2018.

¹⁵"European Union Naval Forces - Port Visit to Mumbai," Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, January 25, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/57118/european-union-naval-forces-port-visit-mumbai_en.

¹⁶Interview of the author with EU officials, Brussels, February 2019.

¹⁷"Elements for an EU Strategy on India," 13.

¹⁸Constantino Xavier and Darshana M. Baruah, "Brussels and Delhi: Converging Interests in the Indian Ocean," EU-India Think Tanks Twinning Initiative Paper (Berlin, Delhi: Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI), Carnegie India, March 2017), 10, <https://euindiathinktanks.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Brussels-and-Delhi-Converging-Interests-in-the-Indian-Ocean-min.pdf>.

i) Bilateral Level

The EU's lack of visibility in the region is considered as a major hindrance to the cooperation in the areas in question. Outreach activities of the EU's military structures – like the January visit this year – are therefore of utmost importance, not only to strengthen the understanding of the EU's workings in India, but also to challenge the predominant idea in India that the EU cannot be seen as a security actor. The EU's public diplomacy efforts in general, and maritime diplomacy initiatives in specific should therefore be expanded and intensified to change these perceptions and be taken more seriously by India in maritime security in the IOR. Next to this, avenues for cooperation that have been suggested before open up in the current positive track the EU and India find themselves on. These mainly centre on counter-piracy activities, joint military exercises, search-and-rescue (SAR) operations, humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations, strengthening safety at sea, and regional capacity building. Working towards a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA) with India that would serve as a legal basis for participation in civil and military crisis response operations of the EU would make clear the ambitions on both sides; at least in the medium to long term. This is also needed for sharing sensitive information. The EU Council has already given their mandate to negotiate with New Delhi in this context.

One of the prerequisites to tackle safety and security challenges in the IOR and to cooperate in the maritime domain is information and data sharing. The EU CRIMARIO project was launched in order to increase awareness and get a better picture of potential risks and threats in the Indian Ocean, or in other words; create maritime situational awareness (MSA). For this, the EU and India need to bolster their level of dialogue and mutual trust. The links between India's IFC-IOR and the EU's MSC-HOA have already been established, but could be strengthened by seconding a (semi-) permanent EU military representative to the IFC-IOR in Mumbai. A reciprocal visit of IFC-IOR representatives to the MSC-HOA and the regional IORIS Platform – an information sharing and incident management tool initiated by the EU – would make sense as a next step. Aimed at being a regional platform IORIS is currently only accessible to the national maritime administrations of Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles, but the EU could invite India to join too. Also, under the EU's Maritime Security programme (MASE), two physical information centres have been established in Madagascar (the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre) and the Seychelles (the Regional Centre for Operational Coordination) to strengthen maritime situational awareness. These centres are coordinated by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and largely funded by the EU. Despite the relatively large budget and long-term goals, the EU's continued support of these centres is not certain and has to be consolidated in order to enhance EU's long-term partner credibility. Further support is needed to capitalize on the EU's early achievements. As India is also strongly involved in these island states in the IOR, Delhi could join the EU in the capacity building of these regional centres or take over some of the initiatives in coordination of their own work in these countries. The EU could offer a (semi-) permanent Indian military representative to the IFC in Madagascar. Cooperation in the training of these centres and other regional authorities would also be a potential avenue. The Indian Navy has for example expressed interest to join the EU in the capacity building done in the context of EUCAP Somalia (previously EUCAP Nestor) at the last SHADE meeting in December 2018.¹⁹ As joint involvement in Africa is of interest to both actors and fits the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) – India's joint initiative with Japan – this avenue would be worth exploring.

¹⁹Interview author with EU officials, Brussels, February 2019.

ii) Institutional Level

The two most important multilateral maritime mechanisms in the IOR from New Delhi's perspective are the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Although the EU supports the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), applying for observer status or membership of these platforms would show Brussels' commitment to support the regional architecture and India's role in it. This would also strengthen its profile as a security actor in the region while bringing its activities in the IOR in the limelight. The EU should also explore how to support India, which leads the initiative and has allocated 10 million dollars to disaster resilience infrastructure under the aegis of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) that was proposed at the G20 of November 2018.²⁰

The EU can moreover strengthen its support of India's connectivity approach and intensify its involvement in concrete projects under BIMSTEC and SAARC with the help of the European Investment Bank (EIB). An integrated approach to bolstering blue economy and security initiatives would be commendable in this context. Maritime security is also a priority area in other regional organisations and platforms in the broader Indo-Pacific. As the EU and India both support the centrality of ASEAN in governance in the region, and the EU co-chairs the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Intersessional Meeting on Maritime Security in the period 2018-2020, the EU could propel India in this context. Under the current action plan this offers yet another platform to work jointly on maritime security activities.

EU perspective

The concept of connectivity also featured prominently at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit in October in Brussels, where the EU high representative Mogherini reiterated: "We are very much focussing on increasing our partnership with Asia, be it on connectivity, be it on security (...). If we see developments in our regions - both in Asia and in Europe - we see the need to protect and promote a rules-based international order - not only on trade, but also on security - and a cooperative approach to foreign policy."²¹

This cooperative approach to foreign policy is not self-evident however. The plethora of connectivity approaches and discursive narratives run the risk of intensifying the geopolitical competition in the maritime arena rather than mitigating tensions and stimulating cooperation. The EU needs to carve out a strong autonomous position while at the same time searching for common ground, converging views and a shared narrative in the connectivity approaches that currently surface. The EU needs to reflect on how to position itself in the regional conundrum that

²⁰"Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction Mami Mizutori on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure" (International Workshop on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, New Delhi, 2019), <http://in.one.un.org/un-press-release/special-representative-of-the-un-secretary-general-for-disaster-risk-reduction-mami-mizutori-on-disaster-resilient-infrastructure/>.

²¹"Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini Upon Arrival to the Europe-Asia Meeting (ASEM) Summit, Bruxelles," October 18, 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52407/remarks-hrvp-mogherini-upon-arrival-europe-asia-meeting-asem-summit_en; "Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Press Conference Following the Europe-Asia Meeting (ASEM) Summit, Bruxelles," October 19, 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/asia-europe-meeting-asem/52467/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following-europe_en.

is South Asia and the IOR where India is not an uncontroversial neighbour to its region and China's influence is increasing. India has become more aware of this strategic context and the necessity to become more proactive, and although Delhi is somewhat disappointed in the non-confrontational posture of the EU towards China, it recognised that the EU can be a valuable partner in this regional context nonetheless. It looks like India under Modi is not only slowly moving away from non-alignment, but also cautiously looking west, despite residual hesitancy about this partnership on both sides. The EU feels it should seize this momentum and intensify its cooperation with India, even if it is incremental. Cooperation in blue economy and maritime security are not only seen as the most feasible and promising avenues for working together among all the subjects of the new EU policies; they also fit best the EU's recent priority setting towards Asia and norms the EU propagates in its maritime strategy like freedom of navigation and free trade.²²

Indian perspective

India under Modi has become more conscious of the EU's potential partner-role in the IOR as China's presence in its direct surroundings has changed the strategic context faster than expected and the US has become a less trustworthy partner in Asia. Officials from both the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Navy indicated that they increasingly view the EU as a constructive partner in this current context, that the potential for EU-India cooperation has improved in recent years and that EU-India relations can be leveraged to a great extent. The EU's Strategy on India has set the ball rolling in their eyes and tangibles need to be worked out.²³ This new approach has actually opened many avenues for cooperation and much depends on the level of consensus EU and India are able to forge vis-à-vis China, infrastructure development, military ties etc. Most of them argued that the EU and India can work together to tackle pan-regional challenges such as sustaining persistent surveillance at sea, countering piracy, improving disaster relief efforts, but also in increasing digitalisation of the maritime space or tackling the dangers of cyber-malevolence that are already afflicting the maritime domain. Also, since India holds many joint military exercises individually with European countries, it has shown readiness to cooperate with the EU in (training exercises for) HADR and counter-piracy operations. This will help in developing interoperability. In the context of the blue economy especially the Sagarmala initiative is mentioned as a promising avenue for the EU to support India and with regard to connectivity projects the strategic Chabahar port project in southeast Iran – the gateway to Afghanistan, Central Asia and beyond – is important to India. Few believe in a more strategic cooperation or in the formation of a regional security architecture that could tackle all of this.²⁴

India sees merit in encouraging the EU to join IORA as a dialogue partner. Having the EU as a dialogue partner would, among other things, help to reinforce linkages between India and the anti-piracy work being done off the coast of Somalia by the EU. While the activities are useful for securing Somalia-bound shipments belonging to the World Food Programme and the African Union Mission, it does not extend to other sensitive Indian Ocean littorals, where the competing interests of regional and extra-regional powers and non-state actor violence have generated much security anxiety. Unlike India's patrolling and surveillance-heavy approach in the Southern Asian littorals, the EU's endeavours are essentially capacity building projects meant for Western Indian Ocean states. Many of these (for instance EU MASE) focus exclusively on the Eastern African

²²Interview of the author with EU officials, Brussels, February 2019.

²³Interviews of the author with MEA and Navy officials, New Delhi, January-February 2019.

²⁴Interviews of the author with MEA and Navy officials, New Delhi, January-February 2019.

littorals, widely perceived as Europe's 'proximate' seas. EU's dialogue partner status would also be in keeping with the presence of other key stakeholders such as the United States, China, Japan and the United Kingdom – all of which have dialogue partner status.²⁵

India's approach to the Bay of Bengal has mostly been bilateral. However, its current interest in BIMSTEC as an avenue to greater integration of the Bay of Bengal presents new avenues for cooperation with the EU, mostly in the physical connectivity initiatives. The challenges that the EU faces vis-à-vis the organisation are its undermined bureaucratic set-up, and inconsistency in terms of consultations and high-level meets. The EU can therefore be both the external and internal push for the organisation to sustain its momentum and support the regional integration process in South Asia.

Conclusion

For the EU, working through the existing maritime security governance mechanisms and forging new cooperative ventures currently is the most workable way of achieving balanced cooperation with its partners in Asia, including India. Security cooperation with relevant maritime actors can strengthen the EU's profile as a promising and reliable security actor in the region especially if more coordination at sea in the IOR amongst EU Member States can be set to gain clarity in India's perception of the EU's action. The recent EU-China maritime exercise shows Brussels' involvement in engaging with China – the EU's engagement with India should not lag behind.²⁶ Boosting cooperation with like-minded countries in the region is especially potent at a time that the US commitment to Asia under President Trump is either unclear or diverging from the EU's interest. This makes the EU's current momentum in pro-active policy-making towards Asia even timelier, not to say more sustainable in the medium to long run. EU policymakers realise the current vulnerability of the international order obliges them to strengthen their security profile and support partners in the region that sync with the EU's norms and interests. Although the EU being an extra-regional power in the IOR ultimately limits its options in the maritime security domain, there is more than sufficient scope to continue working on the EU's visibility, partnership profile and expanding cooperative maritime ventures.

India has responded positively to the EU Strategy on India, and although developments are going slowly and incrementally, the two actors are on a more positive track now than they have been in quite a while.²⁷ On the EU side however, Brexit is crucial in how the room for manoeuvre in CSDP, and its (maritime) cooperation with India will develop. As the UK is one of the largest navies of the EU Member States, Brussels is worried that Brexit will weaken the EU as a maritime (security) actor.

²⁵Interviews of the author with MEA and Navy officials, New Delhi, January-February 2019.

²⁶Zoe Stanley-Lockman Diplomat The, "A First: China, EU Launch New Combined Military Exercise," The Diplomat, accessed October 23, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-first-china-eu-launch-new-combined-military-exercise/>.

²⁷"India Welcomes Joint Communication by the European Commission on India-EU Partnership - A Partnership for Sustainable Modernisation and Rules-based Global Order", Ministry of External Affairs, November 26, 2018,

<https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30643/India+welcomes+Joint+Communication+by+the+European+Commission+on+IndiaEU+partnership++A+Partnership+for+Sustainable+Modernisation+and+Rulesbased+Global+Order>

Considering India's strong historic link with the UK, New Delhi is still exploring how to perceive and deal with the EU after Brexit, also in the maritime domain. India's ambition to become a net security provider and preeminent power in the IOR however pushes New Delhi to forge new partnerships and be proactive in supporting regional organizations, platforms and initiatives. At the regional institutional level, in addition to strategic issues, several other maritime and marine issues are resonating in the joint statements and merit attention. The EU has surfaced as a more likely partner than before in this context, and EU-India maritime cooperation has become more advantageous to both actors. Both countries recognise the prospects for the development of Blue Economy, which demand newer ways to manage oceans and the seas through technology, skills and entrepreneurship. Building on existing convergence in governance norms as well as connectivity approaches in the IOR, many concrete activities as outlined in this paper can be undertaken that reinforce the strategic partnership between the EU and India. In a multilateral order that seems more fragile than expected, this might turn out to be much needed.

Policy Recommendations:

- ② The EU should develop more visibility as a security actor in the IOR and work towards convergence of maritime diplomacy of EU Member States in the area. EU flagship port visits are among the tools for branding the EU in India, as are high-level visits of (military) EU staff. Observer status or membership of the EU in IORA and IONS would also be a useful step in this regard, also to coordinate activities and update actors involved in ongoing projects;
- ② Consider creating a (semi-) permanent EU-representative at India's IFC-IO so as to work towards joint maritime situational awareness. An Indian visit to the MSC-HOA and IORIS platform would similarly be useful;
- ② Broaden the scope of Atalanta, to expand from the core of counter-piracy to more comprehensive maritime cooperation;
- ② Consider initiating an exercise in counter-piracy in HADR or SAR in the Mediterranean Sea: India has large interests in terms of human capital in West Asia/ the Middle East and previous experience in evacuation missions in the region. Seeing that the region will likely remain unstable for some time to come this would benefit both the EU and India. The same can be done in the IOR. As the EU is mostly active in the Western IO, it would be useful to expand cooperation and activities to either the Eastern or Southern flank of the IOR. A step-by-step approach is most feasible, where the first step would be common counter-piracy and/ or -HADR-exercises, SAR and HADR-operations in the IOR/ Mediterranean, improving safety at sea, and building common maritime situational awareness through regional information centres;
- ② The EU should invite India to cooperate and coordinate in capacity building initiatives under MASE in the Seychelles and Madagascar and/or EUCAP Somalia. Africa remains a crucial region for the partnership to pan out in the coming years and joint capacity building initiatives like the training of local coast guards and authorities in maritime situational awareness should be explored by both sides;
- ② In the mid-to-long term, the EU and India should work towards a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA), allowing Delhi to cooperate with Brussels in crisis management operations/HADR, including increased cooperation in crisis response. EU-India collaboration could be also extended to disaster relief/evacuations.
- ② The EU and India should establish a structured dialogue to exchange their ideas and understanding of the current security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific in view of discussing the

potential, and the limits, of a joint EU-India approach on maritime security and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

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