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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56384/jes.v42i2.446>

## BOOK REVIEW

**Gabriele Abbondanza and Gorana Grgić. *Europe's Indo-Pacific Pivot: Navigating New Horizons*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore PTE Ltd., 2025.**

**Kainat Baloch\***

The Indo region has become one of the most consequential geopolitical and geo-economic theatres of the twenty-first century. Being the center of global economic growth, maritime trade, strategic competition, and emerging security challenges, the region has attracted unprecedented scholarly and policy attention. While much of the existing literature focuses on the strategic rivalry between the United States and China or on the policies of regional powers such as Japan, India, and Australia, comparatively less attention has been paid to Europe's expanding role in the Indo-Pacific. In *Europe's Indo-Pacific Pivot: Navigating New Horizons*, Gabriele Abbondanza and Gorana Grgić address this scholarly gap by offering a systematic examination of Europe's evolving engagement with the region and its implications for international politics.<sup>1</sup>

The book appears at a particularly important moment in global affairs. The emergence of multipolarity, increasing strategic competition, disruptions to global supply chains, climate-related challenges, and the erosion of aspects of the rules-based international order have collectively elevated the importance of the Indo-Pacific. Against this backdrop, Abbondanza and Grgić argue that Europe can no longer remain a distant observer of regional developments. Rather, Europe understood both as the European Union (EU) and its member states has become an increasingly active participant in shaping the political, economic, and normative architecture of the Indo-

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\* Ms. Kainat Baloch is a M.Phil. Scholar at the Area Study Centre for Europe, University of Karachi. Email: [ksbaloch26@gmail.com](mailto:ksbaloch26@gmail.com).

<sup>1</sup> Europe's Indo-Pacific Pivot: Navigating New Horizons, Springer Nature Link, visit <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-95-0273-8>.

Pacific. This central argument forms the intellectual foundation of the volume and provides a valuable framework for understanding contemporary European foreign policy.

The book is organized into four chapters that progressively develop the authors' argument. The opening chapter, "Europe and the Indo-Pacific: A New International Development," establishes the conceptual and theoretical basis of the study. The second chapter investigates the diverse approaches adopted by European states and institutions toward the region. The third chapter explores opportunities, challenges, and convergences in Europe-Indo-Pacific relations, while the final chapter assesses future trajectories and policy implications. This structure allows the authors to move effectively from conceptual debates to empirical analysis and strategic forecasting.

One of the book's most significant contributions is its sophisticated treatment of the Indo-Pacific concept itself. Rather than accepting the term as a fixed geographical reality, the authors demonstrate that the Indo-Pacific remains a contested and evolving geopolitical construct. They identify four principal interpretations of the region: economic, strategic, counter-strategic, and broader multidimensional visions. According to their framework, the economic vision emphasizes trade, infrastructure development, and economic integration; the strategic vision focuses on balancing China and defending the rules-based order; the counter-strategic vision reflects the rejection of the Indo-Pacific construct by revisionist powers such as China and Russia; and the broader vision combines economic, strategic, political, legal, cultural, and scientific dimensions.

This conceptual categorization represents one of the book's strongest analytical achievements. It enables readers to appreciate the diversity of perspectives shaping contemporary Indo-Pacific discourse while avoiding simplistic binary interpretations. Particularly noteworthy is the authors' argument that most European actors align with the broader interpretation of the Indo-Pacific. Unlike the more security-oriented perspectives associated with the United States and some of its allies, European approaches tend to integrate economic interests, normative commitments, diplomatic partnerships, legal frameworks, and strategic concerns. This observation provides an important insight into the distinctive character of European engagement in the region.

The main theme of Europe's Indo-Pacific policies constitutes the empirical core of the volume and arguably its greatest contribution to European Studies scholarship. The authors provide a detailed examination of ten European actors, including France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Sweden, and the European Union itself. Their analysis reveals both diversity and convergence within European approaches. France emerges as the pioneer of European Indo-Pacific engagement, having conducted regional operations and adopted an Indo-Pacific strategy earlier than its European counterparts. Germany and the Netherlands pursued more cautious approaches through policy guidelines, while the United Kingdom integrated the Indo-Pacific into its broader post-Brexit global strategy. Italy's engagement is particularly interesting because of its substantial regional involvement despite the absence of a formal Indo-Pacific strategy.

The book effectively demonstrates that these national approaches, despite their differences, share several common features. Economic cooperation remains a core priority due to the Indo-Pacific's immense importance for European trade and investment. Security concerns have become increasingly prominent, particularly in relation to maritime stability, freedom of navigation, supply chain resilience, and the preservation of international law. Equally important is the normative dimension of European engagement, reflected in commitments to multilateralism, international law, and the rules-based international order. The authors convincingly argue that this combination of economic, strategic, and normative considerations distinguishes the European approach from those of other major actors.

From a European Affairs perspective, one of the book's most valuable contributions is its analysis of the European Union's evolving geopolitical identity. For decades, scholars characterized the EU as an economic giant but a strategic dwarf. Abbondanza and Grgić challenge this traditional characterization by illustrating how the Indo-Pacific has become a testing ground for the EU's ambitions to enhance its geopolitical relevance. The publication of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2021 represented a significant milestone in this regard, signaling Brussels' recognition that developments in the Indo-Pacific directly affect European interests and security. The authors argue that the EU's regional engagement reflects broader efforts to strengthen strategic autonomy while simultaneously reinforcing multilateral cooperation and international norms.

The authors also succeed in explaining why the Indo-Pacific matters to Europe. Their analysis extends beyond conventional geopolitical considerations and highlights the profound economic interdependence linking the two regions. They note that the Indo-Pacific accounts for a substantial share of global population, economic output, and maritime trade, while the EU remains one of the region's largest investors and trading partners. The emergence of major infrastructure and connectivity initiatives, combined with concerns about supply chain resilience and maritime security, further reinforces the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific for Europe.

Equally compelling is the book's emphasis on the security dimension of Europe-Indo-Pacific relations. The authors highlight how developments in the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, and other regional hotspots have direct implications for European interests. They argue that disruptions to maritime trade routes, growing strategic competition, and emerging security partnerships increasingly link European and Indo-Pacific security environments. The observation that European security can no longer be understood independently of developments in the Indo-Pacific reflects one of the volume's most important insights and contributes significantly to contemporary debates on European strategic thinking.

Methodologically, the book adopts a comparative and interdisciplinary approach that effectively combines perspectives from International Relations, European Studies, Security Studies, and regional studies. This methodological pluralism enhances the analytical richness of the volume and enables the authors to capture the complexity of Europe's engagement with the Indo-Pacific. Their extensive use of official policy documents, strategic frameworks, governmental reports, and academic literature provides a solid empirical foundation for their arguments.

Another notable strength of the book is its engagement with existing scholarship. The authors offer a comprehensive review of both Indo-Pacific studies and Europe-Indo-Pacific relations literature, identifying important gaps and areas requiring further research. They correctly observe that existing scholarship disproportionately focuses on France, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, while smaller European actors remain understudied. By incorporating countries such as Lithuania, the Czech

Republic, Ireland, and Sweden, the book broadens the analytical scope of European Indo-Pacific studies and enriches our understanding of European foreign policy diversity.

Despite its considerable strengths, the book is not without limitations. First, the analysis occasionally places greater emphasis on official strategic narratives than on implementation outcomes. While policy documents and strategic frameworks receive extensive attention, a more systematic assessment of policy effectiveness would have strengthened the analysis. Second, although the authors acknowledge the perspectives of Indo-Pacific actors, the discussion remains predominantly Europe-centered. Greater engagement with how regional partners perceive European involvement could have provided a more balanced perspective. Third, the emphasis on geopolitical and strategic developments sometimes overshadows social, environmental, and developmental issues that increasingly shape regional interactions. Nevertheless, these limitations are relatively minor and do not detract from the overall significance of the work.

In conclusion, *Europe's Indo-Pacific Pivot: Navigating New Horizons* is an important and timely contribution to the growing literature on European foreign policy and Indo-Pacific studies. Abbondanza and Grgić successfully demonstrate that Europe has become an increasingly consequential actor in the Indo-Pacific and that its engagement reflects broader transformations in the international system. Combining conceptual clarity, empirical depth, and policy relevance, the book offers valuable insights into Europe's evolving role in global affairs.

For scholars of European Studies, International Relations, and contemporary geopolitics, this volume provides an indispensable examination of one of the most significant developments in European external relations. It illuminates how European actors are adapting to a changing international order and how the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a central arena for Europe's economic, strategic, and normative ambitions. As such, the book deserves wide readership among academics, policymakers, and students interested in the future of Europe and its place in the evolving global order.