

Introduction

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Abstract: This special issue of *Deusto Journal of European Studies* includes some of the contributions presented during the International Congress “European Union-Asia Pacific dialogue; fostering synergies on global challenges”, held at the University of Deusto on April 22 and 23, 2021. This event took place within the framework of the activities of the Jean Monnet Network (EUNAP). This European project provides an academic platform to promote mutual knowledge, joint research and multidisciplinary debate on the relations between the European Union and the Asia Pacific region. During the second day of this International Congress, various PhD candidates and young researchers from both regions had the opportunity to present their contributions on the different challenges and perspectives that the interregional dialogue currently faces. This special issue includes five of these contributions made at this event.

Keywords: European Union, Asia Pacific, Indo-Pacific, Road and Belt Initiative, Memorandums of Understanding, transatlantic relationship, strategic autonomy, digital currencies, trade and investments, strategic development, China, ASEAN.

José Luis López-Aranguren, Ph.D. Professor of Public International Law and International Relations at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zaragoza, analyses and assesses the geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific region for the European Union (EU). Under the title “The EU’s strategic projection in the Indo-Pacific”, the author highlights the growing importance of this region in economic, demographic and security terms, which has made it a prominent reference in the international order. Despite the increasing relevance of this region and the fact that three of its Member States (France, Germany and the Netherlands) have adopted specific strategies on the Indo-Pacific, the EU has not had its own strategy towards this region until 2021. After analysing the scope of the “Indo-Pacific” concept, the author delves into the analysis of national strategies for the region drawn up by France, Germany and the Netherlands, as well as the

recent strategy adopted by the EU itself, assessing the impact that its implementation may have on the EU's projection and geopolitical role in the region.

Carmen Martínez San Millán, PhD candidate employed by the *Junta de Castilla y León* in the area of Public International Law and International Relations at the University of Valladolid (Spain), begins her article with the analysis of the trade agreements that China is concluding with numerous states, including some EU Member States, within the strategic framework of the so-called "New Silk Road". With the title "The cooperation agreements within the Belt and Road Initiative: the European Common Commercial Policy at crossroads", the author highlights that these cooperation instruments are in practise commercial commitments, despite being called "Memorandums of Understanding". In the case of the EU Member States, such trade engagements raise the problem of their compatibility with the EU law, specifically with the provisions of the common commercial policy, an area of EU's exclusive power. Drawing on these premises, the article delves into these trade agreements with China, while assessing to what extent they undermine the EU's role as a trade actor and are incompatible with EU law.

Antonio José Pagán Sánchez, PhD candidate at Nankai University and at the City University of Hong Kong, delves into the evolving relations between the United States (US), the EU and China over the last decade. Under the title "The rise of China and the US-Europe alliance drift in the 2010s: a lost decade for the European Union?", the author argues that the EU has not been able to define a specific strategy for its relations with China, nor has it aligned itself with US on a common front to face the unstoppable rise of the Asian giant as an economic and geopolitical power. According to the autor, this lack of common policy is evidenced by the EU's position with regard to some of China's relevant geostrategic impulses, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, New Silk Road and Huawei's 5G technology. The author concludes, however, that the current commitment of the EU to develop its strategic autonomy in all areas, in a highly uncertain and competitive global context, can provide new geopolitical perspectives to its relations with China.

Rosa María Ricoy-Casas, Lecturer of Political Science at the University of Vigo (Spain), analyses the challenges raised by the growing expansion of cryptocurrencies in trade and economic exchanges. Under the title "Digital currencies: challenges between the United States, the European Union and Asia Pacific", the author highlights the progressive implementation of a cryptocurrency of its own by China. This trend may turn the Chinese cryptocurrency into an alternative to cash, as well as the international payment system led by the UD dollar until now. The New Silk

Road, represented by the “Belt and Road Initiative” could transform the yuan into a digital currency with global reach. Against this background, the author analyses the possibilities that the EU, US and Japan have to counteract the growing competition of the virtual yuan.

Sang Chul Park, Professor at Graduate School of Knowledge based Technology and Energy in the Korea Polytechnic University, discusses the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in developing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as its implications for Europe. Under the title “The roles and strategies of ASEAN in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)”, the author highlights how China focuses its interest on ASEAN in the development of the BRI, as it provides a strategic connection bridge between Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Indochina peninsula and Europe. For the ten ASEAN member countries, the BRI also opens up important perspectives to improve their connectivity through the development of infrastructures and the establishment of joint ventures. In this context, the article delves into the relations between China and ASEAN in the framework of the development of the BRI, while assessing the challenges and the economic and social impact derived from this mutual interaction.

About the autor

Beatriz Pérez de las Heras is Professor of European Union Law and Jean Monnet Chair on European Integration at the University of Deusto (UD). PhD in Law (UD), she accomplished post-graduate studies at the Centre Européen Universitaire de Nancy, where she obtained the DESS and DEA en Droit Communautaire. She was Director of the European Studies Institute at UD from 1996 to 2009, and Vice-Dean for Research and International Relations at Deusto School of Law from 2013 to 2015. She has been a visiting scholar at the US Universities of Oregon (2009), Georgetown (2012), Fordham (2013), Boston College (2014) and Florida International University (2016). She is currently Editor-in-Chief of *Cuadernos Europeos de Deusto Journal* and Main Researcher of the *Integración Europea y Derecho Patrimonial* research team. She is author of several books and scientific articles on European legal issues. Her current research interests are chiefly focused on the European Union (EU)’s climate change and energy policy, democracy and citizenship in the EU, and the role of the EU as an international actor. As of September 2019, she is the Coordinator of the Jean Monnet Network project “European Union-Asia Pacific Dialogue: promoting European Integration and mutual Knowledge across Continents” (EUNAP).

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