

Jean Monnet Lecture Series on EU-Asia Connectivity

EU-Asia: Shaping a new world order through connectivity?

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The world order is changing and is shifting east

- “The 20th century concentration of international politics on the transatlantic area is now shifting towards the Asia-Pacific region.”
- “Crises in the Western Hemisphere and internal threats to democracy in Europe and in the US are seen as a weakening of democracy as a model and giving impetus to those states that have a different view of how countries should be run.”



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A geopolitical European Commission

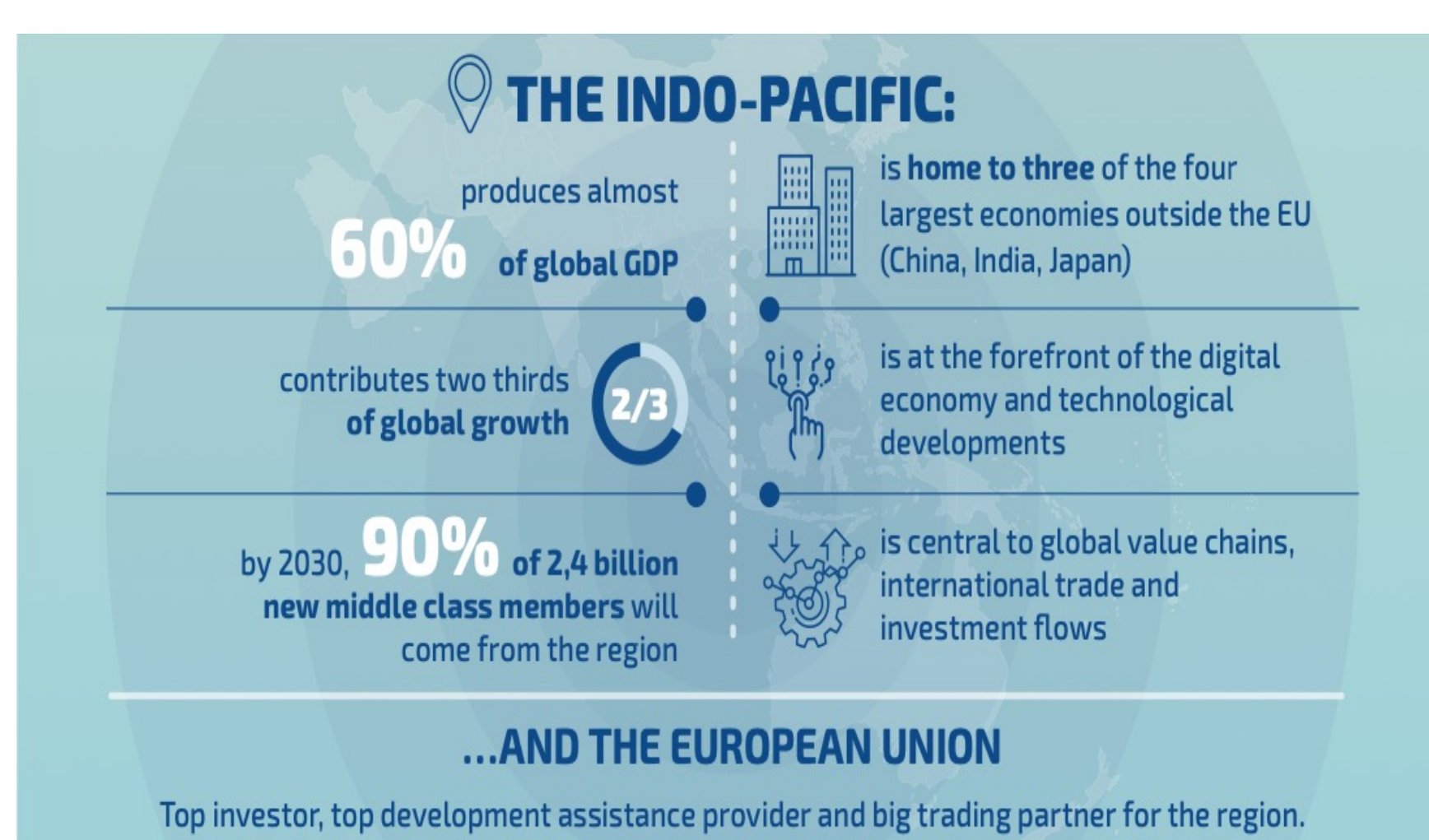
- “The changing global context has forced the EU to take a more strategic outlook on the world. We saw that already in the Global Strategy in 2016 and this is now being played out in a more concrete way. It has to do with a realisation in Europe that the interests of China and the US have changed quite a lot and that that change is not always to Europe's advantage.”



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The Indo-Pacific Strategy: Strategic autonomy and geopolitics

- “The Indo-Pacific Strategy is a way for the EU to say that we want to be present in this region, we have understood the strategic importance of this region and we have to be there.”



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- “It is an uneasy balance between what I call the usual EU that we know from maybe 20 years back and a new more strategic EU.”

- “Ultimate aims in the Indo-Pacific Strategy are material, so access to strategic goods like microchips, securing economic competitiveness by securing global value chains and enforcing and maybe spreading EU regulatory frameworks.”

What role does connectivity play?

- “When [the 2018 EU-Asia connectivity strategy] was launched, it came across as a rather bland, quite unspecific strategy, sort of the EU feeling its way through these more geopolitical dimensions, and it left a lot to read between the lines.”
- “The Global Gateway Initiative builds on the connectivity strategy, but it has become much more strategic and much more assertive.”
- “It wants to offer something concrete to partners in Asia and in the Indo-Pacific, and very clearly says that we are offering another governance model.”



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Is the EU becoming a strategic global actor?

- “[The EU] very clearly seeks presence in [the Indo-Pacific] region and it very clearly says that it is ready to compete on the material, ideational level... that it is necessary for its own interests and also its milieu-shaping goals in the world.”
- “[The EU] is still quite strong on carrots but not so strong on sticks. I think here we cannot expect the EU to become a military power, but it could, for instance, make use of its coercive economic tools so its tools of economic statecraft.”

Can the EU shape the emerging international order?

- “It is trying in its own way, [but] even if it has become more geopolitical more strategically minded it's still the EU and not a sovereign country.”
- “Especially [through] the Indo-Pacific Strategy we can see a little bit more of a role of strategic autonomy for the EU, with a hint of geopolitics.”