



EU IN THE INDO-PACIFIC JEAN MONNET NETWORK

NEWSLETTER ISSUE 10

PROJECT UPDATE

IN THIS ISSUE

- Essay by
Jasmine Barry
- Focal location
spotlight:
South Korea
- Recent
outputs

Contact Us



+6433690390



nick.smith@canterbury.ac.nz



[@NCREurope](https://twitter.com/NCREurope)



www.canterbury.ac.nz/ncre/

We are three months away from our final event for the EUIP project, a full day symposium which is to be held in conjunction with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels. At this event we will showcase the findings from our multinational research to key EU officials from the European External Actions Service (EEAS) and the European Commission.

The 33 months that have gone by have been extremely fruitful and the final outputs which are scheduled for publication in 2026 will be a testament to this. This has been a project that has involved the hard work of more than 50 individuals (ranging from scholars, administrators and interns) and demonstrates the advantages of cross-cultural collaboration.

The research has been stimulating and there are plans afoot to build on this research in the coming years. It is clear that the topic of the EU in the Indo-Pacific is important and that there is demand for research on this, both in the EU and in third countries.

Nāku noa, nā

Nicholas Ross Smith



JASMINE BARRY: SEEN TO BE HEARD: WHY EU VISIBILITY AND PERCEPTIONS MATTER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Jasmine spent a semester as an intern on the EUIP Network as part of her MEuro coursework at the National Centre for Research on Europe. Like all our interns, Jasmine was asked to share her reflection on the topic of the EU in the Indo-Pacific.

As geopolitical tensions rise, many global actors turn to the Indo-Pacific (IP) as an area of interest and influence. The EU has increasingly sought connection in the IP, culminating in the 2021 “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”. Consequently, now more than ever, the way that the EU is perceived as a potential global player is salient to its reception in each IP country. Having a singular strategic framework in what is a heterogeneous region is ambitious and means that there are many different relationships and reactions to the EU’s presence in the region. These relationships differ greatly based upon historical interactions and each country’s priority areas for cooperation. The seven key priority areas delineated in the strategy include; Sustainable and inclusive prosperity, Green transition, Ocean governance, Digital governance and partnerships, Connectivity, Security and defence and Human security.

There are many interpretations of the EU’s IP strategy, from an assertion of its strategic autonomy in the region or a necessary re-alignment to more general direction rhetoric. In contrast the approach of other global actors in the IP are relatively clear. The US has been critiqued for its ‘zero-sum’ mentality and appears to centrally be motivated by regional competition with China. The EU’s strategy being values grounded, with a diverse range of priority areas is important in setting it apart from the US and China; ensuring it is an attractive partner for IP countries. However, if these values are not visible and present in engagement within IP partnerships then this negates the EU’s impact. If the EU seeks to legitimately strengthen its partnerships, the visibility of the EU in the IP is paramount to its success. Indifference towards the EU from IP countries would likely lead to disengagement and ineffectiveness.

Gaining insight into the perspectives of the EU from within IP countries was personally the highlight of my time at the EUIP. The sandpit interviews gauged the perspectives of key individuals involved or formerly involved in the foreign policymaking process. Differing priorities from each area were expressed, though these are to be expected, as each IP country has different political stances and systems. What I didn't expect was the range of views on EU capabilities in various areas such as military and security capabilities. Generally, the EU's economic engagement was perceived as being the most influential. This is central to the strategy, with an emphasis on supply chain security and resilience dissimilar to other actors in the region. While this is certainly the EU playing to its own institutional strengths, it reflects the link between visibility and credibility. The visibility of the EU's economic engagement is clearly demonstrated through tangible outcomes such as the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) in the Indo-Pacific.

The priority areas of cooperation that were most varied in reception from the sandpits were largely security and defence. At the time of the interviews the EU had not released its 'White paper for European defence - Readiness 2030', which was unveiled in March of this year (2025). Enhancing security and defence cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners (India, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Australia) is a part of this plan and a part of its wider goal of closing capability gaps. As Andrius Kubilius, EU Commissioner for Defence and Space stated, "This is not just about military strength – it is about our readiness, strategic autonomy, and the future of Europe as a global player." (2025). This plan suggests that the EU is making concerted efforts to increase capabilities both internally and in its foreign policy. The swift rebranding of the plan further highlights the importance of both visibility and perceptions as what was initially 'ReArm Europe', was downgraded to 'Readiness 2030' to lessen the overtness of its militaristic connotations.

While it is early days in terms of seeing the full impact of the 'EU IP Strategy', making sure long-term EU engagements in the Indo-Pacific are visible and understood, can increase their impact. Regional partners may hesitate to fully commit to EU frameworks when uncertain about the direction of long-term EU engagements. The insights I have gained from the internship mean I believe that the EU has potential long-term partnerships with many likeminded actors in the region if cohesive and meaningful cooperation is pursued further.

FOCAL LOCATION SPOTLIGHT: SOUTH KOREA



Since the establishment in 2010 of a Strategic Partnership based on the Framework Agreement, the EU-Korea bilateral relationship has upgraded continuously. The Framework Agreement (FA), together with the two additional Agreements – Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the Crisis Management Participation agreement (FPA) – has been the backbone of the bilateral diplomatic relationship between the two parties.

More recently, the EU-Korea relationship increasingly accents the importance of rules-based features and common values, such as multilateralism, democracy and human rights. Most recently, the EU and Korea adopted a few meaningful new cooperative initiatives, including Digital Partnership (2022), Green Partnership (2023), and Security and Defence Partnership (2024), elevating the bilateral relationship to a new level.

Early in 2025, the two parties successfully concluded the negotiation on the Digital Trade Agreement, as well. Both based on these new initiatives and the common priorities manifested by the respective Indo-Pacific Strategy recently adopted, the EU and Korea have continuously heightened the level of policy dialogues and expanded the scope of bilateral cooperation.

SOUTH KOREA AND THE EU: ROADMAP TO 2030

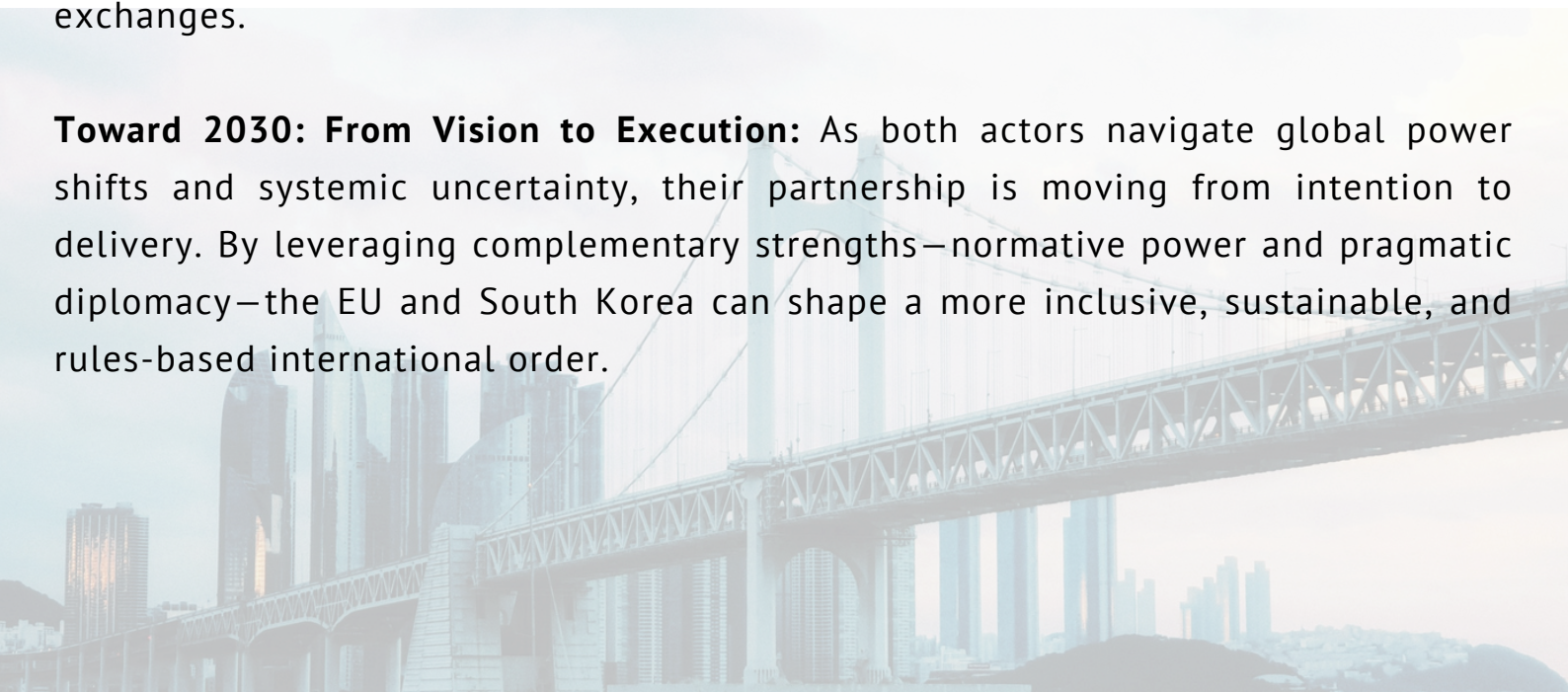
As the EU and South Korea deepen ties beyond six decades of partnership, a forward-looking roadmap is taking shape—anchored in shared values, strategic alignment, and mutual global aspirations. The evolving geopolitical context and joint Indo-Pacific strategies present both challenges and new opportunities.

Strategic Convergence, Regional Impact: Digital governance, green transition, and sustainability form the core pillars of cooperation through 2030. With Korea's technological strength and the EU's regulatory leadership, collaboration is expanding in areas like AI, cybersecurity, and semiconductors. The 2025 Digital Trade Agreement and Korea's participation in Horizon Europe enhance joint R&D and digital standards development.

Indo-Pacific as a Strategic Arena: Both sides identify the Indo-Pacific as central to global stability. Korea's "Global Pivotal State" vision complements the EU's Global Gateway, enabling coordinated initiatives in digital connectivity, climate resilience, and maritime security—particularly in ASEAN and Pacific Island states.

Institutional Depth, Policy Continuity: Despite domestic political shifts, EU–Korea cooperation is sustained by robust institutional frameworks, including summits, strategic dialogues, and joint platforms. Future focus areas include digital ODA mechanisms, carbon accounting alignment, ESG standards, and people-to-people exchanges.

Toward 2030: From Vision to Execution: As both actors navigate global power shifts and systemic uncertainty, their partnership is moving from intention to delivery. By leveraging complementary strengths—normative power and pragmatic diplomacy—the EU and South Korea can shape a more inclusive, sustainable, and rules-based international order.



DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Digital governance stands at the forefront of EU–South Korea cooperation. In 2023, their digital partnership was elevated to ministerial level, with further momentum expected from the 2025 Digital Trade Agreement.

South Korea’s technological edge in semiconductors, smart manufacturing, and digital trade complements the EU’s strengths in regulatory frameworks and digital standard-setting. Joint initiatives are expanding in cybersecurity, particularly in response to emerging threats like disinformation and election interference. The alignment of priorities is further reinforced by Korea’s associate status in Horizon Europe, which enables collaborative research in digital, industry, and space.

Digital governance was ranked the top area for cooperation by Korean stakeholders interviewed for the EUIP project, signaling strong interest in shaping inclusive and resilient digital ecosystems.

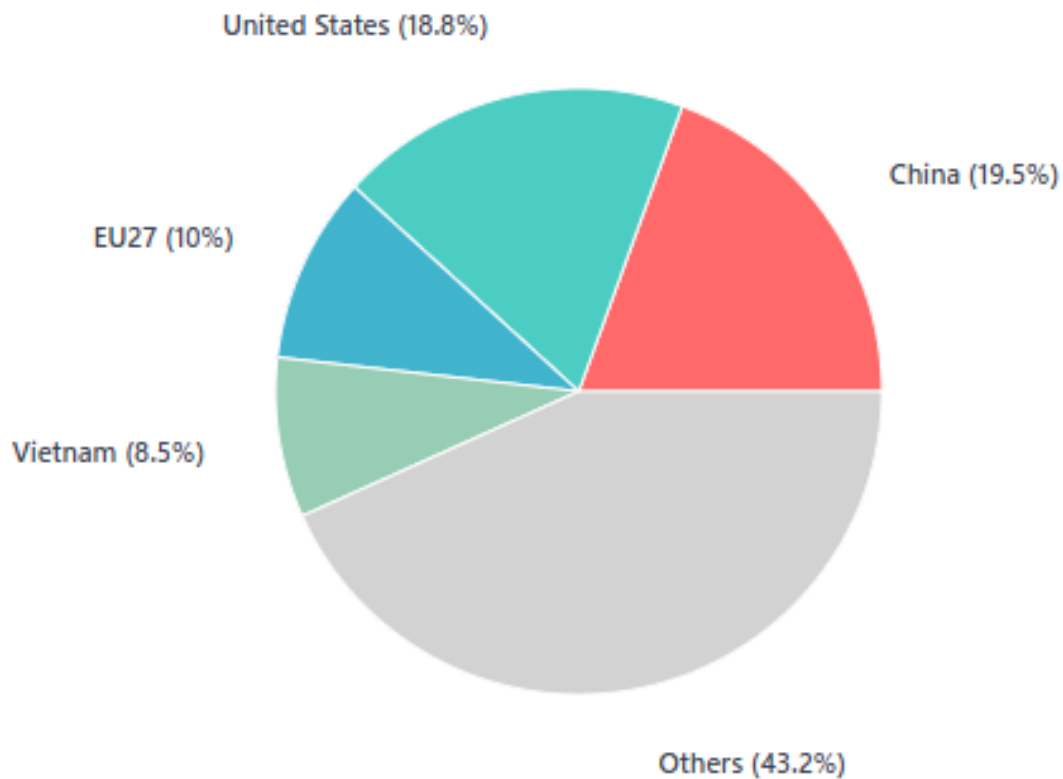
EUPCD

As of November 29, 2024, the European Union Launched a new bilateral project titled “EU Public and cultural diplomacy in the Republic of Korea (EUPCD)”. The project, with a lifetime of 4 years and budget of Euros 3 million, aims at enhancing the EU-Korea bilateral relations by implementing a number of public and cultural diplomacy activities, targeting youth, civil society organizations, think-tanks, academia and cultural sector. The main contractor is a Spanish consulting company called IDOM, and the Project Team is composed of two Key Experts and one additional expert, all of whom are closely cooperating with the EU Delegation.

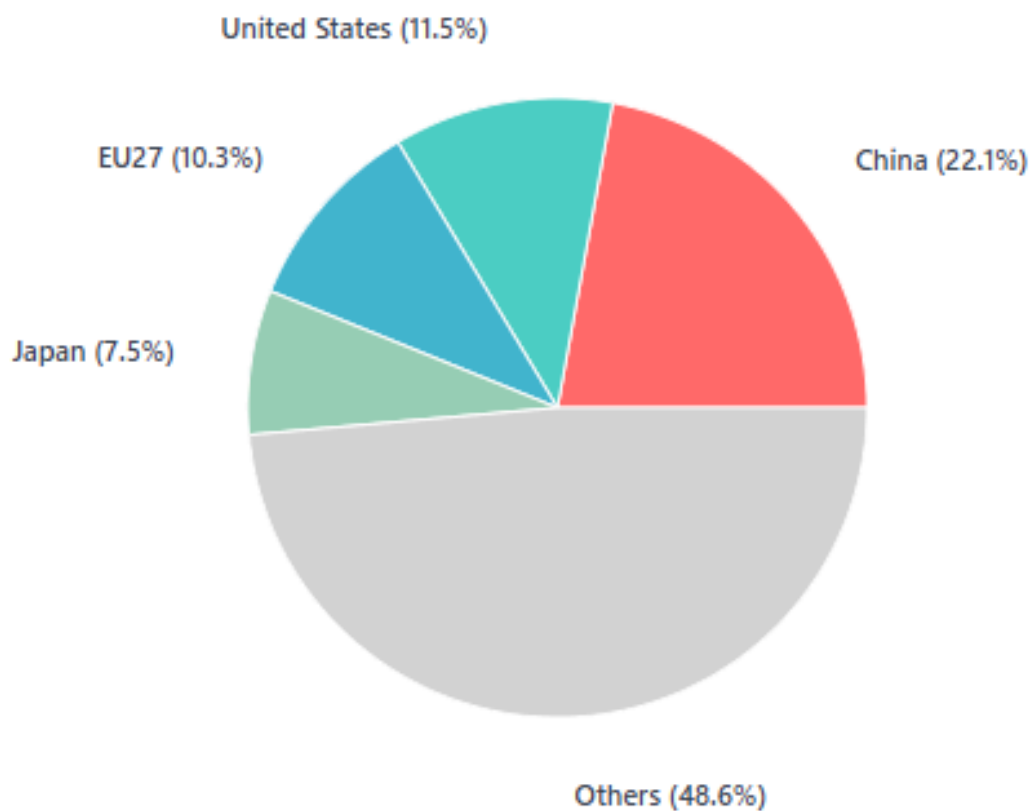
The Team leader for this project is Sunghoon Park, Professor emeritus of Korea University and Jean Monnet Chair, who is at the same time the leader of the Korean EUIP project team. Over the upcoming four years, the EUPCD project will implement a total of minimum 20 activities that will contribute to enhancing the mutual understanding between the EU and Korean stakeholders, with the view of upgrading and upscaling the bilateral relations between the EU and Korea.

SOUTH KOREA'S TWO-WAY TRADE

EXPORTS



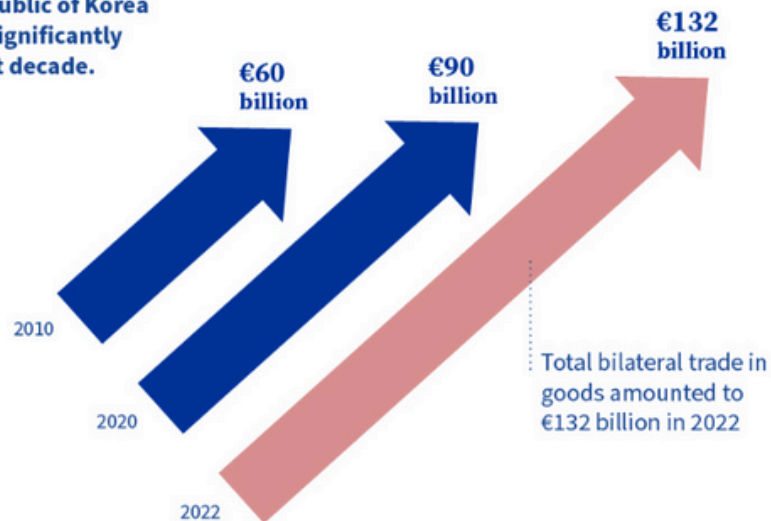
IMPORTS



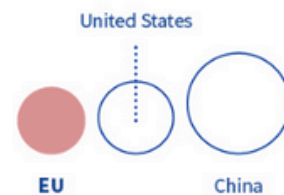
EU-SOUTH KOREA TRADE

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) provisionally applied from July 2011 until fully entering into force in December 2015.

Trade between the EU and the Republic of Korea has grown significantly over the last decade.

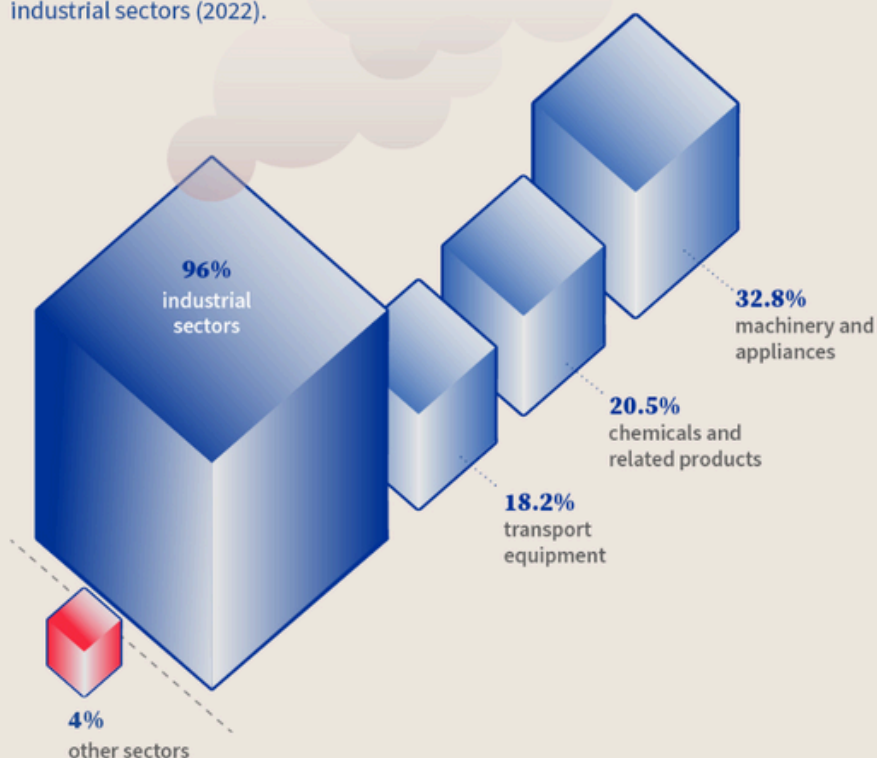


The EU is the Republic of Korea's 3rd largest trade partner and as of 2020 – the Republic of Korea has become the EU's 9th largest trade partner.



Industrial sectors:

Bilateral trade between the EU and the Republic of Korea remains highly concentrated in the industrial sectors (2022).



THE SOUTH KOREA RESEARCH TEAM



Sunghoon Park

Professor Emeritus

Division of International Studies

Korea University



Sung-Won Yoon

Associate Professor

Division of Business Administration

The University of Suwon



Sae Won Chung

Associate Professor

Division of International and Area Studies

Pukyong National University



Michael Reiterer

Distinguished Professor

Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy

Vrije Universiteit Brussel



RECENT OUTPUTS FROM PROJECT MEMBERS

Journal articles

Jingkai, Shao and Paul Bacon. 2025. "Narrowing the 'expectations deficit'? Evolving Japanese expectations of the EU as an Indo-Pacific security actor (2020–2022)", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, doi:10.1080/14782804.2025.2472630.

Smith, Nicholas Ross. 2025. "Conceptualizing Utu as a Foreign Policy Doctrine for Aotearoa New Zealand", *Global Policy*, doi:10.1111/1758-5899.70010

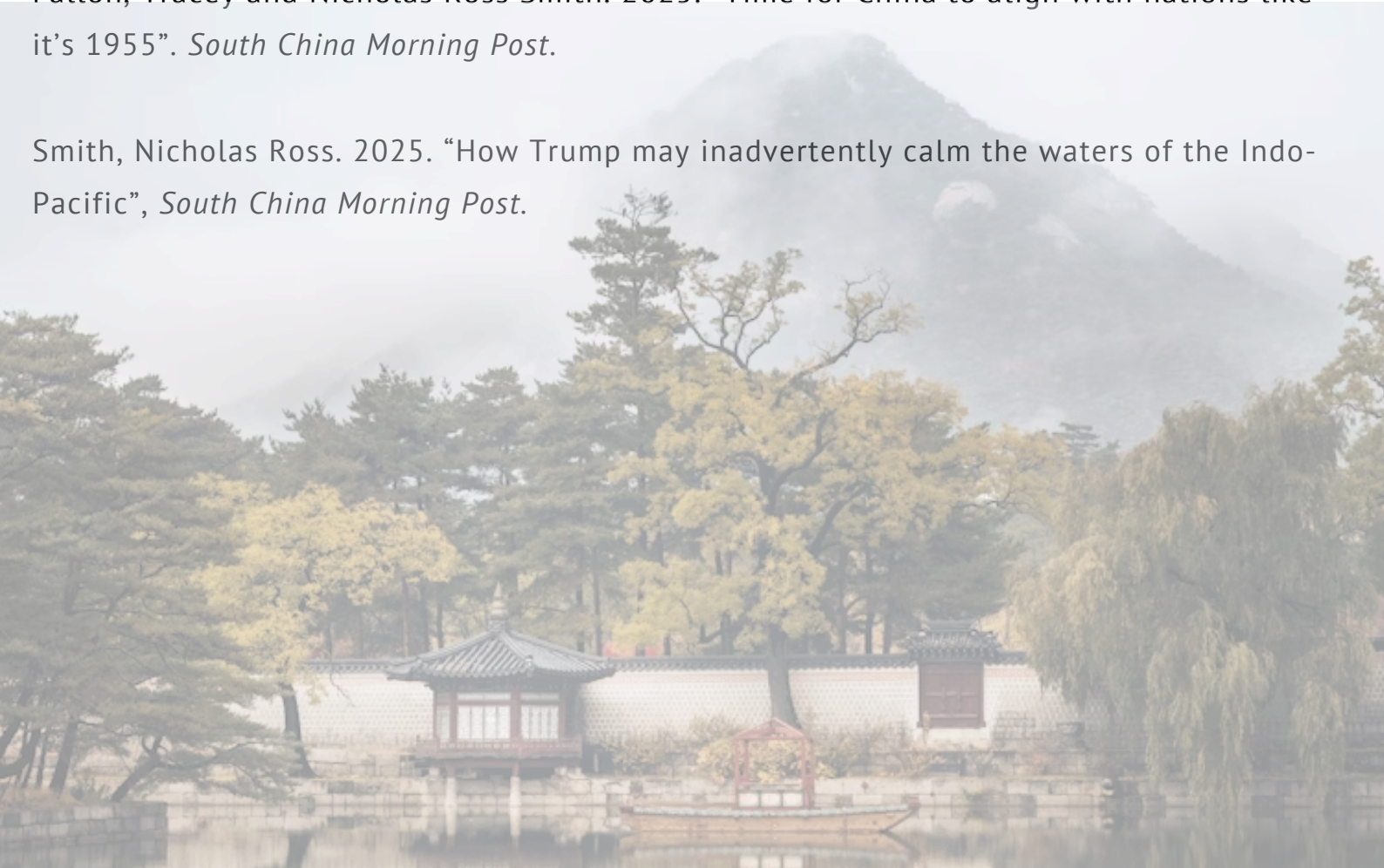
Reiterer, Michael. 2025. "EU Cyber Diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific: Pick Up Speed and Strengthen Set-Up", *Policy Science in Commemoration of Professor Noriko Yasue*. Vol. 32/5.

Commentaries

Reiterer, Michael. 2025. "NATO Summit in The Hague with IP4 Summit", *Korea on Point*

Fallon, Tracey and Nicholas Ross Smith. 2025. "Time for China to align with nations like it's 1955". *South China Morning Post*.

Smith, Nicholas Ross. 2025. "How Trump may inadvertently calm the waters of the Indo-Pacific", *South China Morning Post*.





Funded by
the European Union