

“European Countries Can Contribute to Stabilizing the Indo-Pacific”



© Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia

FRANCES ADAMSON
Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs
and Trade, Canberra

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Secretary Adamson, from your point of view, which are the most important trends in the region and how will they affect Germany and Europe?

ADAMSON: The Indo-Pacific region’s economic and strategic weight has increased substantially. However, there is a heightened sense of competition: some rules are being challenged, and this should be of interest to Europeans, too. There is much debate,

particularly in Germany, regarding the multilateral system and the international rules-based order. From Australia’s perspective, maintaining peace and stability in the region requires sovereign, independent states, willing and able to resist coercion but equally to collaborate in the pursuit of shared interests. If we fail to meet these challenges, there will be consequences not just in the Indo-Pacific, but across the globe.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Where do you see potential for deepening cooperation between Germany and Australia?

ADAMSON: Germany and Australia share a strong commitment: to the rules-based international order, to free trade, and to policies that welcome investment. In recent years, both Chancellor Merkel and successive Australian prime ministers have committed to deepening our cooperation through a strategic partnership.

However, we also find ourselves as partners in multilateral institutions, where there are regular exchanges. We very much welcome the prospect of the incoming European Commission striving for deeper engagement in the Indo-Pacific, and I know that Germany will be an enthusiastic participant in that.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: How can middle powers such as Germany and Australia navigate the increasing tensions between China and the US?

ADAMSON: Australia shares a longstanding alliance with the United States, with whom we share many values, and which are our largest economic partner. Simultaneously we have a comprehensive strategic partnership with China, our largest trading partner. We value both relationships, but are keen to ensure that those relationships are conducted in a respectful way and that we are able to protect Australia's interests where they come under pressure, e.g. with respect to freedom of navigation. Amid changes within our region, these relationships are not without challenge, but also represent an enormous opportunity.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Are you afraid that smaller countries will be forced to choose between Washington and Beijing?

ADAMSON: We are already seeing smaller companies choosing to become part of a supply chain to one country rather than the other, but it remains to be seen whether this trend will continue to its logical conclusion.

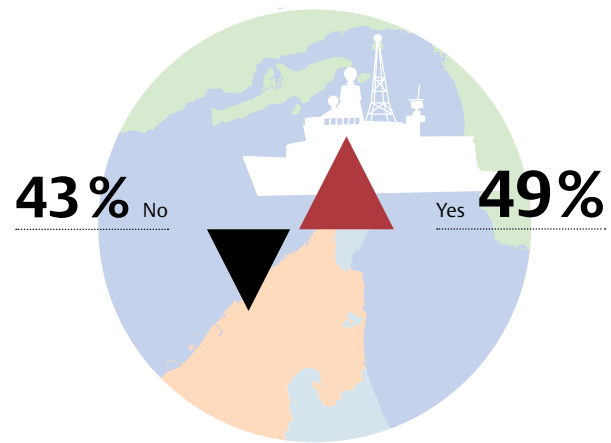
Australia's decision regarding 5G was based on principle: If a company bidding for a contract is liable to being subjected to extra-judicial direction from another government under foreign laws in ways that are contrary to Australia's interests, then those companies are not welcome in Australia's 5G infrastructure.

Free trade and investment regimes retain many supporters, including the World Trade Organisation in particular. There are legitimate concerns and grievances, and it falls to member states to actively address these.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: Is Germany contributing enough to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region?

ADAMSON: Australia and Germany are very strong upholders of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea. Simultaneously, I am asking colleagues across Europe to speak up, to advocate the rules-based system and for international law wherever it is challenged. Freedom of Navigation operations are part of this discussion, but there are many ways in which European countries – out of their own interests – can contribute to stabilizing the Indo-Pacific. The

Should Germany take part in naval missions to protect freedom of navigation and maritime trade routes?



2019: don't know 6%,
no answer 2%

EU is contributing to building resilience in the region, including through greater connectivity. Germany has been quite active in terms of advocacy. Whether countries emphasize a diplomatic presence, defence measures or development assistance, each government must decide for itself.

KÖRBER-STIFTUNG: What lessons can we learn from Canberra's debate on foreign interference?

ADAMSON: There is a difference between foreign influence, which, exercised transparently, we are comfortable with, and foreign interference, against which we need to protect ourselves. This is not about individual countries, but about sovereign, democratic governments protecting their institutions and their way of life. In Australia, we outlawed foreign political donations, and introduced the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme.

Community cohesion is a further factor. In multi-cultural societies such as ours, it is vitally important that all people are treated as, and perceive themselves to be, valued members of society. Australia has appointed a foreign interference coordinator, whose job it is to work on both foreign interference and on building trust and confidence in our communities. It is not possible to successfully tackle one without the other. ✕