Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Pacific Review

ISSN: 0951-2748 (Print) 1470-1332 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rpre20

Less dependent on China? The ASEAN region and Germany's "de-risking" strategy

Jürgen Rüland & Elisabetta Nadalutti

To cite this article: Jürgen Rüland & Elisabetta Nadalutti (24 Apr 2026): Less dependent on China? The ASEAN region and Germany's "de-risking" strategy, The Pacific Review, DOI: 10.1080/09512748.2026.2655280

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2026.2655280

Published online: 24 Apr 2026.

THE PACIFIC REVIEW
https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2026.2655280

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Less dependent on China? The ASEAN region and Germany's "de-risking" strategy

Jürgen Rüland[a] and Elisabetta Nadalutti[b]

[a]Department of Political Science, University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany; [b]Department of Law, University of Udine, Udine, Italy

ABSTRACT

Deteriorating Sino-German relations have alerted German policymakers to the substantial security risks associated with asymmetric economic dependencies. "De-risking" (also known as China + 1) has since become the German response to mitigate vulnerabilities. At the core of this strategy is a diversification of political and economic partners. German government documents and official rhetoric designate the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and some of the grouping's member countries as particularly appropriate "de-risking" partners, characterizing them as "natural partners" and occasionally even "value partners." This implies that German policymakers see normative overlaps with ASEAN member countries. This article examines the extent to which such normative overlaps exist. With role theory as an analytical framework, it compares German and ASEAN countries' foreign policy role conceptions. While at first sight, there are indeed normative matches, a closer examination reveals major differences. We argue and show that these differences limit a sustainable deepening and intensification of Germany's relations with Southeast Asian countries, which also reduces the latter's significance for Berlin's "de-risking" policies. Thus, if it tones down its normative zeal, the best that Germany can achieve is a relationship based on pragmatic realpolitik in policy fields with mutual interests.

KEYWORDS German foreign policy; ASEAN; China; de-risking

Introduction

For much of the Cold War, German policymakers viewed Southeast Asia primarily through the lens of anti-communism. As a result, the region remained largely peripheral to German foreign policy thinking. This began to change, when in 1993, alerted by East and Southeast Asia's economic miracles (World Bank, 1993) and in view of the recession following the short-lived unification boom at home, the German government published its first Asia Strategy (Deutscher Bundestag, 1993, sect. III), elevating Asia

CONTACT Jürgen Rüland juergen.rueland@politik.uni-freiburg.de Department of Political Science, University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

to a priority in German foreign policy. Yet, although the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as Asia's premier regional organization[1] and its member countries figured prominently in this and subsequent strategy papers (Auswärtiges Amt, 2002), the substance of mutual relations remained disappointingly shallow. Until the late 2010s, mainly driven by big business, Germany's Asia policy overwhelmingly concentrated on China and, to a much lesser extent, Japan and India. In fact, Asia policy was reduced to China policy and China policy was foreign economic policy.

However, in the 2010s ties with the People's Republic of China progressively deteriorated (Ulatowski, 2022, p. 390). With the rise of Xi Jinping to the helm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2012 and the country's presidency in 2013, the Middle Kingdom's foreign policy became more assertive, ending the preceding government's policy of a "peaceful rise." Testimony to this are the intensification of Beijing's maritime claims in the South China and East China Seas, its Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), a massive global infrastructure program worth US$1 trillion with major geopolitical and geoeconomic implications starting in 2013, and moves towards creating an autocratic, Sino-centric world order. Even more alarming for German government officials and business leaders was what they perceived as Beijing's increasingly unfair economic policies which threaten Germany's successful export-oriented business model (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, 2019, p. 3). The China strategy that the German government eventually released in 2023 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023b, p. 8) thus followed an earlier policy revision of the European Union (EU), ambiguously qualifying China as a cooperation partner, (economic) competitor and geopolitical rival (European Commission, 2019).

Complicated and occasionally outright acrimonious Sino-German relations motivated the German government to devise foreign (economic) policies that reduce increasing (economic) dependencies on China. Unlike the United States, which seeks to decouple from China (i.e. sever economic ties), the German government prefers a less radical "de-risking" or "China + 1" strategy (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023b). "De-risking" implies the maintenance of constructive political and economic relations with China, while reducing dependencies through a diversification of cooperation partners.

This is the context in which the "traffic light" coalition of Social Democrats (SPD), Greens and Liberals (FDP), which governed Germany between 2021 and late 2024, began to reach out to Southeast Asia. The region lies adjacent to China and is politically well represented by the ASEAN regional grouping. It also encompasses a fast-growing market of around 700 million consumers which, by 2050, is expected to become the world's fourth-largest economy (Andal, 2017, p. 278). With the ASEAN Economic Community, Southeast Asia has also sought to establish a single market and production base, albeit still an imperfect one (Dosch, 2016). At the same time, ASEAN countries have attempted to hedge against the intensifying rivalry between China and the United States in the region. Consequently, the German government's "Policy Guidelines for the

Indo-Pacific," adopted in 2020, accorded a major role to ASEAN and individual member states in its evolving "de-risking" strategy, regarding them as "natural partners" due to seemingly overlapping normative repositories (Auswärtiges Amt, 2020, p. 24; SPD-Bundestagsfraktion, 2024; Aun, 2024; critical Heiduk, 2024).

This brings us to the puzzle of this article: To what extent is Germany's Southeast Asia policy able to build up political, economic and cultural ties that will enable ASEAN and its member states to emerge as "sustainable" (SPD-Bundestagsfraktion, 2024, p. 2) and reliable risk-reducing partners for German foreign (economic) policies? We will show that such a development faces major obstacles due to profound normative incompatibilities which are difficult to reconcile.

In the remainder of the article, we will proceed as follows. In the section following the introduction, we will briefly trace the events and developments that have led to an increasing German dependency on China. The section thereafter focuses on Germany's seeming pivot to the ASEAN region under the aegis of de-risking. Next, we will sketch an analytic framework based on role theory. Subsequently, we will examine the extent to which normative overlaps exist between the role conceptions propagated by the German government and those communicated by ASEAN and its member states. We posit that a substantial overlap of these role conceptions is a precondition for a substantive and lasting deepening of mutual relations on which robust "de-risking" policies should build. Yet we show that despite seeming similarities, German and ASEAN (member states') role conceptions differ markedly, making it difficult to establish a cooperation that transcends pragmatic *realpolitik*. The final section concludes the article, highlights its major findings and develops preliminary ideas on how German foreign policy can come closer to its goal of incorporating Southeast Asia in its "de-risking" strategy.

The article rests on data generated by 12 online interviews with diplomats, business managers, officials from business associations, academics, parliamentarians and journalists, which lasted between 30 and 90 min. Other sources include foreign policy documents, parliamentary interpellations and motions on ASEAN and its member countries collected in the German *Bundestag's* digital archive, the analysis of media reports accessed through the database Nexis, websites and the evaluation of the existing academic literature. The time frame this article covers, ranges from the late 2010s to early 2026.

Dependent on China?

Between 2016 and 2023 and again in 2025 China was Germany's largest trading partner. Amounting to 297.9 billion Euro, two-way trade peaked in 2022 before declining to 251.8 billion Euro in 2025. Worrisome for Germany is its glaring and growing trade deficit, climaxing at 84.3 billion Euro in 2025. While German exports to China declined sharply, registering

a hefty decline of 9.7% in 2025, imports from China surged by 8.8% (Matthes, 2025; Destatis, 2026). The high import bill reflects Germany's increasing dependencies on supply chains originating in China. Many goods are no longer produced in Germany or Europe, either due to high costs or because—as in segments of the electronics sector, the chemical and pharmaceutical industries—China has achieved technological leadership. During the Covid-19 pandemic German authorities realized that they were highly dependent on China even for simple medical equipment such as FFP2 masks. At the same time, China's radical lockdown interrupted many supply chains, leading to production stops in Germany.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine starting in February 2022 foreshadowed what may happen to the German economy if China emulates the Russian example and invades Taiwan, which it considers a renegade province. The subsequent sanction regime imposed on China would significantly exceed the turbulences the sanctions against Russia have caused for the German economy. They would affect nearly 10% of Germany's trade. Supply chain bottlenecks would be massive, with articles of daily use such as laptops, solar modules and many medical products either no longer available or in short supply (Hägler, & Yang, 2024). The same would be true for products such as rare earths, essential for the manufacturing of batteries, wind turbines and, in particular, technologically advanced military equipment (Merics, 28 October 2025). Already in the past, China has weaponized its near monopoly over processed rare earths[2] in conflicts,[3] and would not hesitate to cut off Germany from deliveries if the Federal Republic joins the sanction regime.[4] Moreover, a large portion of the more than US$90 billion that German firms invested in China between 2014 and 2024 would have to be written off (Fischer, 2025). The impact on German employment would also be tangible, as 2.4% of all jobs are related to trade with China (Spillner, & Wolff, 2023, p. 4). Finally, as Germany imports 70% of its chips from Taiwan (Schwung, 2025), a Chinese invasion of the island would further cripple German industries.

Aside from these anticipated shocks, for years German businesses complain about distortions and obstacles in their trade and investment relations with China. In a 2019 position paper, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and in June 2025 the influential Mechanical Engineering Industry Association deplored the absence of a level playing field (Bermingham, 2025; Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, 2019). While China has free access to the European market, entry for German and other European producers to the Chinese market faces numerous restrictions. These include economic sectors closed to foreign investors, upper ceilings for shareholding, the requirement to engage in joint ventures, protectionism in the service sector, continued tariffs for industrial goods and a host of non-tariff trade barriers. Investors also complain about arbitrary bureaucratic practices, frequent and non-transparent regulatory changes and a cyber security law which forces users to disclose sensitive data and entails

restrictions for cross-border data exchange (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, 2019, pp. 3–4).

Observers also criticize the distortion of markets and prices by state interventions in factor prices (land, energy, capital, labor) due to direct or indirect subsidies, an undervalued currency, interference in company decisions and the state-directed fusion of firms in order to create national champions (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, 2019, pp. 3–4; Matthes, 2025).

Non-transparent subsidies, forced technology transfer, the lax implementation of intellectual property rights and strategic takeovers of high-tech companies abroad have catapulted China into a leadership position in an array of advanced technologies. In the process, Germany's communication and IT sectors became particularly vulnerable. A case in point is the expansion of the country's 5 G network, where 60% of the required materials and equipment come from China (Iida, 2024, p. 79). Moreover, as a recent German Marshall Fund report warns, the Chinese companies Huawei, Alibaba and Tencent provide some 35% of Germany's cloud computing infrastructure. Critics suspect that these dependencies open the door for technology leakage, data theft, cyberattacks, network infiltration and espionage (Jagtiani, 2025, pp. 29, 36).

Many of these problems must be attributed to Beijing's "Made in China 2025" strategy, a dual circulation strategy with the objective of strengthening economic autonomy. It seeks to promote domestic production (Suarsana, 2024, p. 19), achieve technological leadership in ten future-oriented economic key sectors,[5] immunize the country against external shocks such as the US-initiated tariff war, and create favorable conditions for exporting its production overcapacities. In its external dimension it is closely linked to the BRI's connectivity agenda with the dual objective of facilitating Chinese exports and securing the reliable supply of raw materials.

Unsurprisingly, German business representatives are disillusioned with the government's modernization theory-inspired doctrine of "change through trade" which in the past provided the optimistic ideological underpinning of Sino-German relations (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1902; Ulatowski, 2022, p. 388). The German Federation of Industries unequivocally concludes that China is *not* developing towards a market economy. Instead, strong state influence is a major characteristic of the Chinese economy, which is a mix of state and market economy elements at best (Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie, 2019, p. 2; similar Asien-Pazifik Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft, 2021, p. 12).

In the geopolitical domain, Germany and other Western trading nations are much concerned about China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea, of which it claims 90% demarcated by a "ten-dash line," and in the East China Sea, where it is locked in a dispute with Japan over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese). At stake here is freedom of navigation in maritime regions through which 40% of European trade passes (Sicilia, & Benson, 2024). An armed conflict in these waters would require

large detours, lead to a massive surge in transportation costs and fuel inflation in Germany.

All these risks and dependencies have led to a reorientation of Germany's China policy. Like the EU, the German government now perceives China more as a competitor and rival than a cooperation partner. The "de-risking" policy outlined in the German China Strategy includes policy changes such as incrementally dissociating the country from the Chinese IT firms Huawei and ZTE in the modernization of the 5 G networks by 2029 (Jagtiani, 2025, p. 16). Similar to the EU, Germany has also adopted safeguards, allowing it to review and eventually block Chinese firm acquisitions in the field of security-sensitive technologies and critical infrastructure (Hahnemann, Huotari, & Kratz, 2019, p. 7; Jagtiani, 2025, p. 32; Interview, 19 September 2025).

A German pivot to the ASEAN region?

While not severing ties with China, Berlin seeks to contain dependencies by intensifying relations with the ASEAN region (and partners elsewhere). Long overdue, in 2019 Germany acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), ASEAN's guidelines for peacefully conducting international relations. In 2020, Germany supported the EU in entering a strategic partnership with ASEAN and it also advocates, though so far with dim prospects of realization, the conclusion of a bi-regional free trade area with ASEAN. In 2023, as a tribute to the country's size and ambitions, Indonesia became the partner country of the Hanover Fair, one of the world's largest industrial fairs (Hildebrandt, & Godwin, 2024).

Diplomatic interactions with ASEAN member states markedly increased during the "traffic-light" coalition led by Chancelor Olaf Scholz (2021-2024). Between 2022 and 2024, high-ranking German government representatives such as the Federal President, the Federal Chancelor and the Foreign Minister made 13 visits to the region and Southeast Asian leaders traveled to Berlin seven times. This compares favorably with a meagre four German visits by the two preceding governments. Whether this trend continues remains to be seen. Although Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul of the coalition government formed by Conservatives (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats in May 2025 has visited Indonesia, the ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam in his first year in office, it seems that German Indo-Pacific policies attach higher priority to Indo-Pacific heavyweights including China, Japan and India than Southeast Asia (Interview, 4 Jun 2025).

While on first sight, more state visits signal greater attention to the ASEAN region, current levels of activities are still far below what is needed for a more sustainable relationship. To dynamize relations, high-ranking delegations must visit the region much more frequently. It is insufficient when years elapse before German leaders are seen again in ASEAN capitals. Also potentials for para-diplomatic activities and business relations of the

Länder (i.e. German states) with ASEAN member states remain sporadic and underdeveloped. In the last three years, out of Germany's 16 *Laender*, only delegations from Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt visited ASEAN countries, while the state government of Bavaria declared to devote particular attention to the ASEAN region in its activities to promote export and to secure supply chains (Deutsche Länder, 2026). Similarly underdeveloped are city twinning and university cooperation.

Nevertheless, mutual trade between Germany and ASEAN countries grew from 68 billion Euro in 2021 to 79.7 billion Euro in 2024, a 17.2% rise, albeit constituting only roughly a third of Germany's trade with China. Yet—like in the case of China—the German trade deficit increased markedly, standing at 54.9 billion Euro in 2024. While accurate figures do not exist, the number of German firms active in the ASEAN region seems to increase and has reached a number similar to the 5,200 German firms operating in China (Gutting, 2024, p. 27). Some observers attribute this development to diversification strategies of firms (Deutschland.de, 18 December 2025).

Other studies question this appraisal, contending that despite increasing economic activity in ASEAN member states, German businesses so far only slowly comply with the Federal Government's "de-risking" policies (Kratz, 2024; Matthes, 2024a,2024b; Schüller, 2025). German investments in China grow, while investments in the rest of Asia stagnate (Matthes, 2024a, p. 2; 2024b, p. 4) or - as in Southeast Asia—heavily fluctuate. This reflects that government impact on businesses is limited, as the relocation and diversification of production is a company prerogative.

German multinationals especially hesitate to practice de-risking. Corporations such as petrochemicals giant BASF have made new multi-billion investments in China (Goldberg, 2020), while pulling out of a nickel-cobalt refinery project in Indonesia worth some US$2.6 billion (Yuniar, 2025). In a recent communication to the government, large German companies even called for a less antagonistic China policy (Cash Online, 2024). German multinationals value the economies of scale which, despite distortions, the huge size of the Chinese market offers. Not surprisingly, thus, if German multinationals seriously consider de-risking, they first turn to India, which has a similarly large market as China. Moreover, due to their own size and large resources they are better prepared to cope with regulatory vagaries than the bulk of German SMEs.

It is thus SMEs which tend to build up alternative production sites in neighboring Southeast Asia, preferably Vietnam for labor-intensive products, but due to a reliable legal system and higher skills levels also in Singapore, Malaysia, and a lesser extent Thailand for higher value-added products. Yet some of these firms do so less in response to the German government's "de-risking" policies, but more because their Japanese or

South Korean customers leave China and urge them to follow (Interview, 27 October 2025).

Overall, thus, Germany's relations to Southeast Asia are still reserved, sometimes even complicated, with limited prospects of becoming cordial and deep. The remainder of the article thus examines why this is the case and why Southeast Asia's potential to contribute to Germany's "de-risking" strategy is limited without major policy changes on both sides. For that purpose, we sketch an analytical framework based on role theory, which enables us to assess how far German and Southeast Asian role conceptions in international affairs overlap as a precondition for a sustainable deepening of mutual relations.

An analytical framework: role theory

Foreign policy, as a sub-field of International Relations (IR), struggles with unsatisfactory theory development. Many foreign policy studies explicitly or implicitly borrow from variants of political realism, which focuses on the analysis of power. Another popular approach is Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) which, unfortunately, is often more a heuristic device than a full-fledged theory. Competing frameworks such as the bureaucratic politics approach (Allison, & Halperin, 1972) and Putnam's (1988) two-level games have their merits, but are not helpful for solving our puzzle.

One of the few promising theoretical approaches conducive to our research question is role theory. This can be traced back to the seminal work of Finnish-Canadian scholar Kalevi Holsti (1970). Since then role theory has been successively fine-tuned (*inter alia*, Gaupp, 1983; Walker, 1987; Aggestam, 2006; Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011; Wehner, & Thies, 2014; Cantir, & Kaarbo, 2016; Dannhauer, 2024). It particularly progressed with the emergence of constructivism in the 1990s. Role theory influenced by constructivism is less interested in material aspects such as the international distribution of power and more in the way ideas, identities, norms, perceptions and knowledge affect foreign policy behavior.

Groundbreaking in this respect was a research group led by Hanns W. Maull at the University of Trier (Harnisch, Frank, & Maull, 2011; Kirste, & Maull, 1996). It developed a research program that allowed the identification of the enduring worldviews and behavioral patterns of state actors. These worldviews and the resultant behavior are products of a society's collective memory and represent the sum of its historical experiences, and the geographic and situational factors that shape it. Role theory thus posits that foreign policy behavior is primarily determined by socialization and cognition.

Worldviews, ideas, identities, norms and perceptions which reflect previous experiences with other states and the resultant processes of social learning determine foreign policy-making and are foundational for the definition of core national interests. These are often long-term and

path-dependent processes that make statements about a state's foreign policy and security culture possible. Yet path-dependency and the inherent stability of foreign policy behavior do not exclude change, either triggered by external shocks and crises (Legro, 2000) or driven by role contestation among foreign policy stakeholders.

Role theory attributes the development of role conceptions to foreign policy elites. Holsti (1970, p. 256) derived role conceptions from general foreign policy statements of "highest-level policymakers," defining them as the functions that policymakers believe "their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems" (Holsti, 1970, p. 246). They are endogenously shaped by long-term patterns of attitudes and behavior and are thus the result of a reflexive process. Role conceptions reflect the structure of the international system and a state's geographic circumstances, socioeconomic characteristics, political system, capabilities, ideologies, and historical experiences as interpreted by its foreign-policy elites and shared by a majority of the public. Typical role conceptions which Holsti identified in his pioneering work are those of balancer (that is, a state that seeks to mitigate power disequilibria through balancing moves), mediator, bridge builder, regional leader, loyal ally or active independent (ibid., p. 260).

There is widespread agreement in the scholarly literature (Brummer, & Kießling, 2019; Gareis, 2009; Maull, 1990, 2025) as well as among politicians (exemplary Mützenich 2005) and diplomats (exemplary Ischinger, & Bunde, 2015) that Germany's post-Cold War foreign policy rests on the role conception of a "civilian power".[6] According to Kirste and Maull (1996, 301), six properties characterize a civilian power: civilian powers are agents responsibly and constructively shaping international relations; they are proponents of liberal norms including democracy, respect for human rights, welfare and security; they are managers of interdependence through legalization, contractualization and constitutionalization of international politics (thereby civilizing international politics); they transform the Westphalian state system by eroding national sovereignty; they promote (multilateral) cooperation while rejecting unilateralism; and they consider military power as a residual category, a last resort when an aggressor must be stopped.

Role conceptions cannot only be attributed to nation states, they can also be applied to composite actors such as regional organizations. A case in point is the EU, which has often been portrayed as a "civilian power" (Duchene, 1972) or—more recently—as a "normative power" (Manners, 2002).[7] Even strictly intergovernmentally organized regional organizations with limited actorness (*inter alia*, Hulse, 2014; Mattheis & Wunderlich, 2017) such as ASEAN can develop role conceptions, in particular, if they have repeatedly and most explicitly declared as ASEAN in its Bali III Concord of 2011 (ASEAN, 2011a) that they seek a greater international role as a composite actor (Rüland, 2019). While we are not aware of systematic research on ASEAN's role conceptions, in an earlier study one of the authors of this article sought to fill this gap in the literature and ascribed

to ASEAN the self-image of a "good global citizen" (ibid.). This finding rests on a content analysis of 199 speeches, which high-ranking representatives of ASEAN member states delivered over a 20-year period (1998-2017) in the annual General Debate of the UN General Assembly. While we are aware that the sum of member countries' role conceptions might differ from ASEAN's role conceptions as a composite actor, we maintain that such differences are minimal. It is hardly conceivable that individual member statements in the UNGA would stray far from ASEAN's consensual positions as formulated in the Chair statements of ASEAN Summits or Foreign Minister Meetings.

Including norms and objectives such as development, peace, collective action, regional cooperation, democracy and human rights, environmental protection and sustainability and pluralism and diversity (Rüland, 2019), the role conception of "good global citizen" on first sight exhibits substantial overlaps with Germany's "civilian power" conception. Some of these norms are codified in ASEAN's TAC (1976) and, in extended form, including seemingly liberal political norms, in the ASEAN Charter (ASEAN 2008), a quasi-constitutional document that ASEAN member states adopted in 2008. Closely aligned with the "good global citizen" image and fitting the role conception of a "civilian power" are the "bridge builder" and "mediator" functions proposed for ASEAN (Hutagalong, 2025; Piromya, 2023) and claimed by ASEAN member countries including Indonesia (Habib, 2025; Raditio, 2025), Malaysia, (Marwah, 2025), the Philippines (Manalo, 2023) and Thailand (Indonesia Tribune, 2 February 2026). The same holds true for the frequent emphasis of being constructive actors in world politics and the promotion of the Global Movement of Moderates spearheaded by Malaysia and endorsed by ASEAN (ASEAN, 2011b,c, 2012a; Nguitragool, & Rüland, 2015). Yet not all of ASEAN's member states propagate this role conception with the same intensity. Based on the UN speeches, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines are the most vocal in this respect (Rüland, 2019).

How compatible are German and ASEAN member countries' foreign policy role conceptions?

In this section, we explain the above-mentioned rhetoric-action gap in German relations with ASEAN countries. We attribute it to the normative discrepancies that exist despite seeming overlaps in the protagonists' foreign policy role conceptions. Subsequently, we examine to what extent German and ASEAN (member states') foreign policy role conceptions provide a solid foundation for a credible German "de-risking" strategy in which Southeast Asia figures prominently? Is it justified to consider ASEAN and its member countries "natural partners," as often stated in German and occasionally ASEAN foreign policy rhetoric?[8] Influential German politicians including the former leader of the Christian Democrat parliamentary group, Volker Kauder, and Liberal Party foreign policy expert Alexander Graf

Lambsdorff even regard them as "value partners" (Graf Lambsdorff, 2021, p. 148; Kauder, 2017, p. 137). Taking into account ASEAN member states' great diversity, more cautious analysts single out individual countries as "value partners." Named in this respect are Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

As stated in the introduction, we posit that the greater the overlaps of role conceptions, the greater the potential for a value-based and persistently deepening stable relationship that transcends the volatilities and exigencies of *realpolitik*. For civilian powers, it facilitates trade and investment if economic interactions do not blatantly violate human rights and sustainability norms. Where this happens, the reputation costs for civilian powers increase and may seriously jeopardize (economic) cooperation. For policymakers, friendshoring, that is, de-risking and diversification policies based on substantial normative overlaps, thus promises to be more predictable, consistent and enduring, provided there is no regime change in partner countries.

In subsequent paragraphs we compare German and ASEAN member countries' role conceptions by examining the semantics of the norms and objectives that constitute their seeming overlaps. In other words, we seek to unpack the respective meaning of polyvalent concepts such as peace, (economic) development, democracy, institution-based cooperation, multilateralism and environmental sustainability, to name the most prevalent ones. For a more fine-grained analysis, we distinguish three key dimensions of role conceptions: visions of the global and international order, visions of economic order and visions of domestic order. They lay open ideational discrepancies which, as we show, may have tangible material consequences for the policies of the respective protagonists.

Visions of global and international order

Overlaps of role conceptions between Germany, ASEAN and its member states are greatest in visions of global and international order. The diversity of ASEAN member states has only a limited impact on this component of role conceptions.

The German "Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific" (2020) identify seven policy fields as key themes for Germany's interaction with Indo-Pacific countries including ASEAN member states: strengthening multilateralism; tackling climate change and protecting the environment; strengthening peace, security and stability; promoting human rights and rule of law; strengthening rules-based, fair and sustainable free trade; rules-based networking and the digital transformation of regions and markets; and bringing people together through culture, education and science (Auswärtiges Amt, 2020).

These themes strongly resonate with the civilian power concept and the precepts of the Liberal International Order (LIO) shaped by Western countries in "thick" form after the end of the Cold War. They promote a

global and international order strongly grounded in dialogue-based institutional cooperation. Testimony to this preference is a strong commitment to multilateralism, as Germany's leading role—together with France—in the formation of a now defunct "Alliance for Multilateralism" in 2018 suggests. Also fully compatible with the "civilian power" concept is the "Policy Guidelines'" emphasis on peace, peaceful conflict resolution and security defined as absence of violent hostilities.

To what extent do ASEAN member states share this (liberal) vision of global and international order? Obvious value overlaps between the concept of civilian power and the LIO exist: Their role conception of "good global citizens" includes a strong preference for peace, peaceful conflict resolution, multilateral institutional cooperation (including regionalism), dialogue, and collective action (Rüland, 2019). Germany and ASEAN also share the preference for an inclusive regional architecture as expressed in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which explicitly recognizes China as a legitimate player in the region (ASEAN, 2019).

Yet these seeming overlaps mask normative differences between German and ASEAN (member countries') visions of the global and international order. While Germany favors sovereignty-eroding post-Westphalian norms with "behind-the-border" effects such as the Responsibility-to-Protect norm, ASEAN countries strongly adhere to national sovereignty with non-interference into the domestic affairs of other states as a near-sacred value.

This holds also true for regional integration. In an interview with the *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs*, Bilahari Kausikan, a retired high-ranking Singaporean diplomat, discounted the EU's post-Westphalian (selective) supranationalism and the pooling of sovereignty as "delusion" (Kausikan, 2023, p. 83). Instead, as outlined in the TAC and the ASEAN Way, ASEAN cooperation rests on strict intergovernmentalism. Member states adamantly reject encroachments on their national sovereignty, although in practice they have not always pursued this policy consistently (Jones, 2011). The adoption of seemingly liberal values in the ASEAN Charter was largely a tactical move with the objective of boosting the grouping's international reputation after the disastrous Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/1998 (Rüland, 2017). Hence, the Charter did not markedly change ASEAN's mode of operation: sovereignty-based norms still dominate, while the added liberal norms hardly matter in practice. ASEAN's collective and individual member countries' responses to the military coup in Thailand (2014), democratic backsliding and severe human rights violations such as the brutal repression of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar have been docile at best. The only exception is the 2021 military coup in Myanmar which evoked stronger reactions. Moreover, contrary to the objectives of the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN remains a largely state-centric and elitist organization in which—with the partial exception of business interests—non-state stakeholders have virtually no voice (Collins, 2008; Gerard, 2014; Rüland, 2023).

ASEAN member states also strongly hesitate to build their cooperation on the legalism and contractualism that characterizes German foreign

policies and European integration. They favor "soft law," non-binding decisions, flexibility and informal diplomacy. In these points, they are closer to Chinese conceptions of global order than the German "civilian power" role conception. The fact that Indonesia joined BRICS in early 2025 and that Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam have become BRICS partner countries suggests that tilting towards China is a creeping but ongoing process (Khong, & Liow, 2025).

Other dimensions of ASEAN member states' "good global citizen" role conception such as UN reform, also diverge from the civilian power concept. Although, like Western nations, they seek to democratize the world organization, this does not entail strengthening non-state actors or the parliamentarization of the UN. ASEAN member states primarily pursue a statist reform concept, focusing on the strengthening of the General Assembly and the Global South in the Security Council (Nguitragool, & Rüland, 2015).

Like the Federal Republic, ASEAN and the grouping's member countries, too, opt for a rules-based international order. However, the rules they cherish may markedly differ from the rules Germany promotes. To a varying extent, they suspect rules originating in the West of being a form of liberal value hegemony and tend to regard them as a thinly veiled attempt to maintain neocolonial dependencies.

Much more than Germany, ASEAN member countries propagate a concept of global and international order in which cooperation and institutions are firmly embedded in the precepts of political realism. It is true that ASEAN has been a major institution builder in the Indo-Pacific region, but it is also part of the truth that these institutions have often been instrumentalized for the purpose of soft balancing and hedging. The latter is a strategy of avoiding taking sides with great powers (Goh, 2006; Kuik, 2008). The objective of diversification inherent in German de-risking also entails realist policy recipes. Yet it would be wrong to argue that "de-risking" policies signal an end of German "civilian power" (Maull, 2025). They merely calibrate it to be more in tune with changing international conditions. They are a facet of a gradual distancing from the" hard power"-averse notions of the "civilian power" concept and signify a cautious shift towards "soft balancing" which began after the Russian attack on Ukraine. De-risking is thus a policy representing a rapprochement of middle and small powers' attempts to cope with the challenges of an emerging international order in which great powers premium brute might and relegate rules, cooperation and institutions to a backseat.

Visions of economic order

Role conceptions also overlap to some extent with regard to the preferred economic order. ASEAN's decision to confer on Germany the status of a "development partner" in 2016 testifies to these overlaps (Auswärtiges Amt, 2020, p. 24). But while German and ASEAN countries' role conceptions view economic prosperity and development as major prerequisites for a

peaceful world, they derive different economic strategies from this ideational similarity. Germany's economic policy in general, and the "Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific" specifically, rest on ordo-liberalism which balances economic growth with social and environmental sustainability and regards the private sector as the engine of economic activity.

By contrast, irrespective of much lower state capacities, Southeast Asian countries emulate to varying degrees the developmental state concept of East Asia's economic frontrunners (Johnson, 1982). Although ASEAN member countries to a varying extent and at different times merge state capitalism with neoliberal policies, the last decade has witnessed a return to increasing state activity in the economy (Kurlantzick, 2016; Warburton, 2016, 2018). Developmental states seek to kick-start rapid economic growth through industrialization and to achieve this objective through massive state intervention into their economy, high rates of investment and domestic savings, advancements in productivity through technological progress, international competitiveness and a focus on the export of (initially) labor-intensive products (Önis, 1991, p. 111). The private sector is thus only a junior partner of the government. Developmental states tolerate collateral damage in the form of modernization losers and exhibit a preference for an authoritarian, top-down model of decision-making. Even if some East Asian developmental states such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have democratized in the meantime, the concept differs quite strongly from the "civilian power" role conception, where liberal economic norms go hand in hand with political liberalism. Differing is also the attitude towards environmental sustainability, which developmental states subordinate to economic growth. Most ASEAN states thus pay lip service at best to the replacement of fossil energies by renewable energies (Nguitragool, & Varkkey, 2022).

In the field of trade, in which Germany and other EU members have ceded competences to the European Commission, these contradictions explain at least in part why so far no bi-regional FTA has materialized. In fact, German companies greatly welcome such an agreement as it would place them on par with their competitors in the Indo-Pacific (Huck, 2023). Another reason why the bi-regional FTA has not materialized is the tendency of the EU to conclude ambitious WTO Plus agreements, which ASEAN's weaker economies lack the state capacities needed to comply with. It is thus counterproductive if in free trade negotiations the EU pursues positions that rigidly rest on a European mindset without empathy for the concerns of their counterparts. The complex procurement regulations the EU sought to incorporate in the FTA with Indonesia is a case in point (Interview, 27 October 2025).

Another obstacle is the overburdening of FTAs with normative issues not directly related to trade (CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion, 2023, p. 19; Suarsana, 2025). These include abstract liberal political values structuring domestic order and sustainability norms, which in the form of an "essential elements clause" are incorporated in every EU agreement and which ASEAN

member countries resent due to the built-in threat of sanctions. Even the establishment of bilateral free trade agreements with individual ASEAN member countries, on which the EU embarked after the failure of the bi-regional agreement in 2009, thus became a slow moving process. For a long time, the EU had managed to establish FTAs with only two countries: Singapore in 2019 and Vietnam in 2020. Yet these two FTAs suggest that down-scaling normative issues may eventually facilitate agreements (Mckenzie, & Meissner, 2017). While sustainability issues surrounding the export of palm oil and deforestation have led to the temporary suspension of negotiations with Indonesia and Malaysia, the 2014 military coup in Thailand and democratic backsliding in the Philippines during the Duterte administration (2016–2022) including massive human rights violations have also become major obstacles.

However, harsh US tariff policies in the second Trump administration (starting in 2025) have increased pressure on Southeast Asian countries, too, to diversify their trade relations. The changing geopolitical and geoeconomic context thus compelled Germany, the EU and ASEAN member states to tone down normative disagreements. As a first result, in September 2025 the EU's negotiations with Indonesia on a bilateral FTA ended successfully, while those with Malaysia and the Philippines are expected to conclude in 2026 (Interviews, 2 June 2025 and 19 September 2025). Yet it is essential that EU member countries speed up the tedious and lengthy FTA ratification process. The European Parliament's decision to submit the EU-Mercosur FTA, eventually concluded in late 2025 after 25 years of negotiations, to the European Court of Justice for legal screening (Die Welt, 22 January 2026) sends out the wrong signals to ASEAN and other trade partners.

Business interactions replicate a discrepancy already identified in the field of institutional politics. While German corporate culture heavily rests on legalism and contractualism, Southeast Asian business partners prefer informal interactions (Koswara, 2022). This enables them to act much faster and be more results-oriented, albeit often at the expense of thoroughness and sustainability. This is one reason—among others—why in Southeast Asia the EU's Global Gateway connectivity scheme is unable to successfully compete with the Chinese BRI. For Westerners, informality borders on corruption or even transgresses this boundary. Controllers of large enterprises regard informal processes with unease due to their lack of transparency and their inherent volatility (Interview, 12 June 2025). And, indeed, the corruption rating agency Transparency International evaluates Southeast Asian countries unfavorably. Only Singapore (3rd) is ranked among the world's 10 least corrupt countries. Others such as Malaysia (54th), Vietnam (81th), Indonesia (109th), Thailand (116th) and the Philippines (120th) trail far behind. German businesses thus do not view them as an alternative to China, which ranks 76th in 2025 (Transparency International, 2025). While these discrepancies do not rule out closer economic cooperation, it is unrealistic to expect them to disappear, thus impeding progress.

Visions of domestic order

By far the fewest overlaps exist in the domain of domestic order. Here, the great diversity of political systems in Southeast Asia has a major impact. ASEAN's strong reliance on pragmatic—that is, non-ideological—cooperation, is an institutional and procedural precaution to minimize intra-regional turbulences caused by political regime diversity. It explains why ASEAN countries' refrained from adopting a democracy clause akin to that of the EU, Mercosur and ECOWAS. Shaping the domestic order is thus, in effect, the prerogative of the member countries.

As a "civilian power" and in line with the "Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific," Germany strongly opts for a liberal democratic order, respect for human rights, rule of law and good governance. This is corroborated by the fact that between 1990 and late 2024, 77 interpellations (41%) and 26 motions (50%) on Southeast Asia in the *Bundestag*, the German Parliament, critically focused on normative issues such as democracy, human rights and the environment. By contrast, only roughly 6% of interpellations and 19% of motions had the economy as their theme.[9] Somewhat relativizing these figures is the fact that in parliamentary systems of government (like Germany) interpellations and motions are in most cases filed by opposition parties.

As regards Southeast Asia, Freedom House currently rates none of ASEAN's member states as full-fledged democracies (Freedom House, 2025). In the last decade, even countries previously rated as "free" like Indonesia and the Philippines exhibited tendencies of democratic backsliding (Croissant, & Haynes, 2021; Mietzner, 2021; Thompson, 2021).

As stated above, government systems in Southeast Asia are highly diverse and range from electoral democracies to semi-authoritarian regimes and to military dictatorships and from absolute monarchies to socialist regimes. The democratic self-image most ASEAN member states nevertheless cultivate has merely declaratory functions: good global citizens must be democratic and protect human rights. In reality, however, differing from Germany and Western democracies, they contextualize human rights as posited by the controversial Asian value thesis. This entails a critical stance towards the universality of (individual) human rights, a concern for "different political, economic, legal, social, cultural, historical and religious backgrounds" (ASEAN, 2012b) and prime importance to collective rights such as development. Their democracy rhetoric thinly veils that substantial parts of the public entertain critical attitudes towards political liberalism. These often reflect collective memories of colonialism, given the fact that most colonial powers in the region were liberal democracies.

In the non-socialist states of the region, the domestic political order is shaped by variants of authoritarian corporatism that has also been transferred to ASEAN as a regional organization (Rüland, 2014). Authoritarian corporatism is the result of elite-advocated nativist ideas and ideational

imports of anti-liberal organic state theory from late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. Organic state theory is an anti-liberal conservative collectivist ideology, which attaches higher morality to the state than the individual (Reeve, 1985; Bourchier, 1999). Decision-making is thus organized in a top-down manner with the objective of preventing or at least containing social and political pluralism, which is equated with social disorder. Stakeholder participation is narrowly defined as "participation in implementation" (Cohen, & Uphoff, 1980), that is, participation in implementing government policies.

Southeast Asian governments regard Germany's strong emphasis on liberal political norms as a foundation for cooperation skeptically. They argue that Germany's and other Western countries' normative engagement lacks consistency and often entails double standards, standing for variations of what Holsti (1970, p. 250) calls role performance. One striking example is Germany's past China policy which, though not entirely sidelining values, mainly focused on narrow material interests. Value-driven policies are hence viewed in Southeast Asia as hypocrisy and "lecturing," as undue interference into internal affairs of their countries (Skribot, & Beier, 2024, p. 23). Yet they grudgingly tolerate these intrusions into their domestic policies as long as they are dependent on German (and Western) development aid, technology and investments (Interview, 27 August 2025). With China's rise as an attractive economic partner and their own fast development, these dependencies wane.

In the meantime, German (and European) politicians profess to have learned their lessons from previously acrimonious norm debates. "Evenhandedness" is a frequently used European (and German) rhetorical phrase to describe current interactions. That they at the same time offer to share with ASEAN member governments European (and German) experiences in regional integration, democracy, human rights promotion, rule of law and good governance suggests that they still consider Europe as the normative gold standard with a thinly veiled belief in Western superiority.[10] This normative mindset impedes closer relations and explains why in the domain of domestic order ASEAN countries tilt more towards China than to the West including Germany (Table 1).

Conclusion

This article has shown that Germany's (economic) dependencies on China have been substantially increasing over the last decade. In case of a military conflict with Chinese involvement, for instance, in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea, these dependencies may amount to a massive threat for Germany's prosperity. In recent years, Germany has responded to these threats with a "de-risking" strategy. The ASEAN region, with its proximity to China, its economic vibrancy and a market size of some 700 million consumers, has since come into the focus of German "de-risking" activities. German diplomatic rhetoric characterizes

Table 1. German and ASEAN member states role conceptions: Similarities and differences.

		Differences	
Dimension of Role Conception	*Similarities*	*Germany*	*ASEAN Member States*
Visions of Global and International Order	• Multilateralism • Institution-based cooperation • Dialogue • Collective action • Inclusive regional architecture	• Post-Westphalian, sovereignty eroding "behind-the-border" norms • Institutions facilitating cooperation • (Selective) supranationalism • Legalism and contractualism • Democratizing UN through strengthening civil society and parliamentarization • Rules-based international order	• Sovereignty norms, non-interference into domestic affairs of other states • Institutions also used for soft-balancing and hedging • Strict intergovernmentalism • Soft law, flexibility, pragmatism and informality • Democratizing UN though strengthening countries of the Global South • Rules-based international order without liberal hegemony
Visions of economic order	• Economic prosperity • Socio-economic development • Environmetal sustainability	• Ordo liberalism balancing economic growth, social and environmental sustainability • Private sector as the main economic actor • Liberal economic norms and liberal political norms • Concluding ambitious WTO+ FTAs • Overburdening trade issues with liberal political and environmental norms • Legalistic and contractualistic business culture • Environmental leadership	• Developmental state concept prioritizing economic growth • State-centered economic development, private sector as junior partner • Top-down, tentatively authoritarian process • Concluding less complex FTAs • Down-playing political, social and environmental norms • Informal business culture • Environmental lip service
Vision of domestic order	• Democracy and human rights	• Liberal political values including democracy, respect for (individual) human rights, rule of law good governance • Promotion of liberal values in foreign policy	• Indifference towards ASEAN member states' political system; no democracy clause • (Authoritarian) corporatism • Contextualized human rights, preference for collective human rights • Criticizing Western double standards

Source: Authors.

ASEAN countries as "natural partners" and occasionally even as "value partners," suggesting great potential for forging a close and enduring partnership.

The article argues that this is not the case and that such relationship will most likely not materialize in the future given the sticky nature of role conceptions. Although German and ASEAN member countries at first sight profess similar foreign policy role conceptions, a closer look reveals substantial divergence. Hence, the euphemistic image German diplomacy paints of ASEAN member countries as "natural partners" or even "value partners" must be relativized and problematized (Heiduk, 2024). This language is hardly more than a diplomatic nicety to please ASEAN partners. In reality, the normative divergence identified in our study is a major impediment for a substantive deepening of relations on which a sustainable "de-risking" strategy can be built. It persistently creates irritations on both sides which time and again lead to setbacks, signifying the limits of rapprochement.

Despite these impediments, current geopolitical conditions are favorable for improved relations with ASEAN nations that are increasingly feeling the pinch of the intensifying Sino-US rivalry and are keen to avoid taking sides. The Trump administration's hostile tariff policies increase these pressures. As a corollary, they pursue hedging policies, for which Germany and the EU are welcome partners. Yet, despite shifts towards more pragmatic policies on both sides, the normative discrepancies identified in the foreign policy role conceptions will not disappear without policy changes. Otherwise it is unlikely that German relations with Southeast Asia will exceed pragmatic *realpolitik* on the basis of temporary common interests.

Ties can be improved if the German government tones down excessive normative zeal and concentrates more on solving practical problems including a substantial acceleration of negotiations in the respective policy fields. This at least reduces the incentives for ASEAN member states to seek closer relations with partners which Germany regards as foes and threat. Examples are Indonesia's intensification of relations with Russia under the current administration of President Prabowo Subianto or Indonesia's and Vietnam's conclusion of free trade agreements with the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Anjaiah, 2015; Karyza, 2025). ASEAN countries, for their part, would have to reduce their antagonism to liberal notions of political order.

Summing up, de-risking has become a high-priority policy for Germany. However, as most recent political events show, it can no longer only focus on China, but must increasingly include the United States, which under the Trump administration is rapidly losing its status as Germany's closest alliance partner. Seen through this lens, it makes sense that Federal Chancelor Merz in his visit of China in February 2026 sought to recalibrate de-risking by a constructive search for solutions of existing antagonisms (Hauck, 2026).

The fact that dependencies from China and the United States have become a major (economic) security threat for Germany, increases the ASEAN region's relevance for German de-risking policies. However, as German relations with the region cannot be expected to deepen

substantially soon, they must be complemented by additional collaborations such as global raw material partnerships and more (EU-negotiated) FTAs. Essential is that the latter will be negotiated faster and are freed from overly heavy normative baggage. European and German overtures to Chile, South Africa, Australia and Canada, to name a few examples, are part and parcel of such a policy and point in the right direction.

Notes

1. ASEAN member countries are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam.
2. Rare earth can also be imported from other destinations. Yet China developed the technologies for processing and, hence, has secured a dominant position in the market (Lin, 2025).
3. For instance, in 2010 a rare earth embargo against Japan after an incident near the contested Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands in the East China Sea (Iida, 2015, p. 384, 2024, p. 74).
4. Already today China greatly regulates rare earth exports to Germany. See *Der Spiegel*, 27 October 2025.
5. These sectors are: information technology; robotics; green energy and green vehicles; aerospace equipment; ocean engineering and high-tech ships; railway equipment; power equipment; new materials; medicine and medical devices; and agricultural machinery (Gutting, 2024, p. 17).
6. See also the parliamentary debates on German foreign policy documented in the Bundestag Archive.
7. Other, less frequently cited role conceptions for the EU are "market power" (Damro, 2012) and "ethical power" (Aggestam, 2008).
8. For examples, see the German, French and Dutch ambassadors to Singapore in the *Business Times*, 15 October 2021; Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Statements, 27 September 2023; *East Asia Forum*, 15 April 2024.
9. Authors' analysis of the *Bundestag* archive.
10. For an example, see Swedish Ambassador Olov Skoog in *The Jakarta Post*, 22 July 2014.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editors of the journal, two anonymous reviewers and the audience of a presentation at the University of Freiburg's Colloquium politicum for guidance and helpful comments on a previous version of the article. They also wish to express their gratitude to the interviewed experts for sharing with them their expertise.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Jürgen Rüland http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8885-0207
Elisabetta Nadalutti http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4503-061X

References

Aggestam, L. (2006). Role theory and European foreign policy: A framework of analysis. In O. Elgström, & M. Smith (Eds.), *The European Union's roles in interna-*

tional politics. Concepts and analysis (pp. 11–19). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780202086414

Aggestam, L. (2008). Introduction: Ethical power Europe? *International Affairs*, *84*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00685.x

Allison, G., & Halperin, M. H. (1972). *Bureaucratic policies: A paradigm and some policy implications*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559

Andal, E. G. T. (2017). ASEAN centrality amidst economic integration in the Asia Pacific region. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, *22*(2), 273–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/13547860.2016.1239394

Anjaiah, V. (2015). Vietnam signs FTA with EEU: What about Indonesia? *The Jakarta Post*.

ASEAN. (2008). *The ASEAN Charter*. Retrieved March 12, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf

ASEAN. (2011a). Bali Declaration on ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations "Bali Concord III." ASEAN. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bali-Concord-III.pdf

ASEAN. (2011b). Chairman's statement of the 18th ASEAN Summit "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations." ASEAN. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Statement_18th_ASEAN_Summit.pdf

ASEAN. (2011c). Chair's statement of the 19th ASEAN Summit "ASEAN Community in a Global Community of Nations." Retrieved March 16, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/CS.pdf

ASEAN. (2012a). *2012 Chairman's statement of the 20th ASEAN Summit*. ASEAN. Retrieved March 14, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FINAL-Chairman-Statement1330.pdf

ASEAN. (2012b). *ASEAN Human Rights Declaration*. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration/

ASEAN. (2019). *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific*. Retrieved March 24, 2026, from https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf

Asien-Pazifik Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft. (2021). *Wirtschaftszusammenarbeit der EU mit Asien-Pazifik. Perspektiven der deutschen Wirtschaft*. Retrieved October 8, 2025, from https://asien-pazifik-ausschuss.de/positions/apa-position-wirtschaftszusammenarbeit-der-eu-mit-asien-pazifik-perspektiven-der-deutschen-wirtschaft/

Aun, C. (2024). Germany walks the talk on Southeast Asia. *East Asia Forum*.

Auswärtiges Amt. (2002). Aufgaben der deutschen Außenpolitik. Südostasien sowie Australien, Neuseeland und Pazifische Inseln am Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert. Auswärtiges Amt.

Auswärtiges Amt. (2020). *Leitlinien zum Indo-Pazifik. Deutschland-Europa-Asien. Das 21. Jahrhundert gemeinsam gestalten*. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2380514/f9784f7e3b3fa1bd7c5446d274a4169e/200901-indo-pazifik-leitlinien–1–data.pdf?enodia=eyJleHAiOjE3NzQzODM0ODMsImNvbnRlbnQiOnRydWUsImF1ZCI6ImF1dGgiLCJIb3N0Ijoid3d3LmF1c3dhZXJ0aWdlcy1hbXQuZGUiLCJTb3VyY2VJUCI6IjkyLjIwOS4xNTUuMTY0IiwiQ29uZmlnSUQiOiI4ZGFkY2UxMjVmZDJjMzkzMmI5NDNiNTJlOWQyY2Q2NTA1NzU0ZTE2MjIxMmEyY2UxYmI1YWYxNWMwZDRiYmZlIn0=.TsPJ9HSyFax9yPLRKks4eKhlRMPkryb5EP14oeJzFE8=

Auswärtiges Amt. (2023a). *Integrierte Sicherheit für Deutschland. Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie*. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from https://auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/sicherheitspolitik/nationale-sicherheitsstrategie

Auswärtiges Amt. (2023b). *China-Strategie der Bundesregierung*. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2608578/810fdade376b1467f20bdb697b2acd58/china-strategie-data.pdf

Bermingham, F. (2025). German industry seeks EU action on state subsidies. *South China Morning Post*.

Blumenau, B. (2022). Breaking with convention? Zeitenwende and the traditional pillars of German foreign policy. *International Affairs*, *98*(6), 1895–1913. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac166

Bourchier, D. (1999). Positivism and romanticism in Indonesian legal thought. In T. Lindsey (Ed.), *Indonesia: Law and society* (pp. 186–196). The Federation Press.

Brummer, K., & Kießling, F. (Eds.) (2019). *Zivilmacht Bundesrepublik? Bundesdeutsche außenpolitische Rollen vor und nach 1989 aus politik- und geschichtswissenschaftlichen Perspektiven*. Nomos. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845293417

Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie. (2019). Grundsatzpapier China. Partner und systemischer Wettbewerber – Wie gehen wir mit Chinas staatlich gelenkter Volkswirtschaft um? Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie.

Cantir, C., & Kaarbo, J. (2016). *Domestic role contestation, foreign policy and international relations*. Routledge.

Cash Online. (2024). Abhängigkeit von China auch bei Diversifizierung in ASEAN-Ländern. Retrieved 10 April 2026, from https://advance.lexis.com/document/?pdmfid=1516831&crid=1e68bb90-3381-4431-9298-87a26b2e6c5a&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%33AcontentItem%3A6BV8-4D21-JBK9-2022-00000-00&pdcontentcomponentid=461934&pdteaserkey=sr0&pditab=allpods&ecomp=h6yyk&earg=sr0&prid=e9b24cf0-5f91-4585-s01a-610d9fb82cf5

CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion. (2023). *Souveränität aus eigener Stärke – Eckpfeiler einer neuen China-Politik*. CDU/CSU Bundestagsfraktion.

Cohen, J., & Uphoff, N. T. (1980). Participation's place in rural development: Seeking clarity through specificity. *World Development*, *8*(3), 213–235. (80)90011-X. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X

Collins, A. (2008). A people-oriented ASEAN: A door ajar or closed for civil society organizations? *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *30*(2), 313–331. https://doi.org/10.1355/CS30-2G

Croissant, A., & Haynes, J. (2021). Democratic recession in Asia: Introduction. *Democratization*, *28*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1851203

Damro, C. (2012). Market power Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *19*(5), 682–699. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.646779

Dannhauer, P. (2024). Elite role conceptions and Indonesia's agency in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific: Reclaiming leadership. *The Pacific Review*, *37*(1), 30–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2022.2125999

Destatis. (2026). China im Jahr 2025 wieder wichtigster Handelspartner Deutschlands. Pressemitteilung Nr. 056. Destatis. Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2026/02/PD26_056_51.html

Deutsche Länder. (2026). Deutsche Länder in der Entwicklungspolitik. Retrieved March 27, 2026, from https://ez-der-laender.de/

Deutscher Bundestag. (1993). Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung. Asien-Konzept der Bundesregierung. Drucksache 12/6151. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/12/061/1206151.pdf

Dosch, J. (2016). *Die ASEAN Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft. Überblick für Wissenschaft und Praxis*. Nomos. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845264950
Duchene, F. (1972). Europe's role in world peace. In R. Mayne (Ed.), *Europe tomorrow. Sixteen Europeans look ahead* (pp. 32–47). Chatham House.
European Commission. (2019). EU-China – A Strategic Outlook. Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Council. Retrieved August 17, 2025, from https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf
Fischer, M. (2025). Die Luft für deutsche Firmen wird dünn. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.
Freedom House. (2025). Freedom in the world. Countries and territories. Retrieved October 8, 2025, from https://freedomhouse.org/country/scores
Gareis, S. B. (2009). Deutsche Außenpolitik. Grundlagen, Akteure, Strukturen und Prozesse. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Informationen zur politischen Bildung, no. 304.
Gaupp, P. (1983). *Staaten als Rollenträger: Die Rollentheorie als Analyse-Instrument von Außenpolitik und internationalen Beziehungen*. Verlag Huber.
Gerard, K. (2014). *ASEAN's engagement of civil society: Regulating dissent*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137359476
Goh, E. (2006). Understanding hedging in Asia-Pacific security. *PacNet* 43. Retrieved August 15, 2025, from https://www.stratad,net/downloads/PacNet%2043.pdf
Goldberg, C. (2020). Germany's Indo-Pacific vision: A new reckoning with China or more strategic drift? *The Diplomat*.
Graf Lambsdorff, A. (2021). Liberale Leitlinien für deutsche Außen-, Sicherheits- und Entwicklungspolitik aus einem Guss. *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, *14*(2), 141–151. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-021-00850-z
Gutting, D. (2024). *China + 1: De-Risking für deutsche Unternehmen. Südostasiatische Länder als Standortergänzung zu China*. Springer Gabler. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-44208-8
Habib, A. (2025). The United Nations at 80: Reform or irrelevance. *The Jakarta Post*.
Hägler, M., & Yang, X. (2024). China, eine toxische Bedrohung. *Die Zeit*.
Hahnemann, T., Huotari, M. & Kratz, A. (2019). Chinese FDI in Europe: 2018 Trend and Impact of New Screening Policies. Rhodium Group and MERICS.
Harnisch, S., Frank, C., & Maull, H. W. (Eds.) (2011). *Role theory in international relations*. Routledge.
Hauck, U. (2026). War das ein Neuanfang? *Tagesschau*.
Heiduk, F. (2024). *Germany's value-based partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*. German Institute for International and Security Affairs, https://doi.org/10.18449/2024RP04
Hildebrandt, T., & Godwin, C. J. (2024). Germany faces balancing act in engaging with Prabowo's Indonesia. *The Diplomat*.
Holsti, K. (1970). National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, *14*(3), 233–309. https://doi.org/10.2307/3013584
Huck, A. (2023). Position paper. Why German businesses support an EU-ASEAN FTA. Singaporean-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce. Retrieved March 10, 2026, from https://malaysia.ahk.de/en/information-hub-post/ahk-singapore-position-paper
Hulse, M. (2014). Actorness beyond the European Union: Comparing the international trade actorness of SADC and ECOWAS. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *52*(3), 547–565. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12111
Hutagalong, S. (2025). ASEAN's role: Mediating between USA-China rivalry. *Eurasia Review*.

Iida, K. (2015). Political risks and Japanese foreign direct investment in East Asia: A case study of 'China-plus-one'. *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, *13*(2), 383–410. https://doi.org/10.14731/kjis.2015.08.13.2.383

Iida, K. (2024). The political economy of supply chain transformation in Asia: From "China plus one" to de-Sinicization. *Asia Policy*, *19*(3), 71–90. https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2024.a934566

Ischinger, W., & Bunde, T. (2015). Neue deutsche Diplomatie. *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, *8*, 313–333. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-014-0462-4

Jagtiani, S. L. (2025). Risky configuration. China's footprint in Germany's technology stack. German Marshall Fund of the United States. Retrieved November 10, 2025, from https://www.gmfus.org/news/risky-configuration-chinas-footprint-germanys-technology-stack.

Johnson, C. (1982). *MITI and the Japanese miracle*. Stanford University Press.

Karyza, D. (2025). RI inks trade deal with EAEU, eyes Eurasian market expansion. The Jakarta Post.

Kauder, V. (2017). Sicherheit, Freiheit und Frieden in schwierigen Zeiten. *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, *10*(2), 127–138. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-017-0635-z

Kausikan, B. (2023). ASEAN: Centrality and credibility. An interview with Bilahari Kausikan. *Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs*, *9*, 77–86.

Khong, Y. F., & Liow, C. (2025). Southeast Asia is starting to choose. Why the region is leaning toward China. *Foreign Affairs*, *104*(4), 151–161.

Kirste, K., & Maull, H. W. (1996). Zivilmacht und Rollentheorie. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, *3*(2), 283–312. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40844107

Koswara, A. (2022). *Corporate culture practices of German corporations in the host country Indonesia. An analysis from the perspective of Indonesian employees, managers and German expatriates*. Springer VS. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-39289-5

Kratz, A. (2024). *Why isn't Europe diversifying from China?* Rhodium Group.

Kuik, C.-C. (2008). The essence of hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's response to a rising China. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *30*(2), 159–185. https://doi.org/10.1355/cs30-2a

Kurlantzick, J. (2016). *State capitalism. How the return of statism is transforming the world*. Oxford University Press.

Legro, J. W. (2000). The transformation of policy ideas. *American Journal of Political Science*, *44*(3), 419–432. https://doi.org/10.2307/2669256.

Lin, G. (2025). Southeast Asia's potential role in rare earth elements diversification. Fulcrum.

Manalo, E. A. (2023). Address at the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Retrieved March 19, 2026, from https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/78(ph_en.pdf

Manners, I. (2002). Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *40*(2), 235–258. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353

Marwah, R. (2025). Malaysia as ASEAN chair in 2025: Will ASEAN centrality recalibrated? *Eurasia Review*.

Mattheis, F., & Wunderlich, U. (2017). Regional actorness and interregional relations: ASEAN, the EU and Mercosur. *Journal of European Integration*, *39*(6), 723–738. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2017.1333503

Matthes, J. (2024a). *Deutsche Direktinvestitionen nach China und Hongkong auf neuem Höchststand – von Diversifizierung kaum eine Spur*. Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, IW Kurzbericht, Nr. 7/2024.

Matthes, J. (2024b). *Importseitiges De-Risking von China im Jahr 2023: Eine Anatomie hoher deutscher Importabhängigkeiten von China*. Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, IW Report, no. 18/2024.

Matthes, J. (2025). *Außenhandel 2024 mit China: Problematische Befunde im Detail*. Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, IW Kurzbericht Nr. 20.

Maull, H. W. (1990). Germany and Japan: The new civilian powers. *Foreign Affairs*, *69*(5), 91–106. https://doi.org/10.2307/20044603

Maull, H. W. (2025). *Noch Zivilmacht? Die Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Studie 13, https://doi.org/10.18449/2025S13

Mckenzie, L., & Meissner, K. L. (2017). Human rights conditionality in European Union trade negotiations: The case of the EU-Singapore FTA. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *55*(4), 832–849. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12522

Merics. (2025). *Merics forum: How can the EU navigate China's rare earth controls*. Retrieved October 28, 2025, from https://merics.org/de/kommentar/merics-forum-how-can-eu-navigate-chinas-rare-earths-exprt-controls.

Mietzner, M. (2021). Sources of resistance to democratic decline: Indonesian civil society and its trials. *Democratization*, *28*(1), 161–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1796649

Mützenich, R. (2005). Wandel und Kontinuitäten deutscher Außenpolitik. *Welttrends*, *46*(1), 99–104.

Nguitragool, P., & Rüland, J. (2015). *ASEAN and its cohesion as an actor in international forums – reality, potential and constraints*. Cambridge University Press.

Nguitragool, P., & Varkkey, H. (2022). Governing across regions: Global environment and regionalism in Europe and Southeast Asia. In J. Rüland, & A. Carrapatoso (Eds.), *Handbook on global governance and regionalism* (pp. 400–418). Edward Elgar. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377561.00039

Önis, Z. (1991). The logic of the developmental state. *Comparative Politics*, *24*(1), 109–126. https://doi.org/10.2307/422204

Piromya, K. (2023). Neutrality and non-alignment are the ways forward for ASEAN. *The Diplomat*.

Putnam, R. D. (1988). Diplomacy and domestic politics: The logic of two-level games. *International Organization*, *48*(3), 427–460. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830000829X

Raditio, K. H. (2025). To be a bridge builder: Indonesia's debut at the BRICS summit. *The Diplomat*.

Reeve, D. (1985). *Golkar of Indonesia: An alternative to the party system*. Oxford University Press.

Rüland, J. (2014). The limits of democratizing interest representation: ASEAN's regional corporatism and normative challenges. *European Journal of International Relations*, *20*(1), 237–261. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112445289

Rüland, J. (2017). *The Indonesian way. ASEAN, Europeanization and foreign policy debates in a new democracy*. Stanford University Press.

Rüland, J. (2019). Good global citizen? ASEAN's image building in the United Nations. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, *25*(5), 751–771. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381.2019.1652983

Rüland, J. (2023). ASEAN – A case of illiberal regional democracy. In J. Dosch & F. Kliem (Eds.), *The Elgar companion to ASEAN* (pp. 108–122). Edward Elgar.

Schüller, M. (2025). Geopolitical conflicts and economic disruptions: Germany's China policy under pressure. *Asia Europe Journal*, *23*(4), 489–496. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-025-00751-2

Schwung, G. (2025). *Taiwans Botschafter: "Deutschland steht mit dem Rücken zur Wand."* *Die Welt*.

Sicilia, G., & Benson, E. (2024). *Navigating tides: The European Union's expanding role in the Indo-Pacific*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Skribot, M., & Beier, C. (2024). *Deutschland in den Augen Indonesiens. Eine strategische Partnerschaft auf dem Prüfstand*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

SPD. (2021). Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Koalitionsvertrag 2021-2025. Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands. Retrieved October 8, 2025, from https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag_2021-2025.pdf Delete SPD. (2021)

SPD-Bundestagsfraktion. (2024). Schlüsselpartner für die regelbasierte Weltordnung: Sozialdemokratische Prioritäten für den Indo-Pazifik. Retrieved April 10, 2026, from https://www.spdfraktion.de/system/files/documents/position-prioritaeten-fuer-indo-pazifik.pdf.

Spillner, O., & Wolff, G. (2023). *China de-risking": A long way from political statements to corporate action*. Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V. Retrieved October 7, 2025, from https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/87681/ssoar-2023-spillner_et_al-China_De-risking_A_Long_Way.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Suarsana, D. (2024). *De-risking, but where to? The emerging ASEAN countries as an alternative to China*. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Suarsana, D. (2025). *International perceptions of Germany's and Europe's competitiveness. Opportunities, challenges and policy recommendations*. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Thompson, M. R. (2021). Pushback after backsliding? Unconstrained executive aggrandizement in the Philippines versus contested military-monarchical rule in Thailand. *Democratization*, *28*(1), 124–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1835860

Transparency International. (2025). Corruption perceptions index 2024. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2014

Ulatowski, R. (2022). Germany in the Indo-Pacific region: Strengthening the liberal order and regional security. *International Affairs*, *98*(2), 383–402. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiac008

Walker, S. (1987). *Role theory and foreign policy analysis*. Duke University Press.

Warburton, E. (2016). Jokowi and the new developmentalism. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, *52*(3), 297–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2016.1249262

Warburton, E. (2018). A new developmentalism in Indonesia. *Southeast Asian Economies*, *35*(3), 355–368. https://doi.org/10.1355/ae35-3c

Wehner, L. E., & Thies, C. G. (2014). Role theory, narratives, and interpretation: The domestic contestation of roles. *International Studies Review*, *16*(3), 411–436. https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12149

World Bank. (1993). *The East Asian miracle: Economic growth and public policy*. Oxford University Press.

Yuniar, R. W. (2025). Indonesia to keep EV battery goal after LG-led JV's "very significant" exit. *South China Morning Post*.