Building Bridges: Euro-Indo-Pacific Cooperation for resilient FIMI Strategies

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FIMI's escalation: Moving from shared concern to shared action

The current geopolitical landscape is increasingly shaped by blurring boundaries between physical and cognitive battlefields, driven by recent advancements in information and communication technologies. These advancements enable a new generation of hybrid threats to take root.

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) represents a rapidly growing and evolving challenge to democratic societies across both Europe and the Indo-Pacific. FIMI campaigns are defined as a pattern of coordinated behaviour by state or non-state actors to deliberately create false or misleading narratives through the manipulation of information environments, specifically with the aim to influence public opinion in order to undermine political processes.[1] The definition highlights the importance of *behaviour* by state and non-state actors alike, who operate both from within as well as outside national borders. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and micro-targeting, aid the growing sophistication of these campaigns, thereby increasing their disruptive behaviour.

The openness of democratic societies proves fertile ground for such types of interference. Recent election cycles in Europe and the Indo-Pacific illustrate how elections have been a prime target for FIMI in the past year. In the Philippines president Marcos ordered an investigation into allegations concerning their May 2025 elections.[2] In Europe, the 2024 Romanian presidential elections got annulled and done over due to fear of foreign interference.[3] This highlights a fundamental dilemma in FIMI countermeasures, as actors target the information environment one must protect it without undermining the democratic values FIMI campaigns are seeking to exploit.

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[1] Nicolas Hénin, 'FIMI: Towards a European Redefinition of Foreign Interference' (EU DisinfoLab, April 2023), https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/20230412_FIMI-FS-FINAL.pdf; Strategic Communications, '2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats | EEAS' (EEAS, 23 January 2024), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2nd-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats_en

[2] 'Philippine President Orders Probe into Alleged Foreign Interference in Elections', *Reuters*, 25 April 2025, sec. Asia Pacific, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippine-president-orders-probe-into-alleged-foreign-interference-elections-2025-04-25/

[3] 'Russian Interference Claims Hit Romania's Critical Election on Voting Day', POLITICO, 18 May 2025, https://www.politico.eu/article/high-early-turnout-as-romanians-vote-in-critical-election/

The first policy brief - *FIMI in Focus: Navigating Threats in the Indo-Pacific and Europe* - outlined the shared FIMI threat landscape across Europe and the Indo-Pacific, showing that these threats are not isolated by geography. Across both regions the most prominent state actors are the People's Republic of China and Russia, which are becoming increasingly more aligned in their messaging.[4] The need for enhanced cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific in countering FIMI stems not only from the escalation of the threat, but also from the convergence of the threat landscape and cross-regional activity of its main actors.

While existing cooperation between both regions is growing, it remains largely fragmented and reactive despite shared interests. To build collective resilience, a more structured and proactive approach is needed. This policy brief explores how the Indo-Pacific and Europe can strengthen cooperation to build collective resilience against FIMI, and what concrete policy mechanisms and pathways can facilitate this collaboration. Through a comparative lens this brief will explore existing policy frameworks employed within as well as across both regions. It will assess current cooperation efforts to counter FIMI and identify existing gaps within these. In doing so, it offers a roadmap of actionable strategies for enhancing cross-regional resilience.

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[4] European Union External Actions Services, '3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations' (European Union External Actions Services, 2025)

Shared threat, diverse approaches: Navigating FIMI landscapes

While Europe and the Indo-Pacific share similar threat landscapes and strategic concerns, as highlighted by the first brief, respective FIMI policy responses remain varied and shaped by regional contexts, institutional structures and differing levels of information environment intervention. Understanding these nuances is crucial for building effective bridges to cooperation.

Indo-Pacific: In-between security centric and whole-of-society approaches

The Indo-Pacific region is a primary theatre for strategic competition and thus presents fertile ground for FIMI campaigns. The approach to counter FIMI activities in the Indo-Pacific countries is varied. A first distinction between the counter approaches is based on regime type.[5] While both liberal and illiberal regimes have sought to respond to foreign interference, in illiberal regimes, some countries have pursued an active or passive strategy depending on the pro-/anti- regime content of the FIMI activities.[6] Especially in Southeast Asia, legislation to tackle FIMI threats was built for double use: curb internal dissent and counter disinformation in order to preserve regime stability and control over information flows.[7] This resulted in a more direct interventionist approach in the information environment. For example, Cambodia has closed opposition-news outlets accused of spreading anti-regime narratives with external support.[8]

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[5] Clare S. M. Cho, 'Illiberal Responses to "Fake News" in Southeast Asia', *Democratization* 0, no. 0 (n.d.): 1–21 https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2024.2442395

[6] Cho.

[7] Meia Nouwens et al., 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Convergence and Divergence in the Digital Order' (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2023), https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2024/03/europe-and-the-indo-pacific-convergence-and-divergence-in-the-digital-order/

[8] Verrle Nouwes and Alexander Neill, 'Malign Interference in SouthEast Asia: Understanding and Mitigating Economic and Political Interference and Information Operations' (Royal United Services Instiute for Defence and Security Studies, 2022), https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/malign-interference-southeast-asia; Nouwens et al., 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Convergence and Divergence in the Digital Order', 2023

Similarly, Singapore implemented in 2019 the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, which punishes "false statements of fact" with severe fines.[9] The approach of these governments has been characterized by "legislative opportunism", that seeks to curb internal dissent while not entirely recognizing the nature of the threat.

In contrast, more liberal regimes have put their focus on protecting political processes and societal cohesion. They have adopted whole-of-society approaches with heavy reliance on civil society through, for example, fact checking centres and cyber literacy public initiatives.[10] This approach is usually adopted by countries that are at the frontier of FIMI activities – especially from the PRC – such as Taiwan and ROK. On the other hand, countries that have faced considerable growth in FIMI activities, such as Japan, are still in the early stages of setting a strong anti-FIMI infrastructure. Due to the shared threat coming from their Chinese neighbour, Taiwan, ROK and Japan have set up trilateral security commitments to share best practices and know-how in the face of growing foreign intervention and threats to democratic and societal resilience.

As a prominent example in the region of this whole-of-society approach, Australia defines the line between influence and foreign interference as behaviour that is covert, coercive or corrupting.[11] Highlighting the difference in use of terminology when referring to FIMI practices. In response to these types of behaviour Australia has initiated a strong political and legal response to interference threats including by introducing legislation regarding campaign finance, foreign arrangements and foreign interference and espionage.[12] Beyond legislation and intra-government task forces, Australia also engages a whole-of-society approach engaging civil society including with diaspora communities to raise awareness on foreign interference threats. For instance, the Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation engages industry and digital platforms, highlighting the need to engage industry partners and how address how their platforms are being used for interference by foreign actors.[13]

In sum, where liberal regimes promote a whole-of-society approach with a greater focus on transparency, illiberal regimes lean towards interventionism into their own information and political environment. This divergence between Indo-Pacific states and their FIMI countermeasures presents a possible challenge and point of contention in international cooperation. Due to differences in legislation, there

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[9] Meia Nouwens et al., 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Convergence and Divergence in the Digital Order' (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2023), https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2024/03/europe-and-the-indo-pacific-convergence-and-divergence-in-the-digital-order/; Verrle Nouwes and Alexander Neill, 'Malign Interference in SouthEast Asia: Understanding and Mitigating Economic and Political Interference and Information Operations' (Royal United Services Instiute for Defence and Security Studies, 2022), https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/occasional-papers/malign-interference-southeast-asia

[10] Nouwens et al., 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Convergence and Divergence in the Digital Order', 2023

[11] Amy Searight, 'Countering China's Influence Operations: Lessons from Australia', 8 May 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/countering-chinas-influence-operations-lessons-australia

[12] Australia Government, Department of Home Affairs, 'Countering Foreign Interference', The Deparment of Home Affairs, n.d., https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/national-security/countering-foreign-interference

[13] 'Disinformation and Cognitive Warfare – Perth USAsia Centre', n.d., https://perthusasia.edu.au/research-insights/publications/disinformation-and-cognitive-warfare/

exists a possible disconnect between intervening directly into the information environment versus engaging them as part of a whole-of-society approach.

Europe: Governance centric and values-based approaches

The EU has firmly acknowledged FIMI as a systemic, multidimensional threat to the democratic resilience of its members.

The last European External Action Service (EEAS) FIMI Threat Report frames the information space as a geopolitical battleground, where authoritarian actors – mainly the PRC and Russia – threaten the trust in democratic institutions, polarise societies, and disrupt elections.[14]

In response to such a threat, the EU has adopted a set of initiatives and a multi-layered strategy. This includes both proactive and reactive instruments consolidated in the FIMI Toolbox, introduced in the 2022 Strategic Compass and which relied on both societal elements – such as raising awareness and building societal resilience – diplomatic responses – including attributions and sanctions – and regulatory initiatives, like the Digital Services Act.[15] Most importantly, the EU cooperates with partners such as NATO, the G7, and Indo-Pacific partners – mainly moving along democracies in the region – to enhance a holistic response to FIMI threats.[16] In addition, the EUvsDisinfo platform, part of the EEAS East StratCom Task Force, remains the flagship project for monitoring and debunking foreign disinformation narratives.[17] Despite this, challenges persist, as there is still no single EU-wide legal definition of disinformation or misinformation. Notably, however, December 2024 marked the first instance of sanctions explicitly linked to such activities in connection with Russia.[18]

Within this context, the Netherlands adheres mostly to the EU vision. Firstly, it views (foreign) disinformation as a threat to democratic systems, with a particular attention on vulnerable groups within society.[19] This vision has been translated into a government-wide strategy for tackling disinformation, which is based on prevention measures through societal involvement, education, and awareness.

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[14] European Union External Actions Services, '3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations', 2025

[15] 'EEAS Stratcom's Responses to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) in 2023 | EEAS', accessed 28 May 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eeas-stratcom%E2%80%99s-responses-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-fimi-2023_en

[16] European Union External Actions Services, '3rd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats: Exposing the Architecture of FIMI Operations' (European Union External Actions Services, 2025)

[17] 'EUvsDisinfo: How to Debunk over 6,500 Disinformation Cases in Four Years? | EEAS', accessed 28 May 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/euvsdisinfo-how-debunk-over-6500-disinformation-cases-four-years_en

[18] Nouwens et al., 'Europe and the Indo-Pacific: Convergence and Divergence in the Digital Order', 2023

[19] Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 'Ongewenste buitenlandse inmenging - AIVD', onderwerp (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 5 June 2023), https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/ongewenste-buitenlandse-inmenging

These efforts are tailored to counter the content itself and the producers of such narratives, as well as holding the platforms accountable for their spreading.[20]

While the European Union and the Netherlands recognize the relevance of FIMI threats, the policy in the EU is grounded on a whole-of-society model that combines diplomacy, regulation, and societal resilience. Yet, there are notable implementation gaps: a unified legal definition of FIMI threats is lacking, enforcement mechanisms remain fragmented, national legal frameworks vary, and attribution standards – while being developed at the supranational level – are not universally adopted across member states. In addition, the Netherlands and the EU might also benefit from a deeper understanding of how to tackle FIMI threats when resilience measures are not enough and pre-planned response implemented, moving from a reactive to a proactive approach.

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[20] Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 'Aanpak ongewenste buitenlandse inmenging (OBI) - Buitenlandse inmenging en beïnvloeding in Nederland - Rijksoverheid.nl', onderwerp (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 4 July 2024), https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/buitenlandse-inmenging-en-beinvloeding/aanpak-ongewenste-buitenlandse-inmenging

Bridging countermeasures: Existing cooperation avenues

Cooperation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific is taking shape across three levels: 1) bilateral initiatives between the EU and individual Indo-Pacific countries, 2) minilateral efforts, and 3) through broader multilateral cooperation that bring together a plurality of organizations and countries. This section highlights the most prominent existing avenues of cooperation, with the goal to identify possible gaps and opportunities.

Bilateral cooperation

At the bilateral level, there are multiple noticeable examples of cooperation. Among these, the EU-Japan Security and Defence Partnership of 2023 laid the groundwork for a closer security partnership, including in disinformation and information manipulation.[21] Both sides share concerns over state-sponsored FIMI activities and are exploring joint responses, though operational initiatives remain nascent.[22] Similar nascent efforts have been undertaken with other actors in the region. For example, India and the EU have completed their eight India-EU Cyber Dialogue, a set of fora where issues concerning the cyberspace – including FIMI – are discussed by both parts.[23] Although the cooperation is still at an early stage, there is potential for further expansion of such collaboration. In comparison, more

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[21] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The European Union-Japan Security and Defence Partnership," 2024, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/pressite_000001_00703.html; Valérie Niquet, "Ambitions and Limits: The Deepening Security Dialogue Between Japan and the European Union" (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2024), https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Ambitions-and-Limits-The-Deepening-Security-Dialogue-Between-Japan-and-the-European-Union.pdf#:~:text=health%2C%20climate%2C%20environment%2C%20sustainable%20finance%2C,shared%20values%20and%20a%20growing

[22] Inés Arco and Oriol Farrés, 'Japan and the EU: Global Partners for a Secure and Prosperous Indo-Pacific' (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, 2024), https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/japan-and-eu-global-partners-secure-and-prosperous-indo-pacific

[23] Patryk Kugiel et al., 'Risks, Resilience, Response (3R) - INdia-EU Cooperation on Russian and Chinese Disinformation and Propaganda' (Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan, 2023), https://www.pism.pl/webroot/upload/files/Raport/ORS-PIMS.pdf#:~:text=match%20at%20L122%20constitutes%20%E2%80%9Cdisinformation%E2%80%9D,about%20the%20nature%20of%20disinformation. Kugiel et al. Kugiel et al

structured cooperation frameworks have been established between the EU and South Korea. The 2023 ROK's summit with the EU elevated security cooperation to include countering disinformation alongside cyber defence.[24] Regular EU-ROK strategic dialogues are being set up, signalling closer coordination against FIMI. However, concrete joint programmes are still underdeveloped.

Minilateral cooperation

For minilateral initiatives, the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, US) has established a Countering Disinformation Working Group to promote information-sharing and build a resilient regional information environment.[25] Quad leaders in 2024 reaffirmed regular cooperation against FIMI as a core objective.

Multilateral cooperation

More broadly, the EU engages ASEAN on information integrity through capacity-building and human rights frameworks. In January 2024, the ASEAN human rights body, AICHR, and the EU held a joint Disinformation and Misinformation Dialogue to share best practices, know-how and foster a common understanding.[26] The EU supported programmes like the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) to facilitate such exchanges.[27] At the same time, the consensus-based approach within the ASEAN and its varying political will with regards to FIMI could hinder any deeper and structural cooperation.

At the multilateral level, NATO has made counter-disinformation a key focus in its cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners (Australia, Japan, ROK, New Zealand), launching initiatives in 2023-2024 that address disinformation by sharing best practices primarily in regard to Russian FIMI campaigns.[28] Similarly, G7, through its Rapid Response Mechanisms (RRM), intensified focus on Indo-Pacific FIMI challenges under Japan's 2023 Presidency, with the EEAS tasked to lead a working

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24 The Polish Institute for International Affairs, 'EU-South Korea Extend Cooperation Beyond the Economy', *The Polish Institute for International Affairs* (blog), 2023, https://pism.pl/publications/eu-south-korea-extend-cooperation-beyond-the-economy. The Polish Institute for International Affairs. The Polish Institute for International Affairs
25 Anthony Albanese, 'Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States', Prime Minister of Australia, 2024, https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-leaders-australia-india-japan-and-united-states
26 ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, "Press Release – AICHR-EU Dialogue on Disinformation and Misinformation," ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (blog), 2024, https://aichr.org/news/press-release-aichr-eu-dialogue-on-disinformation-and-misinformation/
27 European Union External Actions Services, 'EU and ASEAN Launch Two Flagship Programmes: ARISE Plus and E-READI', 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/43068
28 European Union External Actions Services, "EU and ASEAN Launch Two Flagship Programmes: ARISE Plus and E-READI," 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/43068

group on collective response.[29] Australia and New Zealand function as observers to the G7 RRM.[30] The G7 RRM has "intensified its focus on the Indo-Pacific since Japan's 2023 presidency. An integral part of cooperation in countering foreign interference is intelligence sharing. Intelligence alliances also play a key role in sharing FIMI-related threats. The Five Eyes intelligence alliances (US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) can play a key role in sharing FIMI-related intelligence within this group.[31] However, this format is highly secretive and operates outside the EU-NATO framework.

Overall, the degree of cooperation between the EU and Info-Pacific partners on countering FIMI is steadily expanding, though it remains uneven and nascent in many areas. Countries that show greater strategic and institutional alignment are more likely to identify similar threats and coordinate more effectively on countering FIMI. In contrast, multilateral initiatives show clear limits due to internal political and strategic divergences. These trends point to the need for targeted measures to enhance and operationalize cooperation.

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[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'The Responses to Information Manipulation, Including Spread of Disinformation', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pagewe_000001_00052.html

[30] 'G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Statement on Russian Influence Campaign | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade', 18 January 2025, https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/g7-rapid-response-mechanism-rrm-statement-russian-influence-campaign

[31] Wesley Wark, 'How Allies Do It: Five Eyes Foreign Influence Transparency Registries' (Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2024), https://www.cigionline.org/publications/how-allies-do-it-five-eyes-foreign-influence-transparency-registries/

Enhancing cooperation: existing limitations and recommendations

Current efforts, albeit promising, remain fragmented which leads to several operational and strategic gaps that hinder cooperation. This section highlights three main cooperation difficulties about current initiatives, while also identifying corresponding opportunities. Since, apart from being obstacles, diverse approaches do offer learning opportunities and a benchmark for further cooperation.

1. **Create opportunity for sharing of threat analysis and early warning signs to facilitate coordinated attribution and responses through a common lexicon**

   One of the central barriers to effective cooperation is the inconsistent use of terminology, as also highlighted in the first brief. Different uses of definitions, terminologies and methodologies lead to coordination deficiencies both within and across the regions.[32] As such, the lack of a universally applied lexicon for both identifying as well as analyzing FIMI campaigns hinders intelligence sharing between regions and domestic prosecution efforts. Divergent legal interpretation, stemming in part from a difference in lexicon, in turn hinders the ability to share threat analysis and carry out coordinated attribution and response frameworks. Therefore, fostering a common lexicon will not only aid threat analysis and the sharing of early warning signals, but it also addresses current lag grey zones which hinder attribution and prosecution.[33] However, these coordination efforts can be hampered by a lack of shared data governance frameworks. Specifically, regulatory inconsistencies in data protection and privacy regulations are a major problem.

2. **Formalize existing but underutilized Europe-Indo-Pacific strategic dialogues for policy development and operational exchanges**

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[32] Laura Jasper, "Balancing Act: Ethical and Legal Dilemmas of Behavioural Influencing in Military Operations" (HCSS, November 1, 2023), https://hcss.nl/report/balancing-act-ethical-legal-dilemmas-behavioural-influencing-in-military-operations/

[33] Laura Jasper, "Balancing Act: Ethical and Legal Dilemmas of Behavioural Influencing in Military Operations" (HCSS, November 1, 2023), https://hcss.nl/report/balancing-act-ethical-legal-dilemmas-behavioural-influencing-in-military-operations/

Regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives often portray certain limits due to differences in political will, or – specific to the Indo-Pacific – different degrees of liberal regimes. As outlined, there is a range of existing efforts ongoing. There, however, remains a vast number of underutilized channels for strategic dialogues. As ongoing initiatives remain limited in scope, frequency and impact.

Responses to FIMI campaigns are often unilateral or occur within a single cooperation structure within regions. Given the vast number of existing initiatives, it is opportune to utilize these channels rather than establishing new ones, which would require additional capacity building. These dialogues can provide a consistent platform for both high-level strategic coordination, as well as operational collaboration.

3. **Bridge differences in information environment governance by engaging industry in a multi-stakeholder, norms-based approach**

   Lastly, the internal political and strategic divergencies across partner countries pose a possible dilemma regarding the level of intervention in the information environment that is deemed appropriate. Coordinated dialogue with non-governmental partners such as the technology industry and social media platforms is still mostly lacking. Establishing such a venue for engagement with the major platforms and industry partners that operate in both regions offers the opportunity for consistent global standards, broader data access for research and transparency in moderation. Part of this multistakeholder approach is the discussion of agreed upon norms and values within the digital domain.[34]

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[34] Tim Sweijs, "Red Lines & Baselines: Towards a European Multistakeholder Approach to Counter Disinformation" (HCSS, October 11, 2021), https://hcss.nl/report/red-lines-baselines/

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