



RE-IMAGINED INDIA-EU PARTNERSHIP: A PERSPECTIVE ON CHANGING GLOBAL POLITICAL REALITIES

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ABSTRACT:

In the dynamic context of global geopolitics, the India-EU partnership has emerged as a cornerstone of international relations, adapting to challenges and opportunities posed by shifting power structures. Established in 1962 with the European Economic Community, it has matured into a significant strategic alliance, particularly after the Cold War. Today, the EU is one of India's largest trading blocs, with an economic relationship shaped by bilateral agreements aimed at enhancing trade competitiveness and investment protections.

The EU's current efforts to diversify its economic dependencies beyond China highlight India's growing relevance. With its expanding economy, demographic advantages, and central role in regional stability, India is uniquely positioned as a key partner. The partnership also extends to global concerns, including climate change, green technologies, and Indo-Pacific security, making it both economically and strategically vital.

However, progress faces constraints. Ongoing negotiations over a Free Trade Agreement remain stalled due to differences on issues such as human rights, labour mobility, and regulatory standards. These challenges underscore the need for a pragmatic recalibration that balances political sensitivities with shared economic and security imperatives.

Ultimately, the partnership holds the potential to shape global outcomes by reinforcing a multipolar world order. By embracing flexibility and focusing on shared democratic values and strategic goals, India and the EU can elevate their cooperation from transactional exchanges to a robust alliance with global influence.

Keywords: *India-EU Partnership, Geopolitics, Strategic Alliance, Trade Agreements, Indo-Pacific.*

INTRODUCTION :

I. Historical Recap of the Partnership:

In the evolving landscape of global politics, the re-imagined India-EU Partnership stands as a crucial focal point. This perspective delves into the transformative dynamics of international relations, addressing the altered realities that shape the collaboration between India and the European Union. As geopolitical forces undergo profound shifts, exploring the intricacies of this strategic alliance becomes imperative for understanding the shared challenges and opportunities in the contemporary world.

The first diplomatic relation established between India and EU was in 1962. However, the beginning of this partnership was not carried out with the current EU rather it was with the

European Economic Community. It came into being in the late 1950s by signing the treaty of Rome which will take the present form of EU in 1993. The partnership has been specifically smooth from the beginning as it has not witnessed any major tussle along the nascent years. However, the Western Economic countries were the part of the Capitalist Bloc and India was much more tilted towards the Communist Bloc i.e. Soviet Union. This created a natural difference which resulted as an obstruction between the full potential partnership especially during the Cold War era. The end of the Cold War was followed by the disintegration of the

Soviet Union and eventually rejuvenation of India-EU ties.

The trade partnership between India and EU has evolved since the 1970s, which led the EU to become India's largest trading bloc today. India's largest trade partners are USA, China and EU, which shows EU's significance in India's trade diplomacy, especially from a developmental perspective.

In 1971, the EU imposed a Generalised System of Preferences on India which exempted it from higher import duties on certain products to maintain competitiveness in European markets. Further in 1981, India-EU signed a Commercial and Economic Cooperation Agreement which makes the trade and commerce perspective much more vibrant and potent. In 2005, both the partners commenced a Joint Action Plan to rectify the direction and potential improvement in trade relations. India and EU started negotiating a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA). However, it has been stuck on a number of issues and the negotiation is still going on. In 2020, the EU had urged India to negotiate a Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement (BIPA) to end the stalemate of BTIA.

Impact of India on Europe's future:

It has become prevalent for the European Nations to reconsider their global economy and trade relationships beyond its Chinese reliance. There is a need for the EU to rebalance its deep ties with other developing nations of G7. In these circumstances, one of the prominent partnerships that Europe will need to strengthen is bound to be the one with India: the country which is already the fifth-largest economy in the world and is poised to overtake Germany and Japan within this decade to become the third behind the US and China.

India is becoming an important player in the world order and is growing with immense potential in various sectors. It is being considered as a critical partnership in achieving

the strategic priorities of Europe. First and foremost, a huge growing labour force will push India to emerge as one of the future alternative suppliers of manufacturing goods as well as liberal reforms in the market and tax simplification through a national Value-Added tax (VAT) could mark new heights. This transition will reduce the reliance of the world (and Europe) on Chinese markets. Secondly, India's escalating energy demands make its involvement imperative in any viable response to the global climate crisis. Additionally, situated as the world's most populous democracy at the centre of the burgeoning Indo-Pacific region, India plays a crucial role as a stabilizing force in an increasingly precarious geopolitical landscape.

The ambitious project brought by the current government which includes 'Make in India' has been a great attraction for Foreign Direct Investments, workforce skill development and the reduction of the administrative costs of doing business. These are the potentials of the new age India, and any nation losing onto understanding the upcoming relevance India will have in the global political order would have a losing hand on development, trade as well as diplomatic relations.

To make this partnership work, it is necessary to have a positive outlook on the potential of each side, understanding the changing dynamics, evaluating the possibility of growth and recognising the downhills of this partnership and work accordingly to make this a success. The renewed trade discussion since May 2021 between India and EU as well as EU-India Strategic Partnership's 'Roadmap to 2025' are some fruitful opportunities for the EU to have a new perspective and approach towards a partnership with India.

The Changing Global Political Realities:

The perception of the EU toward India is that of a valuable partner against the fight for

upholding democratic values. Both the countries share similar commitment for strengthening democracy in the world of uprising authoritarian power like China. Though the EU doesn't have a clean road without criticism. The European Civil Society particularly is condemning India's illiberal nationalist rulings, violation of human rights and restriction on freedom of press.

Additionally, overlooking the crucial factors of Indians discussed in the above section, which will be important for EU's strategic priorities, the EU policy for India is still dominated by its image from the past. This image of India is majorly surrounded by the impression of poverty, food insecurity, trade barriers, tussle between government regulations and private enterprises, weak infrastructure, coal-based energy resources, lack of IT services and lesser modern opportunities. These views of past are imminently reflected in the Europe's policy engagement with India; an access focused Trade Policy; lowering down of barriers for EU exports in exchange of visas for Indian workers; climate change policy convinces India that usage of coal-based resources is deemed irresponsible; economic development policy concentrates on open market economies; institutional reform as well as capacity building and security policy tries to persuade to stand by the side of west.

The EU often lacks an appreciation for India's post-colonial identity, marked by a strong commitment to non-alignment in its strategic approach since gaining independence. India sees itself as a leader in the developing world. Consequently, many Europeans find it challenging to comprehend India's enduring alliances with Russia in energy and defence, especially in the face of Russia's infringement on Ukrainian sovereignty, which contradicts fundamental principles of the international order. Similarly, Europeans are often puzzled by India's close cooperation with China in the BRICS grouping to develop alternative models of

global economic governance, while at the same time being actively engaged in border hostilities in the Himalayas.

These policies of the EU of engaging with Indians are doomed to be met with failure of conduct on the similar lines. Both sides need to start afresh to make it a successful partnership. In recent years, efforts from both sides were evident in their national as well as international policies. Since 2004, the two sides have maintained a 'strategic partnership' under the EU-India Strategic Partnership. This collaboration is built upon shared values and mutual interests, spanning diverse areas such as political and security matters, trade and investment, development cooperation, energy, climate change, and people-to-people exchanges. The partnership underwent its most recent update in July 2020 during the 15th EU-India Summit, introducing the 'Strategic Roadmap to 2025.' This roadmap advocates for enhanced cooperation in foreign policy, security, trade and investment, climate-friendly solutions, digital technologies, and connectivity.

In May 2021, the EU and India launched the EU-India Connectivity Partnership, aligning with the strategic goals. Focused on transportation, digital connectivity, and sustainable energy, this initiative is part of the broader EU Indo-Pacific Strategy and the €300 billion EU Global Gateway initiative for 2021-2027. The partnership aims to enhance economic, social, and political connections, with funding from public EU and Indian institutions, emphasizing the involvement of private sector capital.

In April 2022, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the formal launch of the EU-India Trade and Technology Council, following the model involving the US and EU. The council, established in February 2023, comprises three working groups focusing on key areas such as digital connectivity, artificial

intelligence, 5G/6G, high performance and quantum computing, cloud systems, cybersecurity; green technologies, circular economy, clean energy; and cooperation in multilateral forums. Subsequently, in June 2022, the EU and India initiated tripartite negotiations for a trade agreement, investment protection agreement, and geographical indications agreement. These talks aim to revive discussions that stalled in 2013, following India's withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2019. The success of these negotiations will determine the strength of the positive momentum in EU-India relations.

The EU-India strategic partnership holds the potential to emerge as a major economic and political force in the upcoming years, with enhanced economic ties being crucial for realizing this potential by 2030. Recent institutional reforms in Europe, particularly the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, have integrated the EU's Common Commercial Policy into the Union's overarching objectives, granting increased powers to address global challenges. The von der Leyen-led Commission, since 2019, has explicitly defined and exercised its powers, aiming to make the EU more geostrategic. Presently, the Commission is redefining its mandate to enhance the resilience of the European economy by 'de-risking' trade and investment relations. The EU-India relationship is instrumental in achieving these goals, offering mutual benefits—India as a valuable trade partner with access to a growing market, and the EU as a source of investment, technology, and market access for India's growth.

Common aspirations binding India and EU:

Though there might be some unresolved issues between the partnership still there are various common aspirations in different arenas on which India and EU stand in unison. The partnership supports a multipolar world

founded on liberal values that included democracy, sovereignty, respect for territorial integrity and rule of law. Multipolarity represents a state where there is no dominance of a single nation, rather we have multiple countries having huge influence over the world order. This acts as check and balance to negate any kind of bipolarity during the Cold war and further division of countries in two separate blocs. However, the near future expects a state of tripolarity with the USA, China and India being the biggest influencers.

Both India and the EU are actively engaged in the UN Peacekeeping Missions. India has hugely provided human forces to various missions during the British era and even after independence. On the other hand, the EU majorly provides financial assistance to the peace missions. Other commonalities where India and EU have similar aspirations are prevention of terrorism, cyber-attacks and piracy. Terrorism is that aspect which cannot be resolved by nations on their own, it reflects a need of global cooperation which is usually urged by both India and EU. India and EU are working together for prevention of Cyber-attack as well as online piracy. Sea piracy is also a prominent issue which stands as a common agenda in the lists of both partners.

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The partnership is prominent in working on Climate Change as well as Green Technologies. It also cooperated and coordinated on the freedom of navigation in the maritime arena to avoid the dominance of any particular country, and to pertain the International Waters as per the Rule of Law. Except these, both India and EU are collaborating to limit Chinese Authoritarianism in the Indo-Pacific region. The US 'pivot to Asia', China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and its Maritime Silk Road Strategy have put maritime security at the top of India's strategic agenda. The EU and India could

become key partners in maritime security and counter piracy.

In the tenure of the NDA Government, India has dynamically worked in the field of international trade, cultural and diplomatic relations which has caught the sight of various collaborations. It has also enhanced its relationship with European Nations in recent years. It has often looked at engaging with Europe through big powers of Europe like France, Germany, Italy and Spain but mistakenly neglected engagement with other states. Though recently, it is also trying to engage with Central European Nations through IT services and digital technologies. In 2018, India held its first India-Nordic summit and held engagements with Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.

Challenges and Way Forward:

Some of the major challenges that fall in the way of a strong partnership between India and EU is the stalemate of BTIA negotiations due to differences in tariffs such as on wine or automobiles which India intends to increase, and EU tries to lower down. Europe, on the other hand, is not satisfied with the IPR regime in India. It is also facing inconvenience due to compulsory licensing in pharmaceutical industries in the Indian Market. Both partners are also unable to agree on the market access as well as the labour movement.

Though the EU have agreed to sign a Free Trade Agreement, it disagrees with the movement of labour which seems problematic for India. EU member states need to come at a consensus among themselves that the FTA is in favour of economic ties and European interests. The dairy industry having major producers like Netherlands and countries in the temperate regions are more efficient which would affect the huge domestic dairy producers back in India. Hence there are a number of sectors where both the sides are having some tussle which is acting as a barrier for signing of an FTA. Both the sides

face prominent issues in Data Protection Laws and EU's rhetoric on Kashmir Issue and Human Rights Violations stands as a major impediment in the fostering partnership.

However, recognizing and navigating the political constraints on each side, coupled with a genuine effort to actualize shared values, will be instrumental. The forthcoming years of this decade hold paramount significance for India and the EU as they adapt their economies to a new strategic context and internal demands. A compelling argument exists for an enhanced partnership that aligns with their respective endeavours. However, this collaboration must extend beyond diplomatic and trade negotiations, necessitating the involvement of political leadership, the proactive engagement of regulators and officials at all levels, and increasingly intimate people-to-people interactions

CONCLUSION:

This paper demonstrates that the India-EU partnership is no longer a peripheral relationship but a pivotal axis for de-risking globalization and sustaining a rules-based order. Historically cordial yet under-leveraged ties have gained momentum as the EU diversifies beyond China and India seeks technology, investment, and resilient value chains. The analysis rightly foregrounds convergences of trade, climate, connectivity, and Indo-Pacific security, while identifying stubborn frictions: tariff peaks (autos, alcohol), investment protection, data adequacy, IPR and pharmaceuticals, Mode-4 mobility, and values-linked conditionalities. A credible pathway is incrementalism with ambition: (i) sectoral “early harvests” in green tech, digital public infrastructure, and critical materials; (ii) a modern investment pact aligned with India's new BIT template; (iii) mutual-recognition pilots and regulatory dialogues (CBAM, due diligence, data flows); (iv) mobility schemes for skills-in-

shortage; and (v) deeper maritime domain awareness and supply-chain security in the Indo-Pacific. The partnership's strategic value will hinge on insulating cooperation from episodic disputes and building thick institutional linkages that survive electoral cycles. If both sides adopt a pragmatic, problems-first approach anchored in shared democratic interests, the relationship can move from episodic to systemic—shaping standards, securing sea-lanes, accelerating the green transition, and lending ballast to a multipolar, law-governed international order.

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