

Focus 61 - EU-India Summit: Vision and Mission

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India and the European Union are committed to a framework for strategic cooperation until 2025. They have vowed to cooperate in their response to the coronavirus pandemic, as well as within the United Nations Security Council. Towards this end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with the European Council's President Charles Michel and the European Commission's President Ursula Von der Leyen via videoconferencing on Wednesday, July 15, 2020.

In an initiative to revive talks on a free trade agreement which were suspended since 2013, the two sides announced a "high-level dialogue" between India's Commerce Minister and the EU Trade Commissioner, who would try and forward the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA). "India and the EU are natural partners", Prime Minister Modi said in his opening remarks. "Our partnership is important for global peace and stability, and this reality is clearer given the situation around the world." He also referred to shared "universal values" of democracy, pluralism, inclusivity, respect for international institutions, and multilateralism between India and the EU.

As the EU and India head to deepen their smooth, cordial and beneficial relationship, some regional and global issues pose a challenge. Raising border issues, refugee problems and great power rivalries seem to constitute almost insurmountable obstacles.

In particular, the two sides discussed India's tensions with China at the Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh and elsewhere, the situation with Iran, and concerns over cross-border terrorism from Pakistan. The recent Chinese aggression on the Indian border in Ladakh's Galwan valley escalated into a series of major clashes between the two countries. The EU's investment in China is considerably larger than that in India. Though the EU entertains close ties with both China and India, the European Council's President Michel said, "we are in favour of a peaceful solution and support the efforts to maintain a channel of dialogue."

When asked at the briefing which strategic ties the EU valued more - those with India or China - Von der Leyen answered that ties with each country were "very different", although all players had a common interest in tackling climate change and building trade.

"The difference is indeed that we share with India the fact that we are democracies, and [we are] committed to defending our values," said Von der Leyen, who has visited India in her past role as German Defence Minister.

The EU's leadership also raised concerns over the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as regards the Citizenship Amendment Act. "Regarding the Citizenship law, you know that in the European Parliament this was an important topic, and we raised this issue in our talks. I would like to say that we trust Indian institutions. We understand the Supreme Court will have a role to play to assess this legislation," said Michel at a press briefing after the talks. "We took a decision with India to continue a dialogue on human rights in order to exchange best practices and have the best understanding on how to tackle this issue for India and the EU," he added.

The two sides also issued a joint political statement; a five-year roadmap for the India-EU strategic partnership; a civil nuclear research and development cooperation agreement between EURATOM and the Department of Atomic Energy; and a declaration on "resource efficiency and circular economy" intended to exchange best practices in a range of areas and ensure the renewal of their science and technology agreement for another five years. Both sides stressed the importance of bilateral trade, as the EU is India's largest trading partner, while India is the EU's ninth largest trading partner.

Ahead of the summit, E.U. officials had expressed concerns about a "protectionist" tone to Modi's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" slogan. However, the Prime Minister conveyed in the talks on Wednesday that the program was aimed at "integrating domestic production in India to global supply chains," said MEA Secretary (West) Vikas Swarup, while briefing the media

(Haider, 2020). “Prime Minister’s statement that Atmanirbhar Bharat would be open to the world should be music to the ears of European companies,” he added.

According to diplomats, the now launched high-level dialogue on trade and investment is a key takeaway of the EU-India summit - which was last held in 2017 yet failed to make headway on FTA negotiations (which began in 2007 but stopped in 2013). “We have been at it too long. It is time, especially with the COVID recession staring at all and an aggressive China, to leverage each other’s strengths and push better economics between India and the EU,” said former Indian Ambassador to Brussels, Manjeev Singh Puri (Haider , 2020).

Partnership for peace and stability

The 15th Summit between India and the European Union (EU) was held in a virtual format on 15th July 2020. India was represented by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The EU was represented by Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council, and Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission.

The leaders decided to strengthen the EU-India Strategic Partnership, based on shared principles and values of democracy, freedom, rule of law, and respect for human rights – and aiming at delivering concrete benefits for citizens in both the EU and India. The world's two largest democracies affirmed their determination to promote effective multilateralism – a rules-based multilateral order with the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its core. Cooperation is to be bolstered in the international fora so as to reinforce international security, strengthen preparedness and response for global health emergencies, enhance global economic stability and inclusive growth, as well as implement the Sustainable Development Goals and protect the climate and environment. In this context, the EU is looking forward to India’s G20 Presidency in 2022, and its membership in the UN Security Council in 2021-2022.

As the world is fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders agreed that global cooperation and solidarity are essential to protect lives and to mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. Those involved emphasized the importance of strengthening our preparedness and response capacities; sharing information in a free, transparent and prompt manner; and improving international response capacities – including through relevant international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and drawing on lessons learned from current global responses.

Leaders noted mutual synergies in the field of healthcare through shared capacities, experiences, and strengths in the production of pharmaceuticals and vaccines, as well as healthcare research and development, diagnostics, and treatment. They discussed prospects for global collaboration and sustained funding for the development, deployment and accessibility of effective diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines so as to make them available to all at an affordable price. Those present called for the future COVID-19 vaccine to become a global common good. It was agreed to intensify cooperation between India and the EU as regards health security and pandemic crisis preparedness and responses. Leaders underlined the importance of ramping up the manufacturing of vital medical supplies and stepping up cooperation so as to ensure a continued flow of these supplies, agricultural products, raw materials, and other goods and services across borders.

Leaders also agreed to further develop their trade and investment relations so as to unleash their full potential – particularly in the context of a post-COVID-19 economic recovery, and so as to support sustainable growth and employment on both sides. Those involved reaffirmed their commitment to work towards balanced, ambitious, and mutually beneficial trade and investment agreements, opening markets, and creating a level playing field on both sides. It was also agreed that a regular High-Level Dialogue was to be established at the ministerial level so as to provide guidance to the bilateral trade and investment relations and address multilateral issues of mutual interest. The High-Level Dialogue will aim to foster progress on trade and investment agreements, address trade irritants, and improve conditions for traders and investors on both sides – as well as discuss supply chain linkages. The EU and India agreed to keep the global trading system open – with the WTO as the bedrock of a rules-based multilateral trading system – and to step up cooperation so as to preserve, strengthen, and reform the WTO. This cooperation should address today's challenges effectively, including post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts, aiming for sustainable, socially just, and resource-efficient economies. The blocks will work together so as to make the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference a success, yielding concrete results in this regard. The leaders welcomed the G20 Action Plan to support the global economy and underlined the need to assist most vulnerable countries. The EU and India will enhance coordination on global economic governance, notably within the framework of the G20. They will continue working together so as to promote debt sustainability, including in the G20 framework.

Resolute and coordinated action is key to tackle the generational challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement, including as regards nationally determined contributions. The EU put forward the submission of its long-term greenhouse gas emission development strategy and India will strive to submit its own strategy, as nationally determined. Leaders welcomed the ongoing cooperation between the EU and India under the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership. The EU and India will engage constructively in the global stock take in 2023, the outcome of which shall inform the updating and enhancing, in a nationally determined manner, of actions and support under the Paris Agreement's relevant provisions.

The EU and India will reinforce their cooperation in the International Solar Alliance (ISA) so as to promote the deployment of solar energy, and in the International Platform on Sustainable Finance (IPSF) so as to mobilize private capital towards environmentally sustainable investments. The EU looks forward to cooperating with the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) launched by India so as to ensure that infrastructures are resilient to climate change. The Leadership Group for Industry Transition, launched at the UN Climate Summit in 2019, constitutes an important initiative intending to tackle the climate crisis. Those present also agreed to cooperate closely in developing an ambitious post-2020 global framework to protect biodiversity – to be adopted at the 2021 UN Biodiversity Conference. A high-level dialogue will support mutual understandings and the definition of a common approach towards these issues. Leaders supported an ambitious mandate for an international chemical and waste management framework beyond 2020, for consideration at the fifth International Conference on Chemical Management in Bonn in 2021.

The EU and India will enhance their partnership in support of sustainable modernization. They will boost cooperation so as to support the clean energy transition, resource efficiency and circular economy, as well as the necessary technological leaps – while opening new business opportunities. The partners will further develop cooperation on smart and sustainable urbanization, information and communication technology, transport, space, and health security. They agreed to jointly tackle water issues, air pollution, plastic and marine litter. Exchanges on research and innovation will be increased so as to further underpin progress in these areas. Leaders welcomed the continued fusion research cooperation within the ITER project.

Those present discussed ways to harness human-centric digitalization so as to develop inclusive economies and societies. They agreed to enhance convergences between their regulatory frameworks so as to ensure a high level of protection of personal data and privacy, including through possible data adequacy decisions, and thus facilitate safe and secure cross border data flows. The EU and India will upgrade their dialogue and cooperation on technology. They will engage in 5G and artificial intelligence so as to promote global standards and foster their safe and ethical development.

Leaders agreed to jointly promote a transparent, viable, inclusive, sustainable, comprehensive, and rules-based approach to connectivity so as to ensure that projects are environmentally, socially, and fiscally sustainable, as well as provide a level playing field for businesses. They recalled in this regard the importance of the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment and the G20 Operational Guidelines for Sustainable

Financing. Those involved agreed to explore concrete initiatives, including a possible future comprehensive connectivity partnership, so as to improve connectivity between the EU and India and seek synergies between their cooperation on connectivity with third countries – including in the Indo-Pacific region. They welcomed the ongoing activity of the European Investment Bank in India and the upcoming planned investments of €550 million in the Pune and Bhopal Metro Rail Projects. The EU and India both recognize the private sector's key role and the importance of incentivizing sustainable private financing.

Those present reaffirmed their strong commitment to global peace and security, disarmament, and non-proliferation – as well as to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including its financing and radicalization. The EU and India will intensify exchanges and cooperation in this regard. Leaders agreed to launch a dialogue on maritime security and consultations on security and defence, as well as enhance naval cooperation. They underlined the need to preserve safety and stability in the Indian Ocean. Those involved welcomed the launch of negotiations on a working arrangement between the Europol and the Central Bureau of Investigations so as to support law enforcement authorities both in the EU's Member States and in India so as to prevent and combat organized crime and terrorism. Those present also confirmed their full support to an open, free, stable and secure cyberspace, as well as a commitment to foster responsible and liable behaviour by all actors in the cyberspace. They underlined the need to increase global cyber resilience, including in the health sector. The EU and India will continue to cooperate on both international and regional issues of common interest, including as regards Iran and Afghanistan.

India and the EU reiterated their commitment to human rights, including gender equality and women empowerment, in all spheres of life – and restated the importance they attach to their cooperation. In this regard, one looks forward to the next dialogue to be held in New Delhi. Both partners aim to enhance interaction in the international fora, particularly in the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council.

Leaders welcomed active people-to-people exchanges – including among students, researchers, professionals, businesspersons & tourists – as part of the implementation of the Joint Declaration on Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM). They noted the progress achieved under the High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (HLDMM) to streamline the movement of people in both directions, in line with applicable migration and mobility rules. Those present also encouraged cultural exchanges and educational cooperation between India and the EU.

Leaders adopted the “EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025” so as to guide cooperation between the EU and India over the next five years. Those involved welcomed the signing of the Euratom-India Agreement on research and development cooperation as regards peaceful uses of nuclear energy, facilitating the use of science and technology. Both sides also agreed to organize a high-level India-EU digital investment forum to further develop their trade and investment relations by establishing a high-level trade and investment dialogue at the ministerial level. Enhancing conditions for traders and investors and cooperation on sustainable modernization by boosting clean energy transition, resource efficiency and circular economy were the other concerns. Those present also adopted a Joint Declaration on Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy and welcomed the upcoming renewal of the EU-India Science and Technology Agreement for another five years. They agreed to reconvene for the 16th India-EU Summit in 2021.

The major takeaway from the summit was the five-years roadmap concerning the future India-EU relationship. Dubbed as ‘natural partners’, both sides discussed a wide spectrum of issues. In this realm, both have mapped out a common approach for cooperation so as to mitigate regional and global issues.

Rising global challenges have intensified serious issues among various countries. The recent global pandemic has increased the role and responsibilities of democratic countries as well as multilateral organizations. Emerging from the ashes of two World Wars, the European Union (EU) has proved to be the most significant player - established as a regional and global leader.

The basic foundational pillars of the EU include respect for human rights, rule of law and democratic principles. Despite being the largest promoter of democracy, many international actors have challenged the democratic values and supranational nature of the EU. However, over the years, the EU has emerged as a leading political and economic player, shaping international standards. It has influenced many countries through partnership on common grounds beyond its borders – and established long-standing, mutual relationships.

This synergetic tendency of the EU has brought it closer to India. The EU and India, both called ‘Unions of diversity’, share not only common values such as rule of law and democracy but also a good prospect of mutual respect, along with common benefits. The EU recognizes India as a regional and global leader – while India, a growing economy, needs a powerful partner like the EU.

In order to strengthen the relationship further, the partners have held regular summits so as to discuss common issues (15 such summits have been held thus far). These India-EU annual summits started taking place in 2000 – the strategic partnership began in 2004. The strength of the EU-India partnership can be estimated by the fact that India is EU’s largest trading partner and the bilateral trade between EU-India in 2018-19 stood at \$115.6 billion – with exports valued at \$57.17 billion and imports worth \$58.42 billion.

Besides trade and economy, the EU is of great importance to India, and vice-versa. Over the past years, both have worked together on countering terrorism, cybersecurity, sustainable energy, and climatic changes.

Conclusion

As the world is grappling with new challenges due to the global pandemic, the EU and India have thought this to constitute the best occasion to come together so as to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the deadly virus along with other reciprocal issues. In the current scenario, this summit holds great value – as the Indian Prime Minister expressed himself before the summit: “I am confident this summit will further strengthen our economies as we have cultural linkages with Europe”.

Multilateral commitments between EU and India need to be boosted so as to combat global challenges. India has played a key role mobilizing itself during the pandemic, and the EU is fully dedicated to the partnership. However, this multifaceted and political alliance needs to be structured.

In the summit, India received a huge applause from the EU on securing the G20 presidency and being elected for the UNSC for the years 2021 and 2022. Prime Minister Modi said that “we share pluralism, inclusivity, multilateralism, freedom, and transparency like universal values.”

Over the last few decades, the EU has played a key role in shaping the international standards of education, health sector, and foreign policies. Even in the most unprecedented times of global crisis, the EU has shown a marvellous performance by actively supporting the fight against the virus through financial and health-care initiatives. The EU has also invested in India for poverty alleviation, healthcare, water management, renewable energy, migration issues, and education. Some 6000 EU companies have invested in India. India has also invested in EU companies.

India is a regional player and acts as a bulwark against Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region. However, India is also internally battling with serious issues such as corruption, poverty, education, unemployment, and so on – though it still maintains its regional power status. In critical times, India provided medical support to 130 countries – including China.

According to Michel, India can count on the European Union and the European Union can count on India. The EU-India partnership is a positive movement and reveals potential for a new model of geopolitical and multilateral systems, covering all dimensions. According to Volker Perthes, the EU and India see strong and effective multilateralism as a preferred mode of international cooperation (Perthes, 2020). Thus, it seems the right time for both democracies to bridge strategic gaps and strengthen common approaches.

India and the EU are also tirelessly working to maintain global peace and security, and both have promised to strengthen resilience and responsibilities. The future of the India-EU partnership seems to be more progressive, as both will a stronger strategic relationship.

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