

The India-EU Partnership: A New Era of Multilateral Cooperation

Multilateralism is at a crossroads. The liberal international order which maintained peace and security for almost a century, finds itself in dire straits, as its progenitors withdraw from the very systems they helped to create. A subsequent emergence of unilateral tendencies and a disregard for established institutions by these actors, has further compounded the precariousness of the global governance architecture.

Furthermore, as globalisation continues to bring us closer, it has also laid bare the complexity and interconnectedness of the challenges we face today. From security threats such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation, to development challenges such as climate change and refugee flows, it is clear that responses to these challenges will extend beyond state borders, and require more robust international cooperation.

There is a significant impetus, therefore, to address this paradox, and ensure that a rules-based multilateral system based on cooperation and common value systems is upheld and strengthened. And as the world's largest and most diverse democratic unions, it is clear that the choices made by India and the European Union (EU) will be critical in defining the future of the multilateral system.

India and EU not only share a commitment to fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights, but have simultaneously emerged as significant economic actors. The EU is considered to be the world's second largest economy, with the bloc representing roughly 16 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)ⁱ. India, on the other hand, remains the world's fastest growing major economy and is projected to secure its position as a \$5 trillion economy by 2025ⁱⁱ. In addition, the EU remains India's largest trading partner, accounting for roughly 13 per cent of its total trade in 2018ⁱⁱⁱ.

The confluence of respect for norms with considerable market power, makes India and the EU natural partners to usher in a new era of multilateral cooperation. And over the last few years, there has been increased cognizance in Brussels and New Delhi of this convergence. Perhaps the most telling signal was the adoption of a new EU strategy on India in December 2018, which shifted its perception of India from a trade and development partner, to a strategic one. The Joint Communication called for the EU to “join forces [with India] to consolidate the rules-based global order, based on multilateralism... and develop a shared approach at the multilateral level to address global challenges”^{iv}. This shift was welcomed by New Delhi, and in response, India renewed its commitment to strengthening not only its bilateral relationship with the bloc, but also carrying out an agenda “...for reforming the multilateral system and institutions to better reflect contemporary global realities”^v.

It is within this context, that the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), hosted the *India-EU-Germany Dialogue on Effective Global Governance: A New Era of Multilateral Cooperation*. The Dialogue carried an Indian delegation to exchange views on the future of multilateralism.

The delegation was comprised of the following Indian dignitaries and experts:

1. Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Former Minister of Commerce, Industry and Civil Aviation; representative of the Indian government to the G20.
2. Mr. Jayant Sinha, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) and former Minister of State for Finance and Minister of Civil Aviation
3. Amb. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General for Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships at UN Women
4. Mr. Pawan Khera, National Spokesperson of the Indian National Congress
5. Mr. Madhukeshwar Desai, Vice President, Bhartiya Janata Party Youth Wing
6. Dr. Samir Saran, President, Observer Research Foundation
7. Ms. Aastha Kaul Assistant Manager (Projects), Observer Research Foundation

It is particularly important to note that this delegation reflected India's unique diversity, wherein it consisted of former ministers, members of parliament, diplomats, bi-partisan political actors, and think-tank experts, with significant variation in age and gender.

The Dialogue: An Overview

The delegation visited three key European cities, each home to significant institutions that undergird the international governance architecture, where discussions explored potential avenues for India-EU multilateral cooperation on international, European, and bilateral levels.

1. In Geneva, often referred to as the “capital of the globalised world”, the delegation engaged with key Indian and European interlocutors from international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The delegation also met with senior experts from the KAS Multilateral Dialogue Office.
2. In Brussels, the capital of the EU, the delegation met senior officials from the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Council. Additionally, the delegation held high level meetings with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) at their headquarters as well as key European think tanks such as the Centre for European Studies (CEPS), the German Marshall Fund, and the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue of KAS.
3. Finally, in Berlin, the capital of one of the founding members of the European Union, and one of its largest net contributors, the delegation reached the German Bundestag, where meetings were held with senior members of parliament, who chair various parliamentary committees. The delegation also met senior officials from the Chancellory and senior experts from the Head Office of KAS.

Key themes of convergence

While engaging with a kaleidoscope of actors from across all levels of governance, certain themes emerged as critical to further India-EU cooperation on effective global governance and multilateral cooperation:

1. Trade and Investment

2. Connectivity
3. Climate Change
4. Security

Trade and Investment

In lieu of increased economic interdependence, trade and investment was as a natural topic of deliberation throughout the delegation's visit. As highlighted above, both India and the EU enjoy close economic relations – not only is the EU India's largest trading partner, but it is also the second largest source for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). On the other hand, India is the fourth largest service provider to the EU accounting for €29 billion in services in 2016. ^{vi} With this in mind, two key issues were addressed in regards to further strengthening India-EU's economic partnership – overcoming roadblocks to the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement and opportunities for collaboration multilateral economic arrangements, particularly in safeguarding its bedrock – the WTO.

Crisis at the WTO – Safeguarding Multilateral Economic Governance

As acknowledged by various interlocutors, it is clear that India has and will continue to play “a crucial role in international economic governance” especially in forums such as the WTO. However, as the future of the WTO hangs in the balance, diplomats across Geneva, both Indian and European, expressed grave concern on the crisis of its Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM), the “crown jewel” of the global trading system^{vii}. As expressed by H.E. Mr. J. S. Deepak, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of India to the World Trade Organisation, the “holding hostage of filling vacancies” by the US of the Appellate Body (AB) has serious implications for international economic governance. Two members of the AB (India and US) are set to retire on December 10th, 2019, and without enough members for quorum, the AB will be rendered inoperable^{viii}. This in turn means that decisions from the DSM process would seldom remain legally binding, as members can block panel reports, simply by filing an appeal, rendering the global trading system to a “power-based free-for-all”^{ix}, where larger actors can act unilaterally by circumventing the appeals process.

While this is cause for concern, as highlighted by Mr. Karl Brauner, Deputy Director General of the WTO, the “loss of leadership role” by the US, and the subsequent power vacuum created within the organisation, provides an opportunity for India and the EU to demonstrate “positive leadership” and galvanise support for reform. This process has already begun with India and the EU, along with China, tabling a paper on AB reform^x, suggesting alternatives for filling vacancies as well as extending term periods for sitting AB members. The EU has also gone the extra mile by agreeing to an interim trade dispute mechanism with Canada, in the event of the AB lapse coming to pass in December without remedy^{xi}.

The India-EU Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

While cooperation in international economic governance is key in furthering multilateral cooperation, Europe is cognisant of the seminal role of enhancing trade relations in facilitating this process. The BTIA is central to this endeavour. If the BTIA comes into effect, not only will it usher

in avenues for unprecedented growth for almost half of the world's population, but will allow India and the EU to use its combined economic prowess to further shape the multilateral architecture at international forums such as the WTO.

However, despite this potential, the BTIA seems to have lost momentum, with stalled progress since 2013 after 16 rounds of negotiations. Key points of divergence within the BTIA include, investment protection, intellectual property rights, tariffs and duties in certain sectors, visa regimes in Europe, and data protection. However, deliberations with key interlocutors from the European Commission and the EEAS focused on one specific issue of contention – investment protection.

On meeting the European Commission, investment was highlighted by Ms. Jolana Mungengova, Member of Cabinet, European Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, as a “common thread” between India-EU economic relations. As a corollary, Ms. Mungenova stressed the need to move past the “impasse within the investment protection debate”, by “address[ing] fears” over the future of investment protection in India. This was in reference to India terminating over 20 bilateral investment protection treaties with individual EU countries in 2016^{xii}. In response, members from the Indian delegation, such as Mr. Desai, re-stressed India's position of the importance of following “standardised” legal procedures during investment disputes, wherein private investors must settle cases within the judicial mechanisms of the respective countries rather than through multilateral investment courts. The Commission also discussed the possibility of separating investment protection from the overarching BTIA. This would lead to two separate treaties, as observed within the EU-Vietnam Trade and Investment Agreement^{xiii} potentially reinvigorating momentum in future negotiations, as there is a “higher chance for success” if negotiations run in tandem, without one affecting the other.

The EEAS further echoed this position and with Mr. Gunnar Wiegand, Managing Director, Asia and Pacific, expressing urgency of creating “flexibility” within the BTIA in light of “accelerated [EU] Bilateral Investment Treaty (BITS) negotiations with China”. Furthermore, Mr. Wiegand highlighted current developments such as Brexit and US-China trade tensions as creating the “perfect time” to revive and re-enter negotiations between India and its largest trading partner. But as highlighted by Mr. Herve Delphin, Head of Division, Strategic Policy Planning, EEAS, this revival is contingent on the “political realisation [that] a drive is needed” from both within India and the EU to push negotiations forward.

Connectivity

Following issues of trade and investment, connectivity emerged as another significant theme of convergence. Connectivity is a vital public good, with investment in hard (physical) and soft (service-based) infrastructure critical in advancing not only growth, but the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) themselves. Furthermore, creating networks and connecting goods, services and people has immense potential to shape international norms which as argued by Ambassador Romana Vlahutin, Ambassador at Large for Connectivity, EEAS, is “central to peace and security”.

As highlighted by Dr. Garima Mohan, Fellow, Asia program at the German Marshall Fund, connectivity initiatives have emerged as a geostrategic tool in fulfilling “competing global visions”.

This is particularly true in the case of India and the EU, where common concerns around the imposition of the Chinese model of connectivity in their respective “backyards” through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has led to a renewed interest in shaping norms through enhancing Euro-Asian connectivity. Both India and the EU are committed in ensuring that connectivity is based on common values and norms building and is “environmentally, economically, socially and fiscally sustainable”^{xiv}.

With this in mind, the delegation discussed avenues of “safe, smart and sustainable” connectivity between India and the EU. During discussions with key interlocutors within the EEAS, three key potential aspects of India-EU connectivity were highlighted – transport, digital and human connectivity. These in turn echo the focal points of the EU’s broader Strategy on Connecting Europe with Asia as submitted in 2018. ^{xv}

Transport Connectivity

While the Indian delegation acknowledged the importance of Euro-Asian connectivity, members stressed the need for EU assistance in developing India’s domestic transport links. Deliberations were held on expanding the pre-existing role of the EU in facilitating India’s domestic connectivity initiatives, through investing in key Make in India initiatives such as its industrial and economic corridors^{xvi}. Furthermore on a more granular level, the Indian Mr. Sinha, tabled the possibility to “accelerate electric [and clean] mobility solutions... to further last mile connectivity”, such as instituting bike systems to connect Indian homes with metro and bus services.

On a more regional level, enhancing Intra-Asian connectivity was a key topic of deliberation, which has been deemed critical for promoting both European and Indian economic and strategic goals. India has been increasingly enhancing intra-Asian connectivity as means to promote regional and sub-regional cooperation as demonstrated with its cooperation with blocs such as Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the BBIN Group (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal)^{xvii}. On the European level, as highlighted by the EU’s Strategy on Connecting Europe with Asia, Asian connectivity is directly linked to European prosperity – Asia accounts for 35% of EU’s exports and 45% of its imports^{xviii}. Harnessing Asian connectivity through India-EU collaboration has the potential to not only propel growth and development for over four billion people, but create and strengthen regional networks to further mutually agreeable standards and norms.

Pertinent questions arose around financing the sheer scale of potential intra-Asian connectivity projects, and the role of the private sector in ensuring projects were based on “sustained levels of debt”. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has projected the need of infrastructure investment of \$1.7 trillion per year till 2030 to maintain Asia’s sustainable growth trajectory^{xix}. The EU External Investment Plan or the “Juncker Plan”^{xxx} emerged as an example of blended finance through which governments could mobilise and direct private capital flows towards sustainable connectivity projects.

Digital Connectivity

In discussions relating to digital connectivity, standard setting emerged as the primary vehicle in driving international governance.

On new technologies such as 5G, it has become clear in both Indian and European discourses that its policy implications will extend beyond communication, and will be central to future models of governance. It becomes paramount, therefore, to forge common norms around communication infrastructure and assess and combat potential security threats. India and the EU have already begun stakeholder consultations on the standardisation of 5G norms and is expected to release guidelines by the end of this year^{xxi}. According to Mr. Daniel Gross, Director, Centre for European Studies, standard-setting emerges as a “productive area of collaboration” to mitigate the potential implications of Chinese involvement within its own communications architecture, as “60-70% of European phones are Chinese, and the majority are from Huawei”.

Human Connectivity

Human connectivity was identified by members from the EEAS a “priority sector” for India-EU engagement, with exchanges in education and skill development as a central means to enhance “social mobility... and gender equality”. India has had a long standing engagement with Europe in fields of research and higher education. India is the largest non-European partner of Erasmus+ university exchange programme, as well as the largest beneficiary of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions which promotes exchanges between post-doctoral researchers^{xxii}. Furthermore, under the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program, India-EU research cooperation has been flourishing with over 130 Indian universities partnering with their European counterparts.

Partnerships in education and research represent more than a cross-pollination of ideas – they in turn create the potential to formulate common perspectives on key issues of global development. On sustaining this potential, the role of think-tanks was highlighted by Dr. Saran, as the next gateway, wherein through sustained dialogue in forums such as the EU-India Think Tank Twinning Initiative^{xxiii}, policy responses on issues of multilateral governance can be further strengthened.

Beyond research collaboration, avenues for mutual cooperation in skill development and entrepreneurship was examined. As highlighted through India’s ambitious Skill India initiative, skilling and employment training remains a fundamental development objective, with a target of equipping over 500 million Indian youth citizens with the tools to be productive members of the labour force^{xxiv}. EU has been a key partner in furthering India’s skill development initiatives through the India-EU Skills Development Project which took place in 2012-2016, and worked in “7 states and 6 sectors, trained 199 trainers and 85 assessment professionals, and organised workshops for over 400 participants from different partner organisations^{xxv}”.

The India-EU Skills development Project will become increasingly more important as we move further into the 4th Industrial Revolution (4th IR). While currently geared towards tackling India’s unemployment challenge, continued partnership can help lay critical infrastructure for reskilling and re-education in the future.

Successful transition during the 4th IR will not be predicated simply on reskilling, education, and labour force development. Innovation will be the key to not only catalysing continued growth and prosperity, but also tackling humanity’s greatest obstacles – those that exist currently such as

Climate Change, as well as those that we cannot foresee. As such multilateral cooperation on start-up incubators is essential.

Climate Change

As befits the gravity of its potentially existential consequences, Climate Change has become the most concrete pillar in the India-EU cooperative. While the Paris Agreement signified the convergence of historically divergent viewpoints, it is the steps taken since 2015 that have truly cemented the partnership between the two parties.

The end of the liberal world order has affected climate change just as much as other areas. Previous champions of mitigation have, at least temporarily abdicated their leadership of the cause. Despite these abdications, the shared value systems of the India and EU have placed them at the forefront of the fight against climate change.

India has remained a responsible climate leader. Committed to a low-carbon transition, India is currently on track to fulfil its domestic target of achieving 175 GW renewable energy capacity target by 2022^{xxvi}, and has rolled out an additional plan of further adding 500 GW to ensure achievement of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) goal of 40% renewable power capacity by 2030^{xxvii}. In a similar vein, the EU is also on track to achieve its main '20-20-20' targets of reducing GHG emissions by 20%^{xxviii}, and has made considerable strides renewable power.

While India and EU maintain their individual clean energy transitions, cooperation in solar energy has been particularly of note. The International Solar Alliance (ISA) which was co-founded by India and France on the sidelines of COP21, remains one of the world's largest multilateral arrangements. Furthermore, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has approved investments of €640 million in solar projects to meet the energy needs of over 4 million households – this in turn makes the EIB India's largest investor in solar energy, and the largest recipient of EIB renewable energy financing outside Europe.^{xxix} Additionally, through the India-EU Clean Energy and Climate Change Partnership, both parties have taken concrete measures to move beyond investment and build capacities by creating avenues to explore 'policy and regulatory approaches... to promote business solutions and support joint innovation activities.'^{xxx}

While these initiatives are laudable, as emphasised throughout the delegation's visit, the severity of climate change requires continuous, sustained momentum. It is estimated that India will need \$2.3 trillion to meet its climate targets^{xxxi}, and Europe faces an investment gap of €180 billion per year till 2030.^{xxxii} It is clear that these funding gaps will not be sufficiently addressed by governments, therefore enhanced cooperation in directing private finance flows towards climate change mitigation becomes crucial.

Furthermore, as highlighted during discussions, more crucial in obtaining private sector funding is to, as highlighted by Mr. Sinha, direct it towards "low-hanging fruit" like renewable energy, particularly in solar, which is increasingly viewed as a profitable sector to invest in. This further allows for public spending to be spent on the areas the private sector cannot engage with such as upgrading electrical grids and infrastructure, reducing agricultural emissions, investing in green connectivity solutions among other adaptation and resilience efforts.

Finally, it is imperative to continue to cooperate on joint government funding of climate change innovation, despite high risk. In a perhaps breakthrough discussion with the Chancellery, the Indian delegation proposed a Green Growth Fund, wherein private actors will managing public money to spearhead green technology innovation. The proposal was met with high praise by Dr. Helen Winter MinDgtin, Head of team 41, National and International Economy Policy at the Chancellery, who called for further such financing initiatives.

However, environment is about more than just climate change. As highlighted by Mr. Prabhu, India faces an unprecedented water crisis which could have a devastating cascading effect across the country's agricultural sector, health and welfare systems, and eventually entire economic and structural system. India-EU cooperation on water is essential.

The India-EU Water Partnership provides a comprehensive action plan with nine priority areas for collaboration such water management and sustainable water governance, capacity building and avenues for research exchange^{xxxiii}. The partnership has also culminated into the India-EU Water Forum, which recently concluded its fourth year, bringing together key practitioners from both geographies to exchange ideas and create policy pathways for sustainable water management.

Security

Maintaining peace and security remains the core objective in safeguarding the international order. During discussions with key interlocutors from NATO, the Indo-Pacific emerge as the major sticking point. Both Indian and European interlocutors recognised the importance of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”, with NATO cognisant of the link between “developments in the Indo-Pacific and its [subsequent] impact on the Euro-Atlantic” as expressed by Ms. Gwendoline Vamos, Political Affairs Officer, NATO. This link is perhaps best exemplified through Indian and European trade routes wherein over 35% and 95% of all respective European and Indian trade passes through the Indian Ocean region. Given these stakes, strengthening institutional engagement and creating security architectures based on the rule of law and international cooperation becomes crucial in balancing power within the region.

Terrorism was another key area of discussion where Mr. Prabhu and Amb. Puri encouraged NATO officials to “understand its threat perceptions”, particularly in key NATO missions such as Afghanistan. They underscored Afghanistan's role in its neighbourhood's stability and expressed their appreciation NATO's counter-terror activities in the region.

The emergence of non-conventional methods of warfare was deemed a significant area of future cooperation wherein through initiatives such as NATO's Science for Peace and Security, India and the EU can forge global standards around the use of new weapon systems such as drone technology.

Bilateralising the Multilateral Agenda: Deepening Engagement with Germany

While it is crucial to strengthen India-EU engagement to shape the future of multilateralism, it is important to note that the EU is not a monolith, and bilateral engagement remains seminal in

creating synergies. Perhaps, no other partner is suited to promote Indo-European engagement than Germany.

Germany remains India's single most trading partner from within the EU accounting for \$21.9 Billion dollars in bilateral trade in FY2017-2018^{xxxiv} as well as being within the top 10 largest sources of FDI for India^{xxxv}. This puts the nation in the best position to shape European engagement with India on multilateral economic governance as well as the BTIA. Furthermore, synergies between both countries exist and must be continued to be capitalised on. Regular engagement between both countries is routinely observed through initiatives such as Indo-German Inter-Governmental Consultation which concluded its fifth edition this week. Chancellor Merkel echoed aforementioned European positions on the need for a "fresh attempt"^{xxxvi} at the trade deal, as well as promoting flexibility through simplifying certain processes, such as the recruitment of Indian skilled workers.

As best summarised by Mr. Christian Hirte, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany is one of the most "internationally integrated economies in the world", committed to preventing "power-based trade" from becoming the new norm. And as India emerges the "perfect partner" in this endeavour due to its "commitment and respect for rules, norms and democratic ideals", the potential for both nations to "shape multilateral governance must be capitalised upon urgently".

Moving Forward: Shaping a Normative Partnership for the 21st century

It is clear from the discussions held during this Dialogue that avenues for multilateral cooperation between India and the EU are extensive and complex. However, sustaining meaningful engagement remains critical in shaping the norms of the new multilateral order. Throughout the delegation's visit, interlocutors highlighted the lack of political will from both parties as a significant hindrance in maintaining political momentum.

Increasing visibility is perhaps the most effortless and cost-effective way of encouraging more engagement through creating avenues of track 2 and track 1 diplomacy through public-facing forums, workshops and working groups. As such, the delegation suggests the following engagements:

- i. India-EU Capacity Building Workshops on issues of convergence, including, but not limited to:
 - Electric Mobility and last mile connectivity
 - Skill development
 - Green innovations
 - Water governance
 - Maritime security
 - New defence technologies
- ii. Creating an India-EU Connectivity Forum to supplement the newly launched European Connectivity Forum^{xxxvii} to explore synergies between India and Europe's connectivity

initiatives. Such a forum has the potential to create and shape a joint vision for Euro-Asian connectivity, based on respect for rule of law and multilateralism.

iii. EU led working groups on key issues such as:

- Investment Protection
- 5G connectivity
- Financing Green Transitions
- Multilateral economic governance, particularly WTO and G20
- Creating a new multilateral blueprint for the 21st century.

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