

## *CSDR-KAS Conference*

### **"India and the new European geopolitics"**

9-10 November 2023  
Hyatt Regency, New Delhi

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#### **Day 1 – 9th November Grand Ballroom, Hyatt Regency**

#### **Inaugural Session and Keynote Address**

##### **Panellists:**

**Dr. Adrian Haack:** Director, KAS India Branch Office

**Dr. Happymon Jacob:** Founder & Honorary Director, CSDR

**Amb. Sanjay Verma:** Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, GOI

##### **Dr. Adrian Haack:**

Dr. Adrian Haack opened the conference with his introductory remarks. He emphasized the congruence of viewpoints but underscored the divergence in focus between India and Germany, attributing it partly to their geographical separation, setting the stage for comprehensive dialogue and discussion.

##### **Dr. Happymon Jacob:**

Dr. Happymon Jacob discussed India's role in Europe's new geopolitics, particularly in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Dr. Jacob highlighted the current state of India-EU ties and flagged the sensitive topic of China in the wake of the emerging geopolitical landscape.

##### **Keynote Address - Amb. Sanjay Verma:**

Following Dr. Jacob's brief introduction, Amb. Verma set the stage for the day's discussions by examining Europe's role on the world stage and introducing its 'new geopolitics.' He highlighted the influence exercised by the idea of the 'End of History' on Europe and its idealistic and moralistic aspirations, and the impact of multiple crises such as the financial crisis in 2008, several cases of in-fighting caused by internal strife, the migration crisis, and more recently, the Russian incursion into Ukraine. He noted the significant impact of the above events on the EU's strategic policy and foreign relations.

On a different note, Amb. Verma stressed several developments in Indo-EU relations in recent times. He cited fruitful trade, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) juxtaposed by reciprocal investments, several high-level summits, counter-terrorism and comprehensive security cooperation, and skilled migration exchanges. The EU is working towards reducing

dependencies and, more generally, trending in favor of restructuring supply chains— an aspect which he believes can benefit India. India's industrial capacity and potential leave it well-placed to participate in the numerous diversification efforts conducted by European leaders in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Additionally, Delhi and Brussels are drawn together by shared common interests. He reiterated that the EU's interest in the Indo-Pacific can act as a catalyst to further enhance cooperation in other sectors and, subsequently, in other regions.

He concluded his keynote address by acknowledging India's challenges in adapting to Europe's 'new geopolitics', plagued by internal issues and other crises such as the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, but flagged that recent positive developments are promising for the future of the bilateral relationship.

**Q&A session:**

Amb. Verma was met with various inquiries from the audience. The first question for the Ambassador was about India's absence in conflict mediation. Amb. Verma agreed to the statement and added that although various actors expect India to get involved, they must accommodate the means.

Several other queries led the Ambassador to highlight the role of the Global South in Europe's 'new geopolitics,' notably through the common strategic interests that the two groupings share. He concluded the introductory session by reminding the audience that the EU is yet to delve into a more extensive defense market. Further, he also stressed the occurrence of regular bilateral talks bypassing the EU. He reiterated that he believes in the immeasurable potential of the India-EU cooperation in security and defense.

## **Panel 1: Europe after Ukraine**

### **Panellists:**

**Dr. Adrian Haack** - Director, KAS India Branch Office

**Amb. May-Elin Stener** - Ambassador of Norway to India

**Dr. Jagannath Panda** - Head of the Stockholm Centre For South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs, ISDP

**Prof. C Raja Mohan** - Senior Fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute - New Delhi

**Moderator: Dr. Happymon Jacob** - Founder & Honorary Director, CSDR

### **Dr. Happymon Jacob:**

Dr. Happymon Jacob unveiled the first panel, 'Europe after Ukraine,' by bringing up two aspects that he believes to be crucial for a complete understanding of the subject. Firstly, he noted the immeasurable role played by Realpolitik in the world's decision-making. Secondly, he emphasized Europe's uniqueness and opinion, noting that Europe's views are different from any other continent, and, in norms, the European Union's complex structure is unique. Ultimately, he felt the urgent need to re-envision Europe's relationship with the rest of the world.

### **Prof. C Raja Mohan:**

Prof. Raja Mohan began his introductory remarks by noting the grave impact of the Ukrainian conflict on Europe. Several crises, such as the aforementioned Russian incursion of Ukraine, have shattered Europe and its ideals. Although Brussels had previously transcended national borders and sovereignty, Realpolitik is re-emerging in European decision-making.

He raised several inquiries on Europe's re-envisioning and how India fits in Europe's 'new geopolitics.' First, he reflected on Russia's future and the upcoming role that Moscow will play in Europe. After that, he noted the particularity of America's future relations with Europe with respect to a Trump 2024 scenario. Donald Trump's potential return reinvigorated fears of American isolationism. Third, he emphasized China's part in Europe's geopolitical realignment, describing Sino-European ties as a 'special relationship.' Beijing's closeness to Brussels also depends on whether the US will successfully challenge it. Prof. Mohan highlighted the challenges of Europe's internal division and said that its foreign relations will depend on whether Brussels can overcome these differences. He concluded his remarks by highlighting India's role in Europe's industrial potential, particularly in the defense sector.

### **Amb. May-Elin Stener:**

Ambassador May-Elin Stener noted how the war in Ukraine transformed Europe by worsening the economic spiral and prompting further economic vulnerabilities.

She recalled the international scope of the war in Ukraine, stating it is not exclusively Europe's problem, highlighting the global food crisis caused by the invasion. The food

insecurity caused by the war in Ukraine and the issues about grain shipments have plagued several countries in the Global South. She reiterated her country's stance by defending its support for the Global South, mainly undertaken through humanitarian and 'food security' funds.

She concluded by stressing the importance of dialogue and international law, which her country vehemently defended. She stated that peace summits and the talks surrounding them have to be built on said principles to solve this never-ending conflict.

**Dr. Jagannath Panda:**

Dr. Jagannath Panda cited four structural shifts provoked by the crisis engendered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Dr. Panda noted a change in response to Russia's aggressions in the North European plains. In reaction to the first attacks and bombings carried out in February 2022, Europe condemned Russian actions for an attack on territory and sovereignty. Subsequently, more recently, the EU condemned Russian misdemeanors as an alarming attack on European values. Dr. Panda explained that, despite the condemnation of an attack on European values, alluding to the prominence of specific shared values, the Ukraine war has funneled discord in Western Europe. He believes differences can hamper its support for Ukraine, its pro-Atlantist leanings, and its 'special relationship with China.'

He, afterward, reflected on Brussels' dependencies on Beijing, noting the economic ties that Eastern and Central European countries especially share with the Asian power. He believes that if Europe is on its way to reducing dependencies with Beijing, India can play a part in restructuring supply chains. Finally, he encouraged Europe, India, and, more generally, the Indo-Pacific community to commit to developing ties through the Middle East, a critical geostrategic region. He lauded the recent India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), an initiative to increase interconnectivity between the two areas.

**Dr. Adrian Haack:**

Dr. Adrian Haack, Director of KAS India, began his opening remarks by highlighting the global repercussions caused by the Russian incursion into Ukraine. He noted that non-European countries do not consider the conflict 'European.' In agreement with his fellow panelist, Ambassador May-Elin Stener, cited the global food consequences caused by the grain vacuum as a pertinent example. He later explained that restructuring public finances was another significant effect of the war. Non-military sectors will suffer from under-financing as military spending increases throughout the globe. Funds in climate-friendly programs will be redirected to military fields. Germany has recently announced a significant investment boost in military spending aligning with NATO's recommendations.

Dr. Haack drew attention towards the larger social repercussions of the war, which are regularly overlooked but significant. Ukrainians have emigrated towards Zelensky-friendly destinations as Ukraine's population is significantly reduced, while perceptions of Russia in Ukraine and elsewhere have worsened considerably, encouraging these societies, which have

significant Russian-speaking populations, to be pro-EU and pro-NATO. Finally, he concluded his statement flagging Russia's challenging future— with a liberal Russian state a distant possibility, post-war brain drain, and the unique limitations of authoritarian governance in the information age.

**Q&A session:**

Initially, Dr. Jacob asked the European panelists whether Russia still played a role in Europe's security architecture. Amb. Stener and Dr. Haack replied that Russia previously played a significant role, yet it has vanished from Europe's strategic architecture with its misadventures in Ukraine. According to them, Russia has ignored and bypassed dialogue, an essential international principle, following its invasion of Crimea in 2014.

Afterward, Prof. Mohan and Dr. Panda highlighted how EU-India relations are static but have significant potential. They did note, however, that the EU's involvement in India's strategic regions, such as the Indo-Pacific, is shared with other like-minded partners, such as Japan and South Korea.

An audience member questioned whether Russia should still be considered a 'European nation.' Dr. Haack proposed what he envisioned for Russia's future and explained that Russia has built a 'mental wall' distancing, arguably separating itself from Europe. Prof. Mohan partly agreed but reminded the audience how quickly relations change, such as the Cold War USSR-China ties. He also mentioned how Ukraine could potentially function as a blueprint for a Taiwanese invasion by the PRC. Several panelists also briefly touched upon China's indirect support for Russia. Dr. Jacob concluded the panel by raising questions on how China's role in Europe differs from India's perspective.

## **Panel 2: India's balancing act**

### **Panellists:**

**Amb. Ashok K Kantha** - Former Ambassador of India to China

**Dr. Sophie Eisentraut** - Head of Research & Publications, Munich Security Conference

**Amb. Rakesh Sood** - Former Ambassador of India to France, Nepal and Afghanistan.

**Moderator: Indrani Bagchi** - CEO, Ananta Centre

### **Indrani Bagchi:**

Ms. Bagchi began the panel with a focus on the impact of the India-US dynamic on the India-Europe ties, exploring Europe's perspectives on India's continued close ties with Russia and analyzing Europe's emergence as an independent player globally.

Ms. Bagchi raised pertinent questions to kick off the panel— Has there been a shift in Europe's views regarding India's continued close ties with Russia? Is there a consensus that Europe is emerging as an independent pole in the global arena, considering the US to be central to European affairs? What does India's balancing act look like?

### **Amb. Ashok K Kantha:**

Ambassador Kantha emphasized India's strategic partnership with Europe in various domains and the concern regarding India's continuing ties with Russia, especially in arms purchases. He explained that India has chosen to maintain close relations with Russia to prevent China's growing strategic nexus with Russia. Additionally, India wishes to ensure that Russia doesn't become too close to China, and the legacy of the relationship also plays a role. He also flagged the role played by India's procurement of crude oil from Russia in balancing the global hydrocarbon market.

He highlighted the evolving relationship dynamics between India, China, and Russia. Although China and India share some common elements in their position on the Ukraine conflict, there are also fundamental differences in positions. For instance, both nations refrained from condemning Russia's invasion and purchased discounted oil from Russia in large quantities. However, India did not narrate the Russian talking points, while China consistently echoed Russia's narratives on the origins of the war. Additionally, the discussion underscores how European perspectives of India and China are evolving, primarily due to the widening strategic gap between China and Europe that started opening up around 2019 and further increased post-COVID and post-Ukraine conflict.

Amb. Kantha further discussed the ongoing tussles for a multipolar order. The USA intends to maintain its pre-eminence. On the other hand, China prefers a hierarchical order where they can be the top player despite desiring a multipolar world order. India aims to establish a more balanced, multipolar Asia where China doesn't replace the USA as the leading power. He highlighted the need for collaboration between the EU and India to reshape the

international order, creating a new, restructured, multi-lateralized, multipolar international order.

**Dr. Sophie Eisentraut:**

Dr. Eisentraut acknowledged a significant shift in Europe's and Germany's perspectives on India's balancing act, especially in response to the Ukraine conflict. Initially, it was challenging for Europeans to comprehend India's reaction. However, as the war dragged on, it marked a shift in Europe's perspective of players in the Global South, particularly India, and acted as a wake-up call globally about the massive disillusionment and frustration with the existing international order in many other parts of the world. There is a better understanding of India's need to maintain close ties with Russia for security against China's alliance. There has been much introspection in the wider West about Europe's response to India's balancing act. However, Europe still hopes that India will take a stronger stance against the war and distance itself from it in the future.

Europe is a significant global economic power. However, its economy is increasingly impacted by security concerns and dynamics. The war in Ukraine has strengthened Europe's reliance on the US for security. Europe is very concerned about its increasing security dependence. Although Europe has become more dependent on the US due to the war in Ukraine, Europe is gradually moving towards reduced reliance on the US and becoming less dependent.

**Amb. Rakesh Sood:**

Ambassador Sood provided a historical context, highlighting the absence of a genuinely liberal international rules-based order that every country should defend or uphold. It was a US hegemonic-led order of the Cold War during the Cold War era. The post-Cold War period saw fleeting attempts at a new world order, but that evaporated quickly, leading to US unipolarity. This outcome undermined multilateralism and delegitimized multilateral institutions.

'Each major power, including the US, Russia, and China, seeks to rewrite their history in its favor.' The US desires a return to the unipolar moment; Russia wants to rewrite its history regarding security and economy, while China seeks to overcome the century of humiliation by rewriting its history.

Europe and India have been discussing the concept of a multipolar world. However, the US, being a hegemon, is not interested in a multipolar world as they are used to a bipolar world. If Europe and India would like to see the emergence of a multipolar world, then it would require greater coherence and a more unified voice from Europe. He cautioned that multipolarity without multilateralism could lead to chaos and impose balancing on every country, resulting in a more uncertain and unpredictable world.

Two key factors need to be considered to establish a new world order. Firstly, there must be a convergence of views among the major powers. Secondly, they need to be able to present this

convergence to the rest of the world as a global public good. Examples of such convergence could be seen in the NPT and the Human Rights Commission. However, there is no convergence among the major powers, and even the middle powers are not sufficient to create the necessary cohesion for establishing a new order. Therefore, the absence of convergence among significant powers is delaying the birth of a new world order.

**Q&A session:**

On the role of the Global South in the emerging global order, Ambassador Kantha highlighted that countries like China and India have sought to address all the concerns like debt distress, climate change, etc. because developed countries are busy dealing with the Ukraine conflict.

Regarding India and Europe's convergence on AI apps led by China, Amb. Sood stressed that the whole world's regulations, including the EU and China, would be diverse, and India would not create its version like the Chinese nor mimic Europe's approach.

Dr. Eisentraut disagreed with the notion of a European dilemma regarding Europe wanting India to react strongly and stop buying discounted oil from Russia on one side and reinforcing the energy crisis in Europe itself on the other. She concluded by stating that imposing sanctions would affect energy prices in a way detrimental to the West.



**Day 2 – 10 November**  
**Family Room and Saloon West, Hyatt Regency**

**Panel 3: Europe in India's security calculus**

**Panellists:**

**Amb. Ruchi Ghanashyam** - Former High Commissioner of India to the UK, Ghana and South Africa

**Lt. Gen Vinod Khandare** - Principal Adviser, Ministry of Defence, India

**Amb. Vincenzo de Luca** - Ambassador of Italy to India and Nepal

**Pablo Ahumada** - Political Counsellor, Embassy of France to India

**Moderator: Dr. Happymon Jacob** - Founder & Honorary Director, CSDR

**Dr. Happymon Jacob:**

Dr. Happymon Jacob unveiled the panel with four reflections relevant to a better understanding of the stakes. First, he asserted the current India-Europe defense cooperation as a cornerstone for future cooperation and flagged queries for the military experts on the panel on how this cooperation can be improved. Second, Dr. Jacob asked for an assessment of China's role in the Indo-EU partnership and the repercussions of Beijing's economic linkages with Europe. Third, he noted the importance of the Indo-Pacific and why India and Europe should utilize the region as a catalyst for further cooperation. And finally, for the Indian panelists, he sought inputs on India's view of Europe as a security partner.

**Amb. Vincenzo de Luca:**

Ambassador Vincenzo de Luca began his opening remarks by highlighting the shift in the EU-India cooperation. Partnerships previously built on trade and economic linkages are slowly developing in fields such as security and high technology, particularly in the emerging sector of cyber defense. Amb. de Luca specifically mentioned the Council of Trade & Technology, a relationship that the EU currently holds only with the US and India, as a symbol of fruitful India-EU tech ties that increase cooperation in critical fields such as cyber warfare and privacy.

He added how cooperation is also pursued bilaterally. The Italy-India summit, for example, depicts the strategic partnership between Rome and Delhi— a partnership that the Ambassador has observed closely and has laboriously worked for. Italy and the EU are adapting to emerging theaters, to 'new geopolitics.' Italy recently announced, alongside other EU members and India, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), an initiative to increase Indo-European inter-connectivity. Additionally, the EU has gained significant interest in the Indo-Pacific, a region it considers to be of emerging geo-strategic importance.

**Amb. Ruchi Ghanashyam:**

Ambassador Ghanashyam began by underlining how China's popularity grew due to its economic emergence. Yet, India remained absent in many quarters of the international

community's consciousness. Recently, governments have shown greater interest in cooperating with India, and Amb. Ghanashyam analyzed that India's role in global matters has grown in importance. Besides, the emerging significance of South Asia is amplified by China's role in the region.

She continued by listing the challenges in the security partnership between Delhi and the EU. Obstacles such as disagreements over normative ideals and national interest considerations, a severe lack of understanding of the European Union's functions, and the difference in perceptions vis-à-vis Russia are stated as significant challenges for further linkages. However, she highlighted the corridors in South Asia and Central Asia, which serve as cornerstones for continued and hopefully increased cooperation. Amb. Ghanashyam concluded her opening speech by recalling the need to work towards cooperation in the cyber and water fields, two vital but regularly overlooked sectors.

**Lt. Gen Vinod Khandare:**

Lt. Gen Vinod Khandare, a veteran expert in military matters, elaborated on India-EU military relations and their immeasurable potential. He began by highlighting the difference between defense and security cooperation, a distinction which he feels is regularly overlooked. Afterward, he recalled India's historical dependency on Russia, but in recent times, France is rising steadily as New Delhi's most important defense partner due to diversification in supply.

The recent announcement of the assignment of an EU Defense attaché to India demonstrated the positive military relations between Delhi and Brussels. Fields such as high-tech cyber and emerging technologies are also crucial and must be developed.

He concluded his remarks by affirming his belief that European skill and Indian human resources can work to fulfill both countries' extensive industrial potential.

**Pablo Ahumada:**

Pablo Ahumada, Political Counsellor of the French Embassy in New Delhi, began his opening remarks with a firm statement that Europe since 2021 has been pursuing robust interests in the Indo-Pacific region. He also analyzed that the EU has been striding towards greater cooperation with India by integrating it into connectivity projects such as the Global Gateway– an international initiative that seeks more excellent connectivity. He also reminded the audience that cooperation is pursued through bilateral means and the European Union framework, lending them more robust foundations.

He continued by stating that China-EU ties are suffering due to several factors. But, in his opinion, the EU and India must seek a non-confrontational approach in the Indo-Pacific. He concluded his time by mentioning initiatives the EU is working on with India in the security sphere. The most notable is CRIMARIO, a program that works towards improving and securing maritime routes, a symbol of the EU's emerging interest in the Indo-Pacific community and like-minded partners.

**Q&A session:**

Mr. Ahumada was asked why the EU and India continuously disagree on a multitude of subjects, such as climate change. He opposed and gave as an example the International Solar Alliance, which, according to him, shows greater Europe-India involvement and cooperation in renewable energy.

Amb. Ghanashyam, following a question from the audience, emphasized how China was a great manufacturing power, marking it in people's consciousness. She believes India is starting to popularize itself and be acknowledged by the global community.

Amb. de Luca mentioned the importance of digital connectivity and shared the news of a joint Indian-Italy venture in shipbuilding.

## **Panel 4: India and European security institutions**

### **Panellists:**

**Dr. Mohan Kumar** - Former Ambassador of India to France and Bahrain

**Amb. Pankaj Saran** - Former Deputy National Security Advisor of India

**Amb. Dr Philipp Ackermann** - Ambassador of Germany to India and Bhutan

**Moderator: Prof. Ummu Salma Bava** - Professor & Jean Monnet Chair, Jawaharlal Nehru University

### **Prof. Ummu Salma Bava:**

The panel delved into India's engagement with European security institutions – NATO, the EU, and the OSCE. It explored India's position in the shifting European geopolitics and how Indian foreign policy aligns with these European institutions. Prof Bava raised questions on how India takes care of its strategic requirements and the pros and cons of India pursuing strategic dialogues with the NATO.

### **Dr. Amb. Mohan Kumar:**

Dr. Mohan Kumar began by discussing the European Union's Strategic Compass (SC) and emphasized its importance for preserving and promoting European strategic autonomy. He highlighted three key points regarding Europe's centrality in the SC - firstly, the SC will prioritize European security; secondly, it will focus on securing Europe; and thirdly, it will promote European investment. He suggested that India should engage with the European Defence Agency for two main reasons: Firstly, it is in India's interest to receive Europe's assistance in developing and enhancing maritime awareness in the Indian Ocean. Secondly, Europe can provide valuable support in addressing cyber security and hybrid threats India faces.

He emphasized that India should urge Europe to decrease its reliance on Russia, especially in military and security matters. India could assist Europe in reducing its dependence on China. A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is significant in India-Europe relations. Moreover, India should work with Europe to foster a de-risking strategy, where India can offer itself as an alternative to China.

Dr. Kumar cautioned against India engaging with the NATO, as it would shrink the strategic space available for India. The NATO has specific aims and objectives, and its principal adversary is Russia, which is not India's adversary. This would limit the strategic space for collaboration between Russia and India, a relationship that India values highly and which India wishes to sustain due to previous dependencies.

### **Amb. Pankaj Saran:**

Ambassador Saran highlighted India's positive track record in collaborating with European institutions and expressed the country's keenness to continue doing so. However, India is

waiting for the appropriate partner, institution, and empowerment of the institution to move forward with the cooperation.

He noted how the Russian-Ukraine War has unified and accentuated differences in Europe's policies towards Ukraine and Russia and their security architecture. India's relations with European countries, the EU, and Russia are significant in various fields. India is keen to strengthen its relationship with the EU, but there are concerns regarding the EU's capacity to handle security matters in both its region and the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, how much attention the EU will give to the Indo-Pacific and if it will result in a tangible presence in the area remain to be seen. Despite disagreements over the primary threats faced by the EU and India, India's relationship with the EU and European countries has significantly increased after the Russian invasion into Ukraine.

**Amb. Dr. Philipp Ackermann:**

Ambassador Ackermann discussed the global impact of the recent war in Europe and mentioned that it was a traumatic experience, particularly for the Germans. He stated that the war was more than just a European war; it was a global phenomenon.

Russia has changed entirely during the war. A third of the Russian national budget is now spent on the military. This impacts every country that has relations with Russia, including India. The impact of this war on India, Latin America, Africa, etc., can't be ignored. It's a big deal. Russia is the problem that we have in this war. However, the world that will face the most significant strategic challenge in the future is China, which includes the Indo-Pacific. He expressed concern about Russia slowly becoming a sole junior partner to China and emphasized the importance of India's strategic role in preventing this.

He applauded India for its strategic confidence demonstrated during its successful presidency of the G20 summit amidst complex geopolitics. This reflects a positive outlook on the current government's ability to handle complicated situations compellingly.

While acknowledging India's preference for a bilateral relationship rather than an institutional architecture, he suggested the NATO as an exciting partner for India. India has always been self-sufficient, and forming alliances has never been a priority of Indian foreign policy. However, India is deeply intertwined with the US in strategic questions, and the US has also gone the extra mile to offer India the support it needs because it's a national priority for them.

**Q&A session:**

To a question posed by Dr. Jacob, Dr. Kumar responded that Indian foreign policy is obsessed with policy space- the government wants to keep a margin for maneuvers that may not always be used. He gave the example of the WTO, where there is a gap between applied and MFN tariffs. He further added that if you are to insist on policy space for India in terms of strategic security terms, it will by definition lead to strategic ambiguity.

Also, Dr. Kumar responded that Europe can choose India as a suitable alternative to China. But the problem is that the EU has yet to reach unanimity regarding the de-risking strategy with China that Brussels has put in place. But India should not stop making efforts to prevent this because it is in India's interest that the world is de-risking from China. He further mentioned that the first step would be signing an FTA with the EU, which will tie all the member states together.

India should still attempt to become a suitable partner, as it is in India's interest for the world to de-risk from China. In reply to a question posed by the audience, Amb. Ackermann mentioned that India and Russia have had decades of long-standing relations and that India should never stop dealing with Russia. He concluded by stating that the relations with Russia should not limit India's dialogue or alliances with other nations.

## **Panel 5: India's Defence Sector and Opportunities for Europe**

### **Panellists:**

**Dr. Swasti Rao** - Associate Fellow, Europe and Eurasia Center MP-IDSA

**Vice Admiral Anil Chopra (Retd.)** - Former Commander-in-Chief, Western & Eastern Naval Command, Indian Navy

**Dinakar Peri** - Senior Associate Editor, The Hindu

**Moderator: Lt. General Sanjay Verma (Retd.)** - Former Director General, Weapons & Equipment, ARMY HQs, MoD, India

### **Lt. Gen Sanjay Verma:**

Lt. Gen Sanjay Verma began the session by highlighting the revolutionary change ongoing in the Indian defense sector and how the government's Defense Acquisition Procedure (2020), a policy that was formulated in 2016, is shaping the future for India's defense sector—opening the defense sector for foreign direct investments, setting up defense corridors, liberalizing industrial licenses for defense manufacturing, and exporting policy exclusively for defense platforms. Defense ties with Europe are not new for India; they date back to the 1980s. He cited the following examples: electronic warfare from Hungary, artillery guns from Sweden, and other defense imports from Spain, France, and Germany. He set the stage for the session's focus, flagging how India can leverage its defense requirements through European countries. What are the opportunities? What are the challenges? Before handing over the floor to the panelists, he highlighted how the EU appointing a military attaché in India is a significant step in India-EU defense relations.

### **Dr. Swasti Rao:**

Dr. Swasti Rao, engaged with the Ministry of Defense, began her opening remarks by stating how India is facilitating its defense diplomacy with the EU and that India-EU relations are at their peak. She highlighted that India's understanding of the EU's aspirations to become a security provider and its potential still needs to be improved. She also highlighted the importance of ongoing exercises to understand the broader spectrum of challenges in dealing with individual actors and the EU as a whole.

She proposed a few points on navigating the evolving terrain by identifying critical drivers. First, the vantage point is how the MoD is reshaping its contours of defense diplomacy with Europe using several parameters (eight to be precise). Second, the focus on defense exports and scope of promotion. Third, the relevant skill set needed to train together, and fourth, inquiry into the availability of niche tech transfers to India. She classified European countries into three parts—countries with a highly developed military, those with rich, rare-earth minerals, and those with a developing military that can become defense export markets for India.

She also talked about the defense industrial environment in Europe in light of the latest developments in the EDTIB (European Defense Technological and Industrial Base) and the EDIRP (European Defence Industrial Development Program). She further discussed how India and the EU can work towards a rejuvenated regional defense diplomacy in a changed geopolitical environment. Such an exercise would also entail a careful and realistic review of export controls, transfer of technology (ToT), and other impediments. She concluded her remarks by emphasizing that one should not see dealing with the EU and dealing with a member state as mutually exclusive.

**Vice Admiral Anil Chopra:**

Vice Admiral Anil Chopra began his opening statements by remarking that India's defense sector is in transition and that the EU and India can capitalize on their strengths together, especially during the Russia-Ukraine war. He also said that Europe is interested in the Indo-Pacific region for investments and minerals, and if Europe can provide defense equipment to India regularly, it can secure its interest in the Indo-Pacific region. VAdm Chopra also stated how important the new Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) is and applauded the European markets' transparency, robustness, and reliability.

VAdm. Chopra, when asked whether India should focus on technology-centric or platform-centric acquisition, explained that India should opt for technology-centric acquisition because India has a platform but lacks technology.

**Dinakar Peri:**

Dinakar Peri began his opening remarks with caution. He distinguished the relationship between India and the EU by saying, "We will talk about defense with Europe and security with the EU." He sought to convey how France and Israel were the only reliable partners during the early phase of this defense relationship, and the rest of Europe had its differences in dealing with India, highlighting how France stood with India during the Pokhran nuclear test and how Israel and France supported India in the Kargil War. His concern for Europe as a security market is about the supply chain, especially during the Ukraine war, where most European supplies have gone. He also highlighted the potential of tech transfer between India and Europe, emphasizing that Europe can trust India as a long-term partner, particularly in the backdrop of dual-use and reverse engineering concerns with China.

Dinakar Peri elaborated on how private companies in India engage with foreign companies. He cited the example of how the Tavor assault rifles are manufactured in Gwalior by a private company that is in a joint venture with an Israeli company and how the same is exported to Israel. This shows how Europe can increase its supplies by relying on India. He also said India has a safer IPR regime and a liberal licensing system, which will attract European companies.



**Q&A session:**

VAdm. Anil Chopra was posed a question from the audience regarding tackling China's interference in India's internal waterways. He responded that while it is not a matter of maritime security, it is an essential area of emerging conflict since it involves Indian waterways and needs to be tackled carefully as it could trigger an escalation.

Dr. Rao was asked about the PESCO framework and whether there is any convergence of interest regarding defense acquisition, with a follow-up question on whether India and the EU have a similar program to Initiative in Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET). She said that PESCO has revitalized its framework, and a new wave of PESCO projects has come. Dr. Rao also stated how the European Peace Facility discusses giving military aid to countries outside Europe, opening the door for the Indo-Pacific region. When responding to the follow-up question, she said there is no policy framework for technology between India and the EU, but it needs to be developed.

**Concluding Remarks by Amb. Rakesh Sood:**

Ambassador Rakesh Sood gave the concluding remarks, summarizing the two-day conference, and highlighted how crucial it is for Europe and India to strengthen their capabilities. He highlighted how the Ukraine war catalyzed the setting up of the European Defense Agency, the standard European procurement policy, and how PESCO has re-energized. Amb. Sood emphasized that Russia has no place in the European security architecture. He also said that India had a greater level of comfort in dealing bilaterally with European countries, citing the example of the UK and France, the first to have bilateral relations with India. He agreed with the comments made by Prof. C. Raja Mohan and Dr. Mohan Kumar that India would welcome a European defense expanse, given the shared interest in a multipolar world. Amb. Sood concluded his speech by saying that both India and Europe should be in dialogue, and Europe needs to understand India's concern vis-à-vis China, and India needs to understand Europe's concern vis-à-vis what has transpired in Ukraine.