



India and the World

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Closing gaps in EU-India relations

The recent visit to Sweden by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, was in many ways symptomatic of the growth in the EU-India partnership. The main pretext for Jaishankar's visit was the second EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum, arranged in Stockholm under Sweden's EU Presidency. The forum, and India's central role in it, reflects how the EU is working more closely with the Indo-Pacific region and that the partnership with India amplifies the outreach.

The visit also provided an occasion to reconfirm the strength of the Swedish-India partnership. New Delhi's appetite for moving beyond its first circle of major EU countries towards niched partnerships with smaller Member States has been clearly visible in recent years. During his visit EAM Jaishankar met with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, Foreign Minister Tobias Billström, and the National Security Adviser Henrik Landerholm. Jaishankar also spoke to the Indian diaspora, industry representatives, and engaged with think tanks. From Stockholm, Jaishankar continued to Brussels, where he was joined by India's ministers for Commerce and Industry (Goyal) and Communications, Electronics and Information Technology (Vaishnaw) for the first meeting in the newly constituted EU-India Trade and Technology (TTC) council, along with EVP's Dombrovskis and Vestager.

In the fast paced and geopolitically oriented international politics of today, it is good to be reminded that the strong momentum reflected in the EU-India partnership and on display during Jaishankar's visit to Stockholm, has not always been there.

For many decades engagements between New Delhi and the EU institutions were not reaching full potential. Even the wordings of the Strategic Partnership from 2004 are reflecting engagements much less ambitious than what we see today. In contrast, the EU's bilateral and regional outreach, along with New Delhi's "Brussels' correction", that is, a stronger engagement with the EU's institutions, is currently placing the EU-India partnership as potentially consequential for both parties.

We now seem to be at a historic juncture where the political leadership in India, the leadership of the EU's institutions, and national political leaderships across Member States see benefits of a deepened partnership. Both parties have learned from mistakes from previous years when the relationship was almost exclusively pegged on the hopes of concluding a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Instead, the partnership of today has many touch points, and although the FTA will eventually be foundational going forward, it is not the only pillar on which the partnership rests.

What drives the growing convergence? First, the general redistribution of power in the international system, India's growing capabilities, and the friction associated with China's rise. The EU is now signalling that the Indo-Pacific has Brussels' attention, it is also acknowledging the complexity of the relationship with Beijing, and its commitment to work with India as an emerging power with potential of becoming a co-shaper of international cooperation, norms, and institutional architecture.

Second, the green transition. India will arguably be the first power in modern history, whose rise in the mid- to long term will be propelled by green growth. It is imperative for our planet that India does not repeat what other rising powers' have done before: to base growth in brown energy sources. The necessary shift from brown to green sources impacts international relations and cooperation in dramatic ways as supply chains, infrastructure, and dependencies will be realigned. The EU will be an indispensable partner for India in this regard. Finding ways for increasing European investments into India's green transition, as well as to further cooperate with regards to innovation in green tech to diversify from dependencies both actors currently have on China, would be significant. The green transition also enables new coalitions forming in international politics, which the EU and India have, for different reasons, interests to join.

Third, digitalisation and emerging technologies. Obviously, technology has in different ways been a driver for change throughout history. But compared to previous phases in early modern and modern history, Indo-Pacific powers, including India to a growing extent, are advanced players in development and application of emerging technologies. India and Indo-Pacific partners are now not simply takers of technology as has been the case before, but co-developers, or drivers of innovation. Also, much of the talent that sustains innovation now comes from the East. The EU-India TTC has potential to become a vehicle for co-operation in this domain, allowing for high-level political attention. Interoperability of Digital Public Infrastructure, cooperation regarding quantum computing, and trustworthy AI, and a future MoU for coordination of semiconductor sectors, were tangible and forward looking results coming out of the first meeting of the TTC in Brussels.



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