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The ‘Strategic Pull’ of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

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The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

Abstract

This paper delves in the background and historicity in order to trace the trajectory of the relations between the European Union and India since 1963 when diplomatic relations were established between the two up to the present scenario and provides a glimpse into the manner in which the EU-India partnership has evolved. It attempts to follow the global, regional and local events that impacted the EU-India equation. The role of major agreements, summits and joint declarations that have shaped the contours of the relationship and have propelled EU and India to come together have been studied. It seeks to understand the reasons that have led to the establishment of a stable and trustworthy relationship in the midst of the chaotic and tumultuous international climate. The paper reveals the current nature of relations and mutual benefits accrued therefrom and its ramifications on the global order.

Keywords: India-EU relations, Enlargement, Euro crisis, EU-India FTA, Brexit, Modernization

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The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

Introduction

India and EU share a bond based on goodwill and mutual cooperation. The geographical distance has not deterred the two partners from acknowledging and consolidating upon the bond of friendship that exists between them. There is mutual recognition of being natural partners as they can bank upon each other's support on local, regional as well as global issues.

The EU is a bloc of 27 member-states enmeshed in terms of mutual trade and monetary policies. The area of operation among the EU member-states is essentially borderless and allows for free and smooth movement of people. The member-states being a part of the EU in all possible spheres, such as technology transfers, environmental protection, research, development and energy, benefit greatly. Professionals from the EU member-states belonging to various fields such as law, medicine, tourism, banking and insurance are free to operate in all the member-countries. All member-states are eligible to bid for public contracts (Amadeo 2019).¹ The EU is essentially a free trade area and is commonly referred to as a customs union. The EU member-states are not subjected to any trade barriers while there is uniform imposition of tariffs on goods and services that come from outside the European Union. Thus, the regulation of domestic markets and standardization of taxes and monetary unification have been achieved (Eichengreen 1992).² The EU is a sui generis entity and defies categorization (Marsh and Mackenstein2005)³ as it is neither an international organization endowed with complete international autonomy nor is it a traditional international organization with limited powers. The EU has a distinct legal status both in relation to its member-states as well as third countries (Vooren and Wessel 2014: 7).⁴

India is a federal union of 29 states and 7 union territories It is known as a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government (National Portal of India 2019).⁵ Both the EU and India subscribe to similar values and ideals which leads them to arrive at a common and consensus-based approach on most issues. India also believes in the dictum of reaching out to the world and building alliances with other worthy partners in the quest for furthering its growth and development as well as contributing towards ensuring peace and stability in the world at large.

Shreya Pandey

The Political Dimension of EU-India Relations

The Treaty of Rome of 1957 brought the European Economic Community also known as the Common Market into existence (King's College London 2018).⁶ Britain was very soon enamored by its performance as EEC seemed to be doing much better than the Commonwealth in economic terms. However, the first attempt of the British to gain entry into the EEC failed miserably on account of the exercise of the veto power by Charles De Gaulle (Roberts 2001: 283).⁷

Meanwhile, India seemed to be greatly relieved in the light of this development. India was concerned about the prospect of the inclusion of UK into the European Common Market as its interests were most likely to be compromised, neglected and sidelined along with that of the other developing countries (Publications Division 1964: 397-401).⁸ India was extremely critical of NATO and therefore, the EEC as all its members were part of the former and had threatened to extend their service and come to the assistance of Portuguese colonial rule in Goa. However, India was perceptive enough to recognize the potential of the EEC and was mellowed in its criticism. However, EEC did not show any special interest towards building its partnership with South Asia including India as its focus was more euro-centric till the 1970s (Jain 2014:11-12).⁹

India remained largely unaffected by the ramifications of the Cold War unlike Europe. India pursued the policy of non-alignment during this period which was a relatively new concept that had not been adequately put to test (Chaudhuri 2014: 21)¹⁰ and was largely considered to be a non-European phenomenon (Chopra 1992: 102-103).¹¹

The early 1960s and 1970s saw relevant interaction between different institutions taking place apart from the inauguration of the aid programme. The 1980s witnessed the expansion of dialogue, increase in depth of institutional linkages and addition of other dimensions to the aid programme (Bhasin 2009: 207).¹² The EEC took note of the growing presence of India in global affairs and was mindful of the country's large domestic market, potential for growth and huge geographical area which happened to be larger than the 12 member-states of the EC put together (Europe Information External Relations 1986: 2-3).¹³ The six founding countries of the EEC were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The membership increased to twelve with the joining of Denmark, Ireland and UK in the 1970s while Greece, Spain and Portugal became part of the EC in the 1980s.¹⁴

The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

The EEC is known to have funded Operation Flood which is supposedly one of the largest rural development programmes in India. It led to massive empowerment of dairy farmers owing to increase in milk production and rural incomes. Two phases of the project were funded —from 1970 to 1985 which covered 62 percent of the costs (European Commission 2018).¹⁵

A substantial chunk (about 45 percent) of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) was allocated to Asia out of which 95 percent of the share was dedicated to low income recipient countries that included India. In fact, India and China are known to have majorly benefitted as half of the total ODA was dedicated to both these countries. This gesture of the EEC was a manifestation of blending business interests with altruistic measures for achieving long-term strategic objectives (Rudner 1990: 19-20).¹⁶

India was indeed one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the EEC way back in 1962. Despite the consistent and robust multi-faceted engagement with the EU, the EC Delegation was created in Delhi not before 1982 (Austermann 2014)¹⁷ while the Head of the Delegation was accredited in 1983 (Giri 2001: 97).¹⁸ The EU Delegation in India is known to wear several hats in order to ensure the smooth maneuvering of the EU-India partnership. It coordinates between the different stakeholders and participants of projects apart from managing the domain of external aid and economic and development cooperation programmes (Coulon 2008: 16).¹⁹ The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the “E” in EEC which stood for “Economic” gradually fall into disuse while EC became the EU with the coming into force of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.²⁰

A very clear paradigm shift in India's foreign policy was visible in the 1990s. India was no longer inclined to tenaciously adhere to the doctrines of non-alignment, socialism and third world solidarity, and willfully embraced liberalization, privatization and globalization (Gangopadhyay 2012:117).²¹ The rest of the world including Europe took note of the progressive steps taken by India which led to strengthening of bonds and linkages between India and EU in the mid-1990s (Bendiek and Wagner 2008:153).²² The remarkable rise of India and China resulted in the tilting of the scales of global power towards the East and consequently EU thought it to be crucial to reach out to these countries (Jokela and Gaens 2009:1).²³

India was conscious of the benefits of increasing its clout by means of strong alliances and urged the EU in the 1990s to enhance EU-India political dialogue. EU was the conduit through which India could easily reach out to European countries especially Western Europe (Jain 2002: 135).²⁴

Shreya Pandey

The Cooperation Agreement between the European Community and the Republic of India on Partnership and Development was signed in 1994 which provided the basis for the legal framework of EU-India relations. It contributed substantially towards strengthening the EU-India partnership by means of initiating the process of organizing annual summits that were being held since 2000 (Wulbers 2015:635).²⁵ The Cooperation Agreement elucidated that both the partners had ‘excellent relations and traditional links of friendship’ and ‘respect for human rights and democratic principles’ would be the guiding principle for EU-India relations as well as for the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement (Official Journal of the European Communities 1994).²⁶

The EU-India Enhanced Partnership was signed in 1996. The document was testimony to EU’s acknowledgement of India’s new global image. It was stated that India garners a lot of attention on account of its ‘cultural diversity, democratic tradition and its recently renewed economic dynamism’ (Communication of the European Communities 1996:3).²⁷

India declared itself to be a nuclear weapon state following 5 nuclear bomb test explosions on 11 May 1998. The United States swiftly imposed unilateral economic sanctions upon India (Rogowsky and Butcher 1998).²⁸ Britain similarly adopted an attitude of hostility and urged EU member-states to recall their ambassadors from India. However, the British stance was countered by France and others who believed that the European envoys should stay and report on India’s posturing on the nuclear question (Ray 2011:89).²⁹ The EU member-states such as UK, Germany and France were unable to take a unified stance against India and the EU response can be characterized as mild at its best. The EU expressed “concerns about the emitted dangers in the South Asian region...and that the EU should put sanctions on India if it did not join the NPT” (Khan 2015: 33).³⁰

The first EU-India summit took place in June 2000 in order to nurture the political dimension of the essentially economic partnership. India thus became part of the league consisting of China and Japan that engaged with the EU on a summit level (Mohan 2000).³¹ An Agenda for Action was adopted that proposed ‘enhancing bilateral dialogue by holding further regular Summits, Foreign Ministers’ meetings every year and Senior Officials and experts’ meetings each semester which will address foreign policy and security issues of common concern’ (European Commission 2000).³² The consecutive summits contributed towards increased engagement on all possible fronts between the two partners.

The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

The EU-India partnership was upgraded to Strategic Partnership during the fifth summit in 2004. Emphasis was laid upon greater cooperation by means of:

strengthening dialogue and consultation mechanisms; deepening political dialogue and cooperation; bringing together People and Cultures; enhancing economic policy dialogue and cooperation; and developing trade and investment (Ministry of Commerce 2005).³³

A detailed Joint Action Plan was adopted at the sixth EU-India summit in order to provide a layout for concrete action in the areas endorsed by the EU-India Strategic Partnership. Thereafter, an implementation report of the Joint Action Plan was submitted from the sixth summit onwards. The report on the Joint Action Plan acknowledged the strengthening of the EU-India dialogue that was achieved by setting up of a number of new consultation networks which included Security Dialogue, a Dialogue on Migration Issues and Visa Policy, sectoral Working Groups on Pharmaceuticals and Biotechnology, Agriculture and Marine Products, Food Processing, Technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phytosanitary issues and formation of a High Level Trade Group (European Commission Press Release Database 2018).³⁴

The eighth EU-India summit was held in November 2007. An MOU on the Country Strategy Paper for India for the period 2007-2010 which would provide traction to the EU-India Joint Action Plan and help in the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals was signed (Ministry of External Affairs Government of India 2012).³⁵ The joint statement of the summit did take note of the progress made in specific areas through agreements, dialogue, conferences and round-tables. However, it lacked creativity and innovation and the approach adopted could be characterized as extremely mundane.

The tenth EU-India summit was held in 2009 and it marked nearly a decade of robust and enduring partnership ever since the first summit took place in 2000 (European Commission 2009).³⁶ The joint statement of the eleventh summit failed to discuss the impact of the Lisbon Treaty upon EU-India relations if any. The twelfth EU-India summit reaffirmed belief in the sturdiness of the partnership. Reference was made to greater interaction through the Strategic Partnership and the early finalization of the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (Ministry of External Affairs Government of India 2012).³⁷

A long gap ensued after the twelfth summit and the next EU-India summit could take place only in 2016. This was on account of the killing of two Indian fishermen by a couple of Italian marines while safeguarding an Italian oil tanker as part of an anti-piracy mission off India's southern Kerala coast (*The Local* 2018).³⁸ In Delhi, transfer of power from the UPA

Shreya Pandey

to the NDA had taken place by then. The thirteenth EU-India summit sought to take the relationship to the next level by introducing an all-encompassing comprehensive agenda by means of joint declarations on disparate issues such as terrorism, clean energy and climate, water, migration and mobility. However, the joint declarations were non-binding in nature as no legal or financial obligation under domestic or international law required to be adhered to. This meant that observing utmost seriousness in pursuance of these goals and objectives would be conspicuous by its absence (Europa 2016).³⁹ The EU-India Agenda for Action-2020 was released during this summit with the aim of strengthening the Strategic Partnership in the next five years and taking forward the shared objectives of the Joint Action Plan of 2005 and 2008 respectively (EU-India Agenda for Action-2020).⁴⁰ The fourteenth EU-India summit marked the completion of 55 years of diplomatic relations between the two partners. The very comprehensive joint statement of not less than 53 paragraphs indicates the growing intensity of the relationship. It is pertinent to note that the joint statement specifically mentioned globally proscribed terrorists and terrorist organizations such as Hafeez Sayeed, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, Dawood Ibrahim, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed which must have caused immense discomfort to our belligerent neighbor, Pakistan. Both sides expressed concern over Chinese aggression in South China Sea. The EU was appreciative of the developmental assistance provided by India to Afghanistan. The two sides lent their support to the Iranian nuclear deal and condemned North Korea for relentlessly and irresponsibly pursuing its nuclear and missile programme.⁴¹ The summit witnessed discussion and progress on a wide variety of issues such as global commons, cyber space, non-proliferation and disarmament, blue economy, space cooperation, food safety, best practices and innovative technology, economic transition, start-up, internet governance, pharmaceuticals, science and technology, atomic and fusion energy, civil aviation, skills development, higher education, migration and mobility and people-to-people exchanges. Besides, joint declarations on counter-terrorism, climate and energy and smart and sustainable urbanization were signed. The resumption of holding of annual summits on a regular basis seems to indicate willingness of the two sides to constantly work towards the betterment of relations (European Council, Council of the European Union 2017).⁴²

The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

The Economic Angle in EU-India Relations

The most acceptable stereotype about the EU-India equation is that it is essentially an economic relationship. The economic dimension of the relationship is known to grow exponentially and thrive and thus, keeping alive the partnership has proven to be beneficial to India. India has gained immensely by virtue of being a trade partner of the EU from the very beginning of establishing diplomatic relations.

The EC and India became the first benefactor and beneficiary respectively as far as the GSP (Generalized System of Preferences) facility was concerned. It was touted as the first systematic effort towards strengthening relations between India and EC. However, this mechanism fell short of being effective as a result of non-inclusion of sensitive goods under GSP (Bhattacharya 2005: 5-6).⁴³ The Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) that was signed in 1972 prior to UK's Treaty of Accession in 1973, declared that it would make attempts at solving trade-related disputes of Asian countries belonging to the Commonwealth of Nations. The JDI however, did not exhibit any real concern for furthering India's interests which could have been safeguarded by means of introducing sweeping economic reforms (Jain 2015: 178-180).⁴⁴ The Commercial Cooperation Agreement signed between EEC and India in 1974, although hailed as a model agreement, did not include investment within its purview and India was given short shrift in favour of countries such as Brazil and Yugoslavia (Winand et al. 2015: 111).⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the EC was India's largest trading partner and one fourth of the latter's trade was dependent upon the former (Giri 2001: 91-92).⁴⁶ The CCA of 1981 although much more diversified, did not spur increase in exports from India to the member-states of the EC and comprised only 1.11 percent of total external trade of the EC in 1992. However, the percentage change in India's exports was from 2 percent in 1980 to 20.6 percent in 1993 which was markedly significant (Bhattacharya 2005: 13-14).⁴⁷ The economic reforms in the 1990s led India to emerge as an assertive actor free from economic insecurities and dependence on foreign aid (Acharya 2012).⁴⁸

The EU-India Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development of 1994 bestowed the Most Favoured Nation Status (Wulbers 2015: 635)⁴⁹ upon India and aimed at building linkages among the various business communities in the wake of the economic reforms embraced by India (Official Journal of the European Communities 1994).⁵⁰

The new EU currency of exchange was launched in 1999 and the biggest cash change in history from different European currencies to euro took place. A total of 19 EU countries became a part of the eurozone. Presently, 341 million Europeans use euro everyday which has emerged as the second most-used currency worldwide (Europa 2020).⁵¹ Europe was

Shreya Pandey

India's leading trade partner accounting for 27 percent of exports and 30 percent of its imports. Indian banks and financial institutions made fundamental alterations in their accounting systems and practices (Ramesh 2002: 332-334).⁵² India's FCAs (Foreign Currency Assets) are maintained in major currencies which includes the euro (Agarwal 2013: 484).⁵³ ECB has come out with a report which states that the average annual rate of rupee to the euro has registered an overall increase from the early days of euro in 2001 up to 2017 (Statista 2018).⁵⁴

The big bang enlargement took place in 2004 (Europa 2007)⁵⁵ and it was expected to have a major impact upon market access for India. However, India's share of exports to the new member-states of the EU constituted a meagre 1 percent of the total exports of India. In fact, the level of common external tariffs imposed by EU was less than the average nominal tariffs prevailing in the acceding countries (Nataraj and Sahoo 2004:1872-1875).⁵⁶

Both the partners started negotiations for a free trade pact that was formally known as Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in 2007. However, the negotiations were unofficially halted in 2013 due to lack of progress on what either or both sides considered to be sensitive issues. However, attempts have been made from time to time to resume negotiations in order to achieve a breakthrough, but to the effort has shown no results so far. The recent decision taken by India to end or suspend bilateral investment treaties with its partners including the EU member-states and seek new pacts modelled on the basis of an ideal investment pact has raised concerns on the EU side. The EU has stated that it would rather prefer a single investment treaty with all its members as part of the BTIA (Sen 2018).⁵⁷

The mandatory requirement for successful functioning of the eurozone was— adherence to the rules and financial regulations including maintenance of annual budget deficits that were not to exceed 3 percent of GDP, and public debt was not to increase beyond 60 percent of GDP. These cardinal principles were violated with impunity by some of the member-states (Ray 2018)⁵⁸ as a result of which the euro crisis reared its head in 2009 and the currency started to be looked upon with a considerable amount of skepticism (*Economist.com* 2016).⁵⁹ EU was India's largest trading partner at the time and it was natural for the latter to nurse concerns about the present and future scenario of the economic engagement (Sachdeva 2011:78-81).⁶⁰ The eurozone crisis adversely impacted the pace of progress in EU-India relations. The EU was required to take care and guard her own turf first which led to the EU-India FTA being relegated to the background. EU's aspirations to

The ‘Strategic Pull’ of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

emerge as an influential power in Asia alongside India suffered a setback. Surviving the euro crisis became the utmost priority of the EU.

The EU has largely staved off the economic crisis and the current picture suggests that EU continues to remain India’s largest trading partner. EU’s trade with India constitutes 12.9 percent of total Indian trade which is more than the share of China (10.9 percent) and USA (10.1. percent). A total of €92 billion worth of trade in goods took place in 2018. The EU also happens to be the most popular destination of Indian exports and comprises a share of 18 percent of the total of India’s exports. India remains EU’s ninth largest partner and accounted for 2.3 percent of EU’s total trade in goods in 2018. However, India trails far behind in trading volumes when compared to EU’s leading trade partners such as USA (16.9 percent) and China (15.3 percent). Although it must be noted that EU-India trade in goods saw a substantial increase of 72 percent in the last decade. Similarly, trade in services between EU and India also increased from €23 billion in 2010 to €29 billion in 2016. India is currently the fourth largest exporter of services to the EU and the sixth largest destination for EU service exports. The EU is the leading foreign investor in India as EU’s share in foreign investment inflows doubled from 8 percent to 18 percent in the last decade. EU’s FDI stocks in India were to the tune of €73 billion in 2016 which is a substantial amount but not when compared to EU’s FDI investment in China which amounts to €178 billion. Around 6000 EU based companies operate in India and provide 1.7 million jobs indirectly and 5 million jobs directly in diverse sectors. Indian companies on the other hand, have invested over € 50 billion in Europe since 2000 (Commission and its Priorities 2019).⁶¹ These facts and figures seem to suggest that India and EU do seem to perceive each other as important trade and investment partners.

Contemporary Issues of Engagement

Elections in India and EU in the first half of 2019

The 900 million registered voters of India decided the country’s fate in the general elections held in May 2019. The incumbent Bhartiya Janta Party registered a resounding victory. With such a large mandate the new government led by Prime Minister Modi is likely to have a smooth sail through the next five years of policymaking (*India Today Webdesk 2019*).⁶²

The general election that is held in India every five years is considered to be the largest democratic exercise in the world. The second largest is the European Parliament (EP) elections. Elections in India and EU took place almost at the same time in 2019. More than

Shreya Pandey

5000 candidates belonging to 400 political parties participated in the EP election. The 751 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) consider and approve the legislation proposed by the European Commission, oversee its budget and elect its President (Briefing 2019).⁶³

The centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and the centre-left Socialists and Democrats (S&D) which are the traditional blocs have lost their decisive majority for the first time. The Greens, Liberals, right-wing nationalist and populist groups have made their mark in the elections and are likely to notably affect decisions taken in the parliament (*India Today Webdesk* 2019).⁶⁴

The assumption of power by the leadership in India and European Parliament after the 2019 elections should be utilized for maximizing benefits from this partnership. Regular interaction and meeting between the leaders should be emphasized upon. The momentum of regular parleys set from the thirteenth summit onwards should be sustained and the next EU-India summit should be held with the zeal to achieve substantial outcomes (Lannoo 2019).⁶⁵

The fifteenth EU-India summit was slated to be held on 13 March 2020 in Brussels. However, the corona virus cast its shadow and the summit has been postponed. In the meanwhile, the EU seems to have become clearly uncomfortable with the Indian government's stance on certain domestic issues such as the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and the National Register for Citizens (NRC). A 27 -member delegation of MEPs who claimed that they were travelling in their personal capacity visited Jammu and Kashmir in October 2019 in order to make an assessment of the ground situation themselves. Moreover, the visit was followed up by the tabling of not less than six resolutions in the European Parliament on issues pertaining to Article 370 and the Citizenship Amendment Act. This occurred despite the assertion by the Indian government that these issues were strictly within the ambit of internal affairs and therefore any interference was undesirable and unwarranted. Apart from these issues that have sprung up of late, both sides are most likely to explore ways and means to further strengthen the Strategic Partnership amidst the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic and growing unilateralism in the global economic and political world order.

The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

Increasing Salience of Defence Cooperation

The Global Strategy for EU's Foreign and Security Policy released in 2016 does not seem to recognize India as a security actor who can be instrumental in resolution of regional and international disputes with the exception of combating piracy by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean. There seems to be no focused and specific mention of defence cooperation and military to military contacts. The realm of security is clubbed with foreign policy and hence issues such as counter-terrorism, maritime security and cybersecurity were highlighted in the fourteenth EU-India Summit in this spirit (European Commission 2018).⁶⁶

However, numerous concerted efforts towards reforms such as putting in place EU military training missions (MPCC), European Peace Facility (EPF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), European Defence Fund (EDF), Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats and EU Security and Defence College (ESDC) are likely to enhance the global and security profile of the EU which shall most likely lead to greater engagement between the EU and Indian armed and defence forces (European Union External Action 2018).⁶⁷

In fact, the EU member-states have been known to provide some of the most critical capabilities for the Indian army, navy and air force. The general perception of the Indian military personnel regarding defence equipment from West European countries is that it is extremely expensive to make purchases and maintain the same while many a times a cloud of doubt looms over the quality of spare parts supplied from Central and Eastern Europe. Despite these irritants, bilateral defence and security dialogue is all-encompassing and is increasing at a smooth and fast pace. It is inclusive of defence and security dialogues, defence trade and joint military exercises (EU Public Diplomacy and Outreach in India and in the SAARC 2016).⁶⁸

The United Kingdom and India have pledged to strengthen defence ties through 'a renewed MOU' and have resolved to 'redouble efforts' to work upon 'mutual defence and security capability needs and collaborate on solutions' (Chaudhury 2019).⁶⁹ India and UK have decided to collaborate and concentrate with renewed vigour upon "best practices in Counter Terrorism, Counter Improvised Explosive Devices, air force training, aircraft carriers, maritime safety, shipbuilding and UN peacekeeping" (ET Online 2018).⁷⁰ The strategic partnership signed between India and France took defence cooperation to another level and

Shreya Pandey

concentrated on research and development in defence production and procurement of weapon systems and capabilities, joint military exercises, transfer of sophisticated armament technology, combating international terrorism, sharing of military expertise and joint development of value-added military technologies and hardwares (India-France 2017).⁷¹ One of the most significant development albeit controversial, has been the €7.87 billion defence deal signed with France by the Narendra Modi government in 2016 as per ‘which the sale of 36 Rafale Medium Multi-role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) in flyaway condition’ to India has been agreed upon (Gupta 2019).⁷² France has said that it shall ensure the timely delivery of Rafale fighter jets despite the impediments posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This assurance was given by the French defence minister Florence Parly to the Indian defence minister, Rajnath Singh. The first Rafale fighter was received by India in October 2018 during a ceremony attended by the defence ministers of both the countries which also coincided with the Indian Air Force’s 87th founding day as well as the Dussehra festival (Hindustan Times 2020).⁷³

Such closeness is bound to lead to building of synergies and dealing with common concerns such as the all-pervading power of China. With EU member-states slowly but surely making their presence felt in the region, it would not be wrong to say that joint intervention in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean is a possibility in the near future.

Several ports in the EU are currently operating under the control of the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO), a development that has not brought any cheer to the EU as it has expressed concern over acquisition of strategic assets by external actors. The EU has categorically stated that it shall be working alongside India ‘to help build the capacity of maritime nations in the India Ocean’. A workshop was held in February 2019 wherein experts and officials gathered together to deliberate on matters of concern and importance (Priyanka Bhide 2019).⁷⁴

Similarly, the involvement of India in EU’s dealings with Russia cannot be ruled out. Thus, EU and India are most likely to emerge as reliable partners in each other’s defence and security strategies.

The 'Strategic Pull' of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

Straightening the knots of the economic equation

The economies of Europe and India are known to be dissimilar in nature. The European economy is known to be the largest in the world as measured by assets under management with over \$32.7 trillion. The Indian economy which is worth \$2.183 trillion, is one of the world's fastest growing economies. Angus Maddison has stated that during the 1700s, India's share of world income of around 22.6 percent was very close to Europe's share of 23.3 percent at that time. However, the current scenario reveals that there is a yawning gap between India's share of global GDP which amounts to 3 percent and continental Europe's share of 30 percent respectively (Europe India Centre for Business and Industry).⁷⁵

Currently, the EU is India's largest trading partner in goods and services and this shall most likely continue to be the case in the post-Brexit scenario. However, the potential of the two-way trade between EU and India is far more than the current volume of trade which is recorded to be around \$141 billion. The EU has espoused that it seeks to provide the most conducive regulatory and business environment possible to the European companies in India. The two sides are likely to ink a future investment protection agreement and launch a new partnership on circular economy as well as blue economy. The European Commissioner for Environment recently launched a new Business Support Project aimed at enhancing 'business to business cooperation and communication between European and Indian companies, focusing in particular on small and medium sized enterprises, in order to meet the growing demand in India for innovative technologies'(European Union Delegation to India 2019).⁷⁶

The much hyped and sought after EU-India FTA talks launched way back in 2007 have still not been concluded on account of opposition from both sides on various issues. The EU expressed reservations regarding drug patents, tariffs for second-hand cars, agriculture, services, rules of origin and regarding the list of sensitive items. The EU has been in favour since long of a robust intellectual property rights regime and a sustainable development chapter inclusive of social and environmental clauses. The EU is also upset about cancellation of 20 bilateral investment protection treaties with EU member-countries by India in 2016 and has called for the laying down of detailed provisions for Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). India currently does not see the EU eye to eye upon these proposals. India has been demanding for a different set of concessions for itself. There has been a long-standing demand for increasing the number of visas granted to skilled workers from India. She has also been seeking the 'data-secure nation' status to be conferred upon her by the EU as it would substantially bring down compliance costs for Indian software providers. It is highly unlikely to see the EU relent upon these issues in the near future as it is overly

Shreya Pandey

concerned about regulatory norms and data-privacy standards (Khorana 2019).⁷⁷ Agriculture, cars, wines and spirits, dairy products, pharmaceuticals, insurance, accountancy and legal services are areas where differences persist and have still not been ironed out (Godemont).⁷⁸

However, despite many alarm bells ringing, both EU and India continue to exhibit enduring patience and engage with each other in order to ensure that the EU-India FTA does see the light of day and is ‘economically meaningful, delivering real new market openings in all sectors to both sides, contains a solid rules-based component, and includes a comprehensive trade and sustainable development chapter, notably in order to deal with social and environmental impacts...and ensuring a high level of investment protection in order to remain an attractive destination for new investments is also a key dimension’(Commission and its Priorities 2019).⁷⁹

New Areas of Cooperation

EU and India have resolved to consolidate a partnership of modernization. EU has sought to help India to effectively utilize the demographic dividend, establish herself as a manufacturing hub, extend support to macroeconomic reforms such as Goods and Services Tax, develop infrastructure, alter India’s energy mix, address the problem of climate change and environmental issues, align with international standards, tackle the problem of India’s rapid urbanization and work towards development of rural communities and public health. Digitalization, automatization and data protection are the new buzz words upon which both sides intend to work diligently. The two sides are also seen cooperating actively in bringing about mobility of talent on both sides, overhauling the system of education, enhancing inter-cultural dialogue, ensuring better management of migration and mobility and promotion of tourism. Both sides seek to promote multilateralism through effective functioning of the UN, G20 and WTO. EU and India consistently reinforce cooperation on foreign policy issues and espouse common values as well as common action in this respect. They envisage a multipolar Asia and cooperative and inclusive regional orders. Both sides are seeking to strengthen the partnership by means of taking concrete action, putting in place a more dynamic EU-India diplomacy mechanism, intensifying EU-India parliamentary relations, streamlining the architecture of EU-India strategic partnership and holding of regular EU-India summits (Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan 2018).⁸⁰

The ‘Strategic Pull’ of EU-India Relations: A Critical Assessment

The two sides are always geared towards improving trade and investment ties that increased from \$101.5 billion in 2017-18 to \$115.6 billion in 2018-19 and many European countries such as Germany and France continue to be among the top ten investors in India. Discussions of late have been on India’s e-commerce policy, data protection norms and price control on medical devices. The other issues that are being deliberated upon include phase II of India’s Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme, steel quality issues, market access for alcoholic beverages, and rules related to the cosmetic sector (PTI 2019).⁸¹

Conclusions

There has been a sea-change in mutual perceptions, assumptions and attitudes between India and the EU. India has metamorphosed from an aid recipient to a donor country which has changed the set of global responsibilities that it has traditionally been imbued with. India is looked upon as one of the fastest growing economies of the world with a huge potential for growth.

The EU on the other hand, has had to face the brunt of the eurozone crisis which shook its foundations along with rise of the extreme right, migration crisis and more recently that of Brexit. The erstwhile calm, confident, successful and complacent EU has been driven to the edge as a result of these developments. The chink in the EU armour has exposed its vulnerable side. However, despite undergoing major changes and surviving huge upheavals, EU and India have stood their ground. Such major churning have only made them more resolute and responsible partners who are most resilient in the face of adversity.

The two sides have expressed consensus on foreign policy issues on numerous occasions and have repeatedly asserted that they believe in the dictum of ensuring international peace and security through multilateralism. Thus, EU and India always try their level best to refrain from indulging in tariff and trade wars that would eventually undermine operationalization of international trade. They seek to preserve the economic and political infrastructure that sustains and nourishes complex international operations in all spheres. They have no inclination whatsoever to act impulsively and indulge in irresponsible behaviour having far-reaching undesirable consequences. The two sides do not seek unethical disruptions that would lead to destruction of the essential balance and peace and calm of the

Shreya Pandey

international system. They thus, tend to react to global events in the most measured and mature manner.

Both the partners are acknowledged as credible normative powers who can play a vital role in agenda-setting and taking concrete and responsible action in world affairs especially for the resolution of disputes. They will have to undertake the responsibility of acting as the leading normative powers in the international arena. As national interest seems to be regarded of paramount importance by the leading powers of the world, the well-oiled machinery based on cooperation and interdependence is increasingly being subjected to greater risks. The two sides seek to preserve the international economic and political configuration of the world by espousing and upholding the values of democracy, human rights and rule of law. They enjoy the reputation of being gatekeepers of probity in the international sphere and their current and potential role as effective global partners should certainly not be underestimated.

Economic relations are the adhesive that binds EU and India very strongly. The mutual stake and benefits render this relationship to be an enduring one. The strong foundation of the relationship is also sourced from the similar set of values that the two sides uphold and adhere to. Consensus on most of the global issues makes them natural partners despite belonging to geographically disparate regions. These factors provide ample ground for fostering cooperation in new areas and sectors. Needless to say, the EU-India relationship is bound to grow from strength to strength.

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