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Balancing Interests and Promoting Democracy

The India-EU Trade and Technology Council

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Balancing Interests and Promoting Democracy The India-EU Trade and Technology Council

Abstract

The evolving geopolitical order in the Indo-Pacific has prompted the European Union (EU) to adjust its strategic priorities as it looks eastward to tackle the emerging economic and security threats. The features of the EU's Trade and Technology Council (TTC), signed with the backdrop of an evolving geopolitical order focus on critical aspects of green energy, trade, and technology. This paper comments on the growing European-Indian partnership and how it is strategically beneficial to both the signatories. Additionally, given the EU's commitment to the rule of law, this paper presents a critical assessment of India as a 'like-minded' partner.

Introduction

The European Union has actively focused on diversifying and strengthening its partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, increasing its presence in the region. In September 2021, the EU joined the group of countries to formalise an Indo-Pacific strategy.¹ The strategy outlines the EU's resolve to promote a rules-based order in the region, respect for democracy and human rights, contributing to the international climate goals, strategic autonomy, and common public goods as key goals. To this end, the EU has signed multiple bilateral partnerships in the region including with Japan, Singapore, and South Korea and a strategic partnership with ASEAN

amongst others.² The EU envisions itself maturing into a geopolitical union.³ There are similarities in the Indian strategy as it balances its partnerships within different economic, security and trade blocs, such as the Quad and the BRICS+.⁴ Amid this era of ad hoc coalitions, the EU and India have launched a Trade and Technology Council (TTC), which had its first ministerial meeting on the 16th of May 2023.

This FOCUS paper aims to analyse the TTC in conjunction with broader significance for both the EU and India. The first section provides an overview of the TTC's three working groups, thereby establishing a context, and an understanding of its mandate. The subsequent section delves into the broader potential of the TTC and highlights the strategic opportunities that could be mutually beneficial for both parties. The third section critically comments on the democratic backsliding in India through examples. Lastly, this paper concludes with a call for the EU to leverage its partnership and the benefits of the TTC, to ensure the rule of democracy in India and by extension in the Indo-Pacific.

The Features of the Trade and Technology Council

In the official text, the EU and India have referred to the shifting global geopolitical landscape and their similarities in being vibrant democracies, open market economies and pluralist socie-

ties as a responsibility to increase cooperation in relevant areas, to ensure 'security, prosperity and sustainable development in a multipolar world'.⁵ The language builds on the EU discourse of establishing a rules-based order and solid democratic principles. The narrative of the advocacy of a rules-based order and common values is a recurring theme in the joint statements released through the TTC.

The goals of the council have been manifested through the establishment of three working groups: 1. Strategic technologies, digital governance, and digital connectivity; 2. Green and clean energy technologies; and 3. Trade, investment, and resilient value chains.

Working Group 1: Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance and Digital Connectivity

a. Quantum and High-Performance Computing research and development.

The EU and India have agreed to coordinate quantum and high-performance computing (HPC) research and development to address climate change, natural hazards, bioinformatics, biomolecular research, and drug development. While also emphasising cooperation within the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) to explore the possibilities of bilateral cooperation on responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, including in research and innovation. These

set of goals have formalised dialogues between the two parties beginning in 2021, building on the ‘Intent of Cooperation’ signed in November 2022.⁶ However, there is a wide disparity in infrastructure between the two partners, which could present a challenge.⁷ Nevertheless, these actors have focused their super-computing abilities on addressing and understanding climate change, natural hazards and other areas mentioned above, as well as the scope for information sharing to tackle these issues pertinent to both parties.

b. Strategic Coordination in the Semiconductor Sector

The disruption of supply and consequent increase in demand for semiconductors has exacerbated competition in the industry. To rectify and secure their positions the EU and India signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in November 2023.⁸ The EU and Indian officials have been cautiously hopeful about their role in the semiconductor markets.⁹

The Council of the European Union signed the Chips Act in July 2023 to produce semiconductor chips and increase its global market share from less than 10% to around 20% by 2030.¹⁰ The goals of the Chips Act advocate the decrease in reliance on third countries for the supply of these chips. For India’s ambitions, the government has attracted investments from private actors, multinationals and partner states like Japan and South Korea, the leading players in the industry.¹¹ The investment is accompanied by government initiatives to subsidise investment, an obstacle often faced by foreign investors. Within this working group, India and the EU will jointly work towards training programs, knowledge exchange, and capacity building to nurture a talent pool equipped with innovative skills.¹² This aspect of the TTC is an essential opportunity and is explored in further detail in the next sections.

c. Bridging the digital skills gap

A European/International Certification of Digital Literacy (ECDL/ICDL) Foundation report

from 2019 has highlighted that India and the EU lack adequate digital skills and gaps exist in digital literacy in both areas.¹³ Furthermore, as Table 1 suggests, in the countries of the study the self-perception of skills differs from the actual skills by a big margin, creating gaps in employability for the employers. The report recommends that employers should value certifications over self-assessment tests (for instance, EuroPass CV assessments). In the joint statement of their first meeting of the TTC working groups, this has been outlined as well, to create a framework for standardisation of certifications for employers.

d. Digital Data Protection and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)

India’s innovations in Digital Public Infrastructure have been making ‘international waves’, the effects of which are beginning to be acknowledged in Europe as well.¹⁴ The country’s DPI, also called India Stack,¹⁵ has been endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the

Table 1 – Discrepancy in self-assessment and actual skills (ECDL/ICDL Foundation)

Country	Target Group		Spreadsheets	Presentation	Word
Denmark	First-year university students	Self-assessed	89%	84%	76%
		Actual	57%	58%	79%
Finland	First-year university students	Self-assessed	74%	87%	83%
		Actual	37%	60%	63%
Germany	First-year university students and final-year higher-tier secondary education students	Self-assessed	79%	81%	84%
		Actual	38%	66%	60%
India	University students	Self-assessed	64%	86%	85%
		Actual	33%	60%	49%

G20 and the World Economic Forum.¹⁶ Aligning and building on a centralised structure is of benefit for the EU to accomplish digital targets for 2030, which include extending international partnerships to align international standards with EU standards using a human-centric approach.

During the first meeting, India and the EU agreed to collaborate to enhance the interoperability of their respective DPIs to share the technologies with other developing countries.¹⁷ However, where the EU and India have publicly shown signs of collaboration on the DPI, India's data protection laws have proven to be the biggest point of contention within the scope of the TTC.¹⁸ Rights groups have argued it has the potential to infringe on privacy and enable increased state surveillance.¹⁹ This is because government agencies are exempted from the regulations and can access, manage or block data without appropriate accountability through the law as it stands currently.²⁰

Working Group 2: Green and Clean Energy Technologies

The focus of this working group is divided into three principal areas – renewable and low-carbon hydrogen, batteries of electric vehicles, and standards. According to the joint statement of the first workshop²¹, these goals would be accomplished through the implementation of joint wastewater treatment and management projects to facilitate their market uptake, gap analysis on how to treat marine plastic

litter/pollution, sharing knowledge on circularity aspects of batteries, and recover raw materials and developing standards that can ensure interoperability for low carbon hydrogen and renewable materials. The features of this working group build on existing partnerships and working groups within the broader EU-India dialogue and have been published in the EU-India Strategic Partnership: Roadmap to 2025.²²

To the end of wastewater treatment and management projects, India and the EU formalised a partnership through the Joint Declaration on Water, beginning the India-EU Water Partnership (IEWP) in March 2016.²³ This partnership led by Germany with a flexible coalition of member states, private actors and the government of India, is directed to coordinate on nine priority areas on wastewater treatment and reuse in multiple Indian river basins.²⁴ It provides the government of India with state-of-the-art know-how from European partners in their ambition to clean its river basins from industrial pollution and increase efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability for its water treatment projects in the future. On the other hand, this partnership provides opportunities for European businesses. Similarly, there has been an effort from the side of the European Union to collaborate with India in the sector to find solutions for marine litter. In 2021, the EU sought India's endorsement for the Leaders' Pledge for Nature engagement in negotiations on a Global Plastics Agreement. However, India has

thus far not signed the pledge.²⁵ Provisions for this cooperation have also been mentioned in the roadmap to 2025.²⁶

Moreover, the provisions to share knowledge on batteries of electric vehicles, circularity of their raw materials, and development of standards of interoperability of batteries and low carbon hydrogen are novel inclusions within this working group and do not feature in the roadmap 2025. This signals a new focused cooperation within the TTC, outside the scope of other EU-India agreements.

Working Group 3: Trade, Investment and Resilient Value Chains

India and the EU have reignited the erstwhile stalled free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations in 2022, for which this working group could act as a precursor. Furthermore, according to the text of the first meeting's press release, this working group has given itself short-term goals to accomplish before the next meeting. Therefore, before the next meeting of the TTC, the working group is to focus on four key areas:

1. Resilient value chains - To first agree on broad principles for cooperation and as a second step focus on specific supply chains of mutual interest.
2. Market access issues - to jointly resolve identified trade barriers.²⁷
3. Exchange of information on each side's mechanisms for

screening foreign direct investment to enhance mutual understanding of both regimes.

4. Multilateral trade issues, with particular emphasis on the World Trade Organization, including the forthcoming Ministerial Conference-13 and the G20.

Opportunities

Pioneering the rules-based order through multiple partnerships.

The EU has built multiple bilateral partnerships globally, like the TTC. It has signed deals with several of its partners such as digital partnerships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Singapore, the Joint Commitment to Digital Transformation in the EU-Africa Joint Vision for 2030, and the upcoming EU-Latin America and Caribbean Digital Alliance.

This ad-hoc coalition approach signifies an establishment of more bilateral trade regimes with like-minded partners, intending to be more resilient from external shocks. These multiple partnerships with Asian actors broadly have similar areas of coordination, which allows the different strands of the Indo-Pacific strategy to be uniform but also adaptable based on the demands and requirements of partners. The consequences of such an approach are that the EU can expand its footprint in the Indo-Pacific through consistent rules, supporting its broader strategic ambition.²⁸

A comparison with the EU-US TTC. The EU-India TTC is preceded by the EU-US TTC as the first coordination mechanism of its kind. The EU-US TTC was established with similar goals and has nudged a geopolitical alignment between the two economic powers with regards to unifying their stance against Russia.²⁹ Several achievements of the TTC have direct impact on coordinating efforts to end the war in Ukraine.³⁰ The EU and the US were more aligned in interests when it came to their respective strategies towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine, therefore their TTC was able to explicitly mention blocking technological exports to Russia and Belarus.

However, regarding China, the EU and the US have diverged in their approaches. While the EU strategy is based on de-risking, the US had initially adopted the stance of completely decoupling. Even though the American strategic discourse has softened, the actions remain harsher than those of the EU. Therefore, given this background of the first TTC mechanism, the EU-India TTC does not mention either China or Russia explicitly, however, the sectors of cooperation include 'sensitive areas' identified by the EU in its broader strategy such as emerging technologies and resilience of supply chains. Hence, the EU-India iteration of the TTC allows more flexibility for both these actors to combine their protectionism with opportunism.

The strategic aspects of the TTC. The European and Indian partnership can be seen from a lens of opportunism. While this cooperation does not base itself as an antagonistic partnership against any other actor, there is certainly the element of securing respective economies against shocks emanating from the emerging great power competition.

a. Critical economies and the semiconductor race. The EU's TTC collaboration with India has a mutual strategic objective of 'de-risking' their respective economies from the Chinese economy.³¹ The 'sensitive areas' where the EU is looking to de-risk its economy includes the semiconductor sector. The semiconductor supply chain has increasingly been seen as a matter of 'economic security'³². Major players in the market are addressing concerns through policies focused on changing the market by 2030³³. The EU and India both have limited influence in the global value chain of the semiconductors industry. The US, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China are the leaders in the various levels of semiconductor supply chains. Figure 1 illustrates the difference in the number of Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) and Integrated Devices Machines (IDM) facilities in Europe and the rest of the world compared to the major players.

Moreover, the EU and India both consume more than they produce, therefore, they have chosen similar strategies to assert self-sufficiency domestically and market influence externally.

Hence, the elements of economic security are coupled with opportunism for the EU and India. Any inroads in this concentrated and highly valuable market would be economically and politically beneficial for newer players.

The EU and India intend to foster innovation and increase their respective production capacities through investing in fabrication facilities, OSAT facilities and IDMs. Currently, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, and South Korea respectively are market leaders in these areas with Taiwan and South Korea hosting a large concentration of such facilities. Within the TTC's Working Group 1, the EU and India have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in November 2023, which recognises these strategies and chooses a mechanism of cooperation over competition.³⁴ Both organisations plan to create a self-sufficient semi-conductor eco-system, at the least to secure themselves against any unexpected shocks in the value chain. However, due to being late entrants to the market and a lack of natural resources, both are focusing on the lower ends of the value chain to optimise their impact in the short to medium term. Therefore, strategic coordination is a good opportunity for the EU and India, as they share knowledge, while not being direct competitors to each other.

b. Trade, supply chains and economic corridors. In 2021, the EU was India's third-largest trading partner (14% of total trade in goods, 88 billion EUR), while India was the EU's tenth largest,

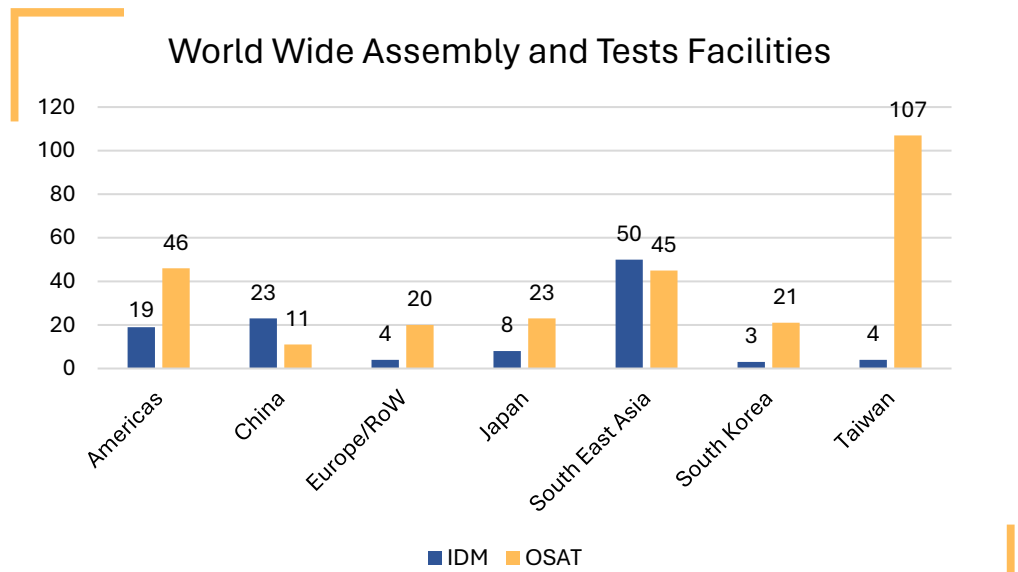


Figure 1 – Region wise comparison of the number of IDM and OSAT facilities (Bish et al. 2022)

contributing 2% to its total trade (goods and services).³⁵ Additionally, in 2023, India's trade dependence on the EU has increased by 1.2% compared to 2022.³⁶ Trade between India and the EU member states like France, Germany, and Ireland has grown, boosting EU-India trade in goods by 30%. The data signifies India's reliance on the EU as an important trade partner, whereas the EU's dependence on India is much less. The obstacles for the EU-India trade have been market access, India's inability to meet EU standards and difficulty to invest in India.³⁷ The low level of mutual economic activity compared to the size of the economies also highlights the potential of the partnership if utilised optimally.

This opportunity relates to the mandates of the third working group, to strengthen an economic partnership between the two economies. The TTC could expedite the free trade agreement negotiations and address market access issues, bolstered by India's growing European

presence through the India-Mediterranean-Europe (IMEC) corridor and the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) states.³⁸

The TEPA agreement reduces tariffs on the export of EFTA goods to India and promises 100 billion USD worth of EFTA investments in India's pharmaceutical, manufacturing, and machinery sectors over the next 15 years.³⁹ The provisions of TEPA foreshadow the potential for India and the EU to overcome the differences which have stalled the talks for their own Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Its mandate highlights India's inclination to find partners in the region, and a call to accelerate an EU/EEA FTA with India.

Before finalizing an FTA, the EU and India must identify cooperative sectors. One consideration is the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) Phase 1, which from October 2023, imposes a 35% tariff on carbon-intensive imports like aluminium

and steel, key components of India's exports to the EU. India argues that the CBAM is a protectionist move on the part of the Union, alluding to its shifting petroleum trade-dependent relationship with Russia.⁴⁰ Therefore, this working group would aid in the identification of the supply chains of mutual interest and mitigating barriers, and a mutual understanding of standards could help unlock the trade potential between the two economies.

The G20's announcement of the India-Europe-Middle East-Corridor (IMEC) in September 2023 complements this working group's goals.⁴¹ Along with the re-establishment of the FTA negotiations, the issues of resilient value chains and market access need to be mitigated to harness the economic successes of the corridor. The abovementioned focus areas of this working group fall within the prominent geopolitical challenge of economic security. The economic corridor is argued to potentially decrease freight times by 40% between Europe and India and is the first such corridor that the EU has signed on an extra-EU level. The IMEC corridor is seen as a strategic counterweight to China's BRI, and even though the signatories have refuted such claims, commenting on Italy's resignation from the BRI simultaneously with the signing of IMEC, signifies a shift in strategic thinking of the European bloc.

c. Multi-lateral memberships. Despite its territorial disputes with China, India is not completely distancing itself from the

Chinese sphere of influence. India is a founding member of BRICS+ and a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). With its recent expansion, BRICS is positioning itself as a 'champion of the Global South'.⁴² Having strategic dialogues and partnerships with members of the 'southern bloc' bodes well for the EU to balance its influence in the region, where China has ambitions to create a counterweight to the US-dominated world order. India's role in the Indo-Pacific and the BRICS+

makes it an attractive strategic partner for Europe to balance its interests and exert influence. Similarly, for India, the EU and member states have memberships in multilateral frameworks such as OECD or NATO where India does not have any influence and is highly unlikely to gain it. Table 2 is evidence of the diverging memberships in multi-lateral frameworks. Therefore, increased cooperation between parties that have distinct memberships to each other, connects the world of multipolarity

Table 2 – Participation of BRICS+ and the EU in multilateral frameworks (Jütten and Falkenberg 2024)

Multilateral framework	BRICS+ members	EU Member States
International Organisations and Formats		
United Nations	All members, China and Russia are also permanent members of the UN Security Council	All Member States: France is also a permanent member of the UN Security Council
WTO	All members, except Ethiopia and Iran	All Member States
OECD	None	All Member States (except Bulgaria, Croatia, Malta, Romania, Cyprus)
G7	None	Italy, Germany, France, EU (observer)
G20	All members, except the United Arab Emirates and Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia through the African Union	Italy, Germany, France, and the EU
G77	All members except Russia	None
Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)	Russia, China, India and Iran	None
Financial institutions		
New Development Bank (NDB)	All members, except Ethiopia, Iran and Saudi Arabia	None
World Bank	All members	All Member States
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)	All members	All Member States (except Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia)
Infrastructure and investment initiatives		
Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)	All members, except Brazil and India	17 EU Member States
Global Gateway	Brazil, South Africa and Egypt	EU
India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)	India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates	Italy, France, and Germany

in a web of partnerships and strengthens the global order. These webs of partnerships are more conducive to maintaining a stable world order, something the EU’s policy aims towards.

India: ‘a like-minded partner’?

The primary tenet of the European Union, from the guiding principles of the EU actions in every policy decision it takes or document it publishes, is the promotion of the rule of law and democracy. As a leading advocate of democratic rule across the globe, the European Union should not merely look at the opportunities in partnering with India, owing to its increasing global footprint, economic potential or diplomatic power. While India certainly is an attractive partner, it is important to assess whether it is a ‘like-minded partner’. The world’s largest democracy has been downgraded on virtually every independent democracy index.⁴³

The current Bhartiya Janata Party regime under Prime Minister

Narendra Modi has held two historic mandates since 2014. In the upcoming general elections in April-June 2024, the party is poised to maintain its government into a third term. This section provides three examples, not to discourage potential partners, but to hold Indian authorities accountable through these partnerships and to safeguard the world’s largest democracy, as a ‘functioning democracy’.

a. Treatment of Minorities and Use of Hate Speech. The BJP adheres to a conservative Hindu nationalist ideology known as ‘Hindutva’, envisioning India as a Hindu state. During its tenure, the BJP government has implemented pro-Hindu policies and fostered a majoritarian discourse in India. This discourse has marginalized minorities, including Muslims, *Dalits*, and Tribals. For instance, the Citizenship Amendment Act, introduced in 2019 and implemented in 2024, was criticized by the UN as ‘fundamentally discriminatory’ for excluding Muslim migrants from Indian citizenship.⁴⁴ Furthermore, there has been

anti-conversion legislation, a ban on wearing hijabs in classrooms in the state of Karnataka, the revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and the demolition of Muslim religious properties.⁴⁵

There is a similar ‘othering’ of minorities in the public sphere. A Washington-based group called ‘Hindutva Watch’ monitors attacks on minorities. In the first half of 2023, Indian media reported more than one instance of anti-Muslim hate speech per day.⁴⁶ BJP elected officials face more registered hate speech cases than all other parties combined. Unfortunately, MPs who engage in hate speech often receive promotions, contributing to increased violence against Muslims.⁴⁷ Additionally, an increase in violence follows such speeches accusing the minority of various unproven conspiracies.⁴⁸

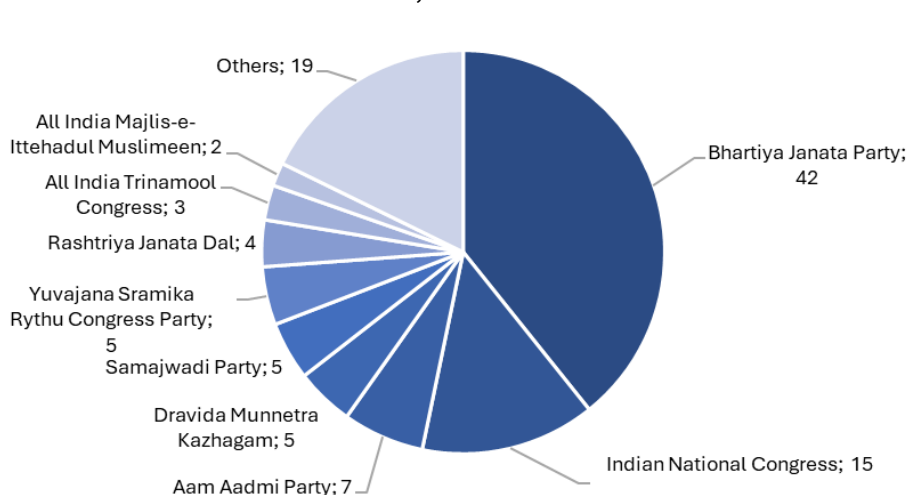


Figure 2 – Party-wise list of elected officials with hate speech cases as of October 2023 (Sabrang 2023)

Moreover in 2023, political violence in the north-eastern state of Manipur amongst two minority groups and the government's inaction to resolve the conflict has attracted further criticism from the EU parliament in resolution RC-B9-0335/2023.⁴⁹ The EU parliament has noted Indian security services' partisan involvement, extreme curfew conditions, and the inability of civil society and media to report on the situation and called for the Indian central government to take action and respect the integration of human rights in the EU-India partnership.

b. Suppression of opposition and civil society. India is grappling with significant challenges to the freedom of civil society and the press. India currently ranks 160 out of 180 in freedom of press rankings by Reporters Without Borders, a decline from its 2020 ranking of 140.⁵⁰ India led the global list of internet shutdowns for a record five years in a row until 2022, accounting for 84 of 187 shutdowns globally in 2022.⁵¹ Furthermore, there are concerns about the misuse of counterterrorism laws and arrests of journalists, activists and opposition leaders without hearings or bail provisions.

The passing of Stan Swamy in 2021, a tribal rights advocate, while in custody is accused to be politically motivated.⁵² UN human rights experts have called the passing of Swamy a 'permanent stain on India's human rights record'.⁵³ The farmers' protests, primarily led by the Sikh minority community, were

marred by accusations of separatism by the BJP and pro-government media.⁵⁴ Prime Minister Modi's labelling of protesters as 'parasites' sparked police-farmer clashes, internet blackouts, and arrests of journalists and activists in Jan 2021.⁵⁵ Misuse of counterterrorism laws has conflated activism with terrorism, causing UN experts to voice concerns over India's declining human rights situation.⁵⁶

These webs of partnerships are more conducive to maintaining a stable world order...

The government has been accused of using the Enforcement Directorate (ED)⁵⁷ to arrest opposition leaders. Between 2013 and 2022, the ED made 121 arrests out of which 115 were opposition politicians.⁵⁸ The government watchdog notoriously has a minimal conviction rate, non-bailable provisions, and lengthened court procedure, allowing for the accused to stay in custody for extended periods.⁵⁹ The most high-profile of the arrests was of New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an ongoing liquor policy scam. On the eve of the 2024 Indian general elections this has drawn international attention from the UN, the US and Germany. The UN expressed hope for the protection of "everyone's rights" in India, particularly in the context of the upcoming general elections.⁶⁰

These developments collectively cast doubt on India's commitment to upholding civil liberties and freedom of expression. Human Rights Watch's South Asia director Meenakshi Ganguly's quote sums up the deteriorating environment of freedom of expression: "Indian authorities seem increasingly determined to prosecute without basis peaceful critics of government policies for violence that, by objective reporting, is largely the handiwork of BJP supporters ... By arbitrarily arresting outspoken activists, the government is not only attempting to silence dissent but also sending a message to supporters that they have free rein to commit abuses against minority communities".⁶¹

c. Crony-capitalism and inequitable growth. A direct challenge for the EU-India partnership is the nature of the Indian economy. The growth of the Indian economy has not been equitable, and India ranks 10th on the crony-capitalism index by the Economist.⁶² The government is accused of patron-clientelism, catering to a few Indian billionaires. The most prominent example is that the Adani group has seen a meteoric rise in its capital wealth through several state contracts, some in industries in which they did not have a presence before 2013.

These sectors include - ports, power plants, defence, electricity, coalmines, highways, energy parks, slum redevelopment and airports. Furthermore, the government has amended laws in some cases, which has allowed

the Adani group to expand into industries such as airports and coal. As a result, the conglomerates' stock value has increased from 8 billion USD in 2013 to 288 billion USD in 2022.⁶³ However, as the Adani group has increasingly faced allegations from independent international watchdogs and opposition groups, the BJP and the Adani group have denied any connections with each other.⁶⁴

Another area of concern is the reporting of national economic data. Several high-position government officials have expressed their concern that the Indian government has presented inaccurate numbers to buttress its position in the international market.⁶⁵ Since India's 2016 demonetisation, the unorganised sector has declined while the organised sector has grown. However, data inaccurately portrays the non-agricultural unorganised sector as part of the growing organised sector, representing disguised growth. Therefore, it is argued that India has had a stagnating economy and has not produced real growth as compared to the nominal data.⁶⁶ Even though these claims cannot be verified, high levels of unemployment and persisting poverty, further highlight inequitable growth. The International Labour Organisation estimates that 83% of unemployed Indians are young, and 29% of young people with higher education remain jobless, highlighting the inability of the economy to create jobs.

Conclusion

The TTC has exciting potential in realising an untapped economic and strategic partnership, which could allow both the EU and India to expand their footprint in the emerging world order. The new world order, based on multipolarity and pluralism, stands to provide opportunities for actors such as India and the EU to fill in the gaps as the competition between the United States and China evolves. The mandates of the three working groups encompass issues that would be relevant in the medium to long term and could lay a foundation for a long and steady partnership. The aspects of sharing knowledge signal an approach of partnership, self-sufficiency, and economic security.

While the working groups would directly engage in economic, climate and technology-oriented areas, the TTC's impact goes beyond these three sectors. A strong Europe-India partnership would function to ensure multipolarity in the global order. The EU-India partnership has been restricted historically due to an Iron Curtain, and it is dialogue and pluralism which would help avoid being embroiled in another great power competition. Beyond the scopes of the TTC, it is also important to acknowledge

A strong Europe-India partnership would function to ensure multipolarity in the global order.

India's diversification of its defence purchases, a move away from Russia and towards France and Germany.

Additionally, India has also proven to be an answer to the energy crisis after Russia invaded Ukraine. Albeit controversially, 20 European Union countries have bought refined oil from India in 2023. While India has drawn criticism for its trade with Russia, it cannot be refuted that it has eased pressure on the demand for oil products in Europe. It should simultaneously be acknowledged that India has bought the unrefined oil at astronomically low prices and made the payments in Indian Rupee, which does not benefit Putin in the aggression towards Ukraine.

As noticed, the EU-India economic partnership has suffered because of differences in the market structures and trade barriers. As new industries grow with emerging technologies and climate responsibilities, the TTC acknowledges the potential for new beginnings. Furthermore, this council has the potential to facilitate dialogues for the negotiations of the FTA, which could boost economic growth for both partners. For India, the European Union is a market where Indian goods could fetch premium values, and for European investment in India to circumnavigate astronomical tariffs imposed thus far. The TEPA agreement with the EFTA states is a testament to the mutually beneficial potential, and its success could determine the course of an FTA with the EEA as well.

At the same time, this paper calls for the EU to be contingent on a democratic order and respect for the rule of law. Understandably, the EU cannot and shall not interfere in India's domestic affairs, however, it can still have influence. From an Indian perspective, the European Union, holds leverage in the knowledge of advanced industries, being a customer for Indian products, and an attractive source of foreign investment, aspects which are essential for India's economic ambitions and growth. Upholding the rule of law also extends to corruption and crony capitalism. The economic data provided by the Indian government deviates from independently conducted international assessments. Therefore,

the EU must stress transparency to secure its investments, given an economic partnership is bound to deepen with a future FTA. Ensuring these conditions would allow the EU to establish a long-lasting partnership and help in avoiding the mistakes of the past.

To conclude, the EU should stress conditionality of a democratic order and economic transparency to develop this partnership. To assert itself as a geopolitical union, the EU needs to have stricter stances beyond unaccountable resolutions, to pioneer democracy and the rules-based order, not just concerning India, but in the region, and across the globe.

About the Author

Saurav Narain holds an Erasmus Mundus International Master in Security, Intelligence and Strategic Studies from the University of Glasgow, Dublin City University and Charles University, Prague. Additionally, he holds a degree in international relations from Leiden University, the Netherlands and has completed an internship at the AIES in 2023. His research interests include multilateralism in global order, the EU policies in the emerging order in the Indo-Pacific, violent extremism in digital media and democratic backsliding in the Global South.

¹ European Commission, "Joint Communication to The European Parliament and The Council - The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" Brussels, 16.9.2021 JOIN (2021) 24 final

² Patrizia Cogo Morales and Raquel Jorge Ricart, 'The EU-India Trade and Technology Council: Opportunities and Challenges Ahead', Elcano Royal Institute, 24 February 2023, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/commentaries/the-eu-india-trade-and-technology-council-opportunities-and-challenges-ahead/>.

³ 'Von Der Leyen: EU Has Matured into a "geopolitical Union" – DW – 09/13/2023', accessed 20 September 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/von-der-leyen-eu-has-matured-into-a-geopolitical-union/live-66795997>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 'First EU-India Trade and Technology Council', Press release, European Commission - European Commission, 16 May 2023.

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