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Bridging Continents

The Future Trajectory of India-EU Relations

by Calvin Nixon
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AIIES STUDY

Abstract

The year 2024 marked the return to power of Narendra Modi in India and Ursula von der Leyen in the European Union. While relations between India and the European Union are widely regarded as holding significant potential, these opportunities have yet to be fully realized.

This AIES study seeks to explore how Indo-European relations can be effectively translated into concrete action. After establishing the context about the state of Indian foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the history of Indo-European relations, the study proceeds to examine key opportunities, including the potential for a Free Trade Agreement between India and the EU, the IMEC trade corridor, and expanding security cooperation. The study offers policy recommendations on these issues, advocating for the signing of standalone trade agreements, continued pursuit of the IMEC initiative despite the current tensions in the Middle East, the development of a Security and Defence Partnership between the EU and India, and enhanced collaboration in peacekeeping efforts.

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. The state of Indian Foreign Policy after ten years of Modi.....	3
3. The Development of Indo-European Relations.....	3
4. The way Forward: Indo-European Relations under Modi 3.0	6
Economic Relations: Will the Free Trade Agreement please stand up?.....	6
Connectography reloaded: Giving life to IMEC	7
Upscaling Security and Diplomacy: Translating Normative Power into Hard Power	8
5. Conclusion	10
Bibliography.....	13

1. Introduction

The 2024 Indian elections were supposed to see Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi return to power with a large parliamentary majority for his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In the run-up to the election, pollsters and media outlets speculated only about the size of the BJP’s majority, as it ran on the slogan “*Abki baar, 400 par*” (This time surpassing 400). Some pundits echoed Modi’s goal of breaching the mark of 400-seats², and exit polls after the last phase of voting closed predicted a landslide BJP victory. Forecasted majorities ranged from 350 to 400 seats for the BJP.³ While the BJP remained by far the largest party after the elections, it did not secure a majority of seats in the Indian lower house of parliament – the Lok Sabha. Instead, it lost 63 seats, scoring 240 seats, and is now dependent on its coalition partners within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to govern India. The NDA now stands at 293 seats in the Lok Sabha – 21 seats more than needed for a majority – compared to 353 seats after the 2019 elections.⁴

Proving pollsters and large parts of the Indian media wrong, the opposition coalition bloc Indian National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) scored a surprisingly large number of seats by winning 205 seats.⁵ Led by the Indian National Congress (INC) which won 99 seats – up from 52 seats in 2019 – the INDIA alliance managed to secure seats with the

help of regionalist forces such as the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh or the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu.⁶ The success of the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh sounded a crushing defeat for the BJP in their own so-called “Hindi-Heartland”. The success of the opposition remains however fragile – after all it still lost the elections. Due to the widely expected landslide win for the BJP, the results remain however an emotional win for the Indian opposition, showcasing that the democratic spirit within India is alive.

The result of the 2024 elections also means a return to coalition politics for India. After two terms in which the BJP secured an outright majority, it now depends on its allied parties to govern. This presents a return to the status quo ante, as before the 2014 elections this was the usual condition for an Indian government over the past decades.⁷ However prior coalition governments tended to be rather balanced between the members of the coalition, while within the incoming NDA coalition the BJP is by far the most powerful force. India’s foreign and security policy is thus expected to stay on course, as no coalition partner has any strong stakes in foreign policy.

The aim of this AIES Study is to investigate how relations between India and the European Union (EU) can reach their full potential during the mandates of the third Modi government and the second Von der Leyen commission. It will assess which steps each actor might have to take to reassure each other to

fully embrace the relations and to hence harvest the opportunities provided by the economic and political strengths of India and the EU. Challenges to deeper cooperation between India and the EU will be evaluated, especially regarding deepened integration in the domains of trade, commerce and security. It will firstly look at the current state of Indian foreign policy after ten years of Narendra Modi being Prime Minister, then it will assess the development of relations between India and the EU before giving an outlook on how Indo-European relations could be improved.

2. The state of Indian Foreign Policy after ten years of Modi

India has under the rule of the Modi government steered away from its traditional Nehruvian foreign policy which had dominated since independence. Whereas India was a global torchbearer of the Non-Aligned-Movement (NAM) during the Cold War and was still influenced by this Nehruvian tradition in the aftermath of the Cold War, the Modi government has changed India's outlook on the world, as well as India's role-taking. Thus, his government has practiced a confident and increasingly assertive foreign policy with clear connotations to the BJP's Hindutva ideology. This is displayed in rhetoric, showcased in the way the BJP government has lately been pushing to refer to India as *Bharat* – the Sanskrit term for India – or in the BJP government's framing of India as a *Vishwaguru* (teacher of the world) and *Vishwamitra* (friend of the world).⁸ It can on the other hand be seen in allegations of the Indian government being involved in assassination plots against Khalistan separatists in Canada⁹ and planned assassinations in the United States of America¹⁰. Moreover India's foreign policy has been highly performative under the leadership of Modi. This can be seen in facets such as the declaration of an International Day of Yoga by the United Nations, which the Indian government heavily lobbied for. Another performative element of the BJP's foreign policy is its strong engagement with the Indian diaspora. Prime Minister Modi has in his quest to engage with the diaspora managed to fill huge stadiums in cities such as New York City¹¹, Houston¹², Sydney¹³, or London¹⁴.

The Modi government's way of engaging with foreign policy has carried foreign policy onto the domestic political sphere. Whereas domestic Indian politics used to be unimaginative about foreign policy as an area of contention in elections, the BJP used Modi's assertive foreign policy as an instrument to foster emotions such as national pride about India's changing status as a rising power.¹⁵ This can especially be seen in the way India dealt with its G20-Presidency in 2023. Modi was not only projected as a global leader and India not only projected as the host of a summit, but rather India's position in the world was celebrated in the open public, by means as simple as street signs, G20 posters or Yoga instructions – based on the International Day of Yoga – on the sides of highways. Thus, a rather elitist policy topic like foreign policy got elevated into a topic visible for every part of Indian society. Furthermore, the G20 presidency was also used by Indian diplomacy to fill the rhetoric of *Vishwaguru* and *Vishwamitra* with content, as India rallied for the inclusion of the African Union into the G20.¹⁶ India's G20-presidency furthermore helped Modi to present India as an independent actor in international relations and as an actor vying for a position as an independent pole in a multipolar world.¹⁷

3. The Development of Indo-European Relations

Starting in 1962, India was the first country from the developing world which initiated diplomatic relations to the European Community. This relationship deepened over the coming decades with cooperation agreements signed in 1973, 1981 and 1994.¹⁸ The birth of the EU in 1992 coincided with the economic liberalization of India. Thus, just as the project of the EU got further institutionalized, India started to join the global economy and departed from its model of a socialist state planned economy. Hence the EU-India Enhanced Partnership Agreement of 1996 acknowledged India's rising economic

importance to the global economy by applauding the achievements of economic liberalization. The Lisbon summit of 2000, two years after India gained nuclear power status in 1998, further acknowledged India’s strategic importance as an actor in the post-Cold War era.¹⁹ Finally, in 2004 a strategic partnership was initiated between the EU and India, followed in 2005 by the first Joint Action Plan (JAP) which laid out the plans for it.²⁰

On the economic front India and the EU entered into negotiations on a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in 2007. Negotiations entered a deadlock as the deadline of 2009 could not be realized because of diverging interests. India was interested in a shallow FTA, unlike the EU which aimed at a comprehensive agreement resulting in deeper integration.²¹ Further barriers, apart from India’s hesitancy to engage in comprehensive trade agreements, were India’s trade regime and technical, legislative and administrative trade barriers. The negotiations on the agreement were finally halted in 2013.²² After eight years of paused negotiations about a FTA between the EU and India, negotiations were restarted in 2021.²³ This was preceded by India concluding bilateral FTAs with Mauritius in 2021 and the United Arab Emirates in 2022, as well as a fast-tracked “early harvest” interim agreement with Australia.²⁴ India is at the same time preparing FTA negotiations with different actors such as the Gulf Economic Council, Israel, Canada and the United Kingdom. This is a rather remarkable development, given India’s long-standing hesitation to engage in multilateral FTAs, seen for instance in its rejection of a membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

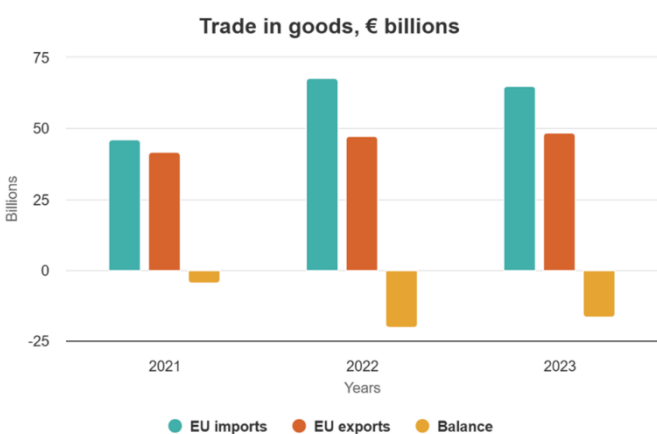


Figure 1 – Trade in goods, € billions between EU and India (European Commission 2025)

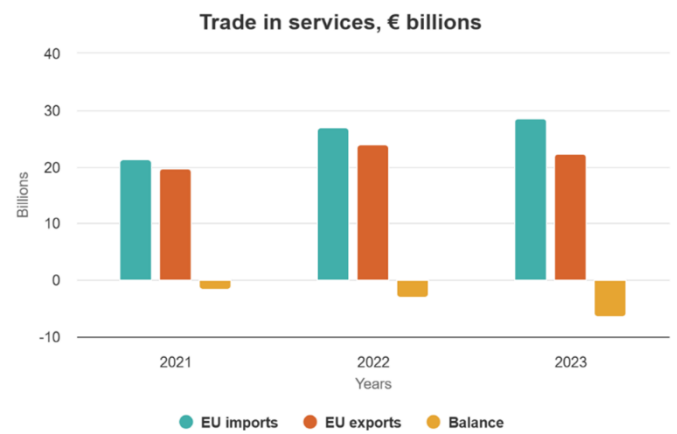


Figure 2 – Trade in services, € billions between EU and India (European Commission 2025)

and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).²⁵

In 2023 trade in goods between the EU and India resulted in imports from India amounting to 65.1 €bn and exports to India amounting to 48.4 €bn, causing a trade deficit of 16.7 €bn (see Figure 1).

Trade in services saw imports from India amounting to 28.5€bn and exports to India amounting to 22.3€bn, causing a trade deficit of 6.3€bn (see Figure 2).

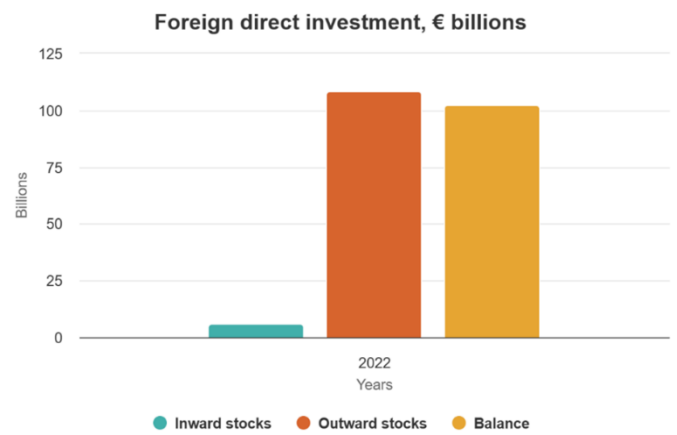


Figure 3 – Foreign direct investment, € billions between EU and India (European Commission 2025)

Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) from the EU to India however greatly outweigh vice-versa FDI flows, as EU FDI to India stood at 108.3€bn in 2022, compared to just 6.1€bn from the Indian side, having a surplus balance of 102.2 €bn. (see Figure 3)²⁶

Bilaterally as of 2023-2024, India’s three largest trading partners within the EU are the Netherlands,

Table 1 – India’s major trading partners in Europe (Government of India – Ministry of Commerce and Industry) | A = approximations

S. No.	Country Countries	Exports (USD Billion)				Imports (USD Billion)			
		2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (A)	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24 (A)
1	Netherlands	6.47	12.54	21.62	22.37	3.32	4.48	5.96	4.97
2	Germany	8.12	9.88	10.13	9.84	13.64	14.97	15.93	16.27
3	Switzerland	1.26	1.35	1.35	1.53	18.23	23.39	15.79	21.24
4	UK	8.16	10.46	11.41	12.92	4.96	7.02	8.96	8.42
5	Belgium	5.24	10.08	8.86	7.84	6.94	9.95	9.18	7.24
6	Italy	4.74	8.18	8.69	8.77	3.86	5.05	5.56	5.80
7	France	4.78	6.64	7.61	7.14	4.34	5.78	5.77	6.24
8	Turkey	3.95	8.72	9.61	6.66	1.47	2.00	4.21	3.78
9	Spain	3.24	4.37	4.66	4.79	1.51	2.05	3.00	2.45
10	Ireland	0.56	0.69	0.58	0.70	0.41	1.14	3.63	5.67
11	Top 10 countries	46.52	73.27	83.52	82.55	58.69	75.82	78.00	82.08
12	Remaining countries	8.74	12.82	13.76	16.26	6.39	10.13	11.80	11.58
13	Total of Europe	55.26	86.10	98.28	98.81	65.07	85.96	89.81	93.66
14	India's Toal	291.81	422.00	444.38	437.11	394.44	613.05	711.85	675.43
15	% share of Europe in India's total	18.9%	20.4%	22.1%	22.6%	16.5%	14.0%	12.6%	13.9%

Germany and Belgium. In total out of the ten largest bilateral trading partners of India in Europe, seven are member states of the EU, with the other three being the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Turkey²⁷ (See Table 1).

Security Cooperation between the EU and India has thus far taken a backseat to economic cooperation. While security issues have been outlined in the strategic partnership of 2004 there have rarely been practical implementations in these regards. Within the broader security environment two contexts have seen comparatively closer cooperation: peacekeeping missions and lately maritime security and maritime governance. Instances for cooperation can be seen in the escorting of a World Food Programme vessel in support of the CSDP mission ATALANTA by the Indian Navy in 2018²⁸, the first ever joint naval exercise between the Indian Navy and the EU’s naval force ATALANTA off the coast of Somalia in 2017²⁹ and the first joint naval exercise of the European Union and India in the Gulf of Guinea on 24 October 2023, which was preceded by the third meeting of the EU-India Martime Security Dialogue on 5 October 2023.³⁰ Moreover, the Indian Navy has played an increasingly active role in the fight against piracy off the coast of East Africa signalling a commitment to defend India’s interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).³¹ Thus, in

January 2024 India started to deploy vessels, including warships, and surveillance aircrafts in its fight against predominantly Somali pirates.³² This makes India the largest national force in the Gulf of Aden and Northern Arabian Sea, bearing fruits as displayed in the handover of 35 pirates from the Indian Navy to the Indian Police in March 2024.³³ Further cooperation in the domain of maritime security was initiated in 2019 between EU CRIMARIO and the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region during the conference “Securing the maritime commons: India, the European Union and Indian Ocean maritime security”.³⁴

On a diplomatic level, relations between the EU and India have seen increased institutionalization in recent years. This includes the introduction of Security and Defence Consultations in 2022 as a result of the 2020 India-EU summit³⁵, as well as the appointment of an EU envoy to the Indo-Pacific and an EU military attaché to India. The appointment of a military attaché has been described by EU ambassador Hervé Delphin as an investment which “will facilitate military-to-military contacts, not just military-to-diplomatic contacts”.³⁶ The second Security and Defence Consultations which were held on 6 May 2024 in Delhi resulted in an agreement to enhance cooperation in domains like cyber, maritime security and crisis management, while harvesting

the opportunities of the EU project Enhancing Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA).

Cooperation between the EU and India has moreover lately been amplified by the announcement of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) at the G-20 summit in Delhi. The economic corridor, which aims to connect India with the Arab Peninsula, Jordan, Israel and the EU (See Figure 5)³⁷, has been called by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen “nothing less than historic”³⁸, praising it as “the most direct connection to date between India, the Arabian Gulf and Europe: With a rail link, that will make trade between India and Europe 40 percent faster.”³⁹ Four of the eight signatories to IMEC’s memorandum of understanding are European – the EU, Germany, Italy and France. This fits into the larger context of recent EU infrastructure policy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen greater European engagement in the domain of infrastructure and development policies, such as the Global Gateway Program.⁴⁰ While IMEC might struggle to take-off in the immediate future due to the Israel-Hamas War in Gaza it remains a possibility for further cooperation between India and the EU and particularly for the EU to enhance its engagement in the Global South and to de-risk geoeconomically from China, while also de-risking its energy supplies.

4. The way Forward: Indo-European Relations under Modi 3.0

Economic Relations: Will the Free Trade Agreement please stand up?

The central pillar of relations between the EU and India is clearly the domain of trade and economic cooperation. Thus the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (EUIFTA) will remain a central topic of discussion for Indo-European relations under the third Modi government. However, the negotiations will continue to be challenging for both sides, as preferences continue to differ greatly. While FTA’s negotiated by the EU are wide-encompassing, including human rights and labour regulations, India prefers shallow FTA’s with a strict focus on trade relations and easing commerce. India moreover has differing opinions regarding the liberalization of certain sectors of its economy. While it is friendly towards liberalizing the services sector⁴¹, it is hesitant to liberalize the manufacturing and agriculture sectors⁴² – sectors which the EU is keen on including⁴³.

Thus to fully embrace the economic opportunities of the relationship, the EU is wise to consider signing standalone agreements on different sectors, instead of negotiating the EUIFTA as one single FTA. This presents both sides with the opportunity to deepen cooperation in unconflictive domains, while continuing to negotiate in more conflictive domains without having to suspend negotiations of the EUIFTA altogether. Another EU policy which could prolong negotiations is the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, which is seen in India as an infringement on national sovereignty. While the EU is inclined by its own set of laws to put a focus on labour regulations and the situations of human rights, it should aim to find a common ground with India on which kind of regulations would benefit the Indian economy.

Importantly the EU has to include sub-national and non-state actors from India into the negotiations. States with a strong agricultural output, such as Punjab, and interest groups, like the automobile sector or chambers of commerce, are instrumental in the articulation of Indian policy. This can be seen

IMEC and its connections

■ Ports — Existing railways - - - Planned railways — Undersea cables and pipelines

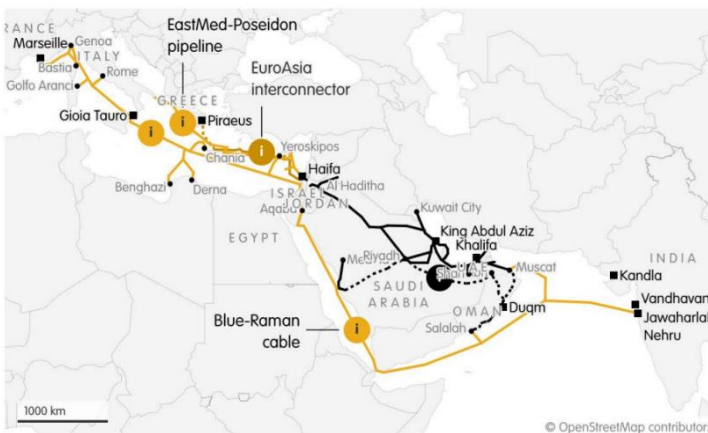


Figure 1 – IMEC and its connections (Rizzi 2024)

very practically in the vocal opposition of farmers regarding the 2020 Farm Bills which would have deregulated large parts of the government-run wholesale markets.⁴⁴ Hence, engaging with sub-state actors and interest groups could help the EU to gain ground on conflictive domains of the EUFTA. By doing so, conflicts about tariffs and import duties, which are used by India to protect its domestic markets from foreign competition, could be eased. Further issues of contention which the EU should try to ease are the stringent visa regulations, which Indian citizens face. As parts of an EUFTA chapter on services trade, eased and equivalent labour mobility between India and the EU should be a high priority, as both actors can expect to bear benefits from increased labor migration. After nine rounds of talks differences, such as high tariffs in India and the EU's environmental regulations, still persist. However the mood still seems to be optimistic about an eventual conclusion as displayed in the comments of India's Ambassador to the EU, Saurabh Kumar, that there is a strong political commitment on both sides to conclude the agreement and that both sides understand the political and strategic dimensions of the EUFTA.⁴⁵

India was interested in a shallow FTA, unlike the EU which aimed at a comprehensive agreement.

In the end both sides need to find a compromise to come to an agreement about the EUFTA, as nobody would benefit from a repeated suspension of the negotiations. This is a history that India and the EU can not allow to repeat, as the geopolitical situation has greatly changed. Both actors have a common strategic competitor in China, from which both actors aim to de-risk themselves economically. Apart from such strategic calculations, both actors must also aim to come to terms due to normative reasons. This is as the EU and India take great pride in being normative powers with strong democratic credentials, though India has faced its fair share of critique from the European side due to a certain degree of democratic backsliding. Ironically, the unexpectedly bad electoral performance of the BJP might ease this problem for the third Modi government, as the 2024 elections in India have demonstrated that democracy is well alive in India

and that the BJP still has to face electoral accountability.

Connectography reloaded: Giving life to IMEC

Complementing the EUFTA with a common strategy about connectivity should be a vital aspect of Indo-European relations in the coming years. IMEC should be one pillar of this strategy, regardless of the state of the Israel-Hamas war, as it both relates to geoeconomic as well as geopolitical challenges faced by the EU and India. It can serve as a trade corridor helping to de-risk supply chains from China, while also serving as a bridge for India in its neighborhood relations towards the Arab peninsula, as well as for the EU in its neighborhood relations towards the same region. Thus IMEC stands the chance of increasing regionalism and cooperation. Furthermore it can build a bridge in cooperation between G7 and BRICS+ members, as the EU, France, Italy and Germany are G7 members,

whereas India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are BRICS+ members. A possible inclusion of Egypt and the addition of the Suez Canal into the naval IMEC corridor could enhance the bridge between the G7 and BRICS+

even further. IMEC will moreover fuel the ambitions of India and the EU to move forward towards a green transition in the energy domain, something greatly needed in the face of new security threats brought upon by climate change. This is due to its focus on interconnected regional power grids, which aim to harvest solar energy and green hydrogen and to distribute energy between India, the Arab peninsula and Europe. For India, IMEC presents the chance to put life into its leadership position within the International Solar Alliance, which got kickstarted by Prime Minister Modi in 2015 and which is headquartered in Gurgaon.⁴⁶

IMEC showcases therewith not only economic opportunities for its members, but would also serve as a common political denominator, as it would certainly be connected to the multilateral I2U2 grouping of India, Israel, the USA and the United Arab Emirates. The inclusion of the USA into the

equation would make IMEC an even stronger instrument for India and the EU in its strategic competition with China, while also strengthening ties to a USA which under a second presidency of Donald J. Trump will probably shy away from the transatlantic partnership. In addition, IMEC presents a vital opportunity for the EU to stimulate its Global Gateway strategy. Projects in the scope of IMEC - investing in infrastructure, transportation, energy and digitization – could be well placed within the Global Gateway strategy. Lastly, the tensions in the Middle East, present a massive challenge for the success of IMEC. The possibilities presented by IMEC and the common economic interests it bestows on Israel, Jordan, Saudi-Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates give these actors however an incentive to find a sustainable solution for the current crisis. India and the EU both hold considerable diplomatic sway and could use their leverage to raise the prospects of peace through connectivity and prosperity in the coming years.

Upscaling Security and Diplomacy:

Translating Normative Power into Hard Power

Security cooperation between India and the EU has already been upscaled over the past years, albeit from a very low level. Whereas India and the EU view themselves both as strong normative powers, the former as a leader of the global south and the latter as a promoter of western liberalism, it is important for the relationship to develop normative power into action. First steps are increased defense cooperation, including in new technologies such as hypersonic weapons, Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Weapons Systems, deepening cooperation in maritime governance and revitalizing the relationship in peacekeeping and development assistance.

Concerning Defense and Technology cooperation, the Trade and Technology Council, initiated in 2022 and formally launched in 2023⁴⁷, should play a central role. Both the EU and India are in need of upping their game with regards to arms production and their strategic partnership lays a good foundation for future cooperation. The EU has gotten more confident on this issue, as seen in its recent initiation of security and defence partnerships with Japan⁴⁸ and South Korea.⁴⁹ A

similar security deal with India would open up economic opportunities, as well as provide much needed strategic cooperation in countering Chinese ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, as well as it would present an opportunity for the EU and the wider West to sway India slowly away from the Russian defence sector. Avenues for cooperation in research on emerging technologies like hypersonic weapons, artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems should be evaluated in a cooperative manner. Building trust between India and the EU in this sector will be crucial to deepen military cooperation between the two actors. The EU can profit from Russia's inability to export arms to India, due to its invasion of Ukraine, as India is already looking for new partners to cooperate. India's relationship with France in particular could help the EU to gain ground in matters of defence cooperation.⁵⁰ Repeated commitments to an intensified defence cooperation between New Delhi and Paris were made for instance in June 2024 – focusing on a “Make in India Initiative”⁵¹ – and in November 2024 – focusing on defence and artificial intelligence.⁵² Moreover, key Indo-French defence projects, such as the Kalvari-class submarines, have included technology transfers.⁵³ This showcases, to more restrictive voices in the EU on the topic of technology transfers, that a trustful relationship with India on security matters is possible, when one is serious about it. Additionally India has been increasingly interested in acquiring French military equipment, as seen in its plans to purchase 26 Rafale-M fighter jets and three Scorpene Class conventional submarines – a deal worth in total more than \$10 billion.⁵⁴

A precondition for this path to be implemented is however that the EU manages to unify its own defence industry and it being able to articulate its strategic interests with one voice. The appointment of former Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius as the EU's first Commissioner for Defence and Space⁵⁵ might increase the possibility for such a task. Kubilius wants the EU to allocate €100 billion to defence in the EU's 2028-2034 budget, showing a commitment to increase defense spending. The EU's €1.5 billion European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) might be a first step towards the EU delivering on such rhetoric, as it aims to implement measures identified in the European

Defence Industry Strategy (EDIS).⁵⁶ The commission aims to test a European Military Sales Mechanism, as proposed in EDIS, within an EDIP pilot project. If successful, European armament policy could be on its way to further standardization and less fragmentation.⁵⁷ The appointment of former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy could further strengthen the strategic outlook of the EU, since Kallas has been one of the most vocal and supportive voices in Europe concerning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and of strengthening the EU's strategic defence capabilities.⁵⁸

Indo-European cooperation in the domain of maritime security and maritime governance can be expected to be continued. The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy lays out the importance of the IOR for the EU. Prior cooperation between the EU and India, as seen in combined efforts to tackle the problem of piracy off the coast of East Africa are examples of practical efforts to showcase how Indo-European security cooperation can look like. As the IOR is of great importance for the EU due to its centrality for world trade, as most major sea lines of communication pass through it, securing the IOR from threats like piracy, rogue non-state actors and encroachment by China, should be a central aspect of the incoming Commission's Indo-Pacific strategy. The fact that 35 percent of European goods are exported to Asia and that 4 out of 10 of its top trading partners are from Asia articulate the commercial importance of stable and secure Sea Lines of Communications.

Likewise the Indian government will have to engage in the same considerations as the IOR connects India to the outside world. Hence it must be expected that India and the EU will continue to vouch for upholding international law in maritime governance bodies – with a keen focus on securing the regime on which the liberal international order in the maritime domain is built upon. Defending the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea will remain a focal point of diplomatic cooperation. This is an area where the EU and India have cooperated in the past, as they contributed to drafting UN conventions and programs dealing with the security of global maritime domains.⁵⁹ Programmes as the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy

or India's *Sagaramla* Programme are results on which further cooperation can be built on. With regards to challengers to this regime, India and the EU should consider enhanced naval cooperation in strategically sensitive areas, like the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, but also the South China Sea to show their commitment to engage with like-minded countries.

India and the EU both have a self-perception of being normative powers, who aim to shape the international system akin to their own norms and values. In important areas these norms and values overlap, as India and the EU are committed to democracy, good governance, checks and balances and the market economy. The histories of Europe and India are however vastly different. India's colonial past has influenced its international outlook as it sees itself as a voice for the post-colonial world. This also influences its development cooperation, as Prime Minister Modi aims for India to become the leader of the so-called Global South. Terms like *Vishwamitra* (Friend of the World) and *Vishwaguru* (Teacher of the World) which have become prominent in the foreign policy discourse of his government⁶⁰ show that India is again more vocally displaying its global ambitions.

Practically these ambitions are displayed in India's rising role as a contributor of development assistance and in its peacekeeping and disaster relief operations, particularly in its neighborhood regions in the IOR. This shows a similarity with the EU, which in its own programmes and with the development assistance programs of its member states is one of the largest donors of Official Development Assistance. Hence the domain of development assistance, including peacekeeping and disaster relief, has the potential to be a domain of increased Indo-European cooperation and integration.

India and the EU as two of the most ardent supporters of peacekeeping operations in the world had already planned cooperation in this sector after the initial declaration of their strategic partnership, as possible pathways for enhanced cooperation were included in the 2005 JAP. While these ideas were not realized, Prime Minister Modi reinstated at the 2020 EU-India Summit the role of both actors and that the Indo-European strategic partnership is

“vital for global peace and stability”.⁶¹ In the EU Roadmap to 2025, concerning the EU-India Strategic Partnership, peacekeeping is mentioned twice. Firstly concerning the aim for regular security consultations between the EU and India and exchange on strategic priorities, and secondly regarding consultations on UN peacekeeping including the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This presents both actors the opportunity to build upon these two possible points of cooperation and to upscale the possibilities of future cooperation.

Concrete measures could be to connect the European Peace Facility with operations of the Indian military to conduct joint peacekeeping missions. For this however, India would need to change its position on participation in military missions outside a United Nations framework, as India has so far only participated in UN missions. Other measures which might be more easily implemented are non-security related joint development assistance programs and joint disaster relief management. The EU, which struggles with its public perception in Sub-Sahara Africa, could profit of India’s image and India could profit of the EU’s sophisticated program structure, as displayed in its Global Europe program. India on the other hand could profit of the EU’s Emergency Response Cooperation Centre, particularly if Indo-European cooperation in the IOR would see greater integration. Indo-European cooperation could hence be a building bridge between the Global North and Global South and a pathway to a more equally footed structure of development assistance. In practical terms it should also be of interest to both actors, as it would give them the possibility to streamline their own development assistance.

5. Conclusion

Relations between India and the EU have been lagging behind their potential for the past decades. While India already started to exercise diplomatic relations with the European Community in 1962 and signed agreements in the decades afterwards,

relations between India and the EU never took off in an institutionalized sense. Neither the launch of the strategic partnership or the 2005 JAP changed this, albeit they would have provided great opportunities for a closer integrated relationship. The failing of the FTA negotiations in 2013 and the fact that it took almost a decade for both actors to rejoin for new negotiations further shed a light on the low degree of institutionalization in Indo-European relations. Nonetheless, relations between India and EU member states remained close and India gained a higher degree of importance both in trade relations and in security relations, due to its strategic role in the competition between China and the West.

This AIES Study introduced pathways India and the EU might take to upscale their relationship and to institutionalize it in the domains of trade and commerce, infrastructure and regional development, as well as security and development assistance. The coming years of the third Modi

government, and second Von der Leyen Commission, present an opportunity for Indo-European relations to take this next step. It is up to Indian and EU lawmakers to be willing to overcome barriers, such as agriculture

and manufacturing tariffs, or fears about knowledge transfer and joint security operations. Sceptics should be reminded of the liberal-democratic values and norms underpinning Indo-European relations. In a global struggle against autocracy, a strong Indo-European partnership demonstrates how democracies who share a set of common values can pitch their systems not just to a domestic, but also a global audience.

Relations between India and the EU have been lagging behind their potential...

About the Author

Calvin Nixon joined the AIES as an intern from May to August 2024. He holds a B.A. degree in Political Science and South Asian Studies, as well as a Master’s degree in International Relations, from Heidelberg University and Leiden University. He has been affiliated with the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC) since 2021. His research focuses on the Indo-Pacific with a particular focus on South Asia.

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Dr. Langweg 3, 2410 Hainburg/Donau

Tel. +43 (1) 3583080

office@aies.at | www.aies.at