
EU-INDIA SUMMIT: SLOW PROGRESS, EXCEPT FOR SECURITY DEAL

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The 14th EU-India Summit held in Delhi last Friday (October 6th) was not a summit of big announcements.

But it succeeded in maintaining the political momentum created by the last summit in March 2016, which came after four years of frozen relations. The summit confirmed that on several issues the strategic orientations of the partners are mostly aligned. It is now time to align the policy agendas. But how and what should be done?

As declared in the joint summit statement, the partners share interests in a number of areas where concrete progress is possible, above all climate change, urbanisation and counter-terrorism.

The EU and India should now focus on transforming political declarations into actual policy. The two parties already hold several policy dialogues but these have been confined to bureaucratic exchanges, in which the counterparts discuss without much real commitment or therefore progress.

To move out from its impasse, there is the need for concrete steps, such as facilitating officer exchanges between Europol and Indian Security Agencies □ agreed upon this week □ to enhance security cooperation.

After Trump, India sees EU as island of stability

In a volatile world orphaned of US leadership, India is looking at the EU as an island of stability and even urging it to upgrade its role as global security provider. In this context, and in line with ongoing discussion on the future of European Defence, the consolidation of the European Defence and Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB) including by supporting its export, would strengthen the EU stand as global security provider.

Especially when looking at the EDTIB from India □ where competition amongst major global defence players to access its market is fierce □ there is a clear need for stepping up EDTIB coordination and integration. EDTIB □ India Industrial cooperation can be a driver to boost EU-India security and defence cooperation.

The EU cannot ignore India's rise and strategic role in the fast-changing Asia. Chinese aspirations will call on India to assume enhanced responsibilities in foreign policy.

India is indeed now seeking its global role and identity. In this process, global powers, such as Russia and US above all, are injecting their influence and values. Moreover, India, like many other countries, is not immune from radicalisation – be it Islamic, or Hindu.

In light of European democratic values where the rule of law and human rights have a central place – values that are today ever more challenged globally – the EU should help India to continue growing into a strong, stable and like-minded democracy, capable of being a strong ally in defending the liberal order.

Still misunderstandings

In spite of being strategic partners since 2004, there is still a profound lack of understanding between India and the EU, which exacerbates the reciprocal underrating of each other's potential.

India still fails to see the added value of dealing with the EU rather than bilaterally with member states. In addition, Indian officials sometimes hold the conviction that EU competences can be overturned by dealing directly with member states on issues, such as trade, on which the EU has exclusive competence.

The EU Global Strategy lists enhanced public diplomacy as one of the five strategic priorities. There is possibly no partnership that could benefit more from enhanced public diplomacy efforts by the EU than this. In this context, the EU recently awarded a multi-year public diplomacy project. Its implementation should be carefully monitored to ensure that results are achieved.

The elephant in the room did not move: despite the fact that EU-India trade relations are substantial albeit stagnating (with bilateral trade in goods at \$88 billion in 2016), no significant progress on a free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations has been made.

The policy community should seriously reflect on how to move forward from this impasse. Negotiations with India may occasionally be difficult, because the reason for halting progress in one area of common agreement may sometimes lie in a different area altogether.

That's why enabling frank discussions through so-called 'Track 2 diplomacy' – discussions amongst civil society composed of think tanks, academia, business and media – could support official negotiations in unfolding the "real" reasons behind a sudden lack of appetite for progress on Indian side.

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