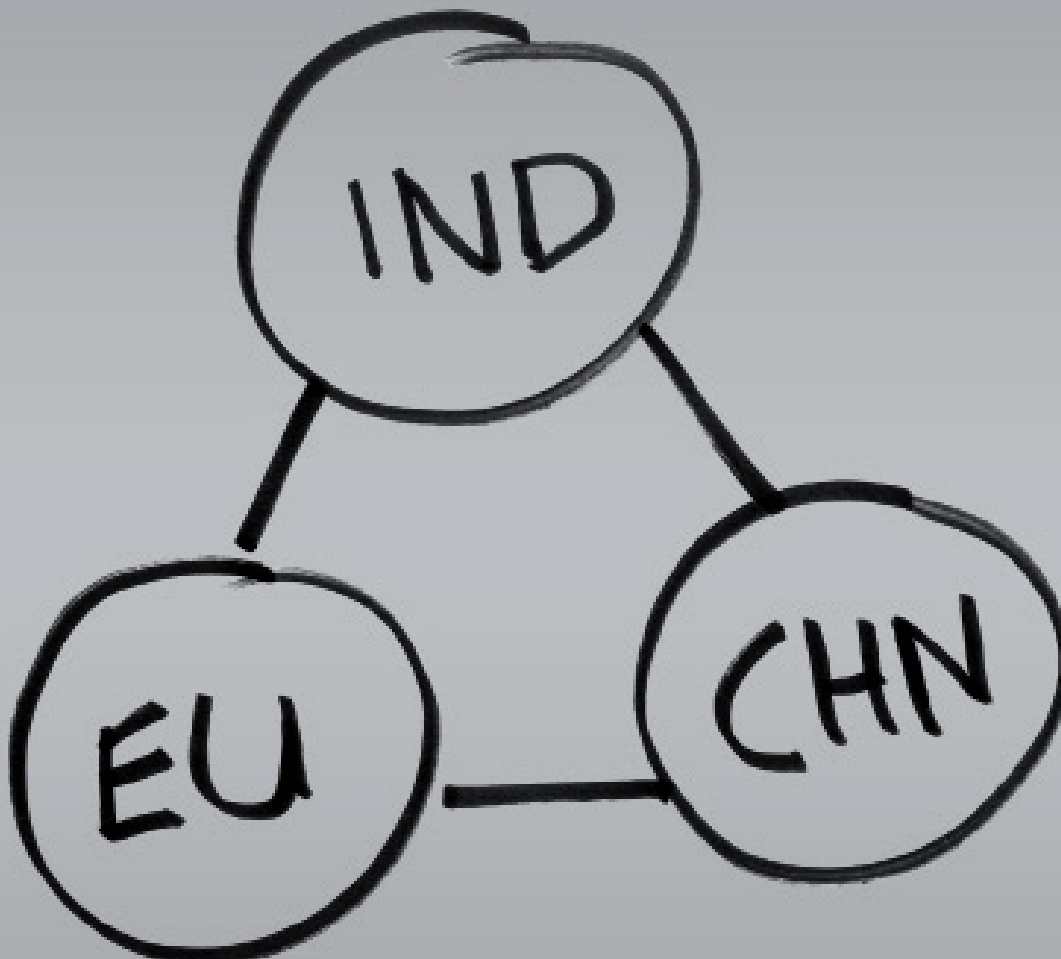


# INDIA-EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:

Perceptions and Perspectives

Rajendra K. Jain

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Rajendra K. Jain

## Abstract

Strategic partnerships have, in fact, become a key foreign policy instrument in a multi-polar world and are increasingly perceived as both a process and a format in which to conduct foreign relations with major players. A variety of adjectives have been used to describe the India-EU strategic partnership since its establishment in 2004. This paper first discusses the nature of the concept of strategic partnership, and examines European and Indian perceptions of this concept. It then evaluates the key challenges confronting the decade-long India-EU strategic partnership, before making a number of concluding observations.

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## Keywords

Strategic Partnership, EU, India, Security, Perceptions, Norm Diffusion

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## 1. Introduction

A variety of adjectives have been used to describe the India-EU strategic partnership. Some call it an honorary degree or reward conferred by the Union on emerging powers as recognition of their growing regional and international profile. Others call it a political declaration of intent, more process than substance, or great showpieces of EU foreign policy – nice ornaments, but badly implemented. Some dismiss it as a “charade” without any strategic content (Jaffrelot 2006) or “a loveless marriage” (Khandekar 2011: 3).

This paper discusses the nature of the concept of strategic partnership and examines European and Indian perceptions of this concept. It evaluates the key challenges confronting the decade-long India-EU strategic partnership and makes a number of concluding observations.

## 2. Defining a “Strategic Partnership”

The term “strategic partnership” entered the international relations lexicon in the late 1990s. It has been a major tool of post-Cold War international relations, which “enhances or justifies a close relationship between two states that seek mutual gains but whose interests may be competitive rather than shared” (Kay 2000: 15). Strategic partnerships have, in fact, become a key foreign policy instrument in a multipolar world and are increasingly perceived as both a process and a format in which to conduct foreign relations with major players. They signify a more intense engagement at higher levels than the normal intercourse between two entities. Each one has a specific character and is structured around a series of dialogues on areas of mutual interest and possibilities for fruitful engagement. They involve “forging links between countries that are neither allies nor adversaries, but which share a range of both common and divergent interests” (Nandkarni 2011: 48-49). The term “strategic” is said to refer more to “the absence of divisive issues than to a joint strategy in the traditional sense” (Godement 2006: 63). Strategic partnerships are “a strategy of cooperating while competing” (Ness 2012: 3). They comprise several common elements:

*“(1) they are formalized in multiple written declarations, statements, agreements, and memoranda of understandings that outline clear policy objectives and attempt to build upon and deepen multifaceted ties; (2) they create formal institutional links at various governmental and non-governmental levels, generating multiple interactive channels at the levels of Track I (official) and Track II (people-to-people) diplomacy; (3) they set up a mechanism for summit meetings . . . with more frequent meetings at the sub-ministerial and bureaucratic levels where officials explore common interests or concerns, often in joint task forces established to address specific issues; . . . (5) seek to establish a stronger economic relationship; and finally, (6) they attempt to foster greater awareness of each other’s culture. . .”* (Nandkarni 2011: 48-49).

### 3. Evolution of the Strategic Partnership

The journey from a “non-associable”<sup>1</sup> in the early 1960s to a strategic partner of the European Union took more than four decades. For the first time, the Joint Declaration of the inaugural India–EU summit (June 2000) spoke of the resolve to build “a new strategic partnership” in the twenty-first century founded on shared values and aspirations. To that end, it specified a 22-point Agenda for Action listing areas in which to “enhance” cooperation and build “a coalition of interests” to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The first summit was said to have marked the “beginning of a process” of building a strategic partnership (India, Ministry of External Affairs 2001: 61) and the Joint Declaration had laid out its “framework” (India-EU Second Summit, Joint Communique, 23 November 2001, para 4).

The European Security Strategy (ESS) (December 2003) was the first EU document to mention strategic partnerships as a kind of foreign policy tool. It urged the EU to “look to develop strategic partnerships” with Japan, China, Canada, and India, as well as with “all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support” (European Council 2003: 14). Each of these partners mentioned in the ESS were “key international players” with which a partnership would develop “in different ways”. (Solana 2004) However, the ESS did not provide any guidelines or list the shared goals and priorities for strategic partnerships.

After working for over a year, the European Commission came out with a communication on “An EU-India Strategic Partnership” (June 2004), which proposed a series of “strategic policy dialogues” and “strategic sectoral dialogues” (European Commission 2004: 6) to streamline the architecture of the relationship. It proposed to develop a “genuinely” strategic partnership with India in four key areas: a) cooperation, especially in multilateral fora, on conflict prevention, the fight against terrorism, and non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction; b) a strengthened economic partnership through strategic policy and strategic dialogues; c) development cooperation; and d) fostering intellectual and cultural exchanges. The objective, the attached 46-page Commission Services Working Document added, was to have “a firm and visible upgrading” of the relationship from the existing dialogue between “good friends to a truly strategic partnership between two major international players” (European Commission 2004: 45). Six weeks later, in a detailed 31-page Response to the EC Communication – the first ever Indian strategy paper on relations with an outside entity – New Delhi presented a number of proposals for enhancing more systematic interaction with the European Union (India, Ministry of External Affairs 2004).

The strategic partnership was endorsed at the fifth India–EU summit (2004). Two texts were negotiated: a new Political Declaration and a Joint Action Plan (European Commission 2005) divided into four sections (politics, trade and investment, economic policy, and cultural and academic matters) covering issues of mutual concern were adopted at the

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<sup>1</sup>The EEC-6 were unwilling to offer association in any form to a large developing country like India with British colonial ties because of the existence of low-wage manufacturing industries and trade, predominantly manufacturing and semi-manufacturing. The Six therefore proposed to adopt a “decalage” in applying the common external tariff so that the export outlets of these countries might be developed while safeguarding Community interests (European Economic Community, Commission 1963: 220).

next summit in September 2005. The Joint Political Declaration was deemed to be the “starting point” of a joint reflection that would lead to “a firm and visible upgrading” of the EU-India relationship, from the existing dialogue between “good friends” to “a truly strategic partnership” between two major players (European Commission 2004a: 15).

An Implementation Report (India, Ministry of External Affairs 2006) on the working of the strategic partnership was presented at the Helsinki summit (October 2006), where it was agreed that an annual progress report on implementation of the JAP would be presented. The eighth summit (November 2007) resolved to make an “overall assessment” of the JAP in 2008 and assess the “ways and means” to further upgrade the overall framework of EU-India relations (India-EU Joint Statement, 30 November 2007, para 3). At the Marseilles summit (September 2008), a revised JAP was adopted, which added 40-odd new activities in four areas (peace and comprehensive security, sustainable development, research and technology, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges). The Joint Action Plans read more like a laundry list which were “long on shared fundamentals and abstract political objectives but short on specifics and deliverables, and devoid of timelines” (Muenchow-Pohl 2012: 13). They lead “mainly to dialogue, commitments to further dialogue, and exploratory committees and working groups rather than to significant policy measures or economic breakthroughs” (Malone 2012: 229).

#### 4. European Perceptions

The European Union’s strategic partnership with India is one of the ten<sup>2</sup> it has worldwide and one of four in Asia. The concept of strategic partnership is apparently rooted in the broader narrative of the EU as a strategic actor. Apart from occasional discursive references to the concept of strategic partnership, there is no well-defined narrative around them. One EU diplomat even described it as “like love – no one can define it. You can only know what it is when you experience it” (cited in Rettman 2010).

There is no clear-cut definition of a strategic partnership so far in any EU document. At a special Council meeting organized by President of the European Council Van Rompuy to discuss strategic partnerships, they were said to provide “a useful instrument for pursuing European objectives and interests. . . the full participation of emerging economies in the international system should allow its benefits to be spread in a balanced manner and its responsibilities to be shared evenly” (European Council 2010: 3). It signifies “a balance of mutual advantages and commitments” (Rompuy 2010). Trade is “a cornerstone” of the strategic partnership (Ashton 2010). Enhancing trade constitutes “a crucial objective” of a strategic partnership “contributing to economic recovery and job creation”. To that end, the EU must “take concrete steps to secure ambitious Free Trade Agreements, secure greater market access for European businesses and deepen regulatory cooperation with major trade partners” (European Council 2010: 3).

Recent years have witnessed a growing body of literature and a growing debate amongst European scholars on the nature, motivations, objectives and the convergence/divergence

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<sup>2</sup> Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States.

of the Union's strategic partnerships. The motivations of the EU's strategic partnerships are said to include the need (a) to address the emergence of new powers; (b) provide an alternative for reinvigorating diplomacy in which bilateral approaches seem to dominate international relations; and (c) an attempt to assert the growing importance of the EU over the national diplomacies of the Member States (Renard and Biscop 2012: 196-197). They are "a necessary (sub-)strategy for the EU to cope successfully with the changing global order and to avoid global irrelevance" and "a blueprint for a smart use of the EU's (and therefore Europe's) power" (Renard 2011: 6).

The objectives of strategic partnerships include managing world multipolarity for the spread and promotion of international norms and multilateralism (Grevi and De Vanconcelos 2008), an attempt to strengthen its new image as a power adapting to multipolarity (Gratius 2011: 4), and adapting EU trade policy to the economic emergence of its partners.

The EU's strategic partnerships are increasingly perceived as static and disappointing. They are not considered to be truly strategic because not every partner is equally strategic, the Union does not cooperate with its partners on most truly strategic issues, it has no structural or institutional impact on the relationship, and most partners do not regard the EU as a strategic partner at all, in many cases (Renard 2011: iv). This led Herman van Rompuy to acknowledge at the first-ever meeting of the Council (16 September 2010) to discuss strategic partnerships that "new players do not always share our interests and worldviews". He added: "We have strategic partners, now we need a strategy" (European Council 2010: 2). The European Council agreed on the need for Europe "to promote its interests and values more assertively and in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit" (European Council 2010: 2). The consensus that emerged at the September meeting was that Europe was still punching below its weight and that it was only when acting together that the EU could hope to itself become a strategic partner (Renard 2011: 14). While Catherine Ashton presented reports on the strategic partnerships with the United States, China and Russia in December 2010, a report on the one with India is still awaited.

## 5. Indian Perceptions

India's strategic partnership with the European Union is one of the nearly 25 India has worldwide, including with three key EU Member States – France (since 1998), Germany (since 2000) and the United Kingdom (since 2004). However, amongst all its strategic partnerships, the EU remains the only entity with which formal documents in the form of Joint Action Plans have been drawn up.

Strategic partnerships, according to the Indian Government, enable an expansion of "policy choices and developmental options" (India, Ministry of External Affairs 2006a: ii) and assume "understanding and openness on both sides" (Nath 2005). They represent an upgrade, "a qualitative transformation" of mutual interaction (Singh 2004a), and a "maturing" of the relationship (Tripathi 2005).

There are, according to India, four key elements of the India-EU strategic partnership. Firstly, like the EU, the primary objective is economic: to increase trade and investment



potential, to seek greater access for Indian products into the European market, and to contribute to Indian growth and development. Secondly, in an age of multi-alignment and simultaneous engagement of all major powers, it enhances strategic autonomy. Thirdly, it is based on sovereign equality and on “comparative advantage and a mutuality of interests and benefits” (Indian Response to the EC Communication 2004: 4, para 2). Fourthly, it was not envisaged as “a partnership *where one side is prescriptive or one side is intrusive* and the other side is, in a sense, a passive partner” (India, Ministry of External Affairs 2004: 6, para 7, emphasis added).

A leading Indian think-tank regards a strategic partnership to be “a long-term interaction between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors”. (Azad and Gupta 2011) For another think-tank, it is “a new pattern of international relationships in which nations enter into freewheeling partnerships with other nations based on complementarity of interests in specific but vital areas. . . . [they] do not bind nations to support each other on all strategic issues in all situations” (Foundation for National Security Research 2011: 1). Each partnership has a specific character and focuses on certain “core areas” of national interest<sup>3</sup> (Foundation for National Security Research 2011: 1). Interestingly, both the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses<sup>4</sup> and the Foundation for National Security Policy considered it a misnomer to regard the India-EU partnership as “strategic” because of the lack of a security or defence dimension.

## 6. A Decade of Strategic Partnership: Key Challenges

The India-EU strategic partnership has facilitated the widening and deepening of dialogue beyond trade and commerce. Engagement has enabled both to sensitize one another with each other’s expectations and perspectives. However, despite a decade-long strategic partnership, both have not been able to transform shared values into shared interests and shared priorities due to a big disconnect in world-views, mindsets and practical agendas, because the two are at different levels of socio-economic development, come from two different geo-political milieus and have different geographical and geopolitical priorities. The lack of deliverables is not something unique to the India-EU strategic partnership, but is typical of the Union’s strategic partnerships with the emerging powers, most of which have a problem of substance. Both India and the European Union, as Pallavi Aiyar elaborates, have complex decision-making processes:

*“Protectionist trade unions, a coalition of 28 member-states with divergent priorities, and a convoluted internal decision-making process do not make for*

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<sup>3</sup> These areas were defined as including the supply of defence equipment and technology, military exercises, cooperation in the field of nuclear energy, trade and investments, diplomatic support on critical issues, cooperation in science and technology, education, agriculture, information and communication technology, banking, insurance, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The Foundation for National Security Policy examined India’s relationship with the United States, Russia, Japan, UK and China, on the basis of five parameters, viz. economics, politics, defence, technology and people-to-people, and rank them in order of importance. The EU also did not figure in the six countries (United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan) that the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses identified for its study on the basis of those which were most active in the fields of defence cooperation, economic cooperation and political-diplomatic cooperation.

*quick results. In this regard, India is Europe's doppelganger. Cumbersome coalitions, powerful civil society organizations and conflicting interests amongst political constituencies are also a hallmark of the decision-making process in New Delhi. But European officials rarely acknowledge these parallels, choosing instead to . . . disparage India for faults the EU itself can be charged with" (Aiyar 2009).*

The proliferation of consultation mechanisms – an annual summit, Foreign Minister ministerial level dialogue, and 27 sectoral dialogues – has perhaps given rise to dialogue fatigue. Some forums like the India-EU Roundtable have not been renewed (after 2008) while new dialogue formats like the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) (see Jain 2013) have emerged. The annual business summit held back-to-back with the political summit has been downgraded to a “business roundtable” at the 2012 summit in Delhi, as it attracted fewer and fewer heavyweights. The two sides therefore need to focus on a smaller number of longer-term strategic priorities than cluttering the agenda, but this is not always easy as many dialogues seem to take on an inherent institutional life of their own.

### *Global Governance*

Emerging powers like India argue that the structures of global governance must be more democratic, representative and legitimate to reflect current geopolitical and economic realities. In recent years, while there has been a gradual, but limited, democratization of the global economic architecture, the political and security architecture remains virtually frozen in time. The EU has been unable to formulate a common position on the enlargement of the UN Security Council due to internal differences.

As an emerging power, India has, in fact, had to navigate “four chaotic transitions” in global governance: (a) the transition from rule-takers to rule-makers; (b) the transition from framing rules to developing new sets of global arrangements in which ‘regime design’ figures prominently; (c) from single regimes to recognizing ‘regime complexes’ or the multiplicity of institutions with overlapping but often incoherent rules in each area (climate change, trade, energy, etc.); and (d) the transition from formal institutions towards informal networks, where small groups of states or even non-state actors are framing the rules that would govern emerging issues like cyber security, outer space, etc. (Council on Energy, Environment and Water 2012: 6-7).

Emerging powers, according to former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, are “premature powers” because they continue to classify themselves as developing countries owing to per capita income level and the continuing incidence of poverty and illiteracy. This leads to considerable ambivalence, since they need “to contribute to global public goods but they also feel entitled to non-reciprocal benefits from global regimes to help deal with their still considerable developmental challenges” (Saran, 2012: 8). While Europe does acknowledge the need to restructure international institutions and give more voice and seats to emerging powers, it perceives their role “more” in terms of co-opting them in a largely Western dominated system, ensuring that they played by the rules already established by the dominant players. If the global economic architecture was undergoing

change in response to the transformation of the global economy, the change was still driven by the Western, industrialized economies with little by way of agenda setting by the emerging economies. “The existing architecture was sought to be retained even while accommodating new players. More tenants occupied the building, but the landlord, who set the house rules, remained the same” (Saran, 2012: 25-26, emphasis added).

As an aspiring power, India has been more sympathetic to the American effort to “rework” the rules of the global game (e.g. the Indo-US nuclear deal), whereas Europe is perceived as “a conservative force: protectionist, in relation to markets, but also much else, hoping to keep what it has” (Khilnani 2006: 490-491). Europe is clearly over-represented in various international institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the G-20 and is in no hurry to end its over-representation. It is not ready to part with the disproportional representation and influence this order affords vis-à-vis the emerging powers. Europe has, in fact, become “a main obstacle” to reform (Muenchow-Pohl 2012: 31). Whatever increase in representation of the emerging powers will take place in international institutions will usually be at the expense of the Europeans. For example, within the International Monetary Fund, the United States effectively vetoed the renewal of the Executive Board’s seats in August 2010 and thereby pushed European countries to accept a reduction from eight to six seats on the Executive Board, with the surrendered seats going to emerging countries.

Instead of being a revisionist power, India has been more than willing to integrate into existing structures. India’s objective is to enhance its influence and representation in the existing international institutional architecture. It does not seek “to destroy or even replace existing international governance institutions with alternative new institutions; it is merely knocking on the door to gain entry or have a bigger say or protect its interests” (Singh, Mehta and Jones 2013: 9). New Delhi has, in fact, consistently urged the preservation and reform of existing institutions and argued that its inclusion in them would prove beneficial. The Indian strategy in global governance today is to intensively engage leading players and forge issue-based coalitions with like-minded countries. Europe needs to recognize that since the end of the Cold War, India has become more pragmatic and less assertive; it feels it deserves a seat at the high table and should be part of the global management system.

### *Effective Multilateralism*

Both India and the European Union agreed to “work closely” to promote effective multilateralism (Joint Action Plan 2005: 3-4), which has been described primarily as “a form of governance that should produce noticeable effects whilst being embedded within strong, negotiated, and enforceable multilateral regimes” (Wouters, Jong and Man 2010: 15). The 2008 Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy confirmed that strategic partnerships were an integral way for the EU to achieve the stated objective of effective multilateralism, saying “the ESS called for Europe to contribute to a more effective multilateral order around the world. Since 2003, we have strengthened our partnerships in pursuit of that objective” (European Council 2008). Strategic partnerships have not proven to be appropriate instruments to promote effective multilateralism, since partners have different perceptions and

expectations largely because of different historical legacies and foreign policy traditions. Most European analysts argue that emerging powers like India tend to take “a rather instrumental approach” to international cooperation and generally regard multilateral bodies to be useful in so far as they “amplify their respective national positions, constrain or inhibit unwelcome initiatives and uphold the traditional principle of non-interference in internal affairs” (Grevi 2012: 16; Wagner 2008: 90; de Vasconcelos 2008: 10). Most of the EU’s strategic partners are said to have a preference for “functional and/or revisionist multilateralism” (Gratius 2011a: 7).

India does not take the EU’s rhetoric on multilateralism and global goods at its face value. The utility and goal of effective multilateralism should be meaningful and achievable. Brussels is motivated by the desire to claim superiority over its partners and very often it tends to become so important that achievable goals are put aside. For New Delhi, effective multilateralism signifies the delivery of “equitable and universally applicable accords” (Abhyankar 2009: 404). It criticizes the tendency of Europeans to ascribe nobler intentions and objectives to themselves in establishing stringent, enforceable regimes as if they were not motivated and reflected European national interests. Morality and universal causes are essentially instruments of state; they are espoused “primarily to advance the national interest and, only secondarily, some collective good” (Karnad 2006: 494). Thus, while some strategic partners use the same words like “effective multilateralism”, they often mean different things (cf. Stumbaum 2007).

Since the end of the Cold War, India has increasingly adopted a more pragmatic approach towards multilateralism and shed its *moralpolitik*. It has been steadily expanding its linkages and interaction with multilateral institutions and regional groupings in Asia (see Jain 2011). It has cooperated in the establishment of new regional organizations and has contributed to the establishment of alternative structures of emerging powers like IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). India’s membership and engagement in these multilateral arrangements does involve some sovereignty trade-offs, but “the underlying vision is that any sovereign trade-offs are more than compensated for by the real power that accrues from these institutions” (Waheguru, Mehta and Jones 2013: 18). India has welcomed the significant political and military role that Europe has played in dealing with complex issues like piracy off the Somali coast and progress on the Iran nuclear issue. However, “unilateral (sometimes covert) interventions as in Libya or Syria have led to unexpected and dangerous outcomes. We clearly need to improve, strengthen and use the processes and institutions of multilateral consultation and action available to the international community” (Menon 2014).

The EU has urged India to be a “responsible power” (See Ferrero-Waldner 2008) and to do more, especially in international security. For one leading Indian analyst, since the 2000s, India has pursued “responsible multilateralism”, which has essentially involved the erosion of Third Worldism in India’s approach towards multilateralism (Raja Mohan 2013: 35). To the West, National Security Advisor Shiv Shankar Menon pointed out that being a “responsible” power means “they want us to do what they wish”. India’s “primary responsibility”, he added, “is and will remain improving the lives of its own people for the foreseeable future. In other words, India would only be a responsible power if our choices bettered the lot of our people” (Menon 2011).

### *Normative Disconnect*

A key objective of the EU's strategic partnerships is to promote and extend social, economic and ideological norms that have been successful in Europe at the global level as global public goods. The EU engages in the practice of "othering" wherein it represents the other as "different" and inferior, as an entity not yet able to achieve universal principles. As a result, it needs to show others how things are done (Diez 2005: 628-629). The Europeans have come to believe that their transcendence of power holds lessons for others, that they have "a civilizing mission", and that the European experience is the standard of the world which others must adopt or adapt in the manner they are proposed. Europe often presents the normative agenda in a way that seeks to undermine the competitive advantage of developing countries. The Union's projection of norms externally is clearly intended to protect and safeguard European interests abroad. Brussels seeks to impose norms irrespective of the stage of development, historical background, political traditions, and social-cultural heritage or systems of other countries (see Jain and Pandey 2014). The Europeans come with their own foreign policy preferences, expecting Indians to conform to them or explain why they are not complying with them. The EU's normative narrative is being increasingly contested and challenged by the emerging powers, including India, which are beginning to contribute to alternative, non-EU narratives. A strategic partnership, in fact, never implied an automatic normative convergence between partners.

The Union's strategic partners often criticize Brussels for its double standards. Indian stakeholders have wondered how the EU espousal of human rights and its promotion of democracy could be reconciled with the political expediency of hugging military rulers responsible for ousting democratically-elected rulers. Thus, Indians feel that they do not need any "ethical lessons" from a Europe which has "long coddled" military dictators in its neighbourhood (Tharoor 2007). India resents Europeans speaking from a high moral pedestal and often assuming a patronizing attitude: "Engage and we shall teach you how to do things." Indians have "an allergy" against being lectured to. One of the great failings of the India-EU partnership has been the tendency of Europe "to preach" to India on matters like human rights which it considers quite competent to handle on its own (Tharoor 2012a).

There is a growing "normative disconnect" (Holslag 2010) between the EU and emerging powers. There is a basic contestation between the European Union and most of its strategic partners about the content, value and scope of norms, because developing countries have been marginalized both economically and politically by the West, which has dominated the process since the end of the Second World War. The EU, thus, engages in a kind of "regulatory imperialism" through "unilateral regulatory globalization" (see Bradford 2011). The EU's unsuccessful attempt to impose a carbon tax on international airline flights was a reflection of its tendency to unilaterally impose its own standards on the rest of the world, seeking to impose unilaterally what it fails to achieve either multilaterally or bilaterally. On climate change, European states are generally perceived as pursuing an environmental agenda that is all about saving their commercial interests and not necessarily about saving the planet (Chaudhuri 2012).

In the post-Cold War era, India has emerged as a far more pragmatic power, more willing to serve its fundamental economic and trading interests and less engaged in sanctimonious moralizing. India deals with the EU in a strongly realist tradition and

is acutely sensitive about sovereignty and internal autonomy against intrusive human rights issues and remains wary about humanitarian intervention and the circumstances in which force may be used. A more confident India has become less vociferous in its opposition towards military intervention. However, in the absence of clear rules, it “prefers abstentions or neutrality to support” (Chaudhuri 2014: 14-15). For the most part, India has been a norm-taker rather than a norm-setter. It has largely pursued a reactive and defensive stance rather than a proactive one towards norms in order to safeguard its national interests and maintain a peaceful external environment to ensure development and growth.

### *Security Dialogue*

Since the 1990s, Brussels showed little interest in engaging in a frank and honest dialogue with India on terrorism or to confront Pakistan about its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. The European and Indian narratives, interpretations and analyses on key issues like terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and failed states have been at variance with one another. For instance, most Europeans have perceived terrorism as “a serious crime rather than an enemy to wage war on” (Argomaniz 2011: 95). In contrast to the rather modest agenda on security and terrorism proposed by the European Commission (June 2004), enhanced technical cooperation in areas such as money laundering and a dialogue on document security, civil aviation and maritime security (European Commission 2004: para 2.1.4 of COM 2004), Indian proposals were much more ambitious.<sup>5</sup> Apart from an annual security dialogue (since May 2006), there are four other security-related dialogues: counter-terrorism (between EEAS, Europol, Eurojust, and DG JUST and HOME and the MEA and specialized Indian agencies); counter-piracy, cyber-security and cyber crime, and non-proliferation and disarmament.

At the EU level, Brussels coordinates things like aviation security and restricting access to materials for explosives. The only multinational agencies that exist at the EU level are Europol – the EU’s centralized police organization – and Eurojust, a judicial organization which brings together investigating judges and public prosecutors. Owing to its extremely limited competences in the security field, the Union is unable to bring many security deliverables to the strategic partnership. Even where it can meaningfully contribute to meeting India’s security concerns, the difficulties in reaching a consensus amongst an increasingly heterogeneous EU-28 often preclude a meaningful response. For instance, after repeated requests, out of the 11 terrorist organizations banned by the EU in May 2002, three were of direct relevance to India. Brussels added another one in November 2005. However, with terrorist outfits changing their names rather frequently, Member States showed little enthusiasm in regularly updating the list owing to the extreme reluctance of EU Member States to get into a rather demanding, time-

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<sup>5</sup> The Foundation for National Security Policy examined India’s relationship with the United States, Russia, Japan, UK and China, on the basis of five parameters, viz. economics, politics, defence, technology and people-to-people, and rank them in order of importance. The EU also did not figure in the six countries (United States, Russia, France, United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan) that the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses identified for its study on the basis of those which were most active in the fields of defence cooperation, economic cooperation and political-diplomatic cooperation.

consuming, and permanent process of negotiation.

None of the major Indian proposals made a decade ago have yet seen the light of day. An agreement with Europol has yet to be signed. Similarly, seven years after India's request for an EU-India Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement in Criminal Matters to provide the over-arching legal framework for cooperation, the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator acknowledged that there was no agreement among Member States on this proposal because it was "quite resource-intensive" (cited in Aiyar 2011). It has hit a "dead end" since the Commission's legal directorate in charge of the dossier has come to the conclusion that "the likely benefits for the EU would not be worth the arduous, multiannual effort to try to integrate the existing patchwork of treaties between India and individual EU member states into one superseding agreement" (Muenchow-Pohl 2012: 33).

The lack of a more meaningful security dialogue is largely because the security milieus of the Union and India are completely different. Given the mismatch of security context, concerns and goals, most EU Member States share neither the same urgency nor the same interest in cooperating with India. Since a multinational entity like the Union has neither the necessary assets nor the competences of Member States, most practical cooperation in terms of surveillance technology, military equipment, intelligence sharing, etc. has been on a bilateral, rather than a multilateral, basis. For instance, one of most fruitful security dialogues was held under the French Presidency in the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai terror attack (November 2008), which led to enhanced cooperation in diverse areas with key Member States.

The Union is neither perceived as a major factor of consequence in South Asia nor is it considered critical to the security discourses within the region. India does not really expect Europe to contribute much to its persistent migraine regarding Pakistan. India, according to a Wikileaks cable, has in the early 2000s tended to regard the EU as "naïve, overly pro-active, and short-sighted, particularly when it comes to developments in South Asia" (Wikileaks 2004). New Delhi has been annoyed with the Union's approach towards the region, describing it as "too obvious, shabby, shortsighted and full of contradictions" and possessing "a tendency to go overboard" (Wikileaks 2004). Dealing with the Maoist insurgency in Nepal is still the only instance in recent years of the short-lived EU-India cooperation on South Asian security issues. India has not been responsive to attempts by Brussels to bring developments in Sri Lanka as part of the annual security dialogue.

Europeans do not seem to be overly concerned about the potential security implications of a rising and more assertive China, its military modernization and its rising defence expenditure. This is partly because Asian issues and nations are too distant to directly impinge on its own security, partly because the EU is not militarily present in East Asia, and unlike the United States, does not play the role of an external balancer in Asia. Asian nations continue to have reservations about the European Union's Asian capabilities and credentials. For instance, for the second time, the EU's request for membership of the East Asian Summit has been declined. Moreover, while Europeans aspire to a multipolar world, they seem to endorse Chinese views of a unipolar Asia. India, on the other hand, is keen that a strong EU plays a larger and more active role in Asia and works towards promoting a more equitable, stable balance of power in Asia. Security is and will continue to remain a marginal area for EU-India cooperation because the EU adds "very little value" to India's efforts to overcome its principal security challenges (Tharoor 2012: 245). The Union is virtually irrelevant in the immediate priority areas of strategic interest

to India, viz. its own neighbourhood, the Gulf region, the United States and China, as well as major global security issues like nuclear proliferation, civil conflict and terrorism.

India and the EU have not yet built a real structure for real discussions on security issues. Despite a common desire to have greater dialogue on conceptual and operational aspects of peacekeeping operations and several Track II efforts, there continue to be difficulties in enhancing cooperation on peacekeeping operations. Whereas the EU seeks to co-opt third countries in Common Security and Defence Policy missions, India is steadfast that it will only participate in UN-mandated and UN-led missions. The lack of a common strategic culture would therefore continue to impede more meaningful strategic cooperation between the EU and India.

Since December 2011, a working relationship has been established between the EU naval operation, ATLANTA, deployed in the Gulf of Aden to combat Somalian piracy, and an Indian naval patrol deployed there, which, like other national patrols in the area, is primarily interested in protecting commercial ships flying its own flag. Not much attention has so far been given to other issues like coordinated action in mutual legal assistance in the investigation and persecution of captured pirates, capacity-building of Indian Ocean regional navies, and the restoration of peace and stability in Somalia without which maritime security in the region would continue to be fragile. Future areas of cooperation can include support for capacity-building of small Indian Ocean region navies, but a major challenge continues to be interoperability. Both have recently begun to show greater interest in forging closer cooperation in non-traditional security. The two sides could consider the establishment of a Joint Counter-Terrorism Technology Development Initiative.

### *Challenge of concluding the BITA*

A major challenge in the India-EU strategic partnership is to conclude the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BITA). After sixteen rounds and several missed deadlines since negotiations first began in June 2007 encompassing trade in goods, trade in services, investment, intellectual property rights, competition, trade facilitation, government procurement, and dispute settlement, an agreement has so far proved to be elusive. For Brussels, the FTA with India is narrower and shallower than what it usually seeks. For India, however, it is a far more comprehensive one than the ones it has negotiated so far. Though most of the issues like pharmaceuticals have largely been resolved, some of the most difficult and sensitive issues have been left till the very end. The Eurozone crisis has reinforced reluctance to make further concessions. Disagreements still persist over key European demands relating to the reduction of duties on automobiles and wines and spirits, as well as government procurement. Key Indian demands include mobility of skilled Indian professionals and data secure status.

Like all trade negotiations, the on-going negotiations for an FTA are contentious, but both feel that they will be better off with an agreement than without one. The FTA will set the parameters of the trading relationship for the next decades and would undoubtedly be the most significant deliverable of the India-EU strategic partnership. Given the massive mandate of the National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party



(BJP) in the May 2004 elections, some issues like an increase in the FDI limit in insurance should be possible. However, red lines still persist on a few contentious issues. The two sides can choose to do the doable in keeping with the incremental approach suggested by India and other issues can be included at a later stage.

### *Overcoming the information deficit*

Despite growing awareness and information about the European Union after the launch of the strategic partnership, there continues to be a wide gap between peoples as a result of mutual indifference and neglect. The strongest clichés about Europe still endure. There is “a permanent lack of mutual knowledge,” with Europe still “marginal in the Indian collective memory” (Goddeeris 2011: 7). The EU “hardly figures on the Indian mental map beyond the small circles of those who have to deal with it directly” (Muenchow-Pohl 2012: 34).

Opinions of the Indian elite have tended to be conditioned by dispatches in Indian newspapers which have originated in or were transmitted by Western wire agencies. Continued reliance on the Anglo-Saxon media has tended to reinforce stereotypical clichés about Europe. The baggage of images of the EU still persists. Images of the Union as a global economic actor with a fragmented foreign policy, the predominance of economic issues in India-EU relations, etc. remains deeply anchored in Indian perceptions of the EU. It had been invisible as a development aid actor. The EU is not perceived as a coherent foreign policy actor largely because of its “capabilities-expectations” gap (Hill 1993). The European Union may have a lot of strategies and create ever newer policy areas, but it has so far not been able to develop a strategic culture. It does not attach much credence to the Union’s soft power; soft power to Indians means no power. The Eurozone crisis has tended to reinforce the already negative perceptions of a Europe in relative decline (see Jain 2014). The EU is grossly under-reported, with most news items being event-driven, the majority being on trade and economic issues, with an imperative India angle. Much of the internal wrangling or the nitty-gritty of internal EU developments is rarely reported except the Eurozone crisis, which has had a steady stream of articles in the Indian media.

Europe has been a key focus of New Delhi’s recent efforts to foster greater awareness about contemporary India. For instance, it has established 35 India Chairs (about a third of 108 worldwide) in 16 EU Member States, many of which focus on contemporary India. But much more needs to be done to enhance knowledge about the emerging powers amongst younger generations in Europe. Much further mutual learning is required for perceptions to gradually change.

### *Challenge of visibility*

Visibility continues to be a challenge for both India and the European Union. There is a communication gap in how the EU communicates and explains itself to a major Asian country. There is also a big gap between self-perceptions of the European reality and how ‘Outsiders’ perceive it. A more conscious effort needs to be made to overcome

perceptual differences. It is essential to explore innovative ways for how the EU can better target and synergize its media, communication and public diplomacy strategies with strategic partners like India in order to enhance its visibility and overcome stereotypes and misperceptions (Jain and Pandey 2010). Both India and Europe have to make a conscious effort to overcome perceptual differences, since misperceptions constrain greater mutual cooperation and dialogue. Since perceptions do matter in cementing or retarding ties, EU policy-makers must address this concern more effectively if they seek to become a player of greater consequence in Asia (Jain and Pandey 2012; Jain and Pandey 2014a). India confronts similar challenges of improving its image and visibility in the EU.

## 7. Conclusion

Strategic partnerships are based on long-term engagement, which can gradually lead to improved understanding and cooperation. They have facilitated more focused, structured sectoral dialogues, but they usually lead to bland statements characterized by a high degree of rhetorical convergence. One should not, therefore, overrate the instrument of strategic partnerships because they were never meant to promise more than they could deliver.

Both EU and Indian officials find each other to be extremely difficult and equally frustrating. Both India and the European Union, according to an ambassador of a prominent Member State, have “a tendency to look to the most powerful poles in international relations rather than towards each other, and each spends more time deploring the shortcomings of the other than building the foundations of future partnership” (cited in Malone 2012: 247).

Even though both New Delhi and Brussels are struggling to find a constructive, yet realistic approach to building a strategic partnership, there is certainly more contact and content than in the past. Greater engagement with the EU has facilitated greater understanding of each other’s perspectives towards bilateral, regional and global issues. But the willingness to discuss and engage has not necessarily been accompanied by a mindset change about each other. With EU development assistance to India having ceased in 2014, the traditional prism of looking at New Delhi as an aid recipient has certainly come to an end. The conclusion of the Bilateral Investment and Trade agreement in the near future can take the relationship to a new height, as it will set the parameters of the India-EU trading relationship for the coming decades and contribute significantly to building greater stakes in the relationship in both entities.

One basic reason has been the lack of an economic underpinning of the relationship, which is one-sixth that of China.<sup>6</sup> Until the 1980s, Continental Europeans treated India as the diplomatic property of the United Kingdom, as key EU Member States had few material interests or stakes in the region. Since then, many of the historical and historical bonds and terms which traditionally linked India with Britain, including the “Oxbridge”

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<sup>6</sup> For Indian perceptions of EU-China relations, see Jain 2009.

legacy, have considerably withered away with time. It has become a more level playing field, and unlike the past, major Member States like France and Germany no longer defer to the UK for expertise or special intuition regarding the region. They have not only forged meaningful strategic partnerships with India but have nurtured extensive links across the socio-political spectrum and civil society. As before, India still has limited interaction with Continental Europe; this is partly due to the lack of a significant diaspora on the Continent and also explains the lack of relations with Continental Europe.

India and the European Union have limited potential and complementarity in geopolitical terms. The foreign policy and security dimensions of the strategic partnership are at a very nascent stage largely because for Indian elites the EU displays a lack of geopolitical coherence and has not yet shown signs of acting as a credible power (Lisbonne-de Vergeron 2006: 5). The Union confronts a continuous challenge to unambiguously demonstrate the value addition it can provide to the partnership beyond trade. Like many of the EU's other strategic partners, India prefers to deal directly with Member States instead of the over-institutionalized and over-bureaucratized institutions of the EU. EU Member States demonstrate a continued reluctance to act collectively and have a marked preference for individualism in dealing with strategic partners. It is therefore hard for Indians "to discount the vigorous competition displayed by leading European countries with each other in vying for Indian favour (mainly in the economic sphere), and the lack of priority these same EU countries accord the EU and its machinery when dealing with India bilaterally" (Malone 2012: 16). Officials from some of the governments of the largest European states frequently urge New Delhi "to support their national policies – so they could undermine the policy being pushed by Brussels" (Chaudhuri 2014: 2). The "choice for low-profile leaders" of principal EU institutions (Tharoor 2012: 246) has also been a contributory factor for the Indian preference for bilateralism.

India has perhaps been too dismissive of the promise and potential of the European Union as a foreign policy actor in a multipolar world. Indian policy-makers also need to overcome their inherent discomfort in dealing with a complex, supranational and postmodern entity like the European Union. New Delhi has welcomed the changes brought about by the Lisbon Treaty, including an end to the irritating presidencies of smaller Member States, but more efforts need to be made at understanding the nuances of the workings of EU institutions. There is an imperative need to intensify interaction and consultations with the European Parliament given its growing importance in the EU institutional architecture. To most Indians, postmodern Europe seems to be a lonely power in what is basically a Westphalian world with pre-modern and modern States. Postmodernism is not only "alien but baffling for the Indian system" (Chaudhuri, 2011). To Indian policy-makers, the postmodern vocabulary and discourse does not persuade practitioners to make decisions on discourse, but on the basis of choices and risks in objective reality (Menon 2013).

Despite shared values, the lack of shared interests on a number of issues will continue to limit cooperation. India and the EU have many common interests, but transforming them into coordinated policies has been rather elusive. Both sides wish to take the relationship forward. However, in the ultimate analysis, it is not really whether the Union is postmodernist and India modernist, the former neo-realist and India realist. It is really about whether the two can display a similarity of analysis and mutual confidence regarding shared interests to facilitate greater cooperation.

Brussels and the Member States complain that they encounter problems of capacity, and resources of India's Ministry of External Affairs cite the small size of its diplomatic service – similar to the island state of Singapore. The EU has also been unhappy that it still does not have direct access to the Foreign Secretary (unlike France, the UK and Germany), but only to the Secretary (West) whose remit includes, among others, the rest of Europe, both East and West.

A worsening demographic profile with a graying population is compelling the European Union to address the problems and opportunities of in-sourcing highly skilled immigrants or outsourcing services. Since skilled immigrants seek better location and conditions, European countries are increasingly concluding social security agreements with India. There is considerable potential for India and Europe to move increasingly towards partnership in cutting-edge technologies in a manner which combines India's strengths with European capabilities. India's participation in the International Thermonuclear Reactor Project (ITER) and the Galileo satellite projects was facilitated by the EU. A more substantive economic, technological and cultural interaction between India and Europe has to necessarily underpin the political relationship. There is a need to widen and deepen civil society dialogue and sustain it beyond being largely government-driven. There is an imperative need to develop a more robust framework of educational exchanges and elite interaction in order to better comprehend differences and work towards achieving common goals. It is essential to encourage Indian elites and students to study in Europe in larger numbers, especially as India's new generation has a societal bias and looks mostly towards the United States. It is also helpful to foster greater research on contemporary India at universities and think-tanks which have been fixated on China for too long. Growing trade and the rise of Indian multinationals is creating greater constituencies in Europe, which will gradually contribute to building better foundations of the India-EU strategic partnership.

Europeans have to revise their mental maps about the growing profile of emerging powers and the gradual shift of economic power to the East. This may not happen soon, as old habits die hard – especially as Europeans have for centuries been accustomed to being influential, and at one point in time, whether your voice was heard at all depended on Europe. With the rise of the Rest, things are not quite what they seemed to be. Europeans will have to change their continuing narrative that they can continue as before without adapting. Europe should recognize that it has to listen more and lecture less, for very often most Indians tend to regard Europe as being intrusive and preachy. The new European narrative needs to be more open, inclusive and accommodating. There has to be a real dialogue, not a dialogue amongst the deaf (not talking *at* each other, but *to* each other). Enduring cooperation requires shared interests not merely at the conceptual level, but in operational terms as well. Very often, it is not merely a question of priorities, but the lack of understanding which results in the lack of cooperation.

With its focus on development and good governance, there are high expectations that the new government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi will overcome political drift and policy paralysis and steer the country towards accelerated reforms and more sustainable economic growth. India is on the verge of an unprecedented economic resurgence under a decisive leadership. To that end, Europe offers immense promise and potential as an invaluable development partner.

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