

# A proposal for coordinated climate action: a multi-layered Indo-European opportunity

By Henrik Chetan Aspengren and Axel Nordenstam<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As climate change lies at the heart of the von der Leyen-Commission's strategic agenda, it is high time to further the external dimension of the European Green Deal in the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and India. The EU and India can together pursue joint leadership on climate action since the Trump administration announced a withdrawal of the Paris Agreement and China lacks in actual climate action (Rattani 2019). As both the EU and India signed, ratified, and continuously support the Paris Agreement, joint climate action is a natural priority. Intensified climate cooperation would also send a distinct signal globally: the EU and India are pursuing joint leadership in the global climate crisis.

At the 15th EU-India Summit in July 2020, the political leaders outlined climate change as an essential priority area in both the joint statement and the Roadmap 2025. The joint statement stated that "resolute and coordinated action is key to tackle the generational challenge of climate change and environmental degradation". Building on the momentum which the strategic partnership between the EU and India currently enjoys, we outline a practical approach for enhanced Indo-European climate action cooperation.

## **The challenge: Connecting multiple actors on multiple layers**

The literature on EU-India climate cooperation offers a key insight, which informs our proposal. There are multiple actors involved in a multi-level governance structure (Jørgensen and Wagner 2017). These actors include India's central government, states governments, and cities, on the Indian side (Beermann et al. 2016) and the European Commission, EU member states, and European regions, cities and local governments on the European side. With engagements between multiple actors on multiple levels, cooperation risks becoming burdened by a lack of coordinated action, disrupted knowledge-sharing, and missed opportunities. While the member states have subscribed to joint EU-wide representation and activities in India, they also drive country-wide bilateral engagements with India, in parallel. Evidently, the EU Delegation in New Delhi facilitates the coordination of the member states in New Delhi and implements the 2016 EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (European Commission 2016). Some member states have their own seconded diplomats dealing with climate issues in India, whereas others rely on the EU Delegation to a much wider extent. Consequently, New Delhi, state governments, and cities have several options for engaging with various European partners for climate action, but the Indian counterparts are constrained by limited institutional capacity for assessing and comparing the alternatives. A coordinated approach by the Europeans is required to scale up the cooperation on climate change when not only India's central government is involved, but also Indian state governments, cities, and rural areas are transitioning towards being climate friendly and contributing to mitigating the global climate crisis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Henrik Chetan Aspengren, PhD, is Research Fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) and Coordinator of South Asia Initiative. Twitter: @HCAspengren. Axel Nordenstam is an Analyst at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). Twitter: @AxelNordenstam.

**To foster the Indo-European climate action partnership, we suggest a more joined-up EU approach as follows:**

**1. Initiate A Portal for a Green Shared Future.** Considering the strong European interest in actively contributing to India's green energy transition, a new digital portal for sustainable solutions broadens the European offer from clean energy to many more areas. Encompassing the European actors active and willing to be engaged in India, this portal would enable Indian government and commercial actors to connect and engage with what the EU can offer in India's modernisation efforts. Be it smart cities, solar technology, on- or offshore wind energy, water scarcity, or reforestation initiatives, there is a smorgasbord of options. Eventually, in a subsequent phase, the portal could be designed as an EU-India corridor of green opportunities which would facilitate Indian business interests and expertise to invest in projects in Europe or locate them on European soil. When designing the first phase of the portal, civil servants can draw inspiration from the ASEM Sustainable Connectivity portal. If widely used, the portal may constitute a door to a more sustainable future.

**2. Designate a Green Deal Attaché to the EU Delegation in New Delhi.** The tasks for a Green Deal Attaché are linked to the Commission's Green Deal framework. The attaché will be promoting the Portal for a Green Shared Future with European climate-friendly solutions and actively travelling to interact with state governments and regional and local stakeholders. As issues of importance to climate action fall under the State list, Union list and Concurrent list of the Indian constitution, local presence is essential. Through active presence on the ground and social media, the climate attaché ease informal communication with the EU's diplomats and increase the EU's visibility in India. Another task for the European Green Deal Attaché is to inform the European Commission, the EU member states, and the European Investment Bank about Indian domestic climate policy debate. Indian climate policy debates are multi-faceted and range from environmental affairs and global responsibilities to multilateral climate policy and renewable energy.

Sending a Green Deal Attaché to India adds manpower to the EU Delegation's climate action and environment team. We envision that the existing Counsellors on climate, energy, and environmental affairs proceed their work as usual and focus on diplomatic interactions in New Delhi, internal coordination together with the member states, occasional attendance at events in state governments, and covering India's multilateral climate policy. While active Counsellors in New Delhi is key for a coordinated European approach, a Green Deal Attaché are operational on the ground and improves EU's daily visibility outside of Delhi. In a nutshell, the Green Deal Attaché's responsibility is to be the focal point for the European side on the one hand, Indian local and regional authorities on the other. Potentially, a Green Deal Attaché could be placed to other strategic partners throughout the world. In the spirit of the Green Deal, the Attaché would strengthen the green, sustainable dimension of the EU-India strategic partnership. Lessons learned and best practises from India could further enable the European Green Deal's external dimensions elsewhere, for instance, in the transatlantic relationship and foster Green Alliances.

**3. Initiate a Biennale on Climate Action.** A large-scale exhibition and meeting place with a specific focus on ideas, tools, and innovative solutions to tackle climate change. The Biennale will take place every second year in India or Europe. The focus should be on European and Indian actors, but this Biennale could be open for actors from other countries as well. Arranging this Biennale is a joint leadership opportunity if the EU and India create a new forum to stimulate the exchange of ideas and solutions on climate action. At the same time as political support to an Indo-European Biennale on Climate Action is critical, the inclusion of different generations, industry, civil society, political parties, and government from Europe and India is vital to pursue joint leadership on climate action.

As India wishes to gain from the current trend of diversification of supply chains, the Biennale on Climate Action could showcase efforts to build and sustain green technology value chains. An Indo-European joint approach would send a strong signal about the EU's willingness to structurally incorporate India in the post-COVID 19 green technology chains and India's acceptance to become better interlinked with Europe.

## Conclusion

As the global climate crisis deepens and widespread demand for climate action increases, the world's eyes are on the EU and India. Both have signaled their intent to take the lead in efforts to handle the crisis. While climate change itself constitutes a significant risk for both, the EU and India also risk being criticised for not fully unlocking the potential of greater bilateral collaboration on climate action. Not effectively utilising the strength of international cooperation will be costly for the planet and in the eyes of the public. As identified in this brief, accelerated action demands innovative ways to deal with the very complex "glocal" character of the climate crisis. Collaboration and consultation between the EU and India cannot be restricted to Brussels, or European capitals speaking to New Delhi, but need to be firmly grounded with local stakeholders. Until there is a structure in place, allowing for and drawing on multilevel input, such discussions remain challenging. Successful collaboration also requires that all involved actors see the benefit of joint action. The three proposals outlined in this brief of a Green Shared Future portal, a Green Deal Attaché, and a Biennale on Climate Action all aim at identifying and matching opportunities and demands raised by stakeholders in Europe and India. As such, it becomes a framework for further implementing actual climate action to not only mutual but also global benefit.

## References

- Beermann, Jan, Appukuttan Damodaran, Kirsten Jörgensen, and Miranda A. Schreurs. 2016. Climate action in Indian cities: an emerging new research area, *Journal of Integrative Environmental Sciences*, 13:1, 55-66.
- European Commission. 2016. Joint Declaration between the European Union and the Republic of India on a Clean Energy and Climate Partnership. Retrieved from (Accessed 28 September 2020)
- Jörgensen, Kirsten and Christian Wagner. 2017. Low Carbon Governance in Multi-level Structures: EU-India relations on energy and climate, *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 27, 137-148.
- Rattani, Vijeta. 2019. 'Exploring the EU-India Leadership Dynamic on Climate Change' in *Challenges in Europe* by Gulshan Sachdeva (ed.). Palgrave Macmillan, 181-196.