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**Enhancing EU-India Multilateral Cooperation at
the United Nations High Table**

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1. EU-India Multilateral Cooperation at the UN High Table

The world today stands at the crossroads of peace and pandemic where both EU and India are confronted with multiple challenges, majorly transnational in nature. Considering the serious dent caused by Covid-19, it is believed that multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) have come under severe stress, thereby exposing its weakness in managing the crisis¹. The strong commitment displayed towards “enhancing cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral fora”² by both Brussels and New Delhi has however remained more of a potential rather than a target fulfilled³. The UN’s flagship project Agenda 2030 which exemplifies the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also seems to be under the scanner as the world struggles to meet the targets by the stipulated timeline. Even though they are placed on different tangents of development (developing vs developed), both EU and India hold the potential to effectively address the common challenges plaguing the world and rebalance the rules-based global order towards sustainability. It is important to note here that EU only enjoys an observer status at UN; not being a formal member of the EU definitely restricts its activities. The *shared competence* between EU and its Member States further complicates the game.

Taking the case of the UN here, time and again, India has reiterated at the high table the urgent need for a *reformed multilateralism* that gives voice to all the stakeholders and focusses

¹ Amrita Narlikar, “Rebooting Multilateralism? Lessons still to be Learnt”, ORF RAISINA DEBATES, Observer Research Foundation, 2020.

² “EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025” adopted during the 15th EU-India Summit held in July, 2020.

³ Lara Klossek, Shounak Set, Tomasz Lukaszuk, “Breaking Glass Ceiling? Mapping EU-India Security Cooperation”, ORF ISSUE BRIEF, Observer Research Foundation, 2020.

primarily on human welfare⁴. However, the lack of a formidable European support and radio silence maintained by them on some of the pertinent issues (such as, Kashmir) has left New Delhi with a bitter taste⁵. Complementing synergies between both the partners in different areas, such as energy, environment, climate action under the shared framework of the SDGs, is crucial, especially in a post-pandemic world. For this end, carving out a formidable time-bound strategy of multilateral cooperation between the two sides at the UN high table holds the key for their long-term strategic partnership.

2. Enhancing Multilateralism: Challenges Ahead

The EU-India strategic partnership relies heavily on the kind of synergies that it is able to build at multilateral fora, particularly in the UN. In fact, marking its 75th anniversary last year, the UN finds itself swaddling between conflict resolution and a growing demand for urgent reforms. Also, taking a cue from the trajectory of the relationship in the past two decades, one can observe that it been growing both in quality and quantity, be it politically or economically⁶. Considering the political, economic and the vast geopolitical clout that the Union enjoys, it is often categorised an ambitious climate leader⁷. On the other hand, India as the largest democracy and fastest growing economy in the world, is trekking a tough terrain marred by severe rise in greenhouse gas emissions and an inadvertent climate crisis. Addressing two critical areas in the partnership is vital for expanding the debate on enhancing multilateralism; firstly, close cooperation in the field of UN peacekeeping missions and second, coalescing EU-India development partnership under the umbrella of the SDGs.

It has been observed that both EU and India are active and vocal supporters of the UN peacekeeping missions, declaring it repeatedly in the official communication of the strategic partnership. Till date, more than 2,53,000 Indians have served in 49 of 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948⁸. Signing a Framework Agreement with the UN, the EU demonstrated its interest in enhancing complementarity in the UN field missions, in the areas of security, logistics and medical support⁹. As part of the CSDP, the Union has 6

⁴ PM Narendra Modi in his intervention at the High-Level Meeting of the 75th UN General Assembly on September 21, 2020.

⁵ Shishir Gupta, "Pakistan battles to push for UN debate on Kashmir amid lack of support", Hindustan Times, June 29, 2020.

⁶ Nicola Casarini, Stefania Benaglia & Sameer Patil, "Moving Forward EU-India Relations", Gateway House and Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017.

⁷ It should be noted here that leadership is a contested concept and there are several criticisms labelled against EU's lack of leadership in global climate action, depending on different contexts and situations.

⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, 2019.

⁹ United Nations Peacekeeping, 2020.

ongoing military missions and 11 ongoing civil missions spread across Asia, Africa and the European neighbourhood¹⁰. A collaboration between Indian and EU peacekeeping missions can help in narrowing the crisis faced by multilateralism. Integrating the two would also help build confidence in the partnership.

Coming to development partnership, as a traditional aid donor, the EU is the world's largest official development assistance (ODA) provider representing around 55.2 per cent of global aid amounting to EUR 75.2 billion in 2019. India as a (re)emerging development partner cooperates with other developing countries in the form of lines of credit, capacity-building and technical training, and bilateral grant programmes. It firmly pushes forth its development cooperation under the South-South cooperation (SSC) framework. The clash of ideologies (the traditional West vs the South) is apparent here. Till now, no significant joint development partnership project has been initiated by the two in a developing country. Although New Delhi has little incentive towards integrating its development partnership along with the Union¹¹, it is certainly a risk worth taking, especially in the context of Agenda 2030 and sustainability.

Given the low-rung visibility of Brussels in the Indian circles, it is believed that Europe can still be a key ally for India in pushing forward its agenda of multilateralism in the coming years¹².

3. Policy Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** The EU and Indian peacekeeping troops must work jointly in other developing countries. To achieve this, the **Indian peacekeeping missions need to be integrated in the CSDP** which might be practically difficult but if achieved it would help in streamlining and consolidating their partnership at the UN. Going beyond military missions, the Ministry of Defence in India and the EU CSDP should conduct regular consultations on how and what of working together under the common banner of UN peacekeeping missions. **The EU must also utilise its enhanced observer status at the UN to support New Delhi's initiatives for reforming the organisation**

¹⁰ European External Action Service, 2021

¹¹ Emma Mawdsley, "Development and the India-EU Strategic Partnership", Policy Brief 14, European Strategic Partnerships Observatory, 2014.

¹² Garima Mohan, "Europe can be a Key Ally for India", Hindustan Times, July 14, 2020.

(making it more inclusive and representative) and encouraging effective multilateralism.

- **Recommendation 2:** The EU must adopt a people-centred approach in order to fulfil the SDGs and enhancing multilateralism as part of its external action, thereby giving precedence to human development. The COVID-19 crisis may have unravelled the biggest stress test for development cooperation but it also gives an opportunity for Brussels to diversify its development measures by assisting the marginalized sections of the society. Here, **its strategic partnership with India needs to be accentuated.** Partnering with India, the Union must focus on building robust sustainable societies, in other developing countries (for instance Africa), to tackle climate change or possibly another pandemic in the near future. India's Vaccine Maitri initiative, where New Delhi is supplying Covid-19 vaccine doses to the developing countries across the globe is an example of people-centred approach.
- **Recommendation 3:** The EU and India must go beyond the traditional government-to-government approach. It needs to focus on constructively involving the sub-national agencies (civil society, NGOs, local district groups etc.) located in both Europe and India to increase the climate mitigation resilience of cities, towns and villages. It is recommended to conduct **regular meetings or dialogues or consultations between the DG DEVCO International Partnerships and the MEA Development Partnership Administration and involving the members of the civil society, local NGO representatives and social groups** to gather information on the demands and needs of all the parties. This becomes even more imperative at a time when Covid-19 emerges on the scene when misinformation and diplomatic wars are rife. Both multilateralism and Covid-19 know no boundaries; it is a transnational challenge however the solutions can be glocalised¹³. **Enhancing sub-national cooperation** would, in a way, add momentum to the whole discourse on multilateralism and a rules-based global order.
- **Recommendation 4:** It is necessary to give an institutional basis for the integration of the EU-India partnership on development. Focussing primarily on sustainable development is vital. It is recommended to set up a **EU-India Sustainable Development Forum** whereby regular ministerial meetings, preferably twice a year,

¹³ According to Britannica, glocalization is “the simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems”.

can be held between the two sides. This Forum would act as a medium for mobilisation of funds and grants to be given out to other developing countries lagging behind in resources towards meeting their SDG targets and commitments. Also, this Forum would provide a gathering force for Brussels and New Delhi to act in unison at the UN high table on discussing topics pertaining to development, SDGs, environment etc. Here, again, **the DG DEVCO International Partnership and MEA DPA need to communicate more often to discuss and draw a charter of targets (energy, environment, climate action, migration) to be achieved in a time-bound manner.**

- **Recommendation 5:** Being the first ever single country from the SSC, India contributes quite handsomely to the India-UN Development Partnership Fund. The **EU can contribute to this Fund** (being the largest ODA donor) in order to kick start sustainable and demand-driven projects in the developing countries. This would help in **fostering and instilling confidence in the Indian ministerial circle (especially the DPA division) that Brussels has got its back.**