

## **The European Union and India: A Tale of Two Diverse Giants**

The European Union and India, though fundamentally different in structure – one a union of 27 European states and the other a sovereign nation with 28 states and 8 union territories – share numerous commonalities. Both regions are marked by high population diversity, a commitment to democratic values, and face similar challenges on the global stage. Delving into their similarities, unique challenges, and the importance of their collaboration is crucial in today's interconnected world.

### **Commonalities between the European Union and India**

#### Diversity as a Foundation

The European Union, comprising 27 member states, boasts a population of approximately 447 million people who speak more than 24 official languages. English is understood by 44% of adults, with German being the most common native language at 18%. India, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, officially recognizes 22 languages and thousands of dialects. Hindi, spoken by over 528 million people, is the most prevalent language, followed by Bengali with 97 million speakers. This linguistic diversity fosters a rich tapestry of cultures, traditions, and local identities in both regions.

#### Democratic Values

The European Union and India are staunch proponents of democracy. Citizens in the European Union elect 720 members to the European Parliament, with around 373 million eligible voters for the 2024 election. India, the world's largest democracy, operates under a parliamentary system. In 2024, nearly 970 million people are eligible to vote for 543 members of parliament, underscoring the vast scale and dynamism of Indian democracy.

#### Economic Integration

Economically, both the European Union and India strive for seamless integration. The European Union's single market allows the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. The Euro reinforces this unity, contributing to a combined GDP of about 17 trillion dollars in 2021. India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) has created a unified domestic market, with its GDP at approximately 3 trillion dollars in 2021, aiming to reach 5 trillion dollars by 2025.

#### Commitment to Sustainable Development

Both the European Union and India are dedicated to sustainable development. The European Union's Green Deal aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. India is committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and actively engages in international climate agreements. India's ambitious renewable energy goals highlight its dedication to sustainability.

## Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights ensures the protection of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law within its member states. Similarly, the Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, including freedom of speech, equality before the law, and protection of minority rights.

### Unique Challenges

#### European Union

The European Union faces several challenges, including the aftermath of Brexit, which has caused economic and political divisions. Significant economic disparities between Western and Eastern Europe present ongoing challenges in balancing economic growth and cohesion. Migration and asylum policies are complex, with differing views among member states causing tensions. The rise of populism and Euroscepticism questions the unity and democratic values of the European Union, necessitating continuous efforts to improve transparency and participation.

Formulating a unified foreign and defense policy is difficult due to differing national interests, and achieving ambitious climate goals while ensuring economic growth and energy security adds another layer of complexity. Additionally, the European Union must adapt to rapid technological changes and address the demographic challenge of an aging population, which pressures social services and healthcare systems. Dependence on external energy sources, particularly from politically unstable regions, also poses risks to energy security.

#### India

Despite its economic growth, India faces significant income inequalities with large disparities between urban and rural areas and different states. Managing rapid population growth and urbanization requires substantial infrastructure development, housing, healthcare, and educational improvements. Political and social stability is challenged by regionalism, caste-based politics, and communal tensions.

Environmental degradation, such as air and water pollution, deforestation, and climate change, presents severe challenges, making it crucial to balance economic development with ecological sustainability. Improving healthcare infrastructure and services, as well as ensuring quality education for all, are ongoing challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The agricultural sector faces problems such as low productivity, lack of modernization, and farmers' distress, requiring sustainable solutions and improved living conditions.

Infrastructure development remains a challenging task essential for economic growth. Security challenges, including terrorism, insurgencies, and border disputes, require strategic approaches for internal stability. Bridging the digital divide and ensuring equitable access to technology and internet connectivity, especially in rural areas, is crucial for inclusive development.

## Significance of the Partnership between India and the European Union: Now and in the Future

Despite their differences, the European Union and India share a commitment to democracy, diversity, and sustainable development. Their collaboration is crucial for addressing global issues and promoting a more inclusive and sustainable future. Ongoing negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) symbolize their determination to build a stronger, mutually beneficial partnership. Through cooperation, they can promote economic growth, address environmental issues, and contribute to global stability. The impact of the Ukraine war on both regions underscores the importance of strategic alliances and adaptive policies in navigating global uncertainties.

## Strengthening the Influence of the European Union in the Global South through Cooperation with India

Cooperation between the European Union and India can significantly enhance the European Union's political influence in the Global South. India's strong ties with many African and Asian countries can help the European Union build stronger diplomatic relations in these regions. Joint development projects and humanitarian initiatives can foster goodwill and trust, improving the European Union's image as a cooperative global actor.

By collaborating on global challenges such as climate change and regional security, the European Union and India can amplify their impact and promote stability and peace. India's cultural influence and educational cooperation can enhance the European Union's soft power, building stronger cultural bonds and fostering positive perceptions of the European Union. Coordinated positions in international organizations and regional groups can advance common interests and address global problems more effectively.

*Despite their structural differences, the European Union and India share a deep commitment to democracy, diversity, and sustainable development. Their cooperation is not only beneficial but essential for tackling global challenges. India's central role in the Global South, with its deep-rooted relationships and influence in Africa, Asia, and beyond, makes it a crucial partner for the European Union. Through joint efforts, they can promote economic growth, advance sustainable development, and address challenges such as climate change, regional security, and technological advancements.*

*India's strategic influence and ability to bridge the developed and developing worlds offer the European Union unique opportunities to expand its reach and impact in the Global South. Joint efforts can strengthen diplomatic relations, build stronger alliances, and promote a more inclusive and stable global order. The cooperation between the European Union and India symbolizes a future of shared prosperity and global peace, making their alliance a cornerstone for navigating the complexities of our rapidly changing world. This partnership not only advances their regional interests but also significantly contributes to global stability and development.*

*By Dr. Bala Ramani and Neena Hartmann*