

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title and subtitle.

Indian Views of Europe's Role as Security Actor

Why the EU Needs to Change its Approach Towards India

FLORIAN BRITSCH

April 2014

- The perceptions of Indian decision-makers regarding the identity and role of the EU as a foreign and security actor deviate significantly from the perceptions of European scholars and practitioners. While certain European soft power tools are acknowledged, hard power and military capabilities remain the most important aspects in Indian debates about the EU as a foreign and security actor.
- India's strategic community does not perceive the EU as a relevant security actor able to contribute meaningfully to Indian security challenges. Other players—such as the United States, China, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel, and Japan (amongst other partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America)—matter more in New Delhi's strategic calculations.
- New Delhi prefers to deal with individual member states like France, the United Kingdom, and Germany—countries with whom India has good bilateral relations and which are important for technology transfer and defence equipment.
- It's time for Brussels to approach New Delhi in a more practical fashion, which extends beyond the articulation of normative principles. Moral preaching and finger pointing by European delegations are often counterproductive. Brussels should engage Indian decision-makers in a proactive dialogue and focus on overlapping interests, including maritime security, terrorism, space and cyber defence.

Europe's new identity as a foreign policy actor, often described as a civilian power—a power that aims to »civilize« international relations by promoting effective multilateralism and a rule-based international order (Council of Europe 2003:9)—has received much attention in academic and policy debates. Compared to the predominantly positive debates in Europe, Indian experts are increasingly critical in their assessment of Europe's new identity as a global actor. Debates in India on the European Union (EU) seem to focus less on the EU's identity as an actor and more on the effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy and its ability to achieve tangible results. While certain European »soft power« tools—in areas such as climate negotiations or institution building are acknowledged—the European debate about its new identity as a civilian power or normative power is often seen as smokescreen for shortcomings in its military capabilities and its lack of a unified security and defence policy.

A Fragmented View: The EU is not seen as an Important Security Actor

»Who do I call if I want to call Europe?« This question—commonly attributed to former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—is regularly repeated in foreign policy circles in New Delhi, and describes a strongly perceived lack of coherent and cohesive decision-making in the EU. Many foreign policy elites are unclear about the EU's supranational system and the division of competencies amongst its institutions and members. Terms like Europe, European Union, Eurozone, or European Economic Area (EEA) are regularly used synonymously, revealing a lack of knowledge in India's strategic community.

The EU has very low visibility in Indian media coverage; general perceptions and public opinion have been influenced by US and British media, which often portray a rather Eurosceptic view. This results in a somewhat frag-

mented view of the EU, which focuses primarily on trade and economic issues. The EU is perceived as a global economic giant, but an unimportant security actor. Especially against the backdrop of the European economic crisis, Shashi Tharoor and other opinion leaders warn that New Delhi may write Europe off as a charming but irrelevant continent, ideal for a summer holiday but not for serious business (Tharoor: 2012).

Cultural commonalities are often viewed through the prism of history. India and the EU share striking similarities: both are economic and political unions of almost 30 member states, which are culturally and linguistically quite different from each other. In principle, the EU and India have great potential to be close, natural partners due to their strong democratic traditions, historical ties, and priorities for governance in a multilateral framework. However, there is no common understanding of what role the strategic partnership should play.

The view of the EU as security actor is also influenced by different understandings and logics of foreign and security policies, which are rooted in historical experiences. Europe's history gives a profound sense of the relevance of non-military instruments. The security that Europeans enjoy today, which in a very traditional sense means safety from external attacks, is a direct result of the integration process. The Indian experience differs significantly. While the EU shares sovereignty as a postmodern actor, India holds a more traditional view of state sovereignty to protect its strategic autonomy. India's general foreign policy imperatives are customarily guided by principles of non-interference and non-intervention. Compared with Europe, however, Indian history in the South Asian security environment has prompted a greater focus on military dimensions and on hard power capabilities.

India's strategic community is also unclear regarding the relations between the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which is often perceived as the military arm of Europe. India's main focus on South Asia, the Gulf Region, and Asia-Pacific further explains the low opinion of the EU as security actor. Apart from the presence and contribution to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan and an anti-piracy engagement off the coast of Somalia (Operation Atalanta), the EU is absent as a military player in Asia.

* The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, India Office organized a conference on »Europe's Role for Security in a Multipolar World: The Views from India and China« in New Delhi, India, September 26–27, 2013, in association with the NFG Research Group »Asian Perceptions of the EU« at Freie Universität (FU) Berlin, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and the Observer Research Foundation. The conference brought together academics, practitioners, and policymakers from Europe, US, India, and China. This paper is based on the discussions in the conference and on interviews the author conducted in India. The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Thus, the EU is often portrayed as an irrational and inconsistent actor; an entity where different countries compete for influence, and a coalition of willing European countries that occasionally engages in conflicts and uses force in the pursuit of national interests.

Strategic Partnership: A Wish List Leading Nowhere?

Having enjoyed stable, historic connections with Europe, India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic ties with the European Economic Community in the 1960s. The Joint Political Statement of 1993 and the signed Cooperation Agreement aimed to broaden and deepen political cooperation. The Joint Action Plan (JAP 2005 and 2008) outlined the implementation of the strategic partnership between India and the EU. The JAP—often described as a »wish list that brings us nowhere«—emphasizes shared values and interests, but fails to define concrete actions, timelines, or deliverables. Both entities have different expectations and are unclear about what they wish to get out of the partnership.

What appears from a European perspective to be a rather ad hoc and unfocused approach in India's foreign policy choices and strategic partnerships is guided by a firm belief in the need for flexibility and clever tactical independence in decision-making. The main challenge for the EU remains expanding the current economic focus in the EU-India relationship into a political and security partnership. Hence, the EU needs to approach India as an equal partner and engage in a strategic dialogue to find a common ground for effective cooperation and a place in India's foreign policy principle of strategic autonomy.

The EU's Ambiguity: India Prefers Dealing with Single Member Countries

India's preference for single EU member states derives from the EU's ambiguous role and status in international organizations, and from the established communication channels with single member countries. If India can successfully deal with individual nation states, it does not see any added value in dealing with Brussels' slower decision-making structures.


The EU itself is not a full member of the United Nations (UN). It is represented along with its 28 members—of whom France and United Kingdom are permanent members of the Security Council (SC). While the EU is signatory to a large number of UN agreements, it only has an enhanced observer status in the UN General Assembly and its committees, and no voting rights. Many EU member states support India's position on reforming the SC; nevertheless, no common EU policy has evolved so far. India, together with Germany, Brazil, and Japan—also referred to as the Group of 4 (G4)—support each other's bid for a permanent seat in the Security Council.

The same problem arises on matters of non-proliferation and export controls. While the EU does not have a common position on India's nuclear policy, some states—for instance, the UK and France—are supportive of the Indian exemption within the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and are ready to have nuclear arrangements with India. India is eager to gain acceptance in the Multilateral Export Control Regimes: namely, the Australia Group, Wassenaar Arrangement, NSG, and the Missile Technology Control Regime. Although the European Commission is a member of the Australia Group and the NSG, it is still single member countries that hold voting rights in these regimes. From India's viewpoint, Brussels can only decide on very limited issues, so why should New Delhi deal with Brussels when it can have far greater influence when talking with Paris, London, or Berlin?

The Road Ahead: Why the EU Needs to Change its Approach Towards India

In its fascination with the US and China, the EU has persistently overlooked India and needs to change its policies accordingly.

European decision-makers need to understand that while the EU and India share common goals and values—such as multilateralism, democracy, human rights, and global governance—both entities have different approaches and strategies. Common values like democracy and human rights should be a part of every dialogue, but moral preaching by European delegations have proved to be unsuccessful. There is no single human rights issue in India, which domestic groups have not detected first.



Therefore, the EU needs to invest heavily in research and knowledge about South Asia. European research has typically been blinded by a passion for the colourful India with all its traditions, languages and religions, but more research needs to be conducted to understand India and the security issues in South Asia. The EU has to become much more active diplomatically and increase its visibility, establish networks, promote student exchanges, and create advocacy groups. In addition and to further strengthen the EU's ability to transport its message to India, the establishment of an EU military attaché in its delegation in New Delhi would be an asset in engaging with Indian defence counterparts.

It's time to address the partnership in a more practical fashion and stop dwelling on the same topics. European and Indian decision-makers often complain about the same issues, but from different angles. While New Delhi perceives Brussels as unable to communicate its message of security, the European side complains that no one in New Delhi is interested in listening. Instead of trying to work on the whole range of security issues at the same time and getting nowhere, both partners should come together to identify overlapping priorities. Topics like terrorism, maritime and cyber security could be promising.



About the Author

Florian Britsch is a researcher in the India Cluster of NFG Research Group »Asian Perceptions of the EU« at Free University of Berlin, and in the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg University. He studied Political Science of South Asia and International Law in Munich, Heidelberg, Granada, New Delhi, and Tokyo. In New Delhi, he is associated with the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Dept. for Asia and the Pacific
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Jürgen Stetten, Head, Dept. for Asia and the Pacific

Phone: ++49-30-26935-7450 | Fax: ++49-30-26935-9211
<http://www.fes.de/asien>

To order publications:
Julia.Schultz@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN: 978-3-86498-864-6