

The European Union and India: Strategic Partners on Multilateralism and Global Governance

November 2019

- On 7th November 2019, Brookings India in collaboration with the European Union Delegation to India organised a panel discussion titled 'The European Union and India: Strategic Partners on Multilateralism and Global Governance'. The keynote address was given by **Mr. Christian Leffler**, Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Global Issues, European External Action Service.
- The expert level panel included **Amb. Shyam Saran**, Former Foreign Secretary (2004-06) and Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and **Mr. G. Balasubramanian**, Joint Secretary Europe West, Ministry of External Affairs. The panel was moderated by **Dr. Constantino Xavier**, Fellow, Foreign Policy at Brookings India.
- In attendance were officials from EU member- state embassies, officials from the EU delegation to India, former Indian foreign secretaries and ambassadors, scholars from India's leading think tanks and universities and members of the media.

Multilateralism: A Shared Vision for Europe and India

Leffler's keynote address stressed on the importance of multilateralism as a shared value between the EU and India, and its importance in a polarised world. Referring to multilateralism as both the ideal and necessary approach, he outlined three thrusts of the EU-India partnership: first, the common goal of helping preserve a rules-based world order. Second, the need to modernise the United Nations and assist it in preserving multilateralism in rapidly changing circumstances. Finally, the need to lead the discussion on multilateral solutions to the great problems of today, with a focus on exploiting the digital revolution.

The Deputy Secretary General also discussed some of the EU's contributions to maintaining peace, including its recent efforts in Venezuela and its sixteen peace and stability missions. Finally, Leffler briefly outlined some of the most promising areas of India- EU strategic cooperation, such as on artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons, UN peacekeeping missions and more. Multilateralism was projected as a core value underlying the EU's own efforts and its partnership with India, with 'openness, transparency, respect, fairness and inclusiveness' being the important factors in strengthening the EU- India agenda moving forward. In a world reeling from climate change, conflict and insecurity, Leffler noted, the importance of working together is paramount.

The Expanding EU-India Relationship

Amb. Saran opened the panel discussion by reinforcing Leffler's point on multilateralism, referring back to a statement he made in 2004 where he had mentioned the twin goals of multilateralism and multipolarity. He noted that the global context has changed, but the need to respect each other's opinions, values and goals has not. For example, challenging fundamentalism, terrorism and other violent threats to peace and stability is a shared goal for both the EU and India, and there must be a constant focus on bringing all stakeholders together to resolve longstanding political instability. Thus, under the guiding beacon of multilateralism, the scope of the EU-India relationship is expanding as the world changes. Amb. Saran further recalled the strong EU-India momentum of the 2000s, which pioneered a push on various economic and security fronts (including intelligence sharing, and a trade deal which was close to completion). He also argued that this positive dynamic then withered away after 2009. On the other hand, he noted that the current global uncertainty is encouraging the EU and India to revive their partnership and finish the business they began twenty years ago (at the first summit) in Lisbon. Joint Secretary G Balasubramanian agreed with this, mentioning the EU-India strategic partnership (active since 2004) and the expanded

cooperation in key new fields: artificial intelligence, digital economy and climate change. The speaker also noted the widening scope of the security relationship between the two partners, with a move towards more concrete measures in that regard. India has recently been giving patrolling support to European ships, and some EU ships have been increasing their port calls to India. Further, India's contribution to UN Peacekeeping missions is a key example of its respect for multilateralism, and another area of EU-India strategic coordination.

Leffler added that these expanding partnerships present the opportunity for the EU and India to project the lessons learnt from open, peaceful and multilateral discussions on a global scale- in other words, the EU and India can look towards becoming standard-setters for fair discussion and negotiation and challenge the polarisation rampant in world affairs today. Even if the multilateral approach is slower and at times more cumbersome, it is the most comprehensive, holistic way to make democratic discussions, and the two parties can encourage the UN, allies and the global community to follow this approach. Expanding on this point, the speaker noted that the EU's multilateralism used to be chided for being 'boring and predictable', but that in today's world, 'boring and predictable were qualities in high demand'.

Working Together to Strengthen Democracy

Following the discussion, the floor was opened to questions from the audience. These questions addressed core aspects of the EU-India dynamic. One audience member asked Leffler about the EU's views on reform within the United Nations, and whether those views align with India's on key concerns such as a revamp of the Security Council. Leffler responded that the UN, needs to modify and modernise itself in line with changing global circumstances and reaffirm the commitment to multilateralism which the organisation claims to protect. Responding to a question on whether public diplomacy can play a major role in India-EU relations, Balasubramanian replied in the affirmative, noting the importance of Indian students in Europe, the increasing availability of technical courses and higher education courses in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, and other people-to-people contacts. Moreover, Indian students who go to Europe become acquainted with the European way of life, and enrich the cultural exchange

between the two regions, leading to more familiarity and ground-level contact. 'Track 1.5' diplomacy and policy dialogues, such as the EU-India Think Tank Twinning Initiative were identified as helping incubate new proposals for EU-India cooperation.

Responding to a question on the nature of the EU- India dynamic, Amb. Saran noted that both parties seek to establish and sustain open, democratic spaces where discussion flows freely and all concerns are accounted for. This common goal arises from India's commitment to multilateralism and democratic expression, and finds resonance in the EU as well. Creating wider spaces that are more democratic is a goal that will benefit both parties and allow them to follow up on common objectives in a peaceful, consensus-driven manner.



(From L to R): Dr. Constantino Xavier, Fellow, Brookings India; Dr. Shamika Ravi, Director of Research, Brookings India; Christian Leffler, Deputy Secretary-General, Economic and Global Issues, European External Action Service; Amb. Shyam Saran, Former Foreign Secretary & Senior Fellow, CPR; Friederike Tschampa, First Counsellor- Head of Section Political Affairs, Delegation of the European Union to India; & G. Balasubramanian, Joint Secretary Europe West, MEA.

*This event summary was prepared by
Aditya Srinivasan & Nidhi Varma
Intern and Research Assistant, Foreign Policy.
Email: nvarma@brookingsindia.org*



@BrookingsIndia



Brookings.India



Brookings India



www.brookings.in