

# Why India-Europe partnership matter

The visit of a delegation of the EU's College of Commissioners led by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen marks a significant new phase in the bilateral relationship between India and Europe

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External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a bilateral meeting with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in New Delhi on Thursday. (PIB via PTI)

At a time when ties between Europe and the United States are facing great pressure, a large delegation of European Commission College of Commissioners is in New Delhi for a two-day visit.

Twenty-two of the 27 Commissioners are part of the delegation led by European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen. This is the first trip out of Europe by the College that took office in December, and the first-ever visit to India by the Commissioners together.

Indian officials said the visit of the College of Commissioners marks a significant new phase in bilateral relations, as India and the EU enter the third decade of their Strategic Partnership.

Meetings of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), bilaterals between Indian Ministers and EU Commissioners, and the meeting at the leaders' level will diversify engagement and promote trade and investments in a range of areas, the officials said.

These include artificial intelligence (AI) and semiconductors, as well as green hydrogen, sustainable urbanisation, water management, resilient supply chains, defence, and space.

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### **A deepening relationship**

India established diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community — the first pillar of the future European Union — back in 1962. The Joint Political Statement signed in 1993 and the Cooperation Agreement of 1994 paved the way for the strengthening of ties between India and Europe.

The multi-tier institutional architecture of cooperation has been presided over by the India-EU Summits, 15 of which have been held so far. The first Summit was held in Lisbon in June 2000, and the bilateral relationship was upgraded to a Strategic Partnership at the 5th Summit in The Hague in 2004.

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and EC President Ursula von der Leyen have met at least seven times in the past. The President paid an official visit to India in April 2022, during which she participated in the Raisina Dialogue as Chief Guest, and delivered the inaugural address.

Prime Minister Modi and President von der Leyen met briefly on the sidelines of the G20 Rio Summit in November 2024. In January this year, the PM spoke by telephone with the President of the European Council Antonio Costa.

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### **Meetings and initiatives**

The India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025, was adopted at the last India-EU Summit in July 2020.

At the Leaders' Meeting in May 2021, the two sides announced the resumption of negotiations for a comprehensive free trade and investment agreement, and an agreement on Geographical Indications. They also launched an ambitious 'Connectivity Partnership'.

During their meeting in 2022, Modi and von der Leyen announced the establishment of an India-EU TTC as a strategic coordination mechanism to tackle challenges at the nexus of trade, trusted technology, and security.

The TTC — a new frontier similar to the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies with the US or the Technology Security Initiative with the United Kingdom — represents three significant pillars of India-EU cooperation: Digital and Strategic Technologies; Clean and Green Technologies; and Trade, Investments and Resilient Supply Chains.

The First Ministerial Meeting of the TTC was held in May 2023; the Second Meeting will be held in New [Delhi](#) on Friday.

In the various meetings between the two sides, the issue of global cooperation — including the ongoing war in Ukraine, in which the US under President [Donald Trump](#) has done a remarkable switch, leaving the Europeans in the lurch — is certain to be discussed.

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## Trade and investments

India and the EU have been negotiating a Free Trade Agreement for the last decade and a half.

The economic argument for an agreement is strong: the EU is India's largest trading partner in goods, and bilateral trade has increased 90% over the past decade.

Bilateral trade in goods was \$135 billion in FY 2023-24, with Indian exports to the EU accounting for \$76 billion and imports for \$59 billion. Bilateral trade in services in 2023 stood at \$53 billion, comprising Indian exports of \$30 billion and imports of \$23 billion.

Cumulative Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows from the EU during the period April 2000 to September 2024 was \$117.4 billion, which represented 16.6% of the total FDI equity inflow.

Indian FDI outflows to the EU are valued at approximately \$40.04 billion for the period April

2000 to March 2024.

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### **Technology cooperation**

**The technology partnership between India and the EU has assumed greater significance and urgency in view of China's advancements in this field.**

Bilateral science and technology cooperation is carried out within the framework of the Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement of 2007. The India-EU Intent of Cooperation in High Performance Computing (HPC) was signed in November 2022, and in November 2023, the two sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding on semiconductor R&D cooperation. The following month, the EU participated in the Global Partnership on AI Summit in New Delhi.

### **Green energy solutions**

**Under the India-EU Green Hydrogen Cooperation initiative, India was the exclusive partner country at the European Hydrogen Week in Brussels in November 2024. The EU was a major partner in the International Conference on Green Hydrogen in Delhi that September.**

The European Investment Bank has committed to supporting Indian hydrogen projects with funding of 1 billion euros. Indian and European companies are collaborating in the renewable and hydrogen sectors with the aim of developing a green hydrogen ecosystem in India by 2030.

### **People-to-people ties**

**Strong and growing people-people ties is one of the foundations of the India-EU relationship. The growing Indian diaspora in the EU contains large numbers of students, researchers, and skilled professionals. Indian professionals received the largest share — more than 20% — of EU Blue Cards issued in 2023-24.**

Over the last 20 years, more than 6,000 Erasmus scholarships have been awarded to Indian students, making them among the top recipients of the scholarships. More than 2,700 Indian researchers have been funded by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (part of the EU's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe) since 2014 — the most in the world.

### **Defence and space**

India and the EU are strengthening their defence cooperation, specially in maritime security and the Indo-Pacific region under ESIWA+ security programme. This is crucial in the context of China's growing maritime prowess and aggressive policies.

The first joint naval exercises were held in October 2023 in the Gulf of Guinea. The two sides have stepped up cooperation on global security, natural disasters, piracy, and counter-terrorism.

The Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO's) PSLV successfully launched the EU's PROBA-3 mission in December 2024. ISRO and the European Space Agency (ESA) have cooperated on the Chandrayaan-3 and Aditya-L1 missions, and signed an MoU for cooperation on Gaganyaan, India's human spaceflight mission.



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