



Delegation for relations with India

20.2.2024

MISSION REPORT

following the 15th European Union-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)
on 18-20 December 2023 in New Delhi and Mumbai, India

Delegation for relations with India

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Introduction

The European Parliament's Delegation for the relations with India (D-IN) paid an official visit to New Delhi and Mumbai from Monday 18 December to Wednesday 20 December 2023 on the occasion of the 15th EU-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM). In this context, MEPs also held a number of meetings with a variety of interlocutors from different sectors of the Indian institutions and society. This visit follows up on a previous Inter-Parliamentary Meeting with the Lok Sabha that took place online in March 2023.

The last official visit of the Delegation for Relations with India took place in 2017, although other parliamentary bodies did visit India in the meantime, as the International Trade Committee in 2022. The Subcommittee on Security and Defence of the European Parliament travelled to New Delhi and Mumbai at the same time and a number of meetings with Indian Authorities were held together.

Context

The European Parliament attaches great importance to parliamentary diplomacy, and in particular, to its inter-parliamentary dialogue with interlocutors in both chambers of the Indian Parliament. India is one of the most important strategic partners of the European Union and, in view of this, it is essential for parliamentarians of both sides to provide parliamentary scrutiny and guidance. The current geo-strategic circumstances and significant developments in our bilateral relations rendered this visit timely and productive.

This is a transformative moment in India domestically and for India's position on the international scene. The economy has been growing significantly and over 400 million citizens came out of poverty over the past 15 years. The size of India's domestic market with an increasing number of consumers, its well educated youth and the significant advances in some technologies are just a few reasons that illustrate why India has become such an important trading partner globally. India has overtaken China as the world's most populous country, is currently the second biggest global digital market, and the world's fifth largest economy in terms of GDP. It is expected that by 2027 India will have the world's third largest economy. India's presence and weight on the international scene has evolved as a result of the huge transformation India is experiencing. Demographics, access to education, technological advances, a growing consumer market and urbanisation are the main pillars of that trajectory.

The European Union's 2018 Strategy on India and the "India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025" reflect the relevance attached to relations with India, a view that is shared by the European Parliament.

The EU and India have been negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement for a number of years. Negotiations were launched originally in 2007, but stalled in 2013, resumed again in 2021, with the ambition to conclude them before elections in 2024. The European Parliament has been very supportive of these negotiations, and followed developments closely. It would seem, however, that these negotiations will not be concluded before the 2024 elections. European parliamentarians have consistently underlined that such an agreement would be very complementary, mutually beneficial and would allow to increase trade, which given the size

of both markets in the EU and in India, is proportionally rather low.

India's G20 presidency has generally been considered as a foreign policy success of the current Government, which is facing elections in April and May 2024. General elections in India constitute the largest democratic exercise globally, in terms of eligible voters (945 million voters were registered by January 2023) but also in terms of allocated funding. These elections and the duration of the legislative term coincide with the European Parliament's elections in June 2024.

Domestic considerations

Prime Minister Modi has been in office since 2014 and remains very popular ahead of the forthcoming general elections. Most analysts would coincide that a third mandate of Prime Minister Modi appears likely. His popularity among large segments of the population is due to the progress achieved in modernizing the country, in addressing social problems, in fighting corruption and in developing the economy. The significant GDP growth has brought over 400 million Indian citizens out of poverty in the past 15 years and the general sentiment in the population is that India is progressing. The opposition parties criticise the divisive politics and claim that the Administration of PM Modi has focused on slogans, such as "Make in India", "Invest India", "Clean India", "Digital India", "Startup India".

Beyond party politics, it can be said objectively that the reforms over the past years have promoted growth, have reduced poverty and have modernized the country. Such trends in the world's most populous country have wider implications, and open huge opportunities. The Government, the media and civil society at large are very aware that India has become a much more attractive place to invest, and in view of the very young population, India needs millions of new jobs annually.

The undeniable progress that India has achieved over the past years (a trend that is likely to continue) is one side of the coin, but a number of challenges obviously persist. Improving the infrastructure remains a major endeavour that requires huge investments. The European Investment Bank has been engaged in India since 1993, and under the EU-India connectivity partnership, it support projects in sustainable urban transportation and climate action. Given the size of the country, its population and its economic growth, it will be key to support India in its way to decarbonise its economy. Sustainable transport and developing renewable energy sources will be crucial and the EU can be a partner in that field. India has committed to reduce emissions and to increase non-fossil energy, but what remains a concern is that it has also decided to further expand coal production, as outlined in its national electricity plan 2023.

Hindu nationalism as promoted by the current administration clashes with the richness of India's multi-ethnic and multi-religious territories. The subcontinent is home to more than 700 different ethnic groupings and more than 100 languages (of which 32 languages have more than 1 million speakers). The Indian Constitution recognizes 22 major languages. Hinduism is the dominant religion, but with over 200 million, India has the third largest Muslim population in the world. Some critical voices claim that the common values and inclusiveness forged by modern India's founding figures and constitution are being compromised. Inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions have been the cause of concern. Inequalities on the grounds

of caste remain, although this form of social organisation, one of the world's oldest, has been constitutionally banned. India's cast system has marked social and religious life profoundly over centuries and its rigid structures continue to influence social mobility, mainly in rural areas. Having said that, it is also true that the main political parties cater for voters among vulnerable groups, including the Dalits, known as the untouchables.

Despite high economic growth and having reduced poverty significantly, the GDP per capita remains low at USD 2400 per annum. India remains the home of a third of the world's poor, about 230 million people are still below the poverty line and inequality is high. The 2022 Human Development Index (HDI) ranks India 132 out of 191 countries. Further progress in poverty alleviation and further development is a key priority for Delhi and a key factor that influences other policy areas, such as the ongoing negotiations on the FTA with the EU.

The EU-India FTA negotiations

MEPs welcomed the frank discussion they had with the Minister of Trade, Mr Piyush Goyal. The European Parliament has been consistently in favour of a mutually beneficial free trade agreement with India, given its potential complementary and the positive impact it would have on trading volumes. Given the size of the European and Indian economies, current bilateral trade remains relatively low (EU trade volume with China is 5 times bigger). Around 6000 EU companies are already present in India, providing directly 1.7 million jobs and indirectly 5 million job in related sectors, but MEPs insisted that a lot of untapped potential remains. The EU is India's third largest trading partner, however, India is just the 10th largest trading partner for the EU.

The Trade Minister reported on the progress achieved after 6 rounds of negotiations, but admitted that the negotiating teams had reached what was possible technically so far, and that political decisions are now required if further progress is to be achieved. He underlined that India's starting point is a very different one and that any trade agreement would have to be in line with India's socio-economic developmental needs. The non-trade questions such as labour standards and environmental protection remain a challenge. The minister noted that sustainability is key for India's development, but at this moment in time it is economically not feasible to give up coal as energy source. Energy consumption will continue to increase annually by 8-10% and other energy sources will not suffice to meet the demand. India will require larger transitional periods and the right level of asymmetry.

MEPs also discussed means to improve bilateral trade with representatives of FICCI, the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. FICCI representatives noted that India will continue to grow and will be the global growth engine over coming years, which offers great investment opportunities. Business representatives underlined that India's green transition offers great opportunities for European companies, but called upon MEPs to facilitate visa arrangements.

While in Mumbai, MEPs had the opportunity to visit the port facilities run by the Danish company Maersk and discuss the kind of infrastructure and logistics required to face the increasing trading volumes. With 63.6 million metric tonnes, the Port of Mumbai registered its highest ever traffic in 2022/2023.

Foreign policy and geo-strategic considerations

European Parliamentarians congratulated the Foreign Minister Dr Jaishankar on India's successful G20 presidency, which illustrated India's role as a global geopolitical actor.

As strategic partners, the EU and India have some convergence on a number of regional and global issues, and we tend to refer to India and the EU as like-minded partners, but India's multi-alignment diplomacy encompasses a wider picture. The Minister welcomed the unprecedented level of engagement between India and the EU, including regular summit meetings, which also enables us to expand our common ground but also manage our differences. He underlined that Europe and India have a different history of relations with Russia and with China. As regards the Middle East, he supported a two-state solution, a viable Palestinian state.

MEPs referred to our diverging approach as regards the Russian aggression against Ukraine, condemned Russia's war of aggression and insisted that the EU will continue supporting Ukraine's sovereignty. India has not condemned the invasion of Ukraine by a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which compromises the fundamental values of an international rules-based system. Delhi and Moscow have had historically close relations. Russia remains the main provider of armament and India has benefited significantly from cheaper crude oil imports. India has abstained from all UN resolutions relating to Ukraine. The Minister pointed out, however, that India does not approve Russia's actions, but continues to engage.

India's relations with China, in contrast, remain tense. Border clashes are a source of concern with this systemic rival. The Minister also expressed concern about the rising tensions in the South China Sea. China remains India's main strategic challenge. MEPs noted in this context that it was key to maintain a rules-based and multi-polar system, also in Asia.

Discussing counter-terrorism, Minister Jaishankar noted that Pakistan, a close partner of China, remains a source of concern. The Kashmir issue is likely to stay a potential source of conflict. As a matter of fact, just a few days before the visit of MEPs, the Supreme Court of India upheld Delhi's decision of 2019 to revoke the special status of the Muslim-majority Indian-administered Kashmir, declaring it was "...a culmination of the process of integration..." The constitutional changes approved by the Parliament of India revoked the special autonomy status in 2019, according to which Indian-administered Kashmir became Union territories of India. Pakistan denounced the Court ruling as having no legal value on the internationally accepted nature of the disputed territory. Without taking sides in the matter, the EU has consistently called on both parties to find a diplomatic solution to a conflict that goes back to partition in 1947.

Both sides welcomed the India-Middle East- Europe corridor as an important strategic project.

Human rights

The EU and India have a Human Rights Dialogue that is considered by the European Parliament as an important dimension of this strategic partnership. This dialogue resumed in

2021, after a pause of 8 years. As relations between the EU and India grow and strengthen further, MEPs underline the need to also strengthen the human rights dimension.

The European Parliament has been very vocal about human rights in India, as was the case in its resolution of 13 July 2023 on the situation in Manipur, or more recently on the European Parliament's recommendation of 17 January 2024 concerning EU-India relations. The latter text had been voted in the Foreign Affairs Committee just ahead of the official visit and was referred to in discussions with Indian interlocutors.

Civil society representatives updated MEPs on various human rights issues, including the difficult situation faced by the Dalit community. Cast-based discrimination was abolished by the Indian Constitution of 1949, but remains a deeply rooted social reality. In this context, reports of sexual violence against women of this community, which are particularly vulnerable, and killings, have been the source of much concern. Access to justice and impunity have been criticised in the last UN periodic reviews on India, but civil society representatives regretted that not sufficient cast-related action has been taken by Indian Authorities.

Freedom of religion, in particular the situation of Muslim and Christian communities, was also referred to (there are currently 12 states with anti-conversion laws although the Indian Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion).

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act adopted in 2020 to regulate funding for NGOs also remains a problematic, as it is considered to be an instrument that limits the space of civil society.

Numerous international analysts and civil society organisations regret the lack of improvement as regards the human rights situation in India. The representatives that MEPs met in Delhi confirmed that general perception. MEPs underlined that human rights are a key dimension in the relations between the EU and India and dialogue needs to be strengthened.

The state of inter-parliamentary relations

Inter-parliamentary relations between the European Parliament and the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha go back to 1981. The President of India, Dr Abdul Kalam addressed the plenary of the European Parliament in 2007. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha paid an official visit to the European Parliament in June 2015.

A total of 15 formal inter-parliamentary meetings have taken place, in addition to numerous additional official visits.

As India is a strategic partner of the EU, the European Parliament attaches great importance to its inter-parliamentary dialogue with both chambers of the Indian Parliament. MEPs have consistently taken the view that relations between the EU and India require a stronger parliamentary dimension. Significant developments in the bilateral relationship, but also in the wider geo-strategic situation, require stronger parliamentary scrutiny. Although the roles of the European Parliament and the Parliament of India have some differences in their respective institutional settings, parliamentary scrutiny is a fundamental responsibility in both

assemblies.

European parliamentarians welcomed the opportunity to meet their counterparts of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to examine together the state of bilateral relations between India and the European Union and invited them to consider paying an official visit to the European Parliament in 2025, following the 2024 elections in both India and the European Parliament.

The ongoing negotiations on a possible free trade agreement, the fight against climate change, regional and wider geo-strategic developments, human rights, the fight against terrorism, just to mention a few, are relevant issues likely to remain on the inter-parliamentary agenda of the next term.

Conclusions

India has been transforming and continues to grow at a moment when other major global economies are slowing down. Geopolitics are also placing India in the centre of the global equation. India's successful G20 presidency is just an illustration of a more ambitious outreach.

India is obviously an important and necessary strategic partner of the European Union and we share fundamental values. India is also referred to often as a like-minded partner, although that statement has its nuances. India's multifaceted outreach on the global scene, its ambition to be the voice of the global south or its approach to climate change illustrate that we do not share the same perspectives on a number of regional and global issues of relevance. India's approach to the Russian aggression against Ukraine is a significant geo-strategic challenge and demonstrates that convergence between the EU and India is selective. Fortunately, on the other hand, both sides having been strengthening the common ground from summit to summit.

European parliamentarians underlined that the EU stands as a reliable partner in that upward trajectory. India wants to become a developed nation by 2047, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of its independence. The European Union can be a valuable partner on this way.

The next EU-India summit and the next Strategic Partnership Review meeting should be an opportunity not just for stock-taking but to further expand the common ground and to design a more ambitious roadmap for the next term, following the elections in the European Union and in India in 2024.

List of annexes

1. List of participants
2. Programme of the visit
3. Agenda of the 15th EU-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)
4. Press statement following the 15th EU-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting IPM



Delegation for relations with India

15th EU-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)
New Delhi and Mumbai,
India

18 - 20 December 2023

Final list of participants

D-IN Members

Mr Morten LØKKEGAARD, D-IN Chair	Renew	Denmark
Ms Alviina ALAMETSÄ	Greens/EFA	Finland
Ms Aurélia BEIGNEUX	ID	France
Ms Laurence FARRENG	Renew	France
Mr Sandro GOZI	Renew	France
Mr Moritz KÖRNER	Renew	Germany
Mr Ralf SEEKATZ	EPP	Germany
Mr Ivan SINČIĆ Ivan	NI	Croatia
Mr Loránt VINCZE	EPP	Romania
Ms Tatjana ŽDANOKA	NI	Latvia

D-IN Secretariat

2 Staff

Political advisors

5 Staff

Interpreters (English/French)

2 Interpreters



Delegation for relations with India

**15th EU-India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)
New Delhi and Mumbai,
India**

18 - 20 December 2023

Final programme

Monday, 18 December 2023 - New Delhi

09.00 - 10.00	Briefing by EU Ambassador, Hervé Delphin
10.15 - 11.30	Meeting with Civil Society (Human Rights, Womens Rights, FCRA, LGBTQI etc)
12.00 - 13.00	Meeting with Dr. S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs
13.30 - 14.45	Briefing by Constantino Xavier on domestic political scenario and foreign policy (sandwich lunch)
15.30 - 16.30	Meetings with Mr. P.P. Chaudhary, Chairperson, External Affairs Committee and Member of the Committee
17.30 - 18.30	Meeting with H.E. Mr Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry. Also present at the meeting, Mr. Satya Srinivas, Additional Secretary and Ms. Nidhi Mani Tripathi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Chief Negotiators for EU India FTA)
20.00 onward	Dinner hosted by Mr. Sanjay Verma, Secretary West, Ministry of External Affairs

Tuesday, 19 December 2023 - New Delhi/Mumbai

09.30 - 10.30	Meeting with Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)
12.15 - 13.00	Meeting with H. E. OM Birla, Speaker, Lok Sabha
13.00 - 14.00	Informal lunch hosted by Parliament of India without participation of any officer from Parliament
14.15 - 15.00	Meeting with H. E. Harivansh Narayan Singh, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha
19.10	Departure to Mumbai on flight AI 624
21.25	Arrival to Mumbai

Wednesday, 20 December 2023 - Mumbai

	Transfer by boat to MAERSK
10.00 - 11.50	Visit MAERSK and discussion on the newly established Federation of European Business in India (FEBI) with Mr Sanjay Tiwari (MAERSK and FEBI Director)
11.50 - 12.35	Lunch offered by MAERSK
12.35 - 13.35	Transfer from MAERSK to Mumbai jetty
14.00 - 15.00	Visit Bombay Stock Exchange
15.45 - 16.45	Discussion with the Indian Industry – Confederation of Indian Industries (CII)

END of official programme



DRAFT AGENDA

15th EU - India Inter-Parliamentary Meeting (IPM)

18/19 December 2023

New Delhi, India

1. Opening remarks by the Co-Chairs
2. Adoption of the draft agenda
3. Political situation in India, ahead of the 2024 general elections
4. Political situation in the EU, ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections
5. Latest developments in relations between the EU and India, including the state of negotiations on a free trade agreement
6. Global and regional geo-strategic issues of mutual concern
7. Closing remarks by the Chair of the Delegation for relations with India, and his counterpart from the Parliament of India



Delegation for relations with India

22.12.2023

PRESS RELEASE

Delegation of the European Parliament pays official visit to India

A delegation of the European Parliament paid an official visit to India from 18 to 20 December 2023, on the occasion of the 15th inter-parliamentary meeting between the European Parliament and the Parliament of India.

The European delegation was led by **Mr Morten LØKKEGAARD** (Renew, Denmark) and included the following Parliamentarians: **Ms Alviina ALAMETSÄ** (Greens/EFA, Finland), **Ms Aurélia BEIGNEUX** (ID, France), **Ms Laurence FARRENG** (Renew, France), **Mr Sandro GOZI** (Renew, France), **Mr Moritz KÖRNER** (Renew, Germany), **Mr Ralf SEEKATZ** (EPP, Germany), **Mr Ivan SINČIĆ** (NI, Croatia), **Mr Loránt VINCZE** (EPP, Romania) and **Ms ŽDANOKA Tatjana** (NI, Latvia).

This visit provided Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) with an opportunity to meet with the Government and Parliament of India to discuss issues of common interest, such as the state of the strategic partnership, EU-India cooperation in a number of fields, bilateral trade, climate change, regional issues, civil society issues and human rights, among others.

The delegation started its official visit in Delhi and met with **H. E. Mr OM Birla**, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, **H. E. Mr Harivansh Narayan Singh**, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, **H.E. Dr. S. Jaishankar**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, **H.E. Mr Piyush Goyal**, the Minister of Commerce, and with Members of the Committee on External Relations. MEPs also used the opportunity to meet with the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and with representatives of civil society to discuss the situation of human rights.

In Mumbai, MEPs visited the MAERSK facilities at the port of Mumbai, the Bombay Stock Exchange and met also with the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII).

India and the European Union are strategic partners and given the current state of global affairs, it is key for both partners to strengthen cooperation and seek more common ground on mutual challenges. MEPs congratulated the Authorities of India on a very successful G20 presidency and on the remarkable socio-economic progress that India has made in recent years.

The European delegation was encouraged by the frank and constructive discussions and noted that there is a much convergence on a wide spectrum of issues. The European delegation expressed support for India's aspiration to become a permanent Member of the UN Security Council. It was also noted that more common ground needs to be sought on a number of important international developments.

As regards the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, MEPs underlined that this has been a serious geo-strategic challenge to the rules based international order and to shared fundamental values. MEPs strongly condemned Russia's unprovoked aggression and underlined the need to further support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

MEPs underlined that human rights are an integral part of the strategic relations between the European Union and India.

European Parliamentarians took that view that the forthcoming summit meeting between the European Union and India should offer the opportunity to make further progress as regards the negotiations on a comprehensive free trade agreement. Given the significant potential to enhance trade and investment relations between the European Union and India, it should be possible to overcome the different perspectives and conclude an agreement that would be mutually beneficial.

European Parliamentarians thanked the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha for the gracious hospitality extended during the visit. They underlined the need to further strengthen the parliamentary dimension of this strategic partnership and invited their fellow Parliamentarians to hold the next Inter-Parliamentary Meeting in 2025 in Europe.