

Pascaline Winand, Marika Vicziany and Poonam Datar, *The European Union and India: Rhetoric or Meaningful Relationship?*

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The book is the result of a project undertaken by lead authors Winand and Vicziany and is a useful contribution to the literature on EU-India relations. The time lag between the research and the book's publication in critical ways makes the findings dated when other events overtake the research questions. In this case what could be a saving grace is that the EU-India relations also experienced a slowdown that had a major impact on the annual Summit that did not take place in 2013–15. Its positive aspect is that it takes an historical, archival-based approach coupled with field interviews of elites to make sense of the relationship.

Divided across 10 chapters with a separate overarching introduction and conclusion, the book tries to answer the lead question on whether this relation is merely a rhetorical one or strives to be a meaningful relationship. The time span of evaluation is larger covering the period from 1950 until 2014 and tries to find the points of convergence in a study that examines the political, economic and security aspects in the bilateral relations within a changing global setting. The book is based on specific interviews and tries to capture the EU-India relation by embedding it into an historical perspective.

The book can be divided into two parts and the authors also set it out in such a manner. Chapters one to four examine in detail the period from 1950 to 1990. The relationship during this period was by no means spectacular and Pascaline Winand has taken pains to examine how the political and trade engagement grew in an incremental manner. For researchers interested in how the relations between Brussels and New Delhi grew in this period, the first five chapters seek to answer the key questions. At a time when the Indian economy grew very slowly in the early 1950s and 1960s and the European Economic Community (EEC) itself was at a nascent level, the archival material examines the interest about the new entity in Europe among the Indian elites. As Winand points out, there was an overwhelming concern within Indian policy-making circles and traders about the impact European regional integration would have on Indian trade. It should be noted that India slowly developed mechanisms to deal with growing trade issues at the bilateral level. Given India's close relation to the United Kingdom and the special partnership through the Commonwealth, this is given more attention in a separate chapter so as to evaluate the impact of the British application to the EEC. It is significant to note that while

Britain's first application to join the EEC in 1963 failed, a year earlier in 1962 the EEC established a formal relation with India. Given India's large trade relations with Britain, there was considerable anxiety in New Delhi on the implications of British membership in the EEC and its impact on the UK-India bilateral relations, a point well researched in the book.

The Commercial Cooperation Agreement (CCA) between the EEC and India receives considerable attention by Winand in Chapter 4 and the reasons would be sound given that the EEC was pre-eminently a trading area. She attributes how British, EEC and Indian lobbying came together to bring about this turning point in the bilateral relations between Brussels and New Delhi. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the slow growth of EEC-India trade and 1983 marks a transforming point as the EEC opened an Office in New Delhi. As Winand points out, it could be read as a sign of Brussels slowly according some measure of importance to India.

Moving from an historical narration, chapters five to ten focus on EU-India contemporary relations in the post-Cold War period. The end of the Cold War was a transformative period for both EU and India. The EEC acquired a newer and bigger political agenda with the launching of the European Union (EU) in 1992, wherein Member States agreed on initiating the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and also agreed to the enlargement of taking in Central and East European countries. India on the one hand had to deal with a major economic crisis that would ultimately lead to the liberalisation of the economy and on the other hand reconfigure its foreign policy to the new reality. Chapter five locates the new coordinates for the EU-India relations in this changed post-Cold War period and the transformed EU and India. While the EU was moving towards a more Post-modern role as an actor in international politics, India's preferred mode of doing business continued to emphasise the bilateral relations with the significant Member States.

For those seeking a better understanding of EU-India relations in the contemporary period, the material in Chapters six to ten seeks to offer some answers to the thematic issues touching upon "EU and Indian perceptions of the challenges of implementing any meaningful collaborations; the extent to which the need of the agrarian sectors in Europe and India could be met simultaneously; the opportunities for European and Indian industrial collaboration; the tensions between European and Indian national interests and how these were reflected in approaches to global security issues; and the relationship between EU and Indian aid programs" (p. 9). Each of these five issues is a key aspect in defining the EU-India partnership and the authors have chosen well to analyse each in a separate chapter. These thematic chapters are all bound together in that they address a single issue of how the Indian national interest guided its engagement with the EU thereby identifying points of convergence and divergence with the EU.

The authors locate the discussion on the thematic issues by first examining the perceptions that the EU and India have about each other in chapter six. This is a key aspect in trying to understand EU-India relations. In part, the absence of concrete policy outcomes and missed deadlines in the bilateral engagement is the result of how Brussels and New Delhi locate themselves as actors in the international arena. The EU as a multi-level actor has not been given the due consideration by India given its predisposition to conduct business with Member States. The authors emphasise that in addressing these issues they have sought to take in Indian perspectives in order better to understand Indian reasons or reservation for enhancing the bilateral relations.

Chapter Seven deals with agriculture which is a very critical issue in the EU-India relationship given the asymmetry in the contribution of agriculture to the GDP and percentage of population employed. Agriculture remains a key issue in the trade liberalisation between both the EU and India as correctly brought out by Vicziany and a source of major impediment in taking forward the relationship given that the priorities for both sides are very different. Entitled “Why European cows are the envy of poor Indian Farmers”, the chapter captures the intricacies of the policies on both sides and why these continue to stall the trade liberalisation discussions. Rural India, the agriculture sector and agro-industry all need to be transformed and this would push many people (rural India has 68 percent of the population and a large number living in poverty) above the poverty line, however, as the author points out, the secrecy shrouding the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has drawn a strong protest against it as the FTA is seen as being harmful to the rural sector.

Chapter eight explores whether trade and investment offer a better prospect for EU-India relations. The EU is India’s largest trading partner and after New Delhi liberalised its economy in the early 1990s, both factors offer tremendous opportunities for European firms to enhance investment in the country. As Vicziany points out, “the potential of using India as a springboard into the emerging economies of Asia holds out the hope of saving their long-term future” (p. 243). This chapter has detailed information on the changing nature of European Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India, and also drawing upon industry sources, it highlights the opportunities for collaboration that could be a win-win for both sides. In fact, the author points out how Europe leads both in creating a favourable investment climate and in terms of technology and job creation in India (pp. 244–246). The author has also highlighted other areas – infrastructure, Indian FDI to Europe, European investments in the Indian retail sector that is now opening up and how the FTA can transform and energise the partnership, provided it becomes more open and transparent and all stake holders come on board.

Issues of national security are the focus of chapter nine and this chapter assumes even more significance in the context of the strategic partnership between the EU and India since 2004. The author examines whether the expectations raised by the strategic partnership communication have been met. By examining three specific cases – the Galileo project, the US-India Civilian Nuclear Deal and the EU sanctions on Iran and Indian responses to them, it tries to extrapolate from it how the partnership has grown and whether each side accords the same kind of priority to their relationship. The chapter shows the mixed security deliverables, and the unevenness of taking forward the EU-India partnership is also because the national and security interests of both do not automatically converge. An ideational proximity between EU and India does not imply an interest convergence. India too has been expanding its foreign policy portfolio and managing to balance its different interests vis-à-vis the EU and other countries.

Chapter ten examines the EU-India development cooperation which assumes significance given that India has also taken on a growing role in this field. While the West likes to term India as a new donor, India has been active in the field of development cooperation from the 1950s, although the West does not consider the Indian contribution in the same manner. India’s development dichotomy and the fact that it occupies “two simultaneous worlds” (p.319) as Datar points out posits a challenge since it is a developing country in key sectors and developed in some other

sectors and has aspirations to be a global player. The chapter details EU funding of different sectors in India and how the priority areas have shifted over the years and more recently the move to partnering Indian states in programme aid as New Delhi has also been pushing for devolution. With the EU phasing out development cooperation to India after 2013, both should also examine possibilities of third party assistance given that India is also changing its aid profile.

The conclusion draws upon the findings to offer insights into the current state of EU-India relations. Given the historical approach adopted by the authors that situated the Europe-India relations since the 1950 and then explored how it evolved, they state that the relationship has undergone a dramatic transformation and conclude that "over time the EU and India have become global competitors, each looking at the other as a potential source of exports, business and investment" (p. 341). The authors correctly point out that in a changing power equation around the world, India engages many other players and actors and the EU is not always a priority.

Since the research comes from a project and there was a time gap between when the interviews were done and the final publication, some of the opinions do not match the developments. What is not clear is the composition of this elite which was interviewed in India. The authors do not use the word elite, but opinions of Indians solicited for the book are elites. Nowhere do the writers state that opinions of ordinary people were sought. The Indian elite is not one single group but varies across the political, economic and social spectrum. Thus there is a rich diversity of opinion on diverse issues and the authors do not indicate from which group most of the opinions have been elicited and whether the opinions resonated across all elites. Second, it is also curious that apart from one individual, none of those interviewed wanted to be named, including journalists. While serving government officials and diplomats are not in a position to talk openly, it is not clear if the authors made an attempt to contact other academics or retired diplomats who are not subject to confidentiality conditions as serving officials are.

Despite this drawback, this is an insightful and well written book that has gone deep into history to find new meanings to the EU-India relationship that has different dimensions, both positive and not so successful aspects. The authors have taken important sectors such as agriculture, trade, security and development cooperation and the overarching bilateral relation to unpack how the partnership is working by examining minute details, and offer some valuable understanding and commentary on what holds back the engagement from becoming more productive and meaningful. For researchers examining EU-India relations, this will be a useful source as it is well documented and gives an historical overview that is important for understanding some of the aspects of the strategic partnership and where it is heading.