

Introduction

The current geopolitical juncture is framed within a fragmented world order, increasingly multipolar in the emerging balance of global power and yet still at risk of succumbing to a growing bipolarity between the United States and China. Faced with this evolution, both India and the European powers are seeking a third way. This situation has led India and Europe to pursue closer collaboration in areas of greater strategic weight

Since Modi came to power in 2014, India has sought a renewed engagement with different regions in order to guarantee its national security as well as its economic growth. This new vision has had an effect on New Delhi's relationship with various European capitals, including Brussels, but also with new leading countries in other sub-regions of Europe. For their part, there is a palpable consensus among European countries, as well as the EU as a whole, on the desire to raise their bilateral cooperation with India to a more geostrategic level, partly as a response to the China factor and also due to India's improved global position.

The current evolution of ties between India and European actors continues to be marked by trade, combined with stronger technological cooperation in the fields of green technology, biotechnology, digital technology, security and defence. This evolution breaks with decades of a bilateral relationship in which trade has predominated, although it remains a key pillar of the relationship. In addition, the issue of promoting greater mobility for skilled legal immigration from India to European countries is becoming increasingly relevant, given the shortage of skilled personnel in certain sectors, such as technology, among others.

The first part of the chapter addresses the role of Europe within New Delhi's geostrategic landscape since Modi's first government in 2014. Subsequently, it explains in detail the evolution of India's relationship with key European actors from New Delhi's perspective, beginning with the EU as a whole and briefly mentioning the countries with the most weight within the Union – France and Germany; there is already exhaustive analysis on India–France and India–Germany relations.

This is why greater emphasis is placed here on the evolution of bilateral relations with other European actors, such as the post-Brexit United Kingdom, as well as the so-called European sub-regions with which New Delhi seeks to strengthen ties. The aim is to

explore in greater depth the relationship between India and other actors that are currently less relevant but have greater potential to be explored. Finally, the positive evolution of the bilateral relationship between Spain and India is highlighted, framed within the Mediterranean region according to New Delhi's current cartographic imagination.

The conclusion highlights those key sectors and areas with the greatest potential for exploitation based on the current priorities of the Indian government, as well as those of the main European actors, including the EU.

Europe's role in India's geostrategic chessboard in the Modi era

India has positioned itself as a major swinging state in the world, becoming a strategist of so-called *minilateralism*¹ (Sánchez-Cacicedo, 2023). India's foreign policy is markedly pragmatic and guided by the country's interests in various areas. New Delhi seeks to become a leading world power. For India, foreign policy is a vehicle for achieving a higher level of economic development and security for the country, thus enabling it to meet its goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047 —*Viksit Bharat @2047 Vision*² — within the framework of its current Era of Elixir — *Amrit Kaal*.

India's current Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar (2024:106), refers to the need for India to have a 'multi-vector' foreign policy that seeks to maximise its outcomes and benefits. This idea is rooted in the tradition of Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of non-alignment, or what is currently termed multi-alignment with more proactive and utilitarian undertones. Simultaneously, with Modi's arrival, India has sought to position itself as master of the world — *vishwaguru* — with a unique mission, including spreading its historical legacy and the wisdom linked to its civilisation (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2014). This narrative became particularly evident during India's presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 2023. Under the slogan 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' — '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' — originating from Hindu sacred scriptures written in Sanskrit, Modi's government sought to send a message to international leaders about the importance of Bharat's (India's, in Sanskrit) civilisational legacy in its new foreign policy. New Delhi seeks to frame itself in a global position within Western values of democratisation and

¹ According to Naim (2009), minilateralism is characterised by "bringing to the table the smallest number of countries necessary to achieve the greatest possible impact in resolving a particular interest".

² See: *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

respect for the rule of law while appealing to its leadership capacity within the global South.

It should not be forgotten that India suffers from the "tyranny of geography" (Chellaney, 2025). Its neighbouring region is in a particularly turbulent situation given the devastating economic crisis in Sri Lanka in 2022, the fall of Prime Minister Hasina's government in Bangladesh last autumn and the prolonged situation of armed conflict and government power vacuum in Myanmar. It is a convulsive region in which neighbouring countries oscillate between their historical support for New Delhi and their growing shared interests with Beijing. For India, the direct Chinese threat is highly tangible considering they share a land border of almost 3,500 km (Ministry of Home Affairs India, 2017), having fought an official war in 1962 and reached a situation of military confrontation again in 1967. More recently, there have been armed clashes on the Sino-Indian border in 2017 and 2020 (Madan, 2025). Tensions remain high with the neighbouring country, despite the mutual intention to stabilise ties after the partial withdrawal of both sides from the Line of Actual Control in October 2024 (Lidarev, 2025).

Furthermore, China's influence currently goes beyond the military sphere, permeating the economic and technological realms. As part of this desire to reduce India's dependence on China, New Delhi has sought to establish closer ties with other powers such as Australia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States (US), Israel, the United Kingdom and the EU (Madan, 2025). This same need also exists on the part of the traditional great powers and other emerging countries, current and potential partners of India. However, India perceives the EU and some of its main European partners as being overly lax in their *de-risking* policy towards Beijing, immune to the imminent threat it poses to New Delhi. This has not been the case with the US; New Delhi perceives the US approach to Beijing as firm, based on its stance of *de-coupling* from China. It remains to be seen in which direction the new Trump administration's policy on China will evolve.

It is to be expected that, if the intention of the new US administration to pursue an isolationist agenda is confirmed, other powers will take a more proactive role in their engagement with India and with the Indo-Pacific as a whole (Xavier, 2025). Hence, collaboration with New Delhi has the potential to deepen and endure significantly in the medium to long term.

Both India and its European partners are pursuing greater strategic autonomy³, which is currently linked to ensuring their economic security and greater resilience, both economically and in terms of energy security and defence. While for the EU it is a question of guaranteeing its economic security through 'strategic interdependence'⁴, India does so through 'multi- or plurilateralism' in order to achieve self-sufficiency —*Aatmanirbhar Bharat*—⁵. Whatever term is used, both India and the EU seek to become influential players in the evolution of the current world order: for the EU, this would mean not losing its relevance as a strategic bloc, while for India it would mean becoming a leading power.

The major challenge facing both India and its European partners is to preserve their sovereignty while seeking to increase their material power, both economically and in terms of security. The EU faces the additional challenge of being regarded as an actor with a coherent and collective vision rather than a fragmented entity given the divergent interests of its Member States. In their efforts to guarantee their survival and the potential third way mentioned earlier, both India and the European powers have understood the need to strengthen their relations with other middle powers of the Indo-Pacific as a counterweight to China and the US.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a stumbling block in relations between the European powers and New Delhi. India is clear that needs Moscow on its side to counter the growing Sino-Russian alliance. New Delhi wants to reduce Beijing's economic and technological dependence on Russia. In fact, India has never publicly condemned Russia's actions nor supported United Nations (UN) resolutions on Ukraine/Russia, abstaining in all votes since March 2022 (Mukherjee 2024:15). More relevant still is the fact that this behaviour from New Delhi has not had substantial consequences for the bilateral relationship between the EU and India, despite Russia being one of the greatest security threats to the EU today.

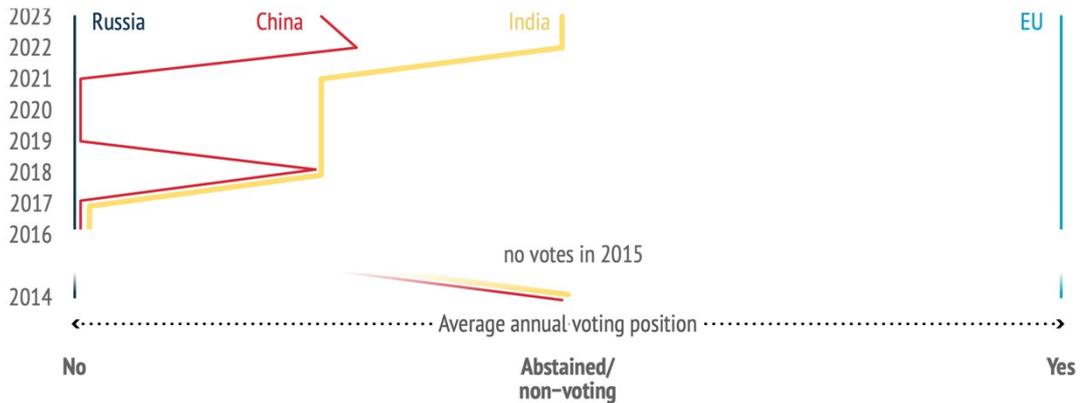
³ For the EU, the concept of strategic autonomy has evolved from the idea of achieving greater independence in the areas of security and defence to taking on a more geopolitical connotation in an increasingly hostile environment. See: European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS). For India, the notion of strategic autonomy means that on fundamental issues—national security, global trade, climate change—New Delhi will cooperate with whomever it can, based solely on its interests. India will be careful to partner with the major powers rather than take sides between them. See: Menon, S. (2021).

⁴ Strategic interdependence in this chapter is based on the premise of the need to ensure the sovereignty of each actor while participating in a fluid network of partners and coalitions focused on shared interests, rather than on an ideological or values-based approach. See: Aydintasbas, A. *et al.* (2023).

⁵ See: *Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan*.

Shifts in UN voting patterns on Ukraine

Divergent voting behaviour by India and the EU on Ukraine. India diverges from Russia and China post-2022



Data: UN Digital Library, 2024.

Figure 1. Mukherjee, R. 2024, p. 15

Furthermore, India has maintained its strong trade relationship with Russia, both in terms of hydrocarbon imports and Russian-made weapons imports. The percentage of crude oil imported by India from Russia rose to 40% of the total between April and October 2024, surpassing the amount imported from Iraq—its main exporter during 2023—given the reduced price offered by Moscow to New Delhi (The Economist, 2025). Indeed, India and Russia agreed the largest energy deal existing between the two countries for a sum of thirteen trillion US dollars last December (Bose and Briancon, 2024). Regarding arms transfers, Russia is India’s largest exporter of weapons, followed closely by France in the period 2019–2023 (Wezeman et al., 2024).

However, the Russia-India relationship has a growing geo-economic component that goes beyond India’s interest in Russian raw materials or defence. This includes the North Sea trade routes through the Arctic, the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor as an alternative to the North-South International Transport Corridor (INSTC), and the Russian Far East. Both countries share an interest in investing in agriculture, biotechnology, energy (including nuclear), mining, labour and maritime transport. Moscow also intends to continue joint projects with India in the construction of nuclear power plants in Bangladesh, for example, or missiles in Vietnam and the Philippines (Sánchez-Cacicedo, 2024).

Key European players from 2014 to the present

Based on the geostrategic juncture outlined above, there has been a relaunch of the relationship between India and the EU since 2021/2022. This date coincides with the Portuguese presidency of the European Council during the first half of 2021 and the subsequent visit of the then President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to India in April 2022. This revival has also taken place with certain European sub-regions, such as the Nordic countries, Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, as well as countries that traditionally have had less of a relationship with India, such as Spain.

This section begins by addressing the evolution of the relationship between India and the EU, followed by the relationship with the United Kingdom, and concludes with the new European sub-regions that have become key in India's new foreign policy vision in the Modi era.

European Union

Decades after the Strategic Partnership Agreement was signed between India and the EU in 2004, this relationship now finds itself at a new crossroads. The EU-India Strategic Partnership: Roadmap 2025 of 2020 is due to be renewed this year, with the development of a priority EU-India strategic agenda becoming a political necessity for the EU for the period 2024-2029 (European Union, 2024). This Roadmap 2025 already represented an expansion of the agenda between the two actors beyond the commercial sphere, including aspects such as sustainability, human rights and multilateralism. Subsequently, cooperation evolved towards issues of connectivity, global health, the environment and human rights, as well as towards coordination on regional security, including a Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative, UN Security Council reform and cooperation at the level of research agencies.

One of the cornerstones of the EU–India relationship has been the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), whose negotiations began in 2007 and were relaunched in 2022. Reaching a final agreement has been challenging due to differing approaches regarding the depth and scope of the agreement, although an Investment Protection Agreement and a Geographical Indications Agreement have nevertheless been concluded.

Following the February 2025 meeting between European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the College of Commissioners and Prime Minister Modi in New Delhi, the end of 2025 has been set as the deadline for finalising the FTA (European Commission, 2025a). This is a very ambitious and not particularly realistic goal.

It is worth noting that the EU was India's largest trading partner in goods (12.2% of India's total trade balance) in 2023, ahead of the US (10.8%) and China (10.5%) (European Commission, 2024). The EU is also the second largest destination for Indian exports (17.5% of the total) after the US (17.6%), while China ranks fourth in 2023 (3.7%). New Delhi is the EU's ninth largest trading partner (2.2% of the trade balance) in goods in 2023, well behind the US (16.7%), China (14.6%) and the UK (10.1%). Even so, trade in goods has increased by 90% over the last decade, which shows a positive trend with the world's fifth largest economy and most populous country. The EU is a leading investor in India (€108.3 billion) in 2022, although far behind China (€247.5 billion) and Brazil (€293.4 billion) (*Ibid.*).

Beyond the purely commercial relationship, under the Portuguese presidency of the EU, the EU-India Connectivity Partnership was signed in May 2021, covering the digital, transport and energy sectors, as well as the flow of people, goods, services, data and capital. It also includes cooperation on regulations, standards and physical projects. Ultimately, it seeks to encourage public-private investment, including from the European Investment Bank (EIB), as well as institutions from Member States and India.

In line with the growing importance of the geopolitics of technology for both actors' foreign policy, there has been a clear increase in the technological aspect of the relationship, specifically in critical and emerging technologies and green technology. The creation of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) in 2022 is indicative of this significant evolution. The first TTC meeting took place in May 2023 and the second this past February in New Delhi. There are three working groups within the TTC that outline the specific lines of collaboration (Ministry of External Affairs of India – MEA, 2023):

- Working Group 1. Strategic technologies, digital governance and connectivity:
 - Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Semiconductors signed in September 2023 with the aim of promoting the exchange of information on subsidies, potential disruptions and R&D in this sector.

- Joint cooperation on public digital infrastructure for third countries, given the success in developing digital identity in India (through Aadhaar)⁶, which has enabled greater digital and financial inclusion for more than 1.3 billion Indians.
 - Cooperation on digital platforms, data governance and telecommunications regulation linked to AI platforms, 5G/6G (interoperable standards) and quantum computing, rather than focusing solely on cybersecurity and Internet governance issues.
- Working Group 2. Green technology and clean energy:
- Cooperation on clean energy, with an emphasis on renewable and low-carbon hydrogen.
 - Cooperation on electric mobility, including aspects of battery circularity for electric cars and the recovery of raw materials.
 - Cooperation on standards that ensure interoperability, including in the green hydrogen sector.
- Working Group 3. Trade, investment and resilient value chains:
- Cooperation on resilient value chains: agreeing on basic standards for cooperation, as well as identifying value chains of mutual interest.
 - Cooperation on market access: identifying and resolving existing trade barriers.
 - Cooperation on the exchange of information on investment scrutiny mechanisms (ISMs): achieving a better understanding of the other party's ISM regime.
 - Cooperation on multilateral trade issues: collaborating ahead of future meetings at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) level, as well as on the

⁶ To better understand what this consists of, visit the Unique Identification Authority of India. See: UIDAI.

implementation of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

The CCT has resurfaced following the recent high-level meeting between Ursula von der Leyen, the College of Commissioners and Prime Minister Modi, at which progress was made in the areas of artificial intelligence, 6G technologies and green hydrogen. In addition, there has been a move towards a potential Security and Defence Partnership. Change source: (European Commission, 2025b).

In November 2024, a meeting of the EU-India energy panel linked to the EU-India Partnership on Clean Energy and Climate was held (MEA India, 2024a).

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the EU-India Strategic Partnership, members of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) met in Brussels last November for consultations. The discussions were wide-ranging, with an emphasis on economic security, green transition, security and defence, migration, mobility, the Partnership for Connectivity, the Global Gateway and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) (European External Action Service-EEAS, 2024).

The current situation between both actors is favourable, though also uncertain, given President Trump's arrival in power and the existing global volatility. Both actors need to recognise their vulnerabilities: for India, China currently poses the greatest threat, while for the EU it is Russia, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There is a clear desire and need to deepen the EU-India relationship within a turbulent geopolitical and geoeconomic context. The recent high-level bilateral meeting between the EU and the Indian Government has demonstrated mutual interest in deepening a more profound and strategic relationship. The bilateral meetings planned for this year are very welcome and will serve to shed light on the evolution of the EU-India relationship.

There is also mutual interest in investing in the security and defence sectors. Not surprisingly, France ranks third as an arms exporter to India, behind Israel and Russia (Wezeman *et al.*, 2024). Mutual interest in this area has evolved over time, despite India's historical perception of European security through the prism of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This perception remains. However, the launch of the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence in 2022, combined with the EU's need to

support Ukraine unilaterally against the Russian invasion, is gradually changing this impression. India has also expressed interest in jointly producing defence equipment, as it is already doing with the US and France.

Furthermore, New Delhi has sought to participate in projects under the framework of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which is limited to Member States or third countries that are members of NATO or have an information security agreement with the EU; this is not yet the case for India, although it has been proposed (Blarel, 2024:39). There is also some scepticism on the part of the EU regarding the possible transfer of dual-use technology to India, given its close relationship with Russia in defence matters, among others.

In contrast, there is mutual interest in developing cooperation at the level of maritime security, in particular concerning maritime domain awareness (MDA). Both the EU and India have increased their activity in this field, particularly in the western Indian Ocean, as a reaction to Chinese penetration into India's sphere of influence and that of other regional actors. The EU has at various times launched the initiatives EUNAVFOR ATALANTA (2008), CRIMARIO I (2014) and II (2020) (Critical Routes of the Indo-Pacific) and, more recently, EUNAVFOR ASPIDES (2024). It has also established the Maritime Security Centre Indian Ocean (MSCIO) in order to monitor EUNAVFOR missions in the region and the global trade routes that traverse the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean.

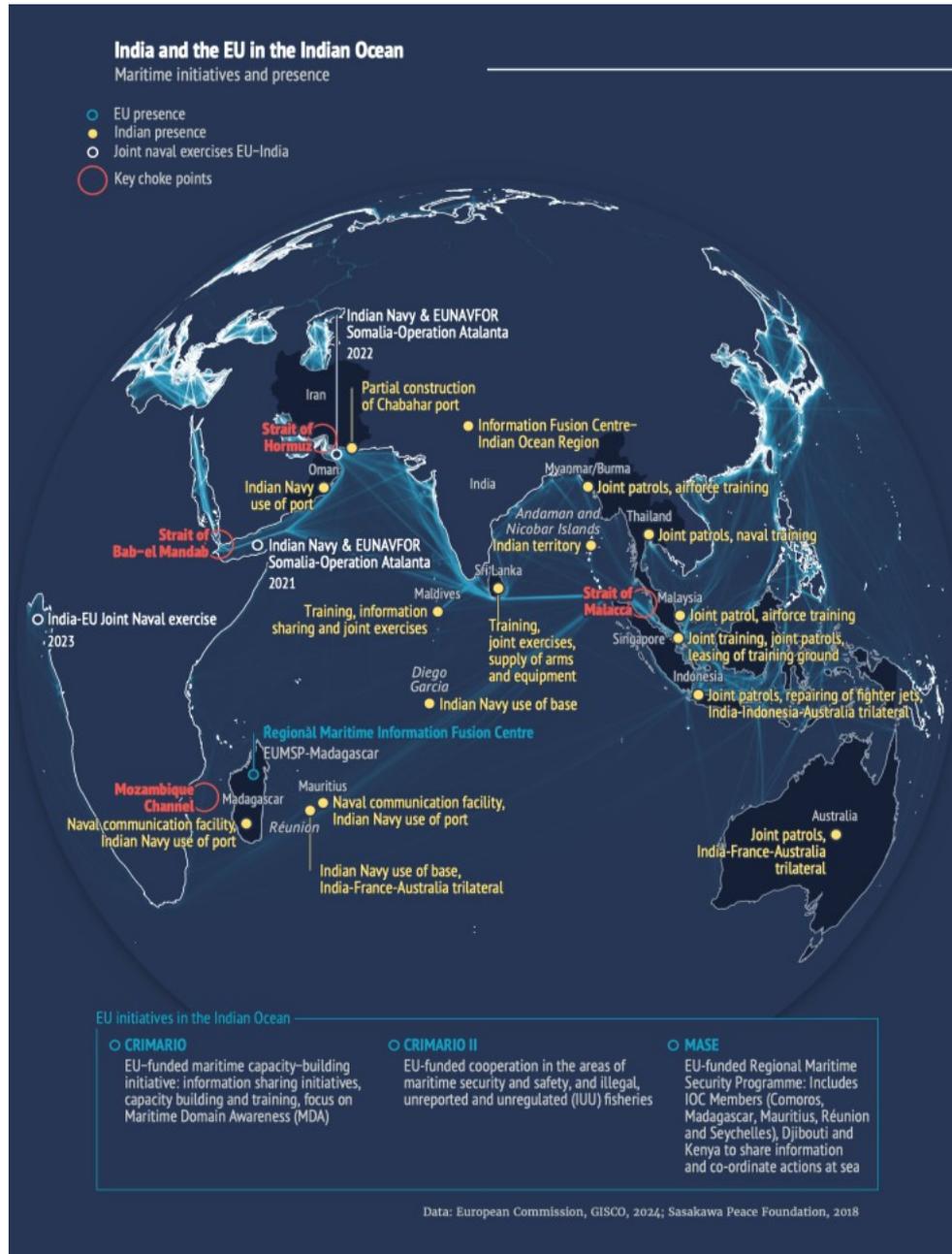


Figure 2. Blarel, O. 2024, p. 38

As a sign of India's approval of the EU's growing interest in the Indian Ocean, the Union has recently been accepted as a Dialogue Partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC). In addition, the EU has more recently joined India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). (European Commission, 2025a). It should be noted that France was already a member of IORARC, while Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and the United States were already dialogue partners. Berlin is showing growing interest

in its commitment to the Indo-Pacific; in October 2024, Germany launched its new strategy *focused on India* (The Federal Government Germany, 2024). New Delhi, for its part, is seeking extraterritorial partners, beyond the US, to support its role as guarantor of security in the Indian Ocean in the face of the Chinese threat in the Indo-Pacific as a whole.

The areas of work and study permits, as well as issues of skilled legal migration from India, are of growing interest to New Delhi and Brussels.

United Kingdom

The relationship between the United Kingdom and India has evolved substantially since Modi came to power in 2014. Ties had stagnated given the link between the UK-India bilateral relationship and the Pakistan factor in relation to the British presence in Afghanistan via NATO. In addition, the UK has been losing influence and strategic power to other European countries, such as France, which have gained ground in the maritime and defence fields. Germany is also gaining ground, as shown by a potential agreement on joint logistical support with the Indian Armed Forces to ensure the German army's presence in the Indo-Pacific (The Federal Government Germany, 2024).

However, it should not be forgotten that the United Kingdom has a diaspora of 1.9 million British citizens of Indian origin known as a *living bridge* (Bajpae, 2024), as epitomised by Rishi Sunak, the recent Prime Minister of the United Kingdom between October 2022 and July 2024. In fact, reaching an agreement on the mobility of persons with an emphasis on skilled legal migration is another of the outstanding issues between the two countries.

Moreover, the United Kingdom's exit from the EU in 2020 has given it independence from the EU in its trade policy towards third countries, including India. This has eventually led the United Kingdom to deepen the historical link between both countries in a more strategic manner, incorporating the areas of security and defence, climate change and clean energy, as well as health and the commercial dimension, as laid out in the 2030 Roadmap for India–UK relations (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – United Kingdom, 2021).

Following the arrival in power of the current Labour government led by Keir Starmer in July 2024, trade negotiations for an FTA have been relaunched. This is considered key for both countries, given that India is the second largest foreign investor in the UK, while Indian exports to the UK are six times higher than exports to Russia (Bajpae 2024). Achieving an FTA between India and the UK could put pressure on the EU to finalise its own negotiations for an EU-India FTA.

In addition, the new British administration seeks to deepen cooperation in areas such as climate change, education, security and technology (Prime Minister's Office – United Kingdom, 2024). It is also worth highlighting the areas of maritime security and technology, given their current geostrategic importance not only for the link between these two countries but also at global level.

Given the United Kingdom's historical presence in the western Indian Ocean, specifically in Chagos (Mauritius),⁷ there is a desire on the part of both actors to achieve closer cooperation, which could include triangulation with the African countries bordering the Indian Ocean (Alden and Schoeman, 2022). There are a series of growing risks linked to piracy, maritime terrorism, and the violation of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of countries in the region by major powers, including China.

Following the example of the India–US relationship, the United Kingdom and India launched the Technology Security Initiative in July 2024 in order to increase their collaboration in critical and emerging technologies (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – United Kingdom, 2024). In addition, with the arrival of Prime Minister Starmer, the United Kingdom has launched a Change Plan that integrates a key technological component based on Cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in order to reinvigorate the UK's role in the world, as well as relaunch alliances and partnerships. Given India's role in new technologies and the availability of a qualified workforce, combined with the shortage of such personnel in the United Kingdom, there is clear symbiosis in this regard (Bajpae, 2024). The United Kingdom ranks fourth in the global AI Index, whilst India occupies tenth place, above a considerable number of European countries, including Spain.⁸

⁷ In October 2024, the governments of the United Kingdom and Mauritius announced an agreement that would return sovereignty over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius under a 200-year *lease* agreement. The agreement also includes Diego Garcia Atoll, where a US military base is located, which could hinder the implementation of the agreement.

⁸ See: Tortoise, <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/intelligence/global-ai>

Spain and sub-regions of Europe

Beyond the emphasis on the EU, Modi's India has shown specific interest in strengthening ties with different subregions of Europe, beyond the traditionally leading post-Brexit EU countries, Germany and France. The current Indian External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, directly refers to these subregions of interest in his book *Why Bharat Matters*, highlighting the following: the Mediterranean region; the Nordic region; the Central and Eastern European region; as well as the Baltic region and the Caucasus (Jaishankar 2024:99). The focus on the Mediterranean region has evident relevance for Spain and its bilateral relationship with India.

India-Nordic countries relations

Before delving into the new relevance of the Mediterranean region, I would like to explain the importance of other European subregions. In the case of the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Norway—two official bilateral forums between India and these countries have been held in 2018 and 2022; in between, more informal dialogues have taken place, as is the case with the EU. According to Henrik Chetan Aspengren, senior analyst and leader of the Indo-Nordic Relations Project at the Swedish Institute for International Affairs (UI), the Nordic countries that have historically led bilateral relations with India have been Sweden and Denmark, although the Economic and Trade Partnership Agreement between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is shifting the balance in favour of Norway.⁹ However, Denmark was one of the three countries chosen by Modi on his 2022 European tour, along with France and Germany, following the Danish prime minister's visit the previous year (Denmark in India, 2022).

Overall, the Nordic countries want to increase their cooperation with India by prioritising integration into value chains, in addition to the opportunities that the large Indian market offers Nordic companies. There is also a desire for political cooperation in jointly addressing global challenges, although there is some reluctance to elevate the

⁹ Interview conducted by the author via email, 22 January 2025.

relationship to a more strategic level given the close ties between Russia and India. According to Aspengren, there is particular apprehension regarding security and defence linked to the potential dual use of technologies, especially in the context of the Nordic public perception of India as increasingly close to Russia. Even so, the Nordic defence industry remains active in this regard and, for now, there has been no sign of a reduction in relations with India, although this could be detrimental in the medium to long term.¹⁰

The greatest convergence of interest is in green technologies, clean energy and energy diversification (Battacharya 2022). Even so, the agenda is broader. Aspengren highlights how India sees the Nordic countries as an opportunity for investment, technological and commercial cooperation, as well as for optimising local employment and talent. We are likely to see more collaboration in the future in the areas of maritime security, common goods and the space sector¹¹. It should not be forgotten that the Nordic countries are key for India's Arctic policy, just as India is crucial for the potential recruitment of qualified labour in the Nordic countries, given their shortage.

India-Central and Eastern Europe relations

Central and Eastern Europe's appeal for New Delhi has a geostrategic component, as it constitutes a gateway for Indian exports to Europe. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India has also come to understand the region's role as a buffer between Russia and Western Europe. However, there are clear divergences regarding the nature of the relationship with Russia following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, Modi visited Kyiv in August 2024 in order to balance the widespread perception of his indiscriminate support for Russia — including economically — following his warm greeting to President Putin during his official bilateral visit to Moscow in July 2024. The fact that President Zelensky proposed India as host country of a second summit for peace in Ukraine points to the swing power of this country, referred to earlier. It is also worth highlighting that while Russia was the principal arms supplier to India between 2019–2023, New Delhi was the third largest recipient of arms from Ukraine, behind China and Saudi Arabia (Wezeman et al., 2024).

¹⁰ Interview conducted by the author via email, 22 January 2025.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Poland and the Czech Republic lead the way in terms of ties with India in the region, with both countries having a historical relationship with New Delhi. In 2024, Poland celebrated 70 years since the establishment of relations, dating back to the year of India's independence in the case of the Czech Republic. Poland is the largest economy in the region, as well as India's largest trading partner at the regional level (MEA India, 2024b). Modi's visit to Poland last year served to conclude a strategic partnership, as well as a five-year cooperation plan, thus pointing to a mutual desire to deepen relations in the fields of renewable energy, information technology and space exploration (Kugiel, 2024a). India also signed an innovation partnership with the Czech Republic in 2024, which was sealed with the Czech Prime Minister's visit to India early last year (Embassy of the Czech Republic in New Delhi, 2024).

On another note, New Delhi is aware of China's attempt to penetrate the region through the 16+1 Initiative launched by Beijing in 2012 (Grieger, 2018) combined with the subsequent Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), including the Baltic countries. Greece would later join the initiative, giving rise to 17+1. However, this ended up losing relevance with the departure of Lithuania and the cooling of relations between the EU and China after the European Commission labelled Beijing a "strategic competitor" in 2019 (European Commission, 2019). From then on, the EU began to take a more hostile stance towards Beijing, leading it to label China a "systemic rival". This development has been welcomed by New Delhi, which has interpreted Beijing's 17+1 Initiative as yet another attempt to gain global influence, as well as pursuing a "divide and rule" strategy towards EU Member States.

India-Mediterranean region relations

The third sub-region worth highlighting is the Mediterranean region, within which New Delhi is attempting to strengthen ties with Italy and Greece, as well as with Spain. Indeed, the last two Guests of Honour of the well-known Raisina Dialogue — organised annually by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in New Delhi — have been the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, and the Greek Prime Minister, Kyriákos Mitsotákis, in 2023 and 2024, respectively. It should also be noted that both Greece and Italy play a key role in the future rollout of IMEC, which will connect India with Southern Europe by crossing the Middle East, more specifically linking the ports of Mumbai and Mundra with the port of

Piraeus in Greece, passing through Jebel Ali (United Arab Emirates) and Haifa (Israel) (Ghanem and Sánchez Cacicedo, 2024).

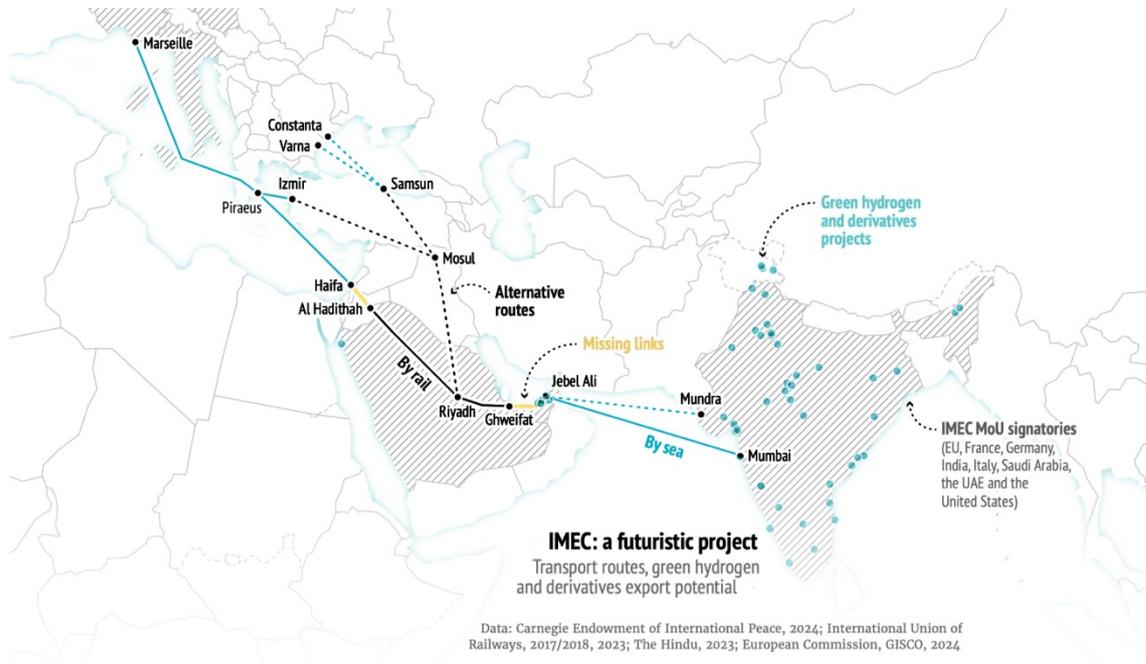


Figure 3. Ghanem and Sánchez-Cacicedo 2024, p. 2

There has been a revitalisation of ties between India and Italy in recent years. Both countries wish to elevate their strategic partnership, as demonstrated by their new Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-2029, which they agreed upon during the last G20 meeting in Brazil in November 2024. This Strategy outlines highly strategic areas of cooperation, beyond sustainable mobility, food processing, agricultural products, machinery and pharmaceuticals. It is worth highlighting the specific mention of IMEC, as well as critical and emerging technologies, the space sector, energy transition, and cooperation on maritime security. Rome and New Delhi have also signed a Strategic Partnership for Energy Transition specifically. Cooperation on irregular immigration is also highlighted, as well as on the mobility of people linked to educational and cultural exchanges (MEA India, 2024c).

There are many parallels between the recent evolution of the relationship between Italy and India and that between Athens and New Delhi. Greece and India have also signed a strategic partnership, with visits at the highest political level beginning with Prime Minister Modi's official visit in 2023, followed by Prime Minister Mitsotakis' visit the following year.

This reflects a clear mutual interest in deepening the relationship, given the potential of the Indian market in the eyes of the Greek government, as well as Greece's strategic location as a gateway to the eastern Mediterranean.

Cooperation in this case is not merely commercial but is acquiring more geostrategic overtones. Thus, IMEC stands out as a key axis in connectivity between India and Europe, in addition to enabling Indian investment in Greece linked to ports, logistics, maritime transport, and supply chains. Also noteworthy is the introduction of India's unified payments interface (UPI) into the Greek financial system to facilitate money transfers between the two countries. The geostrategic component is implicit in the interest in cooperating in the space and scientific sectors—nanotechnology, biotechnology, and clean technologies. The great potential for collaboration in the provision of digital governance services, telemedicine, and digital education through new critical technologies is also emphasised (MEA India, 2024d).

Relationship with Spain

As in the case of Italy and Greece, there is a clear mutual interest in elevating the relationship between Madrid and New Delhi to a more strategic level, as well as seeking greater commercial significance for both countries. President Sánchez's official visit to India at the end of 2024—the first visit by a Spanish president to the country in eighteen years—has given fresh impetus to the desire of both countries to renew their bilateral relations. It is worth noting that Prime Minister Modi visited Spain in 2017 and, very recently, India's current Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, also did so.

In his visit to Spain earlier this year, Jaishankar highlighted Spain's growing importance to New Delhi based on its location in the Mediterranean region, its membership of the EU, and its links with Latin America. Spain is one of the major investors in Latin America, with a substantial presence of leading Spanish companies in the region. In terms of sectoral interests, he highlighted the automotive sector, food processing, green technology and defence (Spain-India Dialogue, 2024).

The recent inauguration of the new final assembly plant for C-295 aircraft for the Indian Air Force has been a milestone in bilateral relations. It is also the first locally manufactured C-295 aircraft, the result of the *Make in India* initiative, which symbolises the interest in cooperating in technology transfer between the two countries (La Moncloa, 2024). This phenomenon has also occurred with the joint manufacture of the Lanza 3D radar for naval use. In addition, future collaborations are being considered for the joint manufacture of submarines (Alvear-Garijo, 2023). This mutual interest in the security sector extends to the field of cybersecurity.

There is also a desire to cooperate at the economic level, given India's great commercial potential, as well as at the level of education, cultural exchange, tourism and ties between peoples. Furthermore, there is considerable interest on the part of New Delhi in promoting the learning of Spanish in India, as it is considered an asset for the country's global vision, as well as for its access to Latin American and US markets in the future (Alvear-Garbijo, 2023). Following the launch of India's New Education Policy (NEP) in 2020, the Spanish language has been officially introduced into the public education system to encourage its learning (*Ibid.*).

Finally, during his recent visit to Spain, Jaishankar highlighted the concept of *the Global Workplace* linked to the technology sector, in which the training of skilled labour and the mobility of talent between the two countries could be greatly encouraged. According to the Indian Foreign Minister himself, Spain should make it easier for Indian citizens to obtain visas, as it is currently one of the EU countries that places the most obstacles in this regard (Spain-India Dialogue, 2025). This undoubtedly hinders the strengthening of ties between the two peoples, as well as limiting the great potential of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

Untapped potential

Both Europe and India have much to gain by working on that third way that both pursue in order to achieve a somewhat more orderly multipolarity. It must be borne in mind that the transition of the world order is currently turbulent. With President Trump's return to power, consolidating a strategy of geopolitical survival becomes imperative, given the foreseeable exacerbation of the trend towards bipolarity driven by the US and China.

It will be crucial for the future of the relationship between Europe and India to deepen even further into a geostrategic approach that includes critical and emerging technologies, requiring preparedness to negotiate regulations and standards in the digital, critical technology, and green technology domains. The Modi government is deploying a clear strategy of fostering various strategic partnerships with different European countries—for example, the innovation partnership with the Czech Republic, the water partnership with the Netherlands, or the energy transition partnership with Italy (Kugiel, 2024b). The major advances achieved between the Biden Administration and the Modi Government linked to the Initiative for Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET), concluded in 2023, could serve as a model for Europe. The existence of the EU–India CCT represents a major step that must be capitalised on in the coming years to achieve greater competitiveness on both sides and to promote connectivity in the Indo-Pacific.

It should be noted that the Indo-Pacific is the main trade route between Europe and Asia via the Middle East. It is also home to the main maritime communication routes that are key to the flow of raw materials (including hydrocarbons, fertilisers and food) and some of the main bottlenecks, such as the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Both Europe and India seek

to guarantee access to these routes, which are key to global trade and which other powers such as China, Russia and the US also seek to secure. The deployment of the EU's Global Gateway and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) demonstrate the strategic importance of connectivity.

In addition, there is a clear emphasis on promoting joint cooperation on maritime security between the EU and India, as well as between some of the member states and India. France undoubtedly leads the way given its historical physical presence as a power in the Indian Ocean. However, other European countries, such as Germany, Spain, Greece and Italy, are seeking to gain more ground in this area.

Finally, the need to improve the mobility of students and skilled labour is of vital importance to the relationship between India and Europe. The visa regime must be facilitated to allow more movement of skilled workers in sectors with shortages. This has been the case in the semiconductor sector in the Netherlands, which is promoting a joint training programme for experts from the Netherlands and India (Indo-Dutch Online Semicon School, 2024).

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, I have sought to highlight the recent evolution of relations between India and the EU, as well as the new European players beyond Germany and France. The fact that the first official visit of Ursula von der Leyen's new European Commission in 2025 was to India with the aim of expanding the relationship to more strategic areas is highly significant. However, the potential for collaboration is much greater, given India's economic value as a market, as well as its role as a counterweight to China, not to mention its cultural wealth. The range of sectoral collaborations with India is increasingly broad, and is becoming more geostrategic in nature, as can be seen from the various bilateral collaborations between India and its partners detailed in this chapter.

Given the transactional trend that currently dominates the international arena, it is to be expected that President Trump's new term in office will exacerbate this situation. This creates the ideal circumstances for fostering even closer ties between Europe and India. Furthermore, it is foreseeable that the US administration will seek to move closer to

Moscow as a counterweight to Beijing, which could give New Delhi more legitimacy in its relationship with Russia. Even so, Europe's perception of vulnerability to Russia and India's perception of vulnerability to China is one of the most sensitive variables in the bilateral relationship, which must be managed optimally for the future.

It would be a great missed opportunity not to make the most of the immense potential of the bilateral relationship between India and Europe, including Spain. That said, the country's structural challenges must not be overlooked, including wealth inequality and the risk of an even more ethnonationalist discourse dominating domestic politics. It is also evident that the transition in the world order is pushing Europe to be far more pragmatic and to follow a path increasingly aligned with New Delhi's multi-alignment. This is therefore a particularly favourable moment to enhance the convergence of interests between Europe and India, including in the commercial, green transition, digital transition, and critical technologies agendas.

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