



Together in an uncertain world

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Together in an uncertain world-The EU's road map for strengthening ties with India must be acted upon by both

- Last week saw the European Union releasing its strategy on India after 14 years.
- The 2004 EU-India declaration on building bilateral strategic partnership, which this road map replaces, has not had much of a success in reconfiguring the relationship as was expected.

Transformative shift

- The new document is sweeping in its scope and lays out a road map for strengthening the EU-India partnership, which has been adrift for a while in the absence of a clearly articulated strategy.
- The new strategy underscores a transformative shift in Brussels vis-à-vis India and talks of key focus areas such as the need to conclude a broader Strategic Partnership Agreement, intensifying dialogue on Afghanistan and Central Asia, strengthening technical cooperation on fighting terrorism, and countering radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorist financing.
- More significant from the perspective of the EU, which has been traditionally shy of using its hard power tools, is a recognition of the need to develop defence and security cooperation with India.
- Despite sharing a congruence of values and democratic ideals, India and the EU have both struggled to build a partnership that can be instrumental in shaping the geopolitics and geoeconomics of the 21st century.
- But where India's relations with individual EU nations have progressed dramatically over the last few years and the EU's focus on India has grown, it has become imperative for the two to give each other a serious look.

Delhi's overture

- New Delhi has found the bureaucratic maze of Brussels rather difficult to navigate and in the process ignored the EU as a collective.
- At times, India also objected to the high moralistic tone emanating from Brussels.
- Where individual nations of the EU started becoming more pragmatic in their engagement with India, Brussels continued to be big-brotherly in its attitude on political issues and ignorant of the geostrategic imperatives of Indian foreign and security policies.
- The result was a limited partnership which largely remained confined to economics and trade.
- Even as the EU emerged as India's largest trading partner and biggest foreign investor, the relationship remained devoid of any strategic content.
- But as the wider EU political landscape evolves after Brexit, and India seeks to manage the turbulent geopolitics in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, both recognise the importance of engaging each other.
- There is a new push in Brussels to emerge as a geopolitical actor of some significance and India is a natural partner in many respects.

Taking it forward

- The new India strategy document unveiled by the EU, therefore, comes at an appropriate time when both have to seriously recalibrate their partnership.
- Merely reiterating that India and the EU are "natural partners" is not enough, and the areas outlined in the document, from security sector cooperation to countering terrorism and regional security, need to be focussed on.

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