



**MARCH
2026**

European Union-India: Lasting Rapprochement or Partnership of Convenience?



Sylvia MALINBAUM

Center for Asian
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ISBN: 979-10-373-1184-9

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How to cite this publication:

Sylvia Malinbaum, "European Union-India: Lasting Rapprochement or Partnership of Convenience?", *Asie.Visions*, No. 148, Ifri, March 2026.

Ifri

27 rue de la Procession 75740 Paris Cedex 15 – FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 – Fax: +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60

Email: accueil@ifri.org

Website: ifri.org

Author

Sylvia Malinbaum is Head of India and South Asia research at Ifri's Center for Asian Studies.

Before joining Ifri in 2024, she worked for the French Treasury of the Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Industry as deputy financial advisor to the Regional Economic Department for South Asia at the French Embassy in India. Based at the French Consulate in Mumbai, she was responsible for economic cooperation between France and West India and supported French companies interested in the Indian market.

Sylvia worked for seven years at the French Treasury, exclusively in overseas posts in Kenya, Egypt, and then India. She holds a master's degree in management from ESCP Business School, after two years of preparatory classes at the Lycée Louis-Le-Grand. Among her latest analyses and publications at Ifri:

- “Chine-Inde: un rapprochement sous contrainte”, *Lettre du Centre Asie*, No. 113, Ifri, 4 septembre 2025.
- “La crise indo-pakistanaise du printemps 2025 : reflet d'un conflit en mutation”, *Briefings de l'Ifri*, Ifri, 23 juillet 2025.
- “India's Quest for Economic Emancipation from China”, *Asie.Visions*, No. 145, January 2025.

Abstract

The partnership between the European Union (EU) and India has long been limited to economic exchanges. Its political dimension has gradually developed, culminating in its elevation to the status of a “strategic partnership” in 2004. However, the failure of negotiations for a free-trade agreement in 2013 slowed this momentum. Since the early 2020s, in an uncertain geopolitical context, bilateral rapprochement has gained new momentum.

While France and Germany remain the driving forces behind EU–India cooperation, in the military and economic spheres respectively, India is now adopting a strategy of diversification in Europe, forging “à la carte” partnerships with different countries according to its interests.

The EU–India summit on January 27, 2026, marked a turning point, with the announcement of several major agreements. The free-trade agreement is a significant economic step forward, but the partnership’s ambition goes far beyond trade. The joint strategic agenda for 2030 aims to strengthen cooperation in a variety of areas: technology, mobility, defense, security, connectivity, and global issues.

However, this rapprochement, which is primarily political, remains fragile. India’s dependence on Russia for its defense, its delicate position *vis-à-vis* China, and the central role of the United States in its foreign policy limit the EU’s ability to become a truly privileged partner. The coming months and years will be decisive in determining whether this partnership can be realized in a lasting and tangible way, or whether it will remain a reactive initiative shaped primarily by current circumstances.

Résumé

Le partenariat entre l'Union européenne (UE) et l'Inde s'est longtemps limité aux échanges économiques. Sa dimension politique s'est progressivement développée, jusqu'à être élevée au rang de « partenariat stratégique » en 2004. Néanmoins, l'échec des négociations d'un accord de libre-échange en 2013 a freiné cette dynamique. Depuis le début des années 2020, dans un contexte géopolitique incertain, le rapprochement bilatéral connaît une nouvelle accélération.

Si la France et l'Allemagne demeurent les moteurs de la coopération UE-Inde, respectivement sur les plans militaire et économique, l'Inde adopte désormais une stratégie de diversification en Europe, nouant des partenariats « à la carte » avec différents pays, selon ses intérêts.

Le sommet UE-Inde du 27 janvier 2026 a marqué un tournant, avec l'annonce de plusieurs accords majeurs. L'accord de libre-échange constitue une avancée économique significative, mais l'ambition du partenariat dépasse largement le commerce. Le programme stratégique commun à l'horizon 2030 vise à renforcer la coopération dans des domaines variés : technologies, mobilité, défense, sécurité, connectivité et enjeux globaux.

Ce rapprochement, avant tout politique, reste toutefois fragile. La dépendance de l'Inde à l'égard de la Russie pour sa défense, sa position délicate face à la Chine et le rôle central des États-Unis dans sa politique étrangère limitent la possibilité pour l'UE de devenir un partenaire véritablement privilégié. Les mois et années à venir seront déterminants pour savoir si ce partenariat pourra se concrétiser de manière durable et tangible, ou s'il restera une initiative de circonstance.

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	6
EU-INDIA: THE ACCELERATION OF THE PARTNERSHIP	7
A partnership with unfulfilled promises	7
Renewed ambition in an unstable geopolitical context.....	8
INDIA AND EU MEMBER STATES: STRENGTHENED PARTNERSHIPS, BROADER HORIZONS	16
France-India: a leading strategic partnership in Europe.....	15
Germany-India: a rapidly expanding partnership	18
India diversifies its partners in Europe	20
AN AMBITIOUS COOPERATION PROGRAM WITH UNCERTAIN OUTCOMES	24
Trade: the conclusion of the FTA is only a first step	23
Security and defense: a new area of cooperation.....	25
Reinventing multilateralism	26
Mobility: a key issue in the EU-India partnership	28
Innovation and technology: India's expectations and European precautions	30
Connectivity as a lever for cooperation	31
CONCLUSION	33

Introduction

On January 26, 2026, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa were guests of honor at the Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. This ceremonial honor illustrates the importance of the ongoing rapprochement between India and the European Union (EU).

Beyond the symbolism, the India–EU summit that took place the following day gave rise to a series of structural announcements: the conclusion of negotiations for the signing of a free-trade agreement (FTA), the adoption of a joint strategic agenda for 2030, and the deepening of cooperation in several key sectors. These advances reflect a step change in the bilateral relationship, which is now driven by a historic level of political ambition.

Nevertheless, this relationship remains complex and difficult to grasp. It is based on common interests while acknowledging the ideological differences between the parties. In this respect, it is above all a pragmatic cooperation initiative in an increasingly uncertain and unstable international context, marked by the weakening of traditional multilateralism. This EU–India partnership charts an alternative path for cooperation, unprecedented in both its nature and scope, bringing together a geographical area representing nearly two billion people.

The stated ambitions are vast, ranging from trade facilitation to cooperation on security and defense, mobility, technology, and collaborative projects in third countries. However, the history of Indo–European relations calls for caution. In the past, Indians and Europeans have struggled to translate their commitments into concrete results. It remains to be seen whether the rapprochement initiated at the end of January 2026 will live up to its ambitions. Is this a genuine strategic turning point, capable of influencing the global realignments currently underway, or a contingent initiative that is likely to lose momentum in the coming years?

EU-India: the acceleration of the partnership

The EU–India relationship, which began in 1962 in a context of post-colonial mistrust, remained primarily economic and limited in scope for a long time, despite its elevation to the status of “strategic partnership” in 2004. Since the early 2020s, it has gained new momentum, notably with the announcement of a free-trade agreement (FTA) in early 2026. In an uncertain international context, this rapprochement reflects a shared desire to strengthen cooperation while responding to specific interests.

A partnership with unfulfilled promises

India established relations with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1962, but the initial relationship was marked by a certain mistrust on the Indian side, as three EEC member states were still colonial powers (France, Belgium, and the Netherlands). Prime Minister Nehru feared that “a relationship with the Community [would] lead to colonial exploitation by other means”.¹

Until the 1990s, India viewed the EU primarily as an economic partner. Two trade agreements were signed (in 1973 and 1981), but their scope was limited. They aimed to create channels for dialogue and structure economic cooperation, without significantly increasing bilateral trade. In the 1990s and 2000s, as India’s growth accelerated under the effect of liberalization reforms, the EU’s share of Indian foreign trade declined; in 2011-2012, the EU accounted for 14% of India’s foreign trade, compared with 26% in 1996-1997.

Politically, India prioritizes its relations with its Asian partners (as illustrated by its “Look East Policy”) as well as with the United States and Russia. It sees the EU as a relatively uninfluential player with limited powers in foreign and security policy and with a complex way of operating. Nevertheless, India’s interest in the EU is gradually growing as the latter develops its political ambitions.

However, two issues are limiting this progress. In the 1990s, the resurgence of violence in Kashmir, linked to separatist movements and military repression, prompted European criticism that was perceived as interference in India’s internal affairs, particularly due to the systematic integration of human rights into comprehensive agreements (1993 CAPD).

1. P. Krugiel, *India’s Policy Towards the European Union in the Post-Cold War Era*, London: Routledge, 2025.

Furthermore, India's nuclear program posed a problem. Although the EU did not sanction India for its 1998 nuclear tests, unlike the United States and Japan, the relationship was nevertheless affected (with some member states, such as Austria, being strongly anti-nuclear).

In the early 2000s, the normalization of relations between India and the United States² created an environment conducive to closer ties with the EU. Official visits became more frequent and nearly forty bilateral working groups were established.³ The first EU–India summit, in 2000, brought together Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, European Commission President Romano Prodi, and Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres, who held the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. In 2004, the relationship was elevated to a “strategic partnership”, and in 2007 negotiations for an FTA were opened.

Although Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was optimistic that the negotiations would be concluded within two years, deep differences quickly emerged. The EU pushed for a comprehensive agreement that included environmental and human rights clauses, while India wanted to focus on trade issues while protecting its agricultural, automotive and pharmaceutical sectors. India accused the EU of protectionism disguised as non-tariff measures. The negotiations ultimately failed and were suspended in 2013.

Renewed ambition in an unstable geopolitical context

The EU–India summit held on January 27, 2026, in New Delhi reflects the desire of both parties to consolidate a politically stable relationship in an uncertain international context. Driven by strong political momentum on both sides, this partnership, long considered disappointing, has seen remarkable acceleration in recent years: the creation of the EU–India Trade and Technology Council in 2023, the visit of the College of Commissioners to Delhi in February 2025, and the announcement of the conclusion of negotiations on the FTA in early 2026.

India, a new European priority

In Brussels, strengthening the partnership with India was a priority for the president of the Commission, who announced in 2021 that negotiations for an FTA would resume in 2022. The return of American unilateralism under the Trump II administration gave these discussions a strong political dimension, with both sides seeking to quickly secure reliable trading

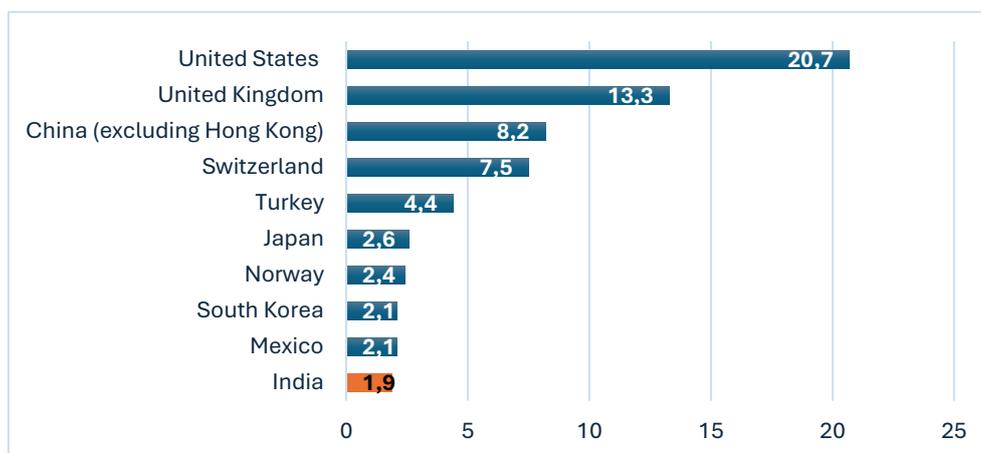
2. After the US sanctions following the 1998 nuclear tests, a dialogue began, paving the way for normalization with Bill Clinton's visit (2000), followed by the announcement of a strategic partnership in 2005 under George W. Bush, and then the 2008 civil nuclear agreement.

3. P. Krugiel, *India's Policy Towards the European Union in the Post-Cold War Era*, op. cit.

partners. For the EU, this rapprochement also represented an opportunity to strengthen its image as a geopolitical power, weakened by the Ukrainian and transatlantic crises, as well as the risks associated with Chinese competitiveness, by demonstrating its ability to independently forge a strategic relationship with a major emerging economy. In this turbulent international context, the January 27 summit was eagerly awaited, and the agenda accelerated after the European commissioners' visit to New Delhi a year earlier.

While current events accelerated the timetable for this rapprochement, the motivations remain primarily structural. On the trade front, the EU is seeking to open up new markets for its exporters, as its global market share eroded from 18% in 2018 to nearly 15% in 2025.⁴ Despite its demographic potential, India remains a modest market for the EU, accounting for only 1.9% of its exports in 2025 (Figure 1), partly due to its still high protectionist barriers.

Figure 1: Main destination countries of EU exports in 2024 (in %)



Source: Eurostat data, consolidated by Maxime Delesque.

This imperative to conquer new markets has gradually been coupled with the need to diversify trade partners, given the growing dependence on the Chinese market. Since March 2019, European doctrine has defined China as both a “cooperation partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival”.⁵ In March 2023, Ursula von der Leyen promoted the now widely accepted concept of de-risking *vis-à-vis* China. India itself adopted a set of measures in 2020 to reduce its dependence on China, including screening Chinese investments and banning all Chinese digital applications, albeit

4. C. Bros and D. Mirza, “EU-India Agreement: The Two Giants Chart Their Course, Far from the Pressures of the Trump Era”, *The Conversation*, January 29, 2026, available at: <https://theconversation.com>.

5. Joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. See “EU–China Relations: A Strategic Vision”, Brussels, March 12, 2019.

with mixed results.⁶ But so far, it has benefited little from the so-called “China+1” strategy, which consists of industrialized economies diversifying their production outside China. The EU recognizes that India cannot replace China – its industry remains less mature and less competitive – but it aims to identify certain critical industries in order to develop targeted cooperation in line with this de-risking approach. The new EU–India strategic agenda therefore aims to “jointly assess external vulnerabilities (...) and develop collaboration in strategic value chains”.⁷

Aware of the proximity between India and Russia, the EU is doing its best to accommodate the Russian–Indian affinity by betting on the gradual weakening of their relationship in the medium and long term. At the same time, it is seeking to present itself as a future partner for New Delhi, capable of fully supporting its economic and industrial ambitions,⁸ rather than letting Russia take the lead, as illustrated by these comments from EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas:

“We are living in these very turbulent times, and we need to build partnerships. And the question is always whether we leave this void to be filled by somebody else or we try to fill it ourselves. So, deepening the ties with India, in order not to push them into Russia’s corner, was the agreement by the College.”⁹

While Russia remained India’s leading arms supplier between 2020 and 2024, accounting for 36% of Indian arms imports,¹⁰ this share is trending downward, reflecting a diversification strategy. The EU is therefore taking a conciliatory approach, preferring to play the long game rather than exerting immediate pressure on India, which could prove counterproductive.

This position explains Brussels’ discretion in the face of Delhi’s refusal to condemn Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. This restraint culminated in September 2025 during the *Zapad* military exercise, a joint Russian–Belarusian maneuver in which India participated with a contingent of 65 Indian soldiers. The day after the exercise, Ursula von der Leyen spoke with Narendra Modi on the occasion of his birthday, while the EU published the *Joint Communication Strategy*, a document laying the foundations for an ambitious common agenda with India.¹¹ In this context, US diplomacy

6. S. Malinbaum, “India’s Quest for Economic Emancipation from China”, *Asie.Visions*, No. 145, Ifri, January 2025.

7. “Towards 2030: A Joint European Union-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda”, European Commission Representation, European Commission, January 27, 2026, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

8. Interview with a European diplomat, EU Embassy in India, New Delhi, October 27, 2025.

9. High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, “College Readout: Press Remarks on the New EU–India Strategic Partnership”, EEAS, September 17, 2025, available at: www.eeas.europa.eu.

10. “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2024”, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), March 2025.

11. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, European Commission and EEAS, September 17, 2025, available at: www.eeas.europa.eu.

appeared much more coercive, with Washington imposing additional 25% tariffs in August to punish India for buying Russian oil.¹²

As the EU asserts its ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, it is also positioning itself as a partner in the region for Delhi. This dynamic is reflected in particular in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy,¹³ which highlights its desire to play a role in Asia. In the Indo-Pacific, several areas of cooperation appear promising, particularly in the maritime sector, the fight against hybrid threats, and counterterrorism. Nevertheless, India remains committed to its status as the preeminent power in the Indian Ocean. While it has recently involved the EU in certain regional initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), launched by India to promote maritime cooperation, it is more reserved when it comes to pooling operational tools within the framework of CRIMARIO, a European program aimed at strengthening information-sharing and maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.

Finally, in an increasingly fragile multilateral system, India and the EU are seeking to consolidate their credibility and influence. Brussels intends to strengthen coordination with New Delhi in multilateral forums, such as the United Nations and the G20. For the EU, India is also a key partner in developing cooperation with emerging economies on major global issues (climate, artificial intelligence, etc.).

Europe, a new focus for Indian diplomacy

The January 27 summit, widely covered by the Indian press, provided New Delhi with an opportunity to restore its image on the international stage after a series of diplomatic setbacks in 2025. These difficulties primarily concern relations with the United States, India's key partner. The protectionist and consular measures imposed by the United States – notably the increase in H1B visa fees, which affect nearly 300,000 Indians – as well as conciliatory gestures toward Pakistan, such as Donald Trump's welcome of the Chief of Army Staff, General Asim Mounir to the White House, were perceived as affronts by Delhi. Tensions with its neighbors have also intensified; since the fall of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her exile in India, relations with Bangladesh have deteriorated, while four days of clashes with Pakistan in May served as a reminder that the Pakistani threat remains significant.

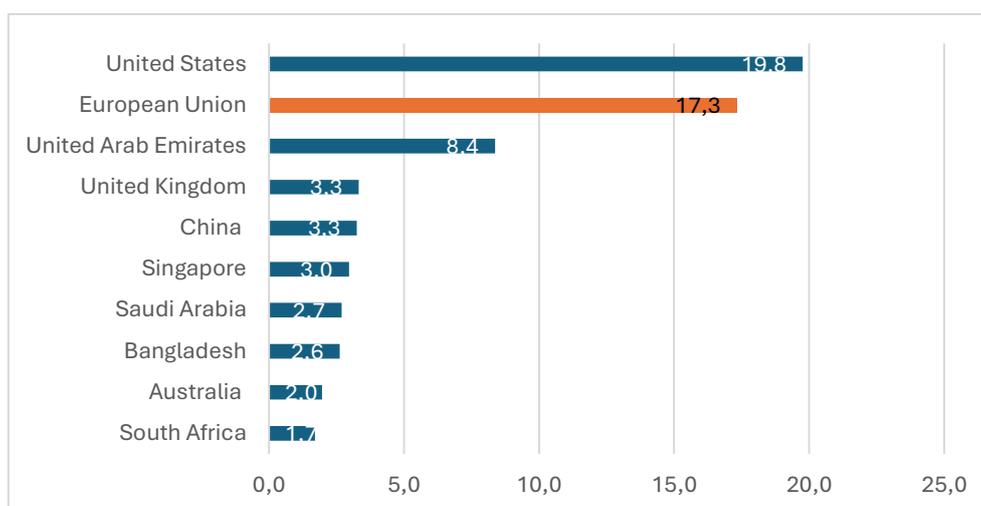
Beyond this short-term interest, the rapprochement with the EU is driven by deeper motivations. The EU is now seen by New Delhi as a partner with more assertive political ambitions. A strong Europe helps to consolidate a multipolar world, a goal that India actively supports.

12. Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Addresses Threats to the United States by the Government of the Russian Federation, White House, August 6, 2025, available at: www.whitehouse.gov.

13. EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, European Commission, September 2021.

The EU is also the second largest market for Indian exporters after the United States (Figure 2). Given the unpredictability of US tariff policies – which have changed three times in the space of a year, rising from 25% to 50% and finally being reduced to 18% – the EU offers the advantage of being a stable partner. It allows India to secure certain export flows, particularly in the textile sector, which has been weakened by Donald Trump’s attacks.¹⁴

Figure 2: Destination countries for Indian exports (in %) in 2024–2025¹⁵



Source: Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, data consolidated by Maxime Delesque.

Beyond these tariff considerations, the main challenge lies in integrating India into European and, more broadly, Western value chains, given that the country accounts for only 1.8% of world trade, compared with 29.2% for Europe and 14.6% for China.¹⁶ India’s Asian integration project, which in the 2010s signed trade agreements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia, has not produced the expected results. India’s refusal to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) illustrates its fear of prematurely opening up its economy and the risk of seeing its market flooded with Chinese goods, which already account for 15% of its imports. Conversely, India now believes that anchoring itself in Western supply chains would enable its industry to benefit from upgrading, technology transfers, and investment,¹⁷ while maintaining structural complementarity in trade (Figures 3 and 4). Today, it is mainly Western

14. This is particularly true given that Indian textiles had previously suffered from a competitive disadvantage compared to other Asian countries, such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, whose products enter Europe at lower costs.

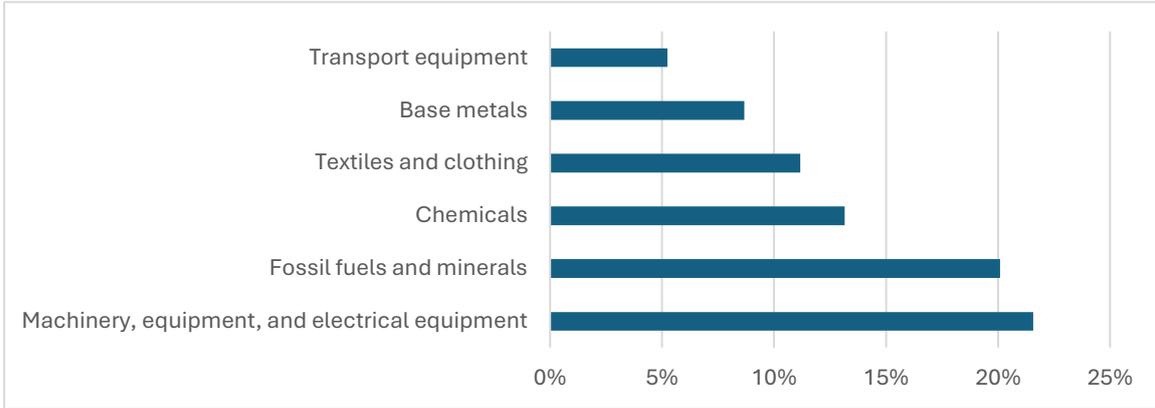
15. The Indian fiscal year runs from April of year n to March 31 of year $n+1$.

16. “Data Center – Total merchandise trade”, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), accessed January 20, 2026.

17. The EU is already a major investor in India, with nearly \$10 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) recorded in 2024.

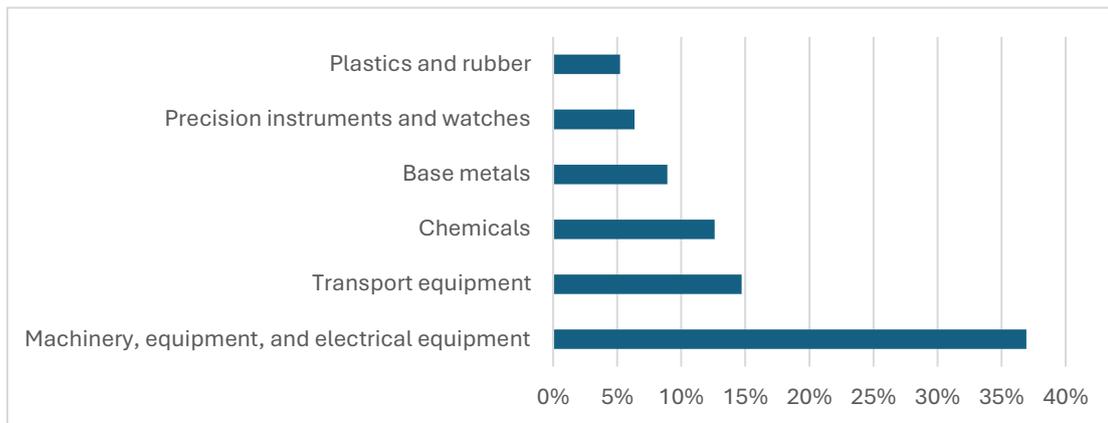
countries that support the *Make in India* initiative, either through the export of machinery and industrial inputs that benefit Indian industry, or through direct investment in local production chains.

Figure 3: Main Indian exports to the EU in 2024-2025 (in %)



Source: Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, data consolidated by the author.

Figure 4: Main Indian imports from the EU in 2024-2025 (in %)

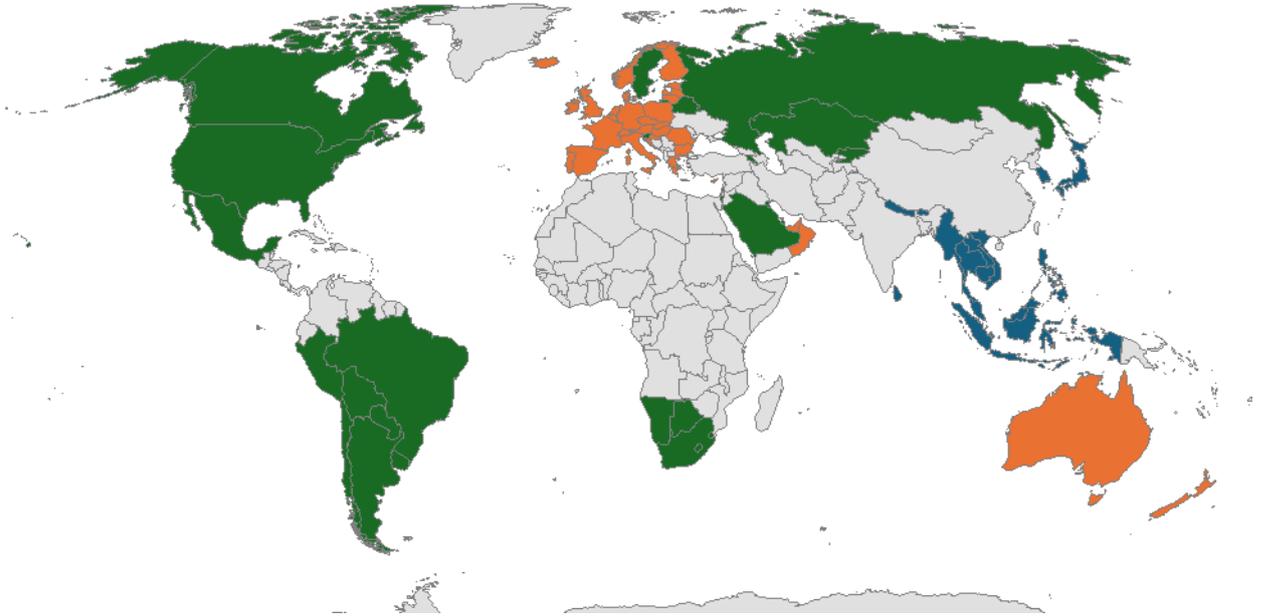


Source: Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, data consolidated by the author.

This logic of openness and diversification is reflected today in India’s trade strategy. Over the past five years, the country has signed eight trade agreements and is currently negotiating 11 agreements covering 24 countries (Figure 5). If these negotiations are successful, India will have trade agreements with all G20 members except China and Turkey. However, the agreements concluded in recent years are still far from complete liberalization; they focus on “*early harvest*” measures, most of which concern only certain tariff lines.

Figure 5: India’s trade agreements

■ Agreements signed or concluded before 2020 ■ Agreements signed or concluded after 2020 ■ In negotiation



Source: Map created by Maxime Delesque, data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 2026, available at: www.iiss.org.

The EU also offers opportunities for India’s students and skilled workforce, at a time when the domestic market is struggling to absorb all young graduates. This dynamic is reinforced by the reduction in traditional migration flows to the United States and Canada, which is leading to a gradual shift towards other destinations.

Finally, India increasingly views Europe as a strategic partner in defense matters. While EU countries remain major arms suppliers, led by France, New Delhi now intends to leverage these partnerships to strengthen its defense industrial base and gradually position itself as an arms exporter.

India and EU member states: strengthened partnerships, broader horizons

The rapprochement between India and the EU is based on two complementary dynamics: enhanced dialogue with Brussels and deeper bilateral relations with member states, which remain New Delhi's preferred partners in Europe. Two countries are playing a leading role: France, a key strategic and military partner, and Germany, India's main economic partner on the continent, which is now keen to expand cooperation. Beyond these long-standing partners, India is gradually expanding its network in Europe, reflecting a more structured engagement and a greater understanding of European balances.

France–India: a leading strategic partnership in Europe

France occupies a special place in EU–India relations, thanks to long-standing diplomatic ties linked to its early decision to invest in bilateral relations. Based on solid mutual trust, this partnership has been structured around major strategic cooperation initiatives.

In 1965, the official visit of Georges Pompidou, the first French prime minister to visit India, opened a “new window on Europe”¹⁸ for the country. Seeking to diversify their relations with the continent, the Indians turned to France, perceived as influential and relatively independent from Washington, in line with Jawaharlal Nehru's strategic concerns and policy of non-alignment.

It was in this spirit of shared sovereignty and mutual respect that France began, in the 1950s, a series of embryonic international cooperation projects with India in the nuclear sector,¹⁹ space²⁰ and defense,²¹ three areas that remain at the heart of the Franco–Indian partnership today.

18. J. Wetz, “Mr. Pompidou's Visit Has Opened a ‘New Window on Europe’ for India”, *Le Monde*, February 12, 1965, available at: www.lemonde.fr.

19. In 1951, India and France signed an agreement on beryllium, the first bilateral agreement signed by the CEA with a foreign equivalent body.

20. Space cooperation began in the early 1960s with India's acquisition of licenses for the Centaure and Bélier launchers, as well as technical assistance for the construction of the Sriharikota launch pad.

21. India purchased 110 *Mystère-4A* fighter jets and 164 AMX-13/Model-51 light tanks in 1956, 12 *Alizé* anti-submarine warfare aircraft in 1959, and three SA-316B *Alouette 3* light helicopters in 1961.

It was truly under François Mitterrand's presidency that political and diplomatic relations accelerated. India appreciated the French president's commitment to the Third World and his clear desire to rebalance relations between North and South.²² Keen to strengthen trade ties, President Mitterrand wanted cooperation between the two countries to be organized around "flagship projects" spread over a long period and "incorporating equipment supplies, technology transfers, appropriate financing, and staff training".²³ This approach, which is still in place today, led to the first major industrial and military contracts, including the purchase of 40 *Mirage* 2000s in 1982²⁴ and an agreement to supply enriched uranium for the Tarapur nuclear power plant. The period also marked the beginning of fruitful defense cooperation, with the first annual bilateral naval exercise in 1983 (renamed Varuna in 2001), as well as a strengthening of cultural exchanges, illustrated by the India Year in France initiative in 1985-1986.

In 1998, Franco-Indian relations gained new momentum with the announcement of a strategic partnership based on high-level political ties and cooperation in the fields of defense, economics, science and technology, culture, and education. In 1998, Paris chose not to condemn India's nuclear tests, a gesture that India still considers today to be a strong symbol of trust.

This relationship was then deepened under each French presidency, with regular official visits that energized the relationship. Among the emblematic contracts were the signing in 2010 under Nicolas Sarkozy of a framework agreement for the construction of the first two EPR reactors at the Jaitapur power plant,²⁵ the signing under François Hollande in 2016 of a contract for 36 *Rafale* aircraft²⁶ (€8.3 billion), followed by an agreement in April 2025 for 26 *Rafale* marines (€6.5 billion)²⁷ and a mega-order currently under negotiation for 114 additional *Rafale* aircraft.²⁸ The Horizon 2047 roadmap,²⁹ published during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France in July 2023 on the 25th anniversary of the strategic partnership, aims to bring the relationship into the modern era and, therefore, emphasizes the priority given to innovation and technology.

22. In 1981, in Cancún, François Mitterrand announced an increase in official development assistance, reinforcing France's commitment to developing countries.

23. Interview with François Mitterrand given to the *Times of India*, Paris, Thursday, June 6, 1985, available at: www.vie-publique.fr.

24. J. Isnard, "France Has Committed to Delivering Forty *Mirage*-2000s to India", *Le Monde*, April 17, 1982, available at: www.lemonde.fr.

25. A. Barluet, "Nicolas Sarkozy mise sur le nucléaire civil en Inde" [Nicolas Sarkozy bets on civil nuclear power in India], *Le Figaro*, December 6, 2010, available at: www.lefigaro.fr.

26. "Dassault Aviation Welcomes India's Acquisition of 36 *Rafale* Aircraft", Press release, Dassault Aviation, September 23, 2016, available at: www.dassault-aviation.com.

27. "Signing of the *Rafale* Marine contract for India", Dassault Aviation, April 28, 2025, available at: www.dassault-aviation.com.

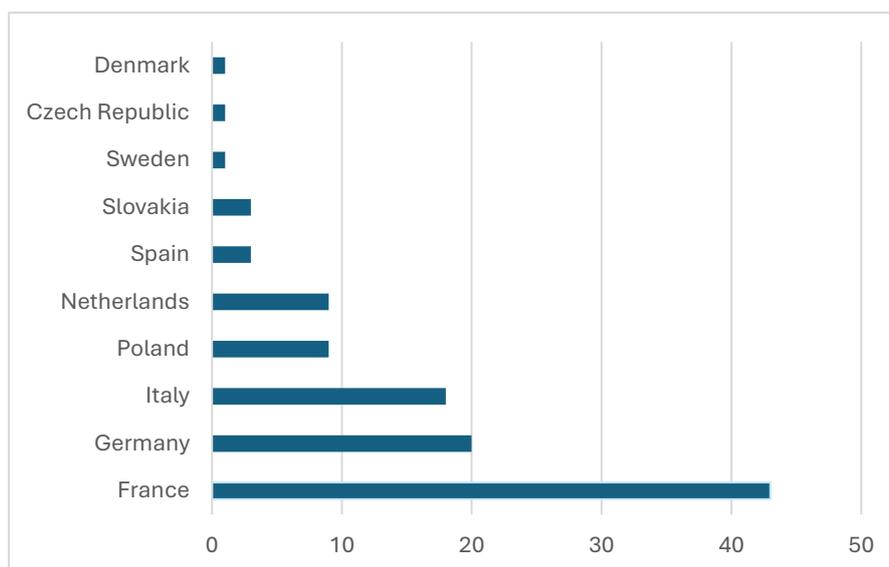
28. "India Approves Mega Order for *Rafale* Fighter Jets, Élysée Hails 'Very Important Milestone' Towards 'Historic' Contract", *Le Monde*, February 12, 2026, available at: www.lemonde.fr.

29. "25th Anniversary of the Indo-French Strategic Partnership: Towards a Century of French-Indian Relations", Presidency of the French Republic, January 26, 2023, available at: www.elysee.fr.

Today, the France–India partnership stands out for its historical depth, shaped throughout the Fifth Republic, which has helped build a strong bond of trust. During Emmanuel Macron’s visit to India in February 2026, the level of ambition for the bilateral relationship was raised even further. The strategic partnership was renamed a “Special Global Strategic Partnership”, aiming to go beyond the bilateral framework to promote an international agenda and support multilateralism in a tense world.

France is India’s leading military and defense partner in Europe. According to the SIPRI database, since the 1980s, France has made 43 arms transfers to India (Figure 6), far ahead of Germany (20) and Italy (18). This French export success can be explained by the award of major high-value-added contracts, including the *Rafale* and six *Scorpène* submarines (\$3.5 billion).³⁰ It is based on technological concessions – France imposes fewer legal restrictions on exports than countries such as the United States or Germany – as well as on co-production agreements aligned with the *Make in India* strategy aimed at strengthening the indigenization of industrial capabilities. For example, the six *Scorpène* submarines from Naval Group were built entirely in India by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders thanks to technology transfer and the mobilization of some 50 local small and medium-sized enterprises to supply part of the equipment needed for the project.

Figure 6: Number of major arms transfers from EU countries to India (since 1980)



Source: SIPRI data consolidated by the author.

30. V. Lamigeon, “Leaks on the *Scorpène* Submarine: What Are the Consequences for DCNS?”, *Challenges*, August 24, 2016, available at: www.challenges.fr.

In commercial terms, however, France ranks only 16th among India's suppliers, with a market share of just 1%, and its trade remains undiversified; nearly half is concentrated in the aerospace sector. In 2024, it also ranks only sixth among European investors in India (USD 304 million), far behind the Netherlands (USD 3.5 billion), Luxembourg (USD 2.4 billion), Germany (USD 1.8 billion), Belgium (USD 1 billion), and Ireland (USD 511 million).³¹

Germany-India: a rapidly expanding partnership

Germany is India's main economic partner in Europe, accounting for 27% of trade in 2024-2025, ahead of France, Italy, and Belgium, whose shares are 14%, 13%, and 12% respectively.³² It ranks third among EU investors in India, with investments amounting to €1.8 billion in 2024.³³ German industry is particularly well represented in India, with 4,984 companies, structured around its Chamber of Commerce – the largest foreign chamber in India. In comparison, France has 3,253 companies in India.³⁴

Germany is also the most attractive destination for Indian investment within the EU, capturing 23% of flows. Its economic attractiveness is reflected in the strong growth in the flow of Indian workers and students in recent years; the country hosts 208,000 Indian workers,³⁵ ahead of Italy (167,333) and far ahead of France (29,579). Indian students³⁶ are four times more likely to choose Germany (42,997) than France (9,500). This interest in Germany is growing in a context where Canada and the United States, which host 32% and 25% of Indian students respectively, have tightened their immigration policies.

Finally, over the last 20 years, Germany has established itself as the leading European provider of official development assistance (ODA) to India (Figure 7), accounting for 53% of European ODA over the period, compared with 27% for France.³⁷

31. "EU Direct Investment Flows in 2024, by Country and Economic Activity", Eurostat, accessed February 19, 2026, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

32. Data from the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

33. Ibid.

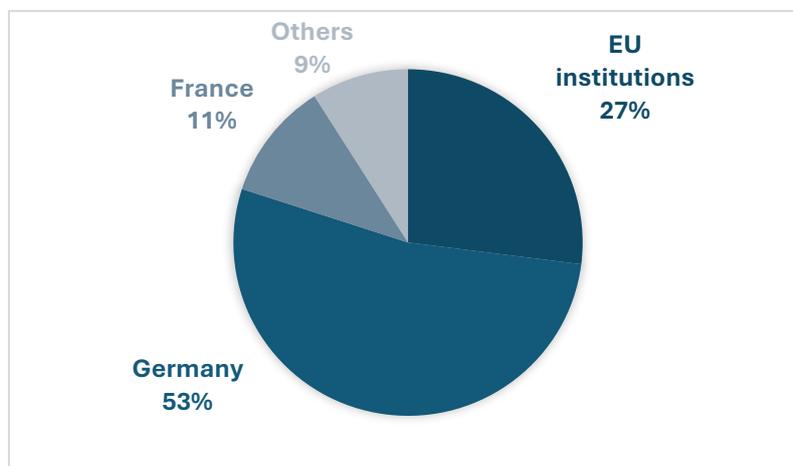
34. "A New Era of India–European Union, Strategic Partnership", *Working Paper*, No. 114, Exim Bank India, January 2023, available at: www.eximbankindia.in.

35. "Population of Overseas Indians", Indian Ministry of External Affairs, February 17, 2026, available at: www.mea.gov.in.

36. "Indian Students Studying Abroad – Lok Sabha, Unstarred Question No. 894", Indian Ministry of External Affairs, July 26, 2023, available at: www.mea.gov.in.

37. Official Development Assistance (ODA) – DAC data, OECD, December 15, 2025.

Figure 7: Distribution of EU official development assistance to India (2005–2024)



Source: OECD data, consolidated by the author.

The India–Germany strategic partnership, launched 25 years ago, has recently been strengthened through proactive diplomacy, expanding cooperation beyond the economy to include defense and energy transition. In 2022, the two sides adopted the Green and Sustainable Development Partnership,³⁸ providing for €10 billion in German financing to India by 2030. Germany is also working to relax its rules on arms exports to India³⁹ and to strengthen industrial cooperation in the field of defense.⁴⁰ This could position it in a wide range of segments: shipbuilding, navigation systems, aircraft parts, helicopters, tanks, military vehicles, small arms, etc. These new ambitions are intensifying competition within Europe, particularly with France, as evidenced by negotiations for the acquisition of three additional submarines as an extension of the P-75 program. While Naval Group seemed to have the advantage, Indian sources now identify Germany’s TKMS as a serious competitor and suggest that the Indian Navy may ultimately favor this option.⁴¹

38. Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP) – Financial Dashboard, Germany–India, available at: <https://india-germany-gsdp.info>.

39. A. Nayak Dutta, “Germany Lifts Curbs on Sale of Small Arms to India as ‘Exception’”, *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2024, available at: <https://indianexpress.com>.

40. The bilateral defense cooperation agreement, signed in 2006 and supplemented by an implementation arrangement concluded in 2019, provides the framework for defense ties between Germany and India.

41. “French Out, German In: India Plans to Scrap Additional Scorpene Submarine Order, May Pick ThyssenKrupp as Partner”, *The Economic Times*, October 14, 2025, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

India diversifies its partners in Europe

India is diversifying its European partnerships beyond France and Germany. This approach is reflected in increased contacts with various European countries or groups of countries and the establishment of tailor-made partnerships adapted to the priorities identified for each of its partners. In total, Prime Minister Modi has made 27 official visits to the EU since his first election in 2014 and has visited 13 member states (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Number of EU official visits by Prime Minister Modi since 2014



Source: Ministry of External Affairs, map created by A. Lamothe © Ifri, 2026.

In addition to his regular visits to France and Germany, Narendra Modi has visited 11 other European states, some of which had never been visited by an Indian prime minister before (e.g., Croatia). Marking the acceleration of the diversification of European partnerships, India established two new strategic partnerships in 2023 (Italy, Greece) and another in 2024 (Poland), a status previously reserved for France (1998) and Germany (2000). This also illustrates that, for India, states remain the preferred interlocutors in Europe; Modi has visited Brussels only once in 10 years.

In addition to Western Europe, India is focusing on three geographical sub-groups, each corresponding to specific interests.

The Nordic countries

The first Indo–Nordic summit in April 2018 brought together India and the five Nordic countries, reflecting India’s interest in cooperation on clean technologies,⁴² sustainable development, and urban transport, as well as its scientific ambitions in the Arctic region.⁴³ Bilateral cooperation has since been strengthened through initiatives such as the India–Sweden Joint Declaration on Sustainable Innovation (2018), focusing on smart cities, energy efficiency, and renewable technologies, and the India–Denmark Green Strategic Partnership (2020).

Central and Eastern Europe

India’s rapprochement with Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Croatia) is primarily driven by economic, industrial, and military interests. Poland’s elevation to the status of India’s strategic partner in 2024 can be explained by the prospects for defense cooperation, particularly for the modernization of Soviet equipment still widely used by the Indian army, such as T-72 tanks. Furthermore, Central and Eastern Europe now represents a growing area of economic engagement for India; Slovakia (17%) and Hungary⁴⁴ (14.9%) are respectively the second and third largest recipients of Indian investment in Europe. The forms of establishment there are diversifying, with both large-scale industrial acquisitions – such as Aurobindo Pharma’s planned purchase of Zentiva for more than \$5 billion⁴⁵ – and breakthroughs in European public procurement markets, such as the €455 million in contracts won in Croatia by Afcons Infrastructure⁴⁶ for road infrastructure works.

Mediterranean Europe

The Mediterranean is now an area of interest for India in political, security, and economic terms. The creation of the Delhi Mediterranean Dialogue (Raisina)⁴⁷ in Marseille in 2025 reflects this desire to establish regular dialogue with Mediterranean countries, while Narendra Modi’s visits to Greece (2023) and Cyprus (2025) illustrate India’s quest for influence in the

42. The term refers to technologies aimed at reducing environmental impact, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable transport.

43. India was admitted to the Arctic Council in May 2013 with observer status and has had a research station in Ny-Alesund in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard since July 2008.

44. With regard to Hungary, there has been an intensification of strategic dialogue, illustrated by the organization, since 2024, of an annual conference in Budapest in partnership with the Observer Research Foundation and the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs.

45. “Aurobindo Leads Race for 5.5 bn USD Zentiva Deal”, *The Economic Times*, August 20, 2025, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com>.

46. “Afcons Infrastructure Successfully Bids for Railways Contract in Croatia”, *Business Standard*, July 21, 2025, available at: www.business-standard.com.

47. Mediterranean extension of the annual forum organized by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

context of the rapprochement between Turkey and Pakistan, as well as converging interests in the port and maritime trade sectors.

At the same time, India is strengthening its military cooperation in the region with Italy, through several port calls and joint exercises since 2023,⁴⁸ as well as with Greece, through a notable increase in interactions.⁴⁹ Mediterranean countries are also participating in the *Make in India* initiative in the field of defense. This is the case for Italy's Leonardo, which is collaborating with India's BHEL to manufacture the naval gun system used on many Indian Navy ships, and for Airbus Spain, which is collaborating with Indian giant Tata on an assembly line for the C-295 military transport aircraft in Vadodara (Gujarat), inaugurated in October 2024 in the presence of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.⁵⁰ Finally, the Mediterranean is becoming increasingly important for connectivity and maritime trade, particularly in the context of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC),⁵¹ which several key European ports such as Marseille, Trieste, and Piraeus wish to join, strengthening the region's role as a gateway between India and Europe.

48. Italian ship ITS Morosini calling at Mumbai in August 2023; participation of the Italian naval air combat group with the Indian Navy in the Indo–Pacific in October 2024.

49. Participation of Greece in the multinational exercise Tarang Shakti 2024 in India; participation of the Indian Air Force in the INIOCHOS-24 exercise in Greece in September 2024 with four SU-30 MKIs.

50. "Tata Advanced Systems and Airbus Inaugurate C295 Final Assembly Line in Vadodara, India", Airbus, October 28, 2024, available at: www.airbus.com.

51. The IMEC (India–Middle East–Europe Corridor) is a corridor project that aims to connect India to Europe via the Middle East, combining maritime, rail, road, and digital infrastructure.

An ambitious cooperation program with uncertain outcomes

Several agreements concluded at the EU–India summit on January 27 should enable the partnership to move toward new ambitions: the FTA, a comprehensive framework of cooperation on mobility, a security and defense partnership, and a new joint comprehensive strategic agenda for 2030. The two partners are thus shaping a cooperation that goes far beyond trade, incorporating technology, the environment, security and defense, connectivity, and mobility.

Trade: the conclusion of the FTA negotiations is only a first step

Trade is undoubtedly the area where the most significant progress has been made; negotiations for a free-trade agreement were relaunched in 2022 and concluded less than four years later, in January 2026. This speed contrasts sharply with the failure of the previous round, which lasted six years (2007–2013). It can be explained by strong political will; during the visit of the European Commissioners in February 2025, Ursula von der Leyen publicly committed to finalizing the negotiations before the end of 2025. To bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion – neither side having any interest in another failure – the most sensitive issues, particularly agriculture, were largely set aside.

The FTA provides significant tariff reductions for both parties, thereby strengthening mutual economic integration. India and the EU benefit from preferential access to each other's markets for almost all their exports, covering 99.5% of goods exported to the EU and 97.5% of those exported to India, respectively. The tariff reduction schedule will be more gradual for European exports, which will see their tariffs on key industrial sectors (machinery and electrical equipment, aeronautics, chemicals, plastics, and pharmaceuticals) gradually reduced to 0% over 10 years, with the majority of tariffs eliminated after five to seven years.⁵² Taking into account the time needed to implement the agreement, its full effects on European exports are not expected to be felt for around ten years.

Indian exporters should see faster gains, as 90.7% of exports to the EU will benefit from immediate tariff elimination, particularly in labor-intensive sectors. For these sectors, which are also highly vulnerable to the

52. "EU and India Free Trade Agreement – A Strategic Shift for the EU", DLA Piper, February 6, 2026, available at: www.dlapiper.com.

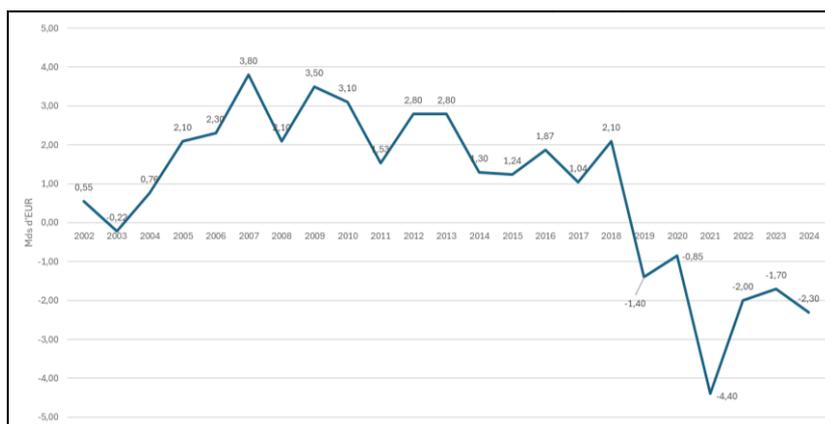
unpredictability of US trade policy, preferential access to the European market offers stable prospects in terms of both market opportunities and jobs.

It was also urgent for India to conclude the FTA quickly in order to try to offset two significant changes expected in early 2026. In January 2026, India lost most of its preferential access to EU markets with the suspension of tariff benefits granted under the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).⁵³ This scheme previously allowed Indian exporters to benefit from reduced customs duties, improving their competitiveness in Europe.

Similarly, since January 1, 2026, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has been applied, in its final form, to Indian steel and aluminum, representing 7.7% of Indian exports to the EU.⁵⁴ At the same time, the EU has also put in place safeguard measures on certain steel products, which have been extended until June 30, 2026.⁵⁵ This situation made it urgent for India to find solutions to support its steelmakers. Considered by the Indian authorities as “disguised green protectionism”, the FTA did not, however, provide for any exemptions from the CBAM. The EU nevertheless offered technical support to help Indian industry decarbonize, through a €500 million financial package.

In addition, since January 23, a European embargo has been in place on Russian oil refined in third countries. Indian oil exports have already begun to decline, even though this product had become the main export item to the EU, rising sharply since the start of the war in Ukraine.⁵⁶ This dynamic explains why, since 2022, trade, which was previously relatively balanced, has shifted to a surplus in favor of India (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Trade balance between the EU and India



Source: Eurostat data, consolidated by Maxime Deslesque.

53. Directorate-General for Customs and Indirect Taxation, Implementing Regulation (EU) 2025/1909 of September 24, 2025, Official Journal of the European Union, available at: www.douane.gouv.fr.

54. Data from the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

55. French Customs, “Safeguard Measures Against Certain Steel Products”, available at: www.douane.gouv.fr

56. According to data from the Indian Ministry of Commerce, exports of fuels and petroleum products to the EU reached \$19 billion in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, accounting for a quarter of India's total exports to the EU, before falling to \$15 billion in 2024-2025.

For Europeans, the FTA facilitates access to many sectors, with particularly significant gains for those that were previously most heavily taxed. The wine industry, which has suffered from trade tensions with the US, coupled with restrictive measures in China and a slowdown in European consumption, will see customs duties on alcoholic beverages – currently very high, at up to 150% – gradually reduced, while remaining substantial (30% for wines and 40% for spirits). The automotive sector, on the other hand, is only benefiting from limited liberalization; tariffs will be reduced to 10%, but only for 250,000 vehicles, which represents a marginal share of the Indian market as a whole.

The FTA is a strong strategic signal of mutual commitment and can lay the foundations for further economic integration in the future. Two complementary agreements are also being negotiated, contributing to this effort to bring the two economies closer together: an agreement on investment protection, aimed at providing legal certainty for bilateral flows, and an agreement on geographical indications, designed to guarantee the recognition and protection of products with a protected designation.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the effective implementation of the FTA, which is subject to ratification by the European Parliament, remains uncertain. Beyond the issue of customs duties, European exporters face persistent non-tariff barriers, such as certification requirements, complex import formalities, approval delays, regulatory unpredictability, bureaucratic red tape, and corruption. In practice, it therefore remains to be seen to what extent the FTA will be able to remove these obstacles.

Security and defense: a new area of cooperation

In recent years, the EU and India have strengthened their operational cooperation on maritime security. In September 2021, the EU published its Indo-Pacific strategy, signaling its strategic interest in the region. It is already funding several initiatives such as the Maritime Security Project and, since 2024, Safe Seas Africa in the southwestern Indian Ocean, where the French departments of Réunion and Mayotte are located, as well as ESIWA+ (Enhancing Security Cooperation in & with Asia & the Indo-Pacific), launched in 2024 to strengthen security cooperation with countries in Asia and the Indo-Pacific (cyberspace, counterterrorism, maritime security, and crisis management). The Indian Navy and the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) are cooperating in Operation Atalanta (launched in 2008) to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Indian Ocean. This collaboration illustrates the concrete operational partnership between India and the EU in the field of maritime security.

57. EU-India Agreements: Documents, European Commission, available at: <https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu>.

The Security and Defense Partnership (SDP), signed on January 27 in Delhi, aims to further bilateral cooperation in the areas of cybersecurity, hybrid threats, and maritime and space security, following the launch in 2025 of the Strategic Dialogue on Foreign and Security Policy.⁵⁸ Beyond operational cooperation, the SDP paves the way for industrial cooperation, with New Delhi seeing European rearmament as an opportunity to export its own equipment (such as the Pinaka rocket launcher)⁵⁹ and to integrate into the European industrial fabric through joint ventures in order to acquire new technologies and know-how. However, this approach is met with reservations in Europe; India's military proximity to Russia limits the possibility of technology transfers.

An agreement on information security, aimed at facilitating the sharing of sensitive information, is under discussion, but its outcome is likely to be complex, as it requires a high level of mutual trust. Its success would be an indicator of the degree of cooperation that both parties are willing to agree to.

Reinventing multilateralism

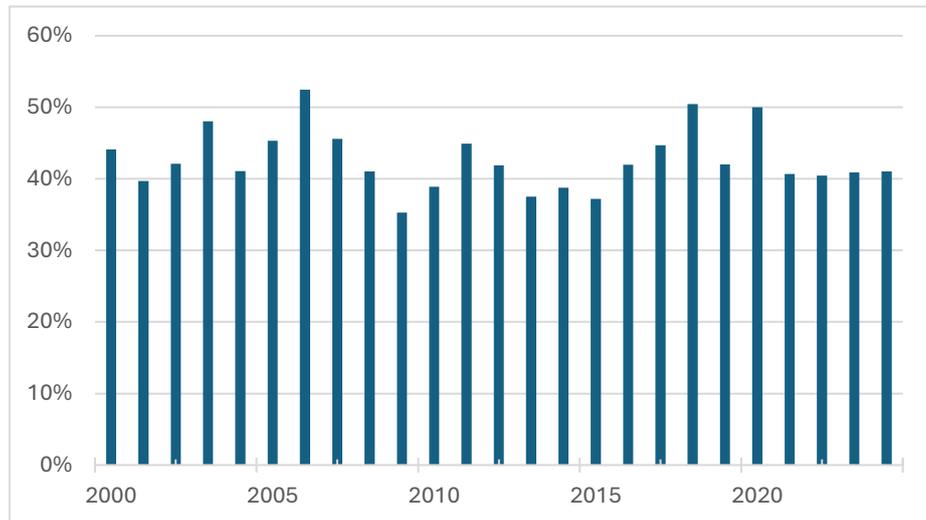
The EU and India are seeking to demonstrate their ability to influence world affairs, despite the polarization between China and the United States. But areas of convergence remain fragile. While both sides share a commitment to multilateralism, democracy, and a rules-based international order, their positions on global and regional issues are far from always aligned. A comparison of India's and France's votes in the United Nations General Assembly⁶⁰ shows that their convergence rate averages 45% over the last 25 years (Figure 10). This convergence is even lower on human rights issues, where it falls to 38% over the same period.

58. The Dialogue is held in the presence of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

59. L. Péria-Peigné, "Multiple Rocket Launchers: A Long-Standing and Enduring European Dependency?", *Ifri Papers*, Ifri, February 2026.

60. As the EU does not vote as an entity, it was necessary to select a member state to make the comparison for this study.

Figure 10: Percentage of convergent votes between France and India at the UN General Assembly



Source: UN digital archives, data consolidated by Maxime Delesque.⁶¹

Recent examples include India’s refusal to condemn Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, choosing instead to maintain its neutrality toward Moscow. India also abstained from voting in June 2025 on the UN General Assembly resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, due to its close partnership with Israel. Differences also persist on certain global issues such as climate change. Although India has joined the Paris Agreement and embarked on an ambitious energy transition, it insists on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and calls for increased financial commitments from rich countries. More broadly, India does not see itself as a defender of the current international system – which, in its view, undermines its weight on the world stage – and has long sought to reform it by demanding greater representation in bodies such as the UN (particularly the Security Council), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The fact that India has hosted the headquarters of the International Solar Alliance in Delhi since 2015 – the first multilateral organization established in the Indian capital, bringing together nearly 120 countries – illustrates this desire to have a greater say in global governance.

Furthermore, the issue of democracy and human rights remains a sensitive subject. On the Indian side, European diplomacy is often perceived as prescriptive, even moralizing – a perception summed up by Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar: “When we look out at the world, we

61. The database records, for each resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the vote of each country (for, against, or abstention). In this analysis, a vote is considered common when India and France adopt the same position on an adopted resolution, whether it is a favorable vote, an unfavorable vote, or an abstention.

look for partners. We don't look for preachers.”⁶² On the European side, the erosion of freedoms in India – now described as a “partly free democracy” by Freedom House and an “electoral autocracy” by the V-Dem Institute – is raising growing concerns among informed European public opinion.

On emerging global issues, however, Europeans and Indians have already worked together in the past, particularly on those where governance architectures did not yet exist. The artificial intelligence (AI) summits held in Paris in 2025 and Delhi the following year are an example of successful North–South multilateral collaboration. In the same spirit, President Macron emphasized in January 2026, during his speech to ambassadors, his desire to “build an international agenda within this Franco–Indian relationship”, noting that “the priorities that India gives to the BRICS are the same as those that France gives to the G7”, thus aiming for a partnership beyond the bilateral framework to address major global imbalances. A first informal meeting of the G7 under the French presidency was held on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference on February 14, 2026, in the presence of Minister Jaishankar. Several themes have already been identified as likely to be addressed within the BRICS and G7: the development of common practices in maritime and port security, the regulation of AI, adaptation to climate change, reform of the United Nations, and securing supply chains for critical minerals.⁶³ During his official visit to Mumbai on February 17, Emmanuel Macron also extended a hand to the Indian prime minister by seeking to encourage New Delhi to back “a moratorium on strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure” in Ukraine.⁶⁴

However, questions remain about the real scope of these initiatives. Donald Trump's skepticism toward multilateralism in general, and the G7 in particular, is likely to make the task difficult for the French presidency. Furthermore, India's ability to exert sufficient influence within the BRICS to promote these initiatives also appears limited. Given the internal divisions within the group and the presence of countries with an openly anti-Western stance (China, Russia), such a position is particularly delicate.

Mobility: a key issue in the EU–India partnership

The framework agreement on mobility and migration adopted at the January 2026 summit is a crucial step in bringing the two sides closer together. The aim of the agreement is to strengthen cooperation on the safe and regular migration of highly skilled workers, students, researchers, and seasonal workers. A pilot office, the European Legal Gateway, was inaugurated in New

62. “Need Partners, not Preachers’: EAM S. Jaishankar Hits Out at Europe”, *The Times of India*, May 5, 2025, available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>.

63. Interview with a French diplomat, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Paris, February 13, 2026.

64. E. Macron and N. Modi, “Joint Statement from Mumbai”, press conference, Mumbai (India), February 17, 2026,

Delhi on February 18, 2026, to facilitate the mobility of students, researchers, and skilled workers to the EU in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector,⁶⁵ where India has a significant comparative advantage. In addition, the FTA provides for facilitating the movement of Indian service providers, particularly in the IT sector – a long-standing demand of Indian companies.

For India, sending workers abroad is as essential as access to markets for its exports of goods and services. Worker mobility is therefore a natural part of its trade policy and an important lever in trade agreement negotiations, as exemplified by the Australia–India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) adopted in December 2022, which includes a significant section on people-to-people exchanges.⁶⁶

Figure 11: Distribution of the Indian diaspora around the world

Middle East	9,022,438
Southeast Asia	6,024,837
United States	5,409,062
Canada	2,875,954
South Asia	2,401,704
United Kingdom	1,864,318
European Union	1,725,834
South Africa	1,700,000
Australia	976,000
New Zealand	270,000

Source: Indian Ministry of External Affairs, data consolidated by the author. Data includes people of Indian origin who have citizenship in another country and Indian citizens living outside India.

The Indian diaspora is an essential source of income for the national economy, and its importance continues to grow. India is now the world’s largest recipient of remittances from the diaspora, which reached a record \$135 billion in 2024-2025. These remittances provide much-needed foreign exchange for the balance of payments while providing crucial financial support to many families. In addition, the presence of Indian workers abroad helps ease pressure on the domestic labor market, with 7 to 8 million young people entering the labor market each year.⁶⁷

65. Press release from the Delegation of the European Union to India and Bhutan, “Launch of the European Legal Gateway Office Pilot”, New Delhi, February 18, 2026, available at: www.eeas.europa.eu.

66. The agreement provides for a larger quota of work visas for young Indian graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as in the ICT sector. Mutual recognition of professional qualifications is also facilitated.

67. Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024, Geneva, International Labor Organization (ILO), 2024, p. 6.

For the EU, which currently has over 1.7 million Indian nationals or people of Indian origin (Figure 11), migration remains a sensitive issue, particularly in light of the rise of the far right. Nevertheless, such agreements are of definite interest to sectors facing labor shortages, a problem that is becoming more acute due to the aging population. European higher-education institutions are also seeking to attract Indian students and researchers, particularly in the fields of science and engineering. As migration policy remains largely the responsibility of member states, India has in recent years increased the number of mobility agreements with certain member states: Portugal (2025), Denmark (2024), Germany (2022), Finland (Joint Declaration, 2022), Italy (2023), Austria (2023), and France (2018).

Innovation and technology: India's expectations and European precautions

Beyond trade cooperation and the FTA, India has high expectations of the EU in terms of technology. These expectations are now heightened by the uncertainties surrounding the US as a partner. The Trade and Technology Council (TTC), established in 2023 between India and the EU around three areas – cooperation on critical and emerging technologies, standards and regulation, and value chains – has so far produced no notable results, with only two official meetings, one in 2023 and the other in 2025. In the new EU–India Joint Strategic Framework for 2030,⁶⁸ the TTC remains the main mechanism for monitoring progress on the chapters on technology and innovation, value chains, and economic security issues. Its remit has been extended to trade and investment, as well as green transition and climate resilience.

For India, access to technology is of strategic importance in the context of global competition dominated by China and the United States. Delhi thus aims to become a technological power in its own right. To this end, the Product Linked Incentive Schemes program, launched in 2020, encourages domestic production through subsidies, targeting smartphones, electronic components, drones, the automotive industry, solar panels, and batteries, among others.

The issue is all the more sensitive given that India still depends on its neighbor and rival China for certain critical technologies (green technologies, electronics, telecommunications). Faced with China, which it perceives as a threat, India has naturally turned to the United States. Under the Biden administration, it forged an unprecedented partnership in advanced technologies and defense, the India US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), which became TRUST under the new Trump administration (Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology). Launched in 2025, TRUST aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation in critical technologies

68. Joint EU–India Strategic Agenda Towards 2030, official statement, European Commission, January 26, 2026, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu>.

by facilitating technology transfer, reducing regulatory barriers such as export controls, and supporting reliable supply chains in strategic sectors. The initiative covers defense and national security (AI, autonomous systems, drones, surveillance), emerging technologies (semiconductors, quantum, biotechnology), as well as the energy and space sectors. At the same time, India has sought to diversify its technology partnerships with other countries, drawing inspiration from the iCET model. These initiatives include the UK–India Technology Security Initiative launched in July 2024, the Australia–Canada–India Technology and Innovation Partnership (ACITI) of November 2025, the DRISHTI (Dual-use Robust India–Israel High-Tech Innovation) program launched in December 2024, and a series of collaborations with Japan, including the May 2023 semiconductor agreement and the India–Japan AI initiative launched in 2025.

On the European side, technological cooperation is met with some reluctance. The EU–India agenda for 2030 provides for the creation of innovation hubs bringing together manufacturers, start-ups, investors, and civil society in key sectors such as AI, quantum technology, advanced semiconductors, clean technologies, and biotechnologies. However, India’s proximity to Russia remains a point of tension, while differences persist on the protection of personal data. AI regulation and governance could nevertheless be an area for constructive cooperation, as demonstrated by the AI Impact Summit 2026 in Delhi, which focused on inclusive and responsible AI.

Connectivity as a lever for cooperation

The EU and India are seeking to strengthen their regional connectivity under the 2021 Connectivity Partnership, drawing on funding from Global Gateway, the European strategy dedicated to the development of sustainable infrastructure in the energy, transport, and digital sectors. Among the flagship projects supported is the 12,700 km Blue Raman submarine fiber optic cable, which will connect Europe to India via the Middle East and East Africa.⁶⁹ This cable will provide high-speed connectivity along the EU–Africa–India digital corridor.

This project is part of the broader, long-term IMEC initiative, which aims to diversify trade routes and secure supply chains through the development of maritime, rail, digital, and energy infrastructure. However, this ambitious project still raises many questions. Funding remains uncertain, and the cost cannot be estimated until the results of preliminary studies are available. Private-sector participation is not guaranteed at this stage, especially as doubts remain about the economic viability of the project, particularly given the political instability in the Middle East and the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

69. “Blue-Raman Submarine Cable”, project sheet No. 20240867, European Investment Bank (EIB), December 29, 2025, available at: www.eib.org.

These questions arise as the project's governance is gradually being put in place, with special envoys already appointed in France and Italy.

In addition, India is seeking to strengthen its cooperation with the EU in third countries, particularly through trilateral projects focusing on energy, green mobility, and climate resilience. Concrete initiatives already exist with certain member states, such as India–Germany collaboration in Africa, or the deployment of solar solutions with the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to improve access to clean technologies on the continent.

Conclusion

The EU–India summit on January 27 in Delhi represents a key diplomatic step in strengthening bilateral relations. It demonstrates the willingness of both parties to build a pragmatic partnership, while leaving uncertainties about its implementation in the medium and long term, as well as their ability to reconcile sometimes divergent visions.

Several developments could test the resilience of this partnership in the coming years, particularly changes in India’s relationship with three powers – China, Russia, and the United States.

While Russia is unlikely to be a future partner capable of satisfying India’s technological and economic ambitions, it remains its leading military partner. India will therefore have to manage this relationship with caution so as not to send mixed signals to Europe, especially to Eastern European countries and the Baltic and Nordic states, which are very attentive to this link. Diplomatic tensions are already visible, as evidenced by the tense exchanges between the Indian and Polish foreign ministers in New Delhi in January 2026.

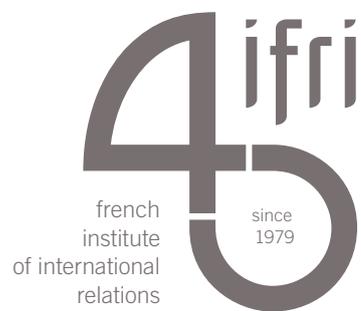
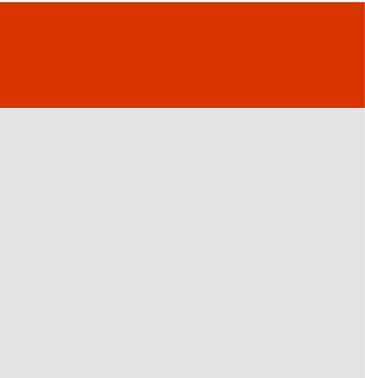
To a lesser extent, a rapprochement between India and China could also dampen European enthusiasm. This dynamic could result from Beijing’s desire to prevent India from moving too close to the Western bloc. China could, for example, agree to invest in certain strategic industrial sectors in India or offer further guarantees to normalize the border dispute. Although this scenario seems unlikely at present, it remains a variable to be monitored in the complex regional geopolitical balance.

The quality of relations with the United States will also have repercussions on the partnership with the EU; a warming of ties with Washington could reduce India’s appeal to the EU, given that the Americans are such an essential partner for New Delhi.

The next few years will be crucial for consolidating the rapprochement between the EU and India. While the January 27 summit represents a major step forward, the partnership remains fragile and faces a highly volatile international context.

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