

## **EU–India Security and Defence Cooperation in the Twenty First Century: Challenges and Prospects**

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### **Introduction**

EU-India cooperation in security and defence has witnessed a major transformation especially in the last decade. During the 13<sup>th</sup> European Union – India Summit held in March 2016 in Brussels, both sides endorsed the EU-India Agenda for Action 2020 as a common roadmap to jointly guide and strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership and enhance security and defence cooperation. The EU has stated several times its interest in working with India on a number of security and defence issues, including terrorism, migration, cyber and maritime domains. There is a lot of convergences between the EU and India on these issues. By intensifying their security and defence cooperation, the two sides have the opportunity to create win-win situations and strengthen the EU-India strategic partnership.

This paper assesses the threat perceptions of both the EU and India. It aims to understand the common elements shared by the two partners and how the EU-India cooperation in the areas of security and defence could bolster their strategic partnership. While the focus is admittedly more on security issues – both traditional and non-traditional – we do explore the defence dimension, including discussion on the prospect for the two sides to expand their maritime security partnership in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) – an area which is vital for the protection of both India and EU trade and economic interests. Increasing defence and military contacts between the two sides – even if it remains for the time being at the level of dialogue and sharing of information - would greatly benefit the EU-India strategic partnership, in particular at this historic juncture characterised by evolving security dynamics in the Eurasian space and growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and the India Ocean.

The paper is divided in three parts. The first section focuses on the EU's perspective. It presents the developments occurred in Europe with regard to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO) in the context of the evolving security environment in Europe and its neighbourhood. It also discusses the prospect for India to participate in some PESCO projects. The second part focuses on India's perspective, focusing on the evolution of India's thinking towards the EU and the potential of India-EU cooperation in the realm of security and defence. The concluding section

includes a list of policy recommendations offered to the two sides' policymakers as well as some final remarks. We conclude by offering a bold proposal, namely that EU and Indian policymakers should seriously consider the participation of India in CSDP and PESCO projects, in particular in crisis management operations. Such a development would undoubtedly boost EU-India security and defence cooperation as well as contribute to harness the full potential of their strategic partnership.

### **1. EU perspective**

The EU is mainly perceived as an economic and trade superpower, but a political dwarf, especially when it comes to security and defence issues. This view – still largely held by many Indian policy makers and media representatives – needs to be qualified, in light of the important developments occurred in Europe regarding the creation of a common security and defence policy.

What is referred to as the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is part of the broader Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), inscribed in the Maastricht Treaty which entered into force in 1993 and established the European Union. The CSDP relates to defence and crisis management, implemented by EU structures in CSDP missions drawing on civilian and military assets provided by member states. The CSDP also entails a mutual defence clause amongst member states as well as a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in which 25 of the 27 national armed forces pursue structural integration.

The United Kingdom, one of Europe's two main military powers (the other being France) is not member of the EU anymore as of 31 January 2020. However, part of the Brexit negotiations between the EU-27 and the UK revolve around the possibility – and conditions – for London to continue to cooperate with EU member states on security and defence issues. This is important to underline, since Brexit may not automatically translate into the EU being weaker from a security point of view.

In terms of functioning, when participating in CSDP missions abroad for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security, the national armed forces of EU member states may either act in an existing national force framework – i.e. as part of an inter-governmental force made available to the CSDP such as the European Corps -, or in the context of the EU Battlegroups. The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) - currently Josep Borrell - is responsible for proposing and implementing CSDP decisions which are taken by the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), generally requiring unanimity. The FAC is a configuration of the Council of the European Union that convenes once a month. Meetings bring together the Foreign Ministers of the member states. Ministers responsible for European Affairs, Defence, Development or Trade also participate depending on the items on the agenda.

The development of the EU's CSDP, coupled with a renewed emphasis on European strategic autonomy in the last years, has been a cause for rising concern among member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – the military alliance that since the end of World War II has guaranteed the security and stability of the European continent. Current discussions inside the EU focus on ways to increase Europe's strategic autonomy without undermining the transatlantic alliance. In this vein, the EU and NATO have taken new steps to strengthen their cooperation over the past years, including opportunities to better coordinate EU and NATO

capability development processes, and to identify which types of military capabilities EU member states should invest in to make burden-sharing with NATO more effective.

EU-NATO cooperation is especially important as new threats to Europe's security have emerged along the bloc's borders. These new developments were included in the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) presented by Federica Mogherini, former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to EU member states in June 2016.<sup>1</sup> The EUGS maintains that the political environment around the EU has changed completely in a very short time. In 2008, Russia invaded Georgia and in 2014 started a hybrid war in Ukraine. The Arab Spring turned the regimes of Northern Africa upside down and in 2012 the "ring of friends" on the south changed into a "ring of fire". The war in Syria has started pushing millions of people to emigrate, mostly to Europe.

While EU-NATO cooperation is well advanced on the ground, the election of US President Donald Trump has somehow weakened the transatlantic bond – at least for the time being. President Trump has in fact criticised the EU for lack of a realistic approach regarding security and urged the European partners to increase funding to NATO. It will remain marked in the memory of Europe's leaders when Trump hesitated about the use of article five of NATO Treaty – that which compels the US to intervene in case one of the members is the object of a violent aggression. As a result, the Europeans started to worry – but also begun to seriously consider how Europe could boost its defence capabilities so as not to continue to depend from an American ally that may decide to turn its back on the Europeans in case of need. In this context, the supporters of CSDP - especially France which has traditionally argued in favour of an autonomous European military force - have brought up the need for a more "strategic autonomy" of Europe from the US and NATO. The recent comment by French President Emmanuel Macron that NATO is facing a "brain death" led to widespread criticism – but it also signalled major concerns across Europe regarding the transatlantic alliance and its ability to deal with new threats in Europe.

Against this backdrop, the EU Global Strategy emphasised closer cooperation among member states in the areas of security and defence, including efforts in developing defence capabilities by increasing investment and enhancing coordination among themselves. Discussions would eventually result in the creation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). This is an important step as it gives space to those EU member states keen on going further faster in the realm of security and defence, giving them the possibility to realise things that had been announced but never done. PESCO is not, however, something completely new. On the contrary, it builds upon the CSDP instruments and structures developed over time.

There are various aspects of PESCO that could be of interest for India. For instance, PESCO is closely connected to the new Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the European Defence Fund (EDF). CARD provides an overview of existing capabilities in Europe and where opportunities for cooperation exist, while EDF provides financial incentives for EU member states to foster defence cooperation from research to the development phase of capabilities including prototypes through co-financing from the EU budget.

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<sup>1</sup> *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, Brussels, June 2016 - [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)

There are a number of PESCO projects underway, including in the areas of capability development and in the operational dimension ranging from the establishment of an European Medical Command, to an EU Training Mission Competence Centre, to Cyber Rapid Response Teams and Mutual Assistance in Cyber Security, Military Disaster Relief as well as an upgrade of Maritime Surveillance, the creation of an European Military Space Surveillance Awareness Network and a joint EU Intelligence School, specialised Helicopter Training as well as co-basing, which would allow the joint use of national and overseas bases.

PESCO projects call into question the ability by the EU to deal with multiple internal and external challenges, including great powers' competition; what is increasingly perceived in Europe as America's diminished commitment to the security of the old continent; and new security threats. Regarding the latter, they include: cyber attacks, meddling in domestic politics, information war (disinformation, fake news etc.), uncontrolled migration, terrorism; external interventions (military, hybrid wars); state collapse and/or civil war in the EU's neighbourhood; threats emanating from the maritime domain; disintegration and weakening of Europe (and the West); deterioration of the rules-based international order.

However, there seems to be a difference between Western and Eastern Europe when it comes to assessing – and evaluating the gravity – of the above-mentioned threats. For instance, Western Europe appears to be more concerned by terrorism and the slowing down of the economy; while Eastern Europe – in particular, the Baltic States and Poland - worry more about Russia's assertive foreign policy, including cyber-attacks and information warfare.

The differences inside Europe show that it remains difficult to reach consensus among EU member states on external action, including security and defence issues. It is thus to be expected that on PESCO, not all EU member states would be onboard, while there could be the case where third states may be more in line with those that want to go further in the realm of security and defence. For the time being, membership of PESCO is only for those EU member states which have undertaken the more binding commitments. However, third states may exceptionally participate in PESCO projects raising the question as to what extent – and on which issues - could India become a potential security partner of the EU.

## **PESCO and India**

In November 2019, the Finish Presidency of the EU presented a five-page document which has served, ever since, as the basis of internal discussions regarding – among the other - the conditions for non-EU countries to take part in a PESCO project. According to that memo, a non-EU country can only join an EU military project when their participation is deemed to add “substantial value” and “its participation does not lead to dependencies on that third state”.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the third state would have to submit a request to the lead country in one of the PESCO projects launched so far, and would need unanimous approval from all EU member states involved. Its participation, however, can be “reassessed” and terminated by the Council

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<sup>2</sup> For more details see: Alexandra Brzozowski, ‘Question marks over third country participation in EU military projects’, *EURACTIV*, 8 November 2019 - <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/question-marks-over-third-country-participation-in-eu-military-projects/>

of the EU when one or more EU member states have substantiated concerns that the country breaches the conditions for participation.

Discussions so far indicate that the only countries which can be considered for participation in PESCO projects are those that “share the values on which the EU is founded” – i.e., respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Accordingly, the proposed terms would exclude countries such as China but would pave the way for the United Kingdom and the United States to join, potentially removing a source of friction in transatlantic ties.

It is in this context that the prospect of India’s participation in PESCO becomes an issue that goes beyond EU-India relations and acquires geopolitical significance. For instance, PESCO projects related to cyber-security could be a good beginning for EU-India bilateral cooperation and set an example for EU’s collaboration with other Asian countries, including South East Asian states that are currently facing growing Chinese intrusion in their cyber-space. Furthermore, India and the EU would benefit from sharing information on their national defence spending plans – the Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and European Defence Fund (EDF) in the case of the EU – and discuss proposals, including joint initiatives, where India could add “substantial value” to PESCO and benefit from participating in it. Areas where there is great potential for EU-India cooperation in PESCO projects include – but are not limited to: cyber-space, including cyber-attacks and cyber-defence of critical infrastructure; defence from terrorist attacks, including fields such as cryptography and intrusion detection; refugees, including borders management. An area where there is great potential for bilateral cooperation - but where the EU-India do not start from scratch - is the maritime domain.

### **Maritime security cooperation**

The role of EU in fighting piracy and promoting security in the IOR through its operation EU NAVFOR Atalanta was a significant step. EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta has been deployed in the Western Indian Ocean since 2008 as part of the international effort to fight piracy off the coast of Somalia. EU NAVFOR also provides protection to the vessels of the UN’s Food Programme which delivers vital humanitarian aid to the population of Somalia. There are similarities in the India-EU approaches to resolving piracy issues.

EU engagement with India in the Indian Ocean should be intensified as this form of cooperation brings benefits to both sides. In particular, EU initiatives such as EUCAP Nestor - the European Union Maritime Capacity Building Mission to Somalia, renamed “EUCAP Somalia” as of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2016 -, the financing of the Indian Ocean Commission – an intergovernmental organisation that links African Indian Ocean nations: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion (an overseas region of France), and Seychelles -, as well as EU-CRIMARIO – a regional mechanism which aims to strengthen maritime safety and security in the wider Indian Ocean region by supporting coastal countries in enhancing maritime situational awareness – proving a testing ground for evaluating the effectiveness of EU-India collaboration. There is scope for further EU-India discussion and joint work to promote the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Finally, a boost to EU-India partnership would come if the EU were to become a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), an inter-governmental organisation aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable

development within the Indian Ocean region through its 22 member states and 10 dialogue partners.

### **The defence domain**

In the defence sector, there is no denying that huge potential exists in the EU for enlargement of its cooperation with India. There is interest by various European defence and aerospace companies to work with their Indian counterparts and harness each other's potential, in particular in the context of the European Defence and Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB). An area for cooperation in this respect could be that of sea-based assets in the naval defence sector where the EU has developed significant capabilities which are regarded with interest by the Indian navy. European defence companies have a lot to offer to India and can address India's defence requirements. However, an obstacle that needs to be overcome in this respect is the traditional habit of India to purchase defence equipment through government-to-government negotiations. But as EU-India cooperation in the realm of security and defence advances, we will hopefully see a change of attitude by the Indian government towards the EU and its common initiatives such as the EDTIB.

## **2. India's perspective**

India strongly believes that the EU is a natural partner and EU support would be vital for India's sustainable growth. The articulation of India's threat perceptions by and large are similar to the threat perception that the EU has. The problems emanating from terrorism, migration, cyber domain and maritime security are all similar to the problems being confronted by the EU. In this vein, India –EU cooperation in the realm of security and defence is directed at enhancing the security of their territories and the well-being of their citizens.

### *Counter terrorism*

Defending the state from terrorist attacks would be one such examples of security of the well-being of the citizens. India's experience of handling cross border terrorism as a perpetual threat seems to have met receptive ears across Europe and the United States, following the West's own experience with terrorist attacks (9/11 in the US, Spain and the UK in 2005, etc). The EU appears thus to have changed its perceptions on the threats emanating from terrorism and it now seems to understand better – and therefore support – India's position on the subject.

The abrogation of Article 370 by an Act of Indian Parliament – a move which has split the State of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh – has been made to counter Pakistan-induced terrorist attacks on Indian soil. According to India, Pakistan started using terror as a tool to 'inflict a thousand cuts on India'. The outreach of these terror outfits euphemistically referred to as non-state actors has now gone far beyond the confines of the region. Some of the lone wolf terrorists in Europe and organised terror attacks elsewhere in the western world as well as in Asia have been linked to Pakistani soil. The dreaded ISIS and other radical Islamic mercenary fundamentalist groups have been using Pakistan as a fertile recruiting ground. Considering the weak economy and rampant unemployment the radicalised youth find it lucrative to join one or the other terror outfits to

make both ends meet. In this context, the Modi's government, by abrogating Article 370, has sought to weaken the reach of Pakistan inside the country, though there are critical voices that accuse the Indian government not to have handled the case very carefully, especially because the former state - now transformed into two union territories - might take a long time to limp back to normalcy. This should invite Indian policy makers to take into consideration the concern of Europe. Undoubtedly, there is need for more understanding by the two sides on their respective positions about state-sponsored terrorism and how to respond to it.

Therefore, while the EU and India have similar concerns on the threats emanating from terrorism, the potential for a deeper engagement must rest on trust and confidence building between the two partners that may not see eye to eye to all domestic and regional issues but who would still benefit from cooperating with each other.

India and the EU committed to enhancing counter terrorism cooperation in the 2005 Joint Action Plan, in the 2009 Summit Declaration and particularly in the Joint Declaration on International Terrorism in 2010. The EU-India Agenda for Action 2020 mentions specifically counter terrorism cooperation. Moreover, a bilateral framework for countering terrorism would also prove essential in pursuing consistent joint work at the UN level. India and the EU should also commit to an internationally functioning legal system which particularly seeks to defy the terrorist threats, remove terrorist and extremist content available online, and increase the effectiveness of sanctions. An area where the EU and India could increase their trust and confidence building in counter terrorism is with regard to the sharing of information between EUROPOL and Indian agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

### *Cybersecurity*

Cybersecurity has also emerged as one of the most important threats to national and global security. The threat from cyber domain will keep growing in the foreseeable future. India strongly believes that the EU has lot to offer in this regard and vice-versa. The EU has come up with its cyber laws and that can be a starting point for debate and discussion between the EU and India.

### *Non-proliferation and disarmament*

India and the EU also share a commitment to work together on non-proliferation and disarmament. However, EU-India dialogue and cooperation on non-proliferation has not been easy, following the EU's decision to put its weight behind the unconditional and indefinite extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a treaty which has never been a favourite with India. Three years later when India felt the imperative to demonstrate its nuclear weapons capability through the conduct of tests, the EU openly criticised that. The EU's continued insistence on the universality of the NPT and its championing of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) have created some difficulties in advancing EU-India cooperation on non-proliferation.

However, things began changing in the early 2000s, when the two sides established their Strategic Partnership. Following US' accommodation of India into the non-proliferation regime, the EU became split on the issue of making an exception for India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in view of India's 'defiance' of the NPT. Some EU member states still argue that allowing India access to international nuclear commerce without getting it to accept a non-nuclear weapons status under the NPT amounts to undermining the regime.

Notwithstanding their differences on the NPT, the EU and India are committed to saving the Iran nuclear deal, viewed by both as the best way to enforce the non-proliferation regime in the Middle East, a position reaffirmed by the EU's HR/VP Josep Borrell and India's Foreign Minister during their bilateral meeting at the margin of the Raisina Dialogue in Delhi in January 2020.

### *Maritime security*

India clearly sees a greater relevance to work together with the EU on maritime security. The protection of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) is vital for both sides. In the past, both India and the EU have cooperated in anti-piracy efforts in the IOR. There is need for more frequent interactions between the leaders of the Indian armed forces and EU military structures. EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta – which has been deployed in the Western Indian Ocean since 2008 – undoubtedly provides a strong basis for further India-EU cooperation in the maritime domain. In addition, the EU and India should increase understanding and exchange of information regarding Asia's evolving security dynamics, including growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean which challenge the rules-based order and have potential to affect the interests of the EU and India.

### **Conclusion**

This study has argued that the EU and India – due to changing dynamics in the Eurasian space and the Indian Ocean - have lot of commonalities to converge on defence and security issues. The two partners hold largely similar views on the risks emanating from terrorism and migration as well as cyber and maritime domains. Regarding the latter, the EU and India have come a long way in understanding each other's role and how they can work together and protect their mutual interests. The new Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region in New Delhi (IFC-IOR) has recently linked up with the Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSC – HOA) established by the EU NAVFOR Atalanta. The cyber domain is also an important area for EU-India security cooperation since it has potential to help each other in protecting IT related infrastructure in addition to their critical infrastructure such as power grid, nuclear infrastructure, banking and finance, and railways. Furthermore, India and the EU are developing a shared approach at the multilateral level for addressing global challenges and increase coordination, including issues such as non-proliferation and disarmament, as well as counter-terrorism.

The evolution of EU-India cooperation in the realm of security and defence owes much to two dynamics: (i) The developments occurred in Europe with regard to the Common Security and

Defence Policy (CSDP) and the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO); (ii) and an increasing willingness – and interest – by India, including the defence industrial sector, to collaborate with the EU and benefit from EU-wide initiatives. We therefore conclude by arguing that EU and Indian policymakers should seriously consider the participation of India in PESCO projects. Such a development would undoubtedly boost EU-India security and defence cooperation as well as contribute to harness the full potential of their strategic partnership.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered to EU and Indian policymakers:

- India and the EU could enhance their mutual understanding by setting up a structured consultation mechanism on security and defence cooperation.
- Following up on the recent EU's India strategy document, India should also come up with its strategy on the EU, with a significant focus on security and defence issues.
- The EU and India should intensify efforts in counter terrorism cooperation and facilitate information sharing in the context of the upcoming working arrangements with Europol.
- Cyber security cooperation should be given priority by the EU and India. The protection and security of critical information infrastructure would profit from their bilateral cooperation. The EU Cyber Security Act can be taken as an example for the evolution of India's cyber law which is under preparation and is expected to be released in 2020.
- The EU and India should consider setting up a working group tasked to explore closer collaboration in the context of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and evaluate the feasibility for India to take part in some PESCO projects.

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