The Role of Enhanced People-to-People Connectivity in the Implementation of the EU-India Roadmap

Executive Summary

The EU-India Roadmap to 2025 deserves more focus on the outreach and engagement of students and young professionals to ensure the sustainability of the overall strategic partnership and its diverse aspirations. The 75th anniversary of the United Nations and the 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals alongside the on-going debates on the future of multilateralism combined with the European and Indian presence at the UN Security Council are important elements for this partnership. These, and other strands of the UN work deserve more attention. Timely educational outreach to deepen the expertise of those who may amplify the strategic EU-India partnership in the future, is also needed. Digital solutions that are widely used among educational and research institutions offer promising means to enhance the recommended people-to-people connectivity across Europe and Asia.

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Introduction

In times when "multilateralism is under siege" (Borrell, 2020) and "the EU is being increasingly challenged by the proliferation of exceptionalism" (Benaglia, 2020), turning to university halls is one of the ways to safeguard decades of tireless work in establishing and maintaining rules-based international order, and ensuring the continuous delivery of public goods. These halls are where the new generation of policy officers, academics, diplomats and entrepreneurs is located. The lessons they learn about the values the EU aspires to safeguard and strengthen across the globe, will be relevant to their future professional assignments.

Major disruptions caused by Covid-19 demonstrate that a crisis is a window of opportunity to generate more receptiveness towards previously less utilised ways to strengthen mutual familiarity and collaborative ties. As the previous months have shown, Covid-19 has pushed the higher education sector towards the adoption of more online solutions, including a transfer of certain in-person training and capacity-building events to virtual platforms. Such an 'online turn' is a chance to strengthen interaction among institutions, academic and teaching staff, alongside students across the EU and India. In addition, it is an opportunity to facilitate consultations on

the agreed milestones during the 15th EU-India Summit and explore specific solutions for specific challenges.

Higher education, research and innovation play an important role in the EU-India strategic partnership. These domains are addressed in a separate section of the Roadmap to 2025, as well as mentioned throughout other thematic sections of this document (European Commission, 2020). Offering such a generous space for closer interactions among curiosity-driven individuals and institutions forms good grounds for supporting the earlier suggested "more adventurous conversation" (Islam, 2016). Many fast-evolving thematic strands might prove to be highly receptive to new analysis and new perspectives.

While ahead of United Nations' (UN) 70th anniversary the scholarly community was preoccupied with various modalities of the potential regional representation at the UN and the Security Council (Drieskens, 2012, 2015; Muller & Schoeman, 2012; Paterson & Virk, 2013; Van Langenhove, Felício, & Abass, 2012; Variar, 2011), UN's 75th anniversary with the Covid-19 context gravitates towards another "San Francisco Moment" (Ponzio et al., 2020, 22). These dynamics should be incorporated in the forthcoming EU-India research consultations. Additionally, the 5th anniversary of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Security Council dynamics enrich the

concise analysis and recommendations for further action.

Connecting students, universities and research centres

The high hopes associated with the 15th EU-India Summit were captured by the observation that "many in Brussels and Delhi would like to see the European Union and India serve as 'like-minded partners' and indispensable allies in protecting the rules-based global order" (Kugiel, 2020). These expectations are shared among the political leadership of EU member states (Michel, 2020; Raik, 2020, 9). India's decision to join the Alliance for Multilateralism indicates that this interest is mutual (Narlikar, 2020, 4).

Meeting these expectations would require extending the consultations and outreach beyond the interactions between political leadership and senior policymakers. Going beyond "leaderisation" (Aggestam & Hedling, 2020), university campuses should be continuously kept on the radar as springboards for promoting widespread understanding and enduring support for multilateralism both in the EU and India. Since the student exchange between the EU and India is rather modest (Šime, 2021), additional offer of virtual

encounters gains prominence. It is a vital investment in individuals who will contribute and shape the EU-India strategic partnership by 2025 and beyond. Early career talents should benefit from more opportunities to learn about a world or a time "in flux" and the come-back of power politics (Dworkin & Gowan, 2019, 2; Raik, 2020; Verbeke, 2017). It should be noted that, the UN was founded by "wide-eyed realists and war-hardened superpowers" (Ali Khalil, 2019, 2). Other accounts of the Security Council refer to realpolitik and brinkmanship (Gowan, 2014, 7; Variar, 2011). It might thus, be questioned whether we are witnessing a come-back of power politics. Perhaps power politics should be viewed as an inseparable component echoed within certain parts of a wider UN system.

Overall, this is just one of the topics that should be addressed by EU and India on a general level and by Estonia and India on a specific level, in their rather recently acquired capacities as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for 2020-2022. Such freshly minted seats in one of the key forums of the UN along with the EU8 - an abbreviation that refers to the current and upcoming European members of the Security Council[1]- add more contextual factors to the EU-India strategic dialogue. It should be made known to and discussed especially with

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1 E3 is formed by Britain, France and Germany. E3 is left out of the picture due to the recent assessments that "the UK is unlikely to exclusively prioritize the E3 format after Brexit and will continue to engage with

Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe as a complement to prioritising working with France and Germany" (Brattberg, 2020, 4).

students specialising in EU-India strategic relations and global governance.

The Agenda 2030 forms one of the key building blocks of the future EU-India strategic partnership (Council of the European Union, 2020; European Commission, 2020, 3). One way to strengthen the implementation is to provide ample space for this topic in higher education programmes and extra-curricular activities. Northern Europe is an area that offers a wealth of examples on ways to do this. In this part of the world, universities and research centres host a dense intellectual infrastructure that provides education, training and remarkably extensive networking opportunities to help navigate the myriad of the Agenda 2030 discussion formats, steering mechanisms, coordination modes, implementation structures, besides also matching authors with similar research interests (Šime, 2020). Bringing some of these competence centres into the forthcoming scholarly consultations between EU-India would be one way to strengthen awareness about these opportunities among broader research circles.

Conclusions and Way Forward

The shift towards more online learning, training and networking should be seen as an opportunity to strengthen collaboration among European and Indian higher education and research institutions. This can be used to promote more pronounced people-to-people connectivity through the implementation of the following policy recommendations:

- Explore additional opportunities to offer online guest lectures of Indian academic staff and researchers to the students studying in the higher education and research institutions in the EU and vice versa. This should be seen as an opportunity to expand the horizons of students about relevant centres of expertise that specialise in certain topics relevant to the study of the EU-India strategic partnership but are not featured within mandatory or suggested course literature.

- The experts' workshop of the EU-India Think Tanks Twinning Initiative has adopted a good method to offer online networking opportunities among the emerging research voices - that in the future will enrich the overall discussions on the EU-India strategic partnership. The effective selection and discussion format has the potential to broaden awareness among emerging scholars about insights produced by their peers on topics they might have limited knowledge on. Such networking opportunities should be offered regularly.

- The Agenda 2030 and the engagement of the EU8 and India at the UN Security Council, should be included among the topics discussed during future online encounters. If the world is truly ready for another San Francisco Moment, then India and the EU8 should play an indispensable role in crafting solutions for future global governance. Consultations among the EU and Indian policymakers and scholars on the subject matter should be encouraged in in-person or online formats.

All three recommendations are addressed to higher education and research institutions willing and technically ready to host the suggested gatherings in both, the EU and India.

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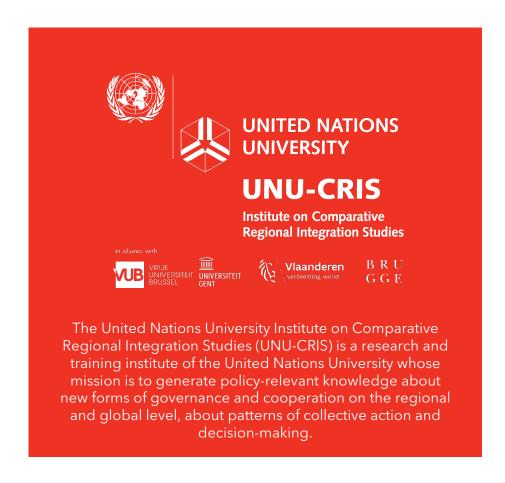Drieskens, E. (2015). Curb Your Enthusiasm: Why an EU Perspective on UN Security Council Reform Does Not Imply an EU Seat. Global Affairs, 1(1), 59–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2014.970468

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