



EU FOREIGN POLICY AND EMERGING INDIA

CATHERINE ASHTON IN NEW DELHI

KLAUS JULIAN VOLL

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Any further information can be obtained through Ernst Stetter, FEPS Secretary General, at ernst.stetter@feps-europe.eu or through David Kitching, Junior Policy Advisor, at david.kitching@feps-europe.eu

INTRODUCTION

Important global, regional and bi-lateral issues require consultations with India, an emerging global player and a regional power in Asia. Catherine Ashton, EU *High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*, met India's top political leadership during her recent four-day visit to New Delhi. Ashton's public speech in the India International Centre focused on *"EU-India relations post-Lisbon: cooperation in a changing world"*. (see the full text of her speech)

"BROAD COALITIONS TO TACKLE GLOBAL PROBLEMS"

The European Union is India's most important trading and investment partner. But given the traditional pre-eminence of India's bi-lateral relations with Germany, England, France etc., the European profile is hardly visible to the Indian leadership. Salman Haidar, former *Secretary* in the *Ministry of External Affairs*, describes a prevalent impression with regard to the EU. *"Europe as an entity does not generate much excitement in India. It's a different matter when it comes to individual countries of Europe: here, many relationships are well established and highly valued. But collectively, Europe remains amorphous. This has long been the case, and while matters have advanced, the diffused policy processes and administrative structures make Europe hard to deal with."*

Mani Shankar Aiyar, Member of Parliament (*Rajya Sabha*/Upper House) and a former Cabinet Minister, chaired her well-attended speech, in which Ashton left no doubt about the EU's responsible and active role in international affairs amidst growing interdependence. *"Power is also shifting between political systems - roughly from the old "West" to both East and South. - The spectacular rise of Asia – not least of India – is a direct consequence of that globalization."*

At the same time she underlined Europe's economic power: *"I myself felt the strength of Europe as an economic superpower when I was European trade commissioner, negotiating agreements on behalf of those 500 million citizens."*

But given the magnitude of global challenges like climate change and the financial crisis, *"broad coalitions to tackle global problems"* are required, according to Ashton.

Ashton defined her role with regard to India: *"My overarching goal is to strengthen the strategic partnership between India and the EU. - The EU and India share both aspirations and fundamental values, notably a commitment to multilateralism in world affairs. We should bolster our relationship*

not as an end in itself, but with a real sense of purpose. - We need to improve our capacity to respond jointly to global challenges. We must encompass a wide range of areas of cooperation from security, climate change and the economy to migration, education and culture."

COUNTER-TERRORISM, ANTI-PIRACY, PEACE-KEEPING AND LABOR MOBILITY

Ashton called on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, on S. M. Krishna (External Affairs), P. Chidambaram (Home) and Vyalari Ravi (Overseas Indian Affairs). As a part of the *EU -India Ministerial Meeting* in Delhi, the two sides discussed a range of bilateral and global issues, including terrorism, piracy, climate, energy, trade and the financial crisis, as well as regional matters, including Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In her interactions with Shiv Shankar Menon, National Security Advisor, Ashton proposed that India should join the EU initiative to tackle piracy and share intelligence in counter-terrorism cooperation. *"In the EU we have these Fusion Centres where we are trying to put together different strands of intelligence. We are looking whether India can join the discussions on this."* The EU's anti-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove and head of EU military staff General Ton Van Osch also participated in the discussions, as well as interacting with their functional counterparts.

India and the EU are trying to revitalize their joint working mechanism on counter-terrorism. For Ashton, *"We are laying the ground for greater cooperation between the EU and India on counter-terrorism."* She further advocated more cooperation between the *European Police Office* (Europol) and Indian agencies.

India is a major naval power in the geo-strategically important Indian Ocean. The EU and India will step up efforts to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia. Referring to the on-going relationship between the *EU Naval Force* and India in combating piracy, Ashton proposed: *"India could take over rotating command structures designed to combat piracy."*

"With India's role as one of the primary contributors to UN peace-keeping activities and the EU's growing role in crisis management, increased co-operation makes a lot of sense," Ashton maintained.

Ashton discussed with *Overseas Indian Affairs* Minister Vayalar Ravi the signing of a *"Labor Mobility Partnership Agreement"* (LMPA) to facilitate legal workforce migration between India and Europe on

a mutual basis. She maintained that Europe is quite keen to build a partnership on migration related matters with India.

PERSPECTIVES

Alluding to the decisive negotiations for a broad-based *Free Trade and Investment Agreement* between the EU and India, Ashton said that it may not be signed at the 11th *Europe-India Summit Meeting* in October 2010 in Brussels. When finalized, it is expected that the current trade flow of approximately 53 billion Euros between the EU and India could triple within five years.

In a country with over-burdened municipalities and more than six hundred thousand villages a major aspect of Europe's know-how is much in demand. India has been in a deep agrarian crisis for quite some time. The democratization processes at the grass-roots levels are manifesting themselves in an almost revolutionary manner with profound social transformations. Therefore, Mani Shankar Aiyar pleaded with Ashton to share in meaningful ways Europe's rich experiences of local self-governance with a sub-continent of similar geographical size.

Given their common personal backgrounds of aiming at a world without nuclear weapons, Aiyar referred to Rajiv Gandhi's *Action Plan for a Nuclear Free World*, which had been submitted by the late Prime Minister as a road map to the United Nations in 1988. Aiyar called the *Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)* "...an unequal treaty. We must get rid of these wretched nuclear weapons."

Aiyar, who had served with the Indian High Commission in Brussels and is one of the few pro-European top politicians, concluded, that the partnership between Europe and India could prominently contribute to the creation of a *Eurasian Identity*.

Catherine Ashton's fourth visit to India indicates, that she is also personally convinced of India's increasing role in international affairs. The relatively small Indian foreign-policy elite, although predominantly Anglo-Saxon in its orientation, has now a visible European partner for further comprehensive interactions.

But only a concerted effort by all the EU member states, together with the Delegation of the European Union, can improve the visible dearth of sustained and meaningful political interactions with India's political leadership across party-lines. Here, the German, Austrian, French, British and Swedish Social-Democrats could perhaps combine their efforts, to rediscover their past relations with Indian Socialists and progressive forces, in order to open suitable dialogues with new counterparts in

“the spheres of politics, culture, academia, civil society and trade unions.” (Massimo D’Alema, President, Foundation for European Progressive Studies).

Ashton’s visit demonstrated, that it is high time, that major European nation states don’t lobby against each other in New Delhi but instead coordinate their foreign and security policies *vis-à-vis* India. Europe as a whole will then be more adequately perceived and dealt with by the Indian leadership, also in matters of geo-political importance in South and West Asia. Ashton: *“We would also like to deepen the dialogue we have with India on regional issues, including on Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, - We recognise that India is playing an important role in Afghanistan and addressing some of the issues related to infrastructure, health and education. We need to work closely.”*

Catherine Ashton left no doubt during her visit, that India will be treated far more prominently in future and not experience benign neglect as quite often in the past: *“India is one of the most significant global powers in the 21st Century. It is the biggest democracy in the world, an economic and cultural heavyweight whose power can only increase.”*