



India's Stance on Ukraine: Caught between EU and Russian Interests

FACT SHEET

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In the international response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, India is performing a balancing act between Russia and Western interests, and has abstained on the major UN votes condemning Russia's actions. With non-alignment as its the official stance, it neither openly supports Russia's expansion nor clearly condemns the act of aggression. Heavily reliant both on trade with Europe and other Western nations as well as on geopolitical, military and technological cooperation with Russia, the Indian government has no interest or clear incentives for choosing sides on the invasion of Ukraine.

The EU and India

India was one of the first trading and cooperation partners of the European Economic Community in the 1960s. This partnership was deepened by the 1994 *Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development*, which set the foundation for mutual cooperation to be based in mutual respect for human rights and democratic principles. In June 2000, the first EU-India Summit took place in Lisbon, after which the EU and India became strategic partners in 2004, reiterating that the cooperation would be built on mutual commitment to "protecting and promoting human rights, a rules-based global order, effective multilateralism, sustainable development and open trade."

India and the EU started negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement in 2007, which were suspended in 2013 after several disagreements on market access, intellectual property for medicines, visas and agricultural policies, etc. At the 2020 EU-India Summit, the partners agreed on the *EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025*, aiming for enhanced cooperation and closer trade relationships.

USSR/Russia and India

India declared itself as a non-aligned state during the Cold War, but had close ties with the Soviet Union, in part due to its border conflicts with China. The Soviet Union supported India's territorial claims over Kashmir, provided India with military and economic assistance and a majority of India's military equipment. The 1971 *Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation* was vital in showing the Soviet Union's support for India, and enabled India to engage in a war against Pakistan in 1971 with military support from Moscow. In return for this support, India abstained from criticizing Soviet interventionism in Hungary and Afghanistan. In recent years, Russia has reaffirmed its support for India in Kashmir, even after India revoked the semi-autonomy previously granted to Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.

Bilateral trade in various sectors has developed into an important pillar of the Indo-Russian relationship, and bilateral agreements on energy, including a 2018 deal for the construction of multiple nuclear reactors in India, binds both countries together for the next decades.

New European Interest in Security Cooperation

In recent years, security cooperation has become more relevant to EU-India relations, especially as China's geopolitical power and presence has expanded and caused concern for both India and European interests in the Indian Ocean. At the EU-India Summit in 2016, both partners agreed on advancing cooperation in the field of security, which the EU reaffirmed in its 2021 Indo-Pacific Strategy. Especially France has taken a leading role in this push during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, drawing on its bilateral Indo-French strategic partnership that includes joint maneuvers, and a controversial deal supplying Rafale fighter jets.

Indo-Russian Security Cooperation

After the fall of the Soviet Union, India maintained its close relationship with Russia, cooperating especially on geopolitical and military matters, and the Indian military has joined Russia in large-scale military exercises on multiple occasions. Their *Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership* includes close military and technological cooperation, as India's army relies largely on Russian weapon supplies. Current estimates suggest that up to 85% of Indian weapon systems could be of Russian origin, more than the previously estimated 60-70%. India and Russia work together on several weapons development programmes, and Indian purchases of Russian weapon technologies led to the US threatening India with secondary sanctions in 2018.

Centrality of Human Rights in EU-India Relations?

Human rights and democratic values are repeatedly mentioned as basis for cooperation between India and the EU in their joint communications. However, European leaders have failed to clearly speak up for the respect for human rights in the cooperation, for example on the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the creation of detention centers in Assam, the shutdown in Jammu and Kashmir, clampdown on human rights defenders, and more. Attempts by the European parliament to vote on a resolution condemning the CAA were shut down, and the Commission left calls by MEPs to speak up about the situation in Kashmir unanswered.

India's Restraint on Criticizing Russia

Because of the geopolitical and military cooperation between India and Russia, India is restrained in the way it expresses itself on Russia's violations of international law. India therefore abstained on the resolution on Russia's annexation of Crimea. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Modi government has once again been urged by politicians from around the world to take a stance; as of March 25 2022, India had only stated its "commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, to international law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states", but refused to express words of condemnation as the EU had urged India to.



In the current geopolitical conflicts, India has not positioned itself clearly against the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine - which is explained by looking at the history of and ongoing mutual support India and Russia have provided to each other.

Further reading

EU-India Strategic Partnership: A roadmap to 2025 (2020)

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45026/eu-india-roadmap-2025.pdf>

EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (2021)

https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf

EU to enhance defence, security engagement with partners in Indo-Pacific, *Business Standard*, February 24 2022

https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/eu-to-enhance-defence-security-engagement-with-partners-in-indo-pacific-122022301600_1.html

Joint Statement: Celebrating a Decade of the India-Russian Federation Strategic Partnership and Looking Ahead (2010)

[https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5118/Joint+Statement+Celebrating+a+Decade+of+the+India+Russian+Federation+Strategic+Partnership+and+Looking+Ahead)

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The Europe-India Balance Sheet: Trade, Like-Mindedness and Strategic Interests

<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/europe-india-balance-sheet-trade-mindedness-and-strategic-interests>

Ukraine: Why India is not criticising Russia over invasion, *BBC*, March 3 2022

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60552273>

UN Resolution on the Aggression against Ukraine (2022)

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3959039?ln=en>

UN Resolution on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine (2014)

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/767565?ln=en>

Why did European Parliament delay a vote on India's CAA, Kashmir?, *AlJazeera*, January 31 2020

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/31/why-did-european-parliament-delay-a-vote-on-indias-caa-kashmir>

Why India's silence on Ukraine is an opportunity for Europe, *ECFR*, March 9 2022

<https://ecfr.eu/article/why-indias-silence-on-ukraine-is-an-opportunity-for-europe/>