

Hypocrisy is the one word that captures the EU's policy towards India, whereas delusion aptly describes its China policy. Instead of harping on soft-power, India must re-visit its EU policy in accordance with Realpolitik.

It is no secret that the European Union (EU) is a confused geopolitical entity today¹. Brussels is sharply divided on major issues such as pandemic response, and global alliances not only within the Parliament but also among the governments that rule the individual States in the EU. On the one hand, the EU criticized Donald Trump's travel ban² during the pandemic, while shutting its own borders with other EU countries, and enforcing a travel ban on its own³.

On the other hand, Brussels actively courts anti-democratic totalitarian one-party government in China and her investments in the EU, under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)⁴. The EU Parliament moved resolutions⁵ against a vibrant democratic Republic of India on its domestic legislation, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) duly ratified through a procedure established by law, passed by both houses of India's Parliament. Yet, the EU stance was notably pusillanimous on the suppression of facts by China during the early days of COVID pandemic⁶, and China's territorial aggression against India, Taiwan, and in the South China Sea during the Summer of 2020. This selective outrage, hypocrisy towards democratic India, while waxing eloquent about 'common democratic values' and delusions regarding totalitarian China, makes EU an unreliable actor that India cannot count on as a strategic partner.



Image source: PTI

For the benefit of readers living in India, let me point out that the realities of the EU are quite different from the chorus of 'India-EU partnership' clamour in Delhi. Observing the EU's foreign policy, while living in the EU, breathing the air, and observing social realities, is very different from watching Brussels sitting in Delhi, where the EU is painted as a romantic, ideal political entity.⁷ The truth is, over nearly two years of carefully observing EU foreign policy from Warsaw, one has witnessed how hollow, fragile and inward-looking the institutions of EU really are, and how polarized the society is deep down⁸, beneath the superficial layers of nicety and old-world charm.

There exist multiple fault lines, between rural and urban Europe, an increasingly unemployed youth and their disconnect with an ageing older population, friction between migrants and the native Europeans at subterranean levels even in 'progressive' Scandinavian States, coupled with rising Islamophobia⁹ not just in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in certain States in Western Europe.¹⁰ Yet, these disaffections do not manifest as massive protests every alternate day, which is why Delhi is clouded in her

perceptions of the EU. Therefore, the EU as an ideal political entity seen from Delhi is a myth.

The hollow character of the EU was exposed most recently by the COVID-19 pandemic. The very first instinct of each of the EU member states in response to the pandemic was not to put up a united front but to shut their own borders with each other. This was against the very foundations of the Maastricht Treaty to the extent that Italy's desperate plea for help, during the initial weeks, fell on deaf ears in Brussels.¹¹



Image source: The Print

Social cohesion is increasingly an issue in the EU, as refugees from North Africa and the Middle East have poured in over the last decade, the conversations inside the living rooms in EU, as well as in political circles in Brussels and various State capitals¹², have been largely in hushed tones, about the changing demography and the means to counter it. These conversations have obvious strategic implications for India's economic skilled migrants, but also because in Poland, Romania, Hungary, and even in certain cities in Western Europe, Indians are often seen as Pakistanis, Arabs and even as refugees with negative connotations, and in rare cases, subjected to discriminatory comments and racial attacks¹³ with Islamophobia at its core.

On the contrary, a vast majority of the Indian community in the EU are highly skilled workers and students.¹⁴ Has the EU ever guaranteed the safety, security, and fair treatment of Indian nationals? Islamophobia in Europe^{15 16}, is perhaps at an all-time high^{17 18} and coupled with unemployment, this should come as no surprise to Indian policymakers that Democracy Index in Hungary, Poland and Romania continue to slide further down¹⁹, far below India and yet the EU has the audacity to give India sermons on a law that was passed within the ambit of the Constitution of India and still under the consideration of the Supreme Court²⁰.

This is not to indicate that everything is perfect when it comes to the CAA in India. Far from it, this legislation has become a deeply divisive issue in India, from Assam to Kerala.²¹ It has divided the people of India among two camps, leading to widespread protests by the youth in the capital and various cities across India. However, as a Constitutional democracy, the very fact that protests, debates, and judicial review processes are underway in India, are itself signs of a healthy vibrant democracy. Yet, the EU's overenthusiasm to criticize India, compared to its refusal to give a joint statement alongside the US, UK, Australia and Canada, to criticize China's actions in Hong Kong²², should be a clear message to India, that the EU considers China as strategically more important than India²³.

The studied silence of the EU on China²⁴ is a classic case of appeasement of a rising revisionist power in international politics. Appeasement is not a new phenomenon in European geopolitics, but something that is in the very DNA of Europe's strategic thinking²⁵. The Western European powers did everything possible to appease Nazi Germany during the early stages of the Second World War, till it became clear that they could not appease Hitler any further without giving up their own territorial and national security²⁶. Thus, the EU will continue to appease China, it becomes a direct threat to the EU itself. Indeed, those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

In India, policymakers tend to overlook these obvious facts of an unreliable EU because India's foreign policy towards Brussels have been primarily influenced by her notions of moral responsibility and soft-power - democracy, the diversity of languages, religion, the cultural values, historical contacts, and so on. This allows the EU to have delusions of grandeur and treat India as a junior partner in the relationship, while occasionally delivering sermons on 'moral conduct' such as the criticism on India's CAA. *Realpolitik* begs the question; can India take the EU seriously as a strategic partner knowing that it is a waning actor in the International system, considering that Brussels was ready to abandon even its own Member State Italy, during a moment of crisis? The proof of the pudding is in

the eating of it.

Therefore, India must have realistic calculations on the role of the EU as a partner. Should there be a conflict between India and China in the future, given the current standoff in Ladakh, the EU is likely to be a bystander, a mere spectator of China's aggressive designs. Forget intelligence sharing or military cooperation, even diplomatic support is very unlikely. Realpolitik should drive India's EU policy and not make-believe rhetoric of 'strategic partnership'. As India rises, and the EU wanes²⁷, the EU needs India far more than ever for the reasons explained below.



(From L) European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, Chinese President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel hold a press conference at the Elysee presidential palace in Paris, on March 26, 2019. – Xi Jinping meets with the leaders of France, Germany and the European Commission, as European countries seek to boost relations with China while also putting pressure over its trade practices. (Photo by Thibault Camus / POOL / AFP) (Photo credit should read THIBAUT CAMUS/AFP via Getty Images)

Internally, over the next three decades, the EU finds itself with internal social cohesion issues such as an ageing population, second-generation Muslim migrants that are still not assimilated in the mainstream and live in ghettos in parts of Germany, Belgium, France, Sweden, Norway, and countries like Hungary and Poland that continue to dilute the Constitution, without actually amending the Constitution on paper. Bruce Ackermann has famously written about Constitutional changes that do not change the Constitution itself.

Externally, the EU faces a resurgent Russia on its East, a reluctant old friend in the form of United States across the Atlantic and a threatening China on its South-East. Therefore, the EU has no choice but to be a partner and work with India. However, the Indian policy-making establishment needs to make it abundantly clear to the EU that this is possible only if such a partnership respects, accepts and accommodates India's core national interests including Art 370 and the CAA without crossing India's red lines.

If the EU cannot do so, it must note that India can also play the same game, bringing global attention to EU's domestic political schisms and social vulnerabilities - which is a Pandora's box with internal social inequalities galore, anti-migration rhetoric, the ghettoization of its Muslim citizens, dilution of Constitution in countries that are a part of the EU, and pusillanimity that favours totalitarian China. However, India's principle of not indulging in the internal politics of other States may have held New Delhi back so far.

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