

Geopolitical Orientations of the Decisive Trends in the Continental Economy: Assessing Its Expansion Within the India-EU Partnership's Sphere of Influence

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ABSTRACT

The evolving India-EU partnership is emerging as a crucial pillar in shaping the continental economy and global geopolitical order. This paper examines the geopolitical orientations of decisive economic trends, analyzing how far India-EU collaboration can extend within their sphere of influence. As global power structures shift due to China's economic assertiveness, the USA-EU trade realignments, and the growing importance of regional blocs, India and the EU are recalibrating their trade, investment, and strategic policies to secure their positions in a multipolar world. By exploring bilateral trade patterns, economic corridors, and investment collaborations, this research highlights how India-EU engagements, particularly in green technology, digital trade, and supply chain resilience, challenge China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and align with global sustainability goals. The study delves into external geopolitical pressures, including China's dominance, transatlantic relations, and India's strategic autonomy, to assess their implications for long-term economic stability. Through a combination of theoretical insights, case studies, and policy analysis, this paper outlines potential pathways for India and the EU to redefine trade standards, overcome regulatory divergences, and enhance strategic alignments. It brings forth significant questions about the future path of the India-EU partnership in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: India-EU relations, geopolitical economy, trade realignments, continental economy, strategic alignments.

Introduction

The global economic order is profoundly transformed, driven by shifting geopolitical dynamics, technological advancements, and the reconfiguration of trade alliances. In this evolving landscape, the India-European Union (EU) partnership plays a pivotal role in shaping the 'continental economy', a concept that emphasizes regional economic interactions, trade linkages, and policy coordination within a geographical landmass (Baroowa 2007). In contrast to the conventional model of globalization that emphasizes intercontinental trade and global supply chains, the continental economy is characterized by initiatives aimed at regional integration, investments in transnational infrastructure, and the alignment of economic policies to foster greater economic interdependence (Haryono, 2024). This approach is particularly evident in the EU's single market, which promotes regulatory convergence, trade liberalization, and the seamless movement of goods, services, capital, and labor. Similarly, India's engagement in the South Asian continental economy is facilitated through frameworks like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its strategic linkages with Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond (Pant, 2022).

The India-EU partnership extends beyond a bilateral economic relationship; it embodies a strategic alignment with broader geopolitical implications. The EU's economic policies are grounded in regionalism, promoting integration among member states through a structured regulatory and institutional framework (Rodrik, 2020). In contrast, India has adopted a hybrid approach that combines elements of economic nationalism with regional trade engagement, particularly through initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC). This evolving partnership is set to redefine power dynamics in Asia and Europe, solidifying the continental economy as a significant factor in the global distribution of economic power. The EU's commitment to a rules-based multilateral economic order aligns with India's strategic autonomy, enabling both entities to navigate economic complexities while enhancing their geopolitical influence (Wouters, 2024).

However, several challenges hinder the full realization of the India-EU economic partnership. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of a comprehensive trade and investment agreement, as negotiations for the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) have faced multiple roadblocks, including differences in tariff structures, regulatory standards, and intellectual property rights. Additionally, geopolitical uncertainties, such as the rise of protectionism, disruptions in global supply chains due to conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war, and the Indo-Pacific security dynamics, introduce complexities

in deepening economic cooperation (Yusuf, 2024). While the EU seeks greater regulatory alignment and market access in India, India remains cautious about trade liberalization that could potentially affect its domestic industries, particularly in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing. Furthermore, the EU's emphasis on sustainability and green trade policies, including carbon border adjustments, poses another challenge for India, which is still balancing economic growth with environmental commitments.

Despite these challenges, the India-EU partnership holds immense potential in shaping global economic governance. The EU's focus on technology-driven economic growth aligns with India's ambitions in digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and clean energy transition (Chhibber, 2022). Collaborations in sectors such as renewable energy, digital trade, and infrastructure development can create new economic synergies, strengthening regional value chains and reinforcing the continental economy model. Either, India's leadership in the Global South and its role in forums like the G20 provide an opportunity to integrate the EU's developmental priorities with India's growth trajectory, facilitating a more equitable global economic order.

In this context, contemporary theories such as dependency theory and world-systems analysis offer insights into the evolving India-EU economic relationship. While dependency theory highlights 'structural inequalities' in the global economy and cautions against 'potential economic asymmetries', world-systems analysis emphasizes the shifting 'core-periphery dynamics', positioning India and the EU as emerging poles in an increasingly multipolar economic order (Wallerstein, 2004). Moreover, the constructivist framework within international political economy indicates that economic collaborations are shaped by more than just material interests; they are also influenced by shared norms, institutional arrangements, and political values (Ruggie, 1998). The India-EU partnership illustrates this constructivist principle, as both entities highlight democratic governance, sustainable development, and multilateral cooperation as essential components of their interaction.

Given these factors, the question arises: to what extent can the India-EU partnership extend its influence within the broader framework of global economic power? The answer lies in the ability of both actors to institutionalize economic cooperation through strategic agreements, enhanced connectivity, and policy convergence. By strengthening trade corridors, harmonizing regulatory frameworks, and fostering innovation-driven collaborations, India and the EU can create a resilient economic framework capable of withstanding global disruptions. The evolving nature of the continental economy suggests that regional partnerships, rather than traditional globalization models, will increasingly define global trade patterns. As economic power shifts and supply chain realignments accelerate, their partnership could set a precedent for sustainable economic integration. If India and the EU successfully navigate their economic and geopolitical differences, their collaboration could serve as a model for emerging economies, shaping power alignments across Asia, Europe, and beyond, while reinforcing a multipolar and interconnected global economic order.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the evolving India-EU partnership within the framework of the continental economy.
2. To study the decisive trends in ways of continental economy.
3. To assess the sphere of influence of the India-EU partnership in the changing geopolitical dynamics.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates political economy, international trade theories, and geopolitical analysis. The research is based on secondary sources, including books, academic journal articles, policy reports, and official government documents from India and the EU. A comprehensive content analysis of policy frameworks such as the India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, the EU's trade and investment policies, and India's strategic economic initiatives has been conducted to assess the evolving nature of economic cooperation.

The study applies theoretical frameworks such as World-Systems Analysis to understand economic power structures, Constructivism to explore the role of norms and institutions, and Regionalism to evaluate economic integration strategies. The research critically examines contemporary challenges and prospects, providing a structured analysis of the role of the India-EU partnership in shaping the global economic order.

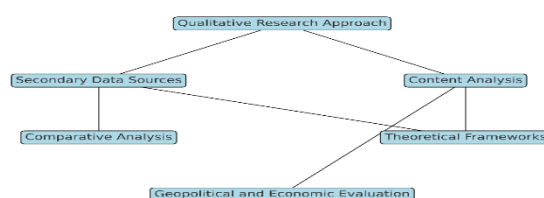


Fig 01: Research Methodology Chart prepared by author

Decisive Trends and Shaping the Continental Economy

Regional Economic Integration and Trade Agreements: India-EU FTA

The contemporary global economic landscape is witnessing a transition from hyper-globalization to regional economic integration, driven by geopolitical shifts, trade realignments, and financial resilience strategies. One of the most significant trade negotiations in this context is the India-European Union (EU) Free Trade Agreement (FTA), an initiative to deepen economic interdependence between one of the world’s largest economies and one of its fastest-growing markets. Given the EU’s focus on trade diversification and risk mitigation, and India’s aspirations to expand its global trade footprint, the FTA holds strategic importance in shaping the continental economy and influencing broader geopolitical dynamics.

The EU has consistently been one of India’s top three trading partners, contributing to over 11% of India’s total trade, with bilateral trade (see Fig 02 & 03) in goods exceeding €120 billion in 2022 (European Commission, 2023). While India benefits from the EU’s Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+), which offers tariff reductions on exports, a comprehensive FTA would institutionalize trade liberalization, improve market access, and increase investment flows. The EU seeks to reduce dependency on China-centric supply chains, while India aims to expand its manufacturing and digital economy through increased European investment and technological collaborations (WTO, 2023). The ongoing negotiations, which began in 2007 and resumed in 2022 after a long hiatus, signal a renewed commitment to achieving a mutually beneficial trade partnership (Weiss, 1999).

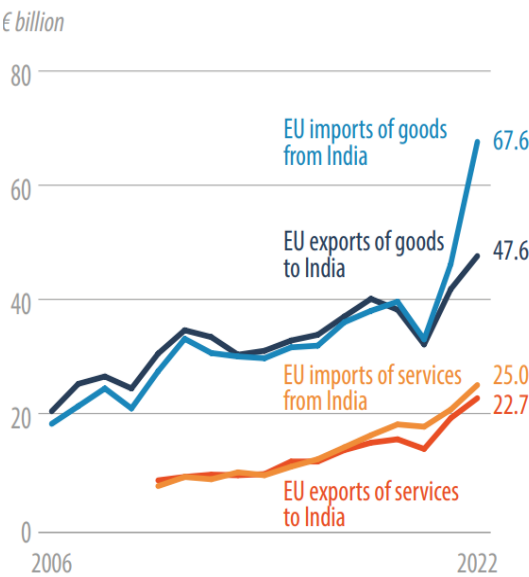


Fig: 02

Source: India-Economic indicators and trade with the EU, and EPRS.

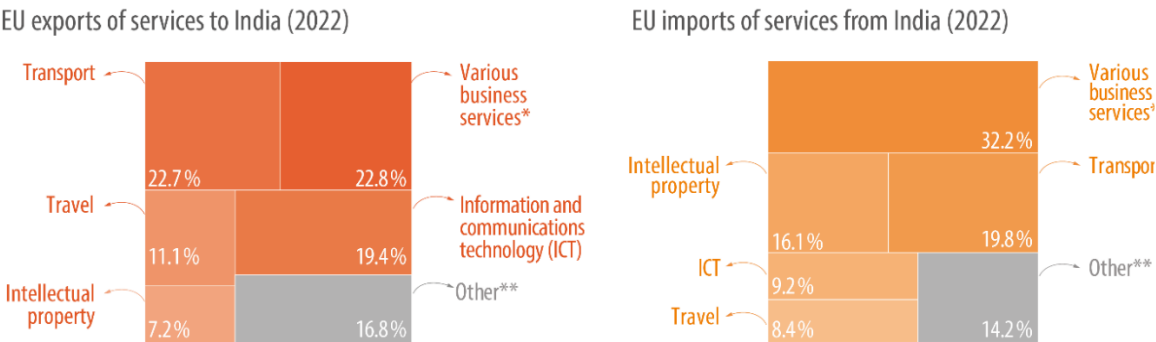
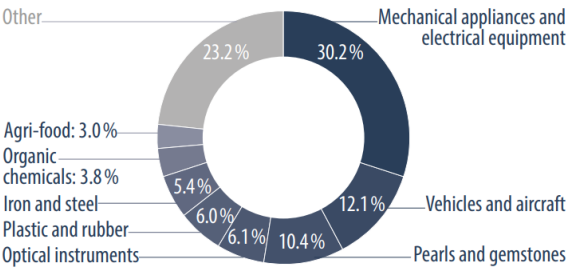


Fig 03: EU Exports of services to India and EU imports services from India (2022)

Source: India-Economic indicators and trade with the EU, and EPRS.

Suzuki (2021) says that the India-EU FTA negotiations have been complex, with key sticking points including tariff barriers, digital trade regulations, intellectual property rights (IPR), labor standards, and sustainability commitments. A major challenge is the EU’s demand for lower tariffs on automobiles, wines, and spirits, while India pushes for greater market access for textiles, pharmaceuticals, and IT services (Krishna, 2023) (Fig 04).

EU exports of goods to India (2022)



EU imports of goods from India (2022)

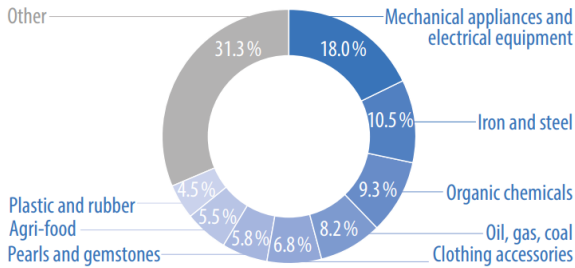


Fig 04: EU Exports of goods to India and EU imports goods from India (2022)
Source: India-Economic indicators and trade with the EU, and EPRS

The elevated import taxes on European vehicles, potentially reaching up to 100%, persist as a divisive issue. In the same vein, digital trade policies present another roadblock, as the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) enforces strict data protection and cross-border data flow regulations, conflicting with India’s more flexible approach under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) (Gupta & George, 2025). The pharmaceutical sector is another critical area, as the EU advocates for stronger patent protections, which could impact India’s generic drug exports. Furthermore, the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) poses new challenges, as Indian exporters must comply with EU climate standards, potentially increasing production costs for key sectors like steel, cement, and aluminum (Bhattacharya, 2023).

The India-EU FTA must be understood in the broader context of regional trade agreements worldwide. The EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), signed in 2019, eliminated 97% of tariffs and established strong regulatory convergence, providing a successful model for economic integration (WTO, 2023). In contrast, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to create the world’s largest free trade zone, prioritizing intra-African economic cooperation (World Bank, 2023). Meanwhile, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which India opted out of in 2020, reflects the growing influence of China in regional trade and India’s hesitancy in engaging in broad trade liberalization without adequate safeguards (Pant, 2022). These examples illustrate that while FTAs enhance trade efficiency, their success depends on strategic alignment, regulatory coherence, and geopolitical considerations.

Despite the economic and strategic benefits, challenges persist. Regulatory mismatches between India’s flexible trade policies and the EU’s rigid environmental, digital, and labor standards create hurdles (Ruggie, 1998). Along with that, geopolitical uncertainties, economic nationalism, and protectionist policies could slow down negotiations. Institutional barriers and bureaucratic delays further complicate the process (Keohane & Nye, 2012). However, successful negotiations could mark a turning point in India-EU relations, fostering long-term trade growth, investment cooperation, and geopolitical stability. As both partners work towards greater trade facilitation, sustainable economic policies, and digital governance frameworks, the FTA has the potential to redefine regional economic integration in the 21st century.

Supply Chain Realignments and Strategic Autonomy

The post-pandemic world (fig 05) has accelerated a shift from hyper-globalization to resilient regionalism, leading to a realignment of supply chains focused on strategic autonomy and economic security (Mattoo & Staiger, 2021). The India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), launched in 2022, plays a pivotal role in strengthening supply chain resilience, digital transformation, and semiconductor collaboration. Given China’s dominant position in global supply chains, both India and the EU seek to diversify sourcing strategies and reduce dependencies, particularly in critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, rare earth materials, and renewable energy (Fujimura, 2004).

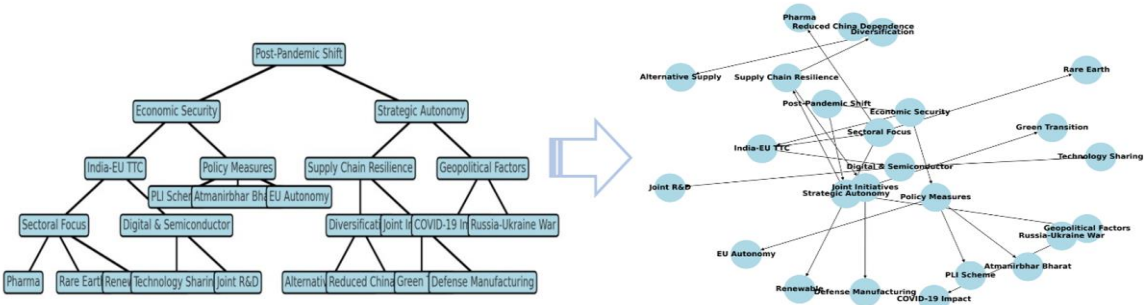


Fig: 05

(prepared by author) *

*This hierarchical tree chart visually represents the post-pandemic shift from hyper-globalization to resilient regionalism, emphasizing economic security and strategic autonomy. At the top, the broad structural shift is divided into two key drivers: Economic Security and Strategic Autonomy. These branches further break down into critical components such as the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC), Policy Measures (including India's PLI scheme and Atmanirbhar Bharat), and Supply Chain Resilience. The chart also highlights geopolitical disruptions like COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war, which have influenced diversification strategies and joint investments. Ultimately, the web chart maps out how these interconnected factors contribute to reducing dependency on China and fostering sustainable, secure, and trusted supply chains.

The disruption caused by COVID-19 and geopolitical conflicts has highlighted the need for regional supply chain fortification and trusted trade partnerships (Nawaz & Zhaolei, 2025). India's Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme aligns with the EU's strategic autonomy goals, fostering joint investments in electronics, green technology, and defense manufacturing. Moreover, initiatives like India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) and the EU's Open Strategic Autonomy framework underscore a commitment to rebuilding resilient and sustainable supply chains while reinforcing bilateral trade interdependence.

Digital and Green Transitions

The digital economy and green transformation are increasingly shaping the continental economic order, with India and the EU emerging as key players in technological governance and sustainable development. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has profound implications for Indian exporters, compelling industries to adopt green technologies and low-carbon manufacturing processes (Bhattacharya, 2023). Simultaneously, India's commitment to net-zero emissions by 2070 and renewable energy expansion under the International Solar Alliance (ISA) aligns with the EU's Green Deal aims (Mesa, 2024).

On the digital front, the India-EU TTC focuses on artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductor cooperation, and cybersecurity, fostering a trusted digital ecosystem (Nawaz & Zhaolei, 2025). While the EU enforces stringent General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) laws, India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) reflects a more flexible approach to digital governance (Chhibber, 2022). The convergence of green technology investments, digital trade facilitation, and AI-driven economic integration presents an opportunity for sustainable economic growth and innovation-driven partnerships (Saran, 2023).

Infrastructure and Connectivity Diplomacy

Strategic infrastructure projects are central to India-EU connectivity diplomacy, positioning both as key actors in Eurasian trade corridors and transcontinental integration (World Bank, 2023). The EU's Global Gateway initiative, a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims to enhance infrastructure financing, sustainable transport, and digital connectivity in partner regions, including South Asia, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, India's Act East Policy and its participation in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) reflect an ambitious push toward enhancing transcontinental trade routes (WTO, 2023).

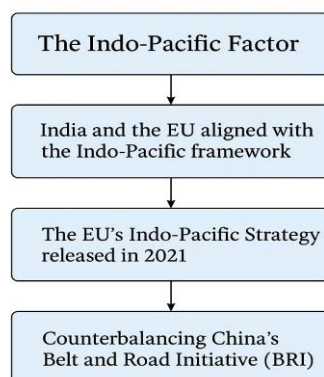
Infrastructure diplomacy is also visible in the India-EU Partnership on Connectivity, which prioritizes smart urbanization, green energy corridors, and digital infrastructure projects (European Commission, 2023). The development of maritime and rail connections for Eurasian trade routes, along with investments in modernizing ports and establishing high-speed rail systems, enhances the economic interdependence between the two regions. As geopolitical tensions reshape global supply chains and trade routes, India and the EU's coordinated approach to infrastructure-led economic diplomacy enhances their strategic influence in the evolving global economic architecture.

Geopolitical Orientations of the Continental Economy

The continental economy is deeply embedded in geopolitical contestations, power realignments, and economic security strategies (Bremmer, 2022). The India-EU partnership has evolved to reflect these dynamics, balancing economic cooperation with strategic competition (Jaishankar, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific Factor

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a critical geoeconomic and geopolitical construct (fig 06), reshaping global trade patterns and economic alliances (Brewster, 2023). India and the European Union (EU) have strategically recalibrated their economic engagements to counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative and assert greater influence in Indo-Pacific trade corridors (European Parliament, 2022). The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021) highlights Europe's growing economic interdependence with the region, emphasizing maritime security, infrastructure development, and resilient supply chains (European Commission, 2021).



The Indo-Pacific Factor

Fig 06: I.P. Factor Prepared by author

India, as a central Indo-Pacific player, has actively engaged with EU member states to advance blue economy partnerships, digital connectivity, and trade diversification (Tellis, 2023). The India- EU Connectivity Partnership (2021) aligns with the Global Gateway Initiative, offering an alternative to China's BRI by focusing on sustainable infrastructure and transparent investment practices (EIB, 2022). Given that the Indo-Pacific accounts for over 60% of global GDP and 50% of global trade flows (IMF, 2023), securing open sea lanes, digital corridors, and energy routes has become imperative for both India and the EU (Menon, 2023).

The China-plus-one strategy, widely adopted by global businesses, has led to supply chain diversification, positioning India as a key manufacturing hub (Baldwin, 2022). Additionally, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), from which India opted out in 2020, poses challenges for trade alignment between India and the EU, prompting negotiations on an India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) (WTO, 2023). As geopolitical rivalries in the Indo-Pacific intensify, questions arise regarding the efficacy of multilateral governance structures, the resilience of economic partnerships, and the role of middle powers like India in shaping a rules-based order (Eichengreen, 2023).

Energy Security and Resource Geopolitics

Energy security has become a central issue in geoeconomic power realignments, as states and economic blocs seek to diversify energy sources and secure critical mineral supplies (IEA, 2023). The Russia-Ukraine war (2022-present) has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of the EU's energy dependence on Russian gas, prompting a strategic pivot towards India, the Middle East, and Africa for alternative energy supplies (BP, 2023). In response, the EU has intensified engagements with India on liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade, green hydrogen projects, and renewable energy collaborations (Chatterjee, 2023). India's LNG import capacity is expected to increase by 40% by 2030, positioning it as a crucial energy partner for Europe (World Bank, 2023). The International Solar Alliance (ISA), co-founded by India and France, serves as a platform for EU-India cooperation in solar energy investments and climate financing. Let's not forget that India's National Green Hydrogen Mission and the EU's Green Deal signal shared ambitions for decarbonization and energy transition (IEA, 2022).

China currently controls over 63% of the global rare earth supply, raising concerns about supply chain vulnerabilities (IEA, 2023). India and the EU have responded by forging critical mineral partnerships, with India investing in deep-sea mining and rare earth extraction technologies. The overarching challenge remains: how can the India-EU energy partnership enhance energy resilience while balancing economic and environmental imperatives? With the global energy market undergoing historic shifts, India's energy security diplomacy will play a decisive role in the evolving continental economy (Mukherjee, 2023).

Goeconomic Fragmentation and the Rise of Multipolarity

The global economy is witnessing goeconomic fragmentation, characterized by regional trade blocs, economic decoupling, and the rise of a multipolar order. As the unipolar moment dominated by the US fades, emerging economies such as India, Brazil, and South Africa are challenging traditional economic hegemonies. The India-EU partnership is instrumental in navigating this fragmented landscape, ensuring trade diversification and supply chain resilience.

One of the most significant manifestations of goeconomic fragmentation is the increasing use of economic sanctions as geopolitical tools, particularly in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Luttwak, 2022). The resulting energy crisis has accelerated the shift towards alternative trade alliances and currency diversification, with India expanding rupee-based trade with Russia and Middle Eastern nations. Meanwhile, the EU is reassessing its economic ties with China, given the risks associated with overreliance on Chinese manufacturing.

The fragmentation of global trade regimes, as seen in US-China trade disputes and EU-India FTA negotiations, raises pressing questions: Is multilateralism weakening in the face of regionalism? Will economic decoupling lead to new forms of protectionism or trade wars? In this context, India's leadership in the Global South, through forums like BRICS and G20, positions it as a key bridge between emerging and advanced economies (Yoganandham, 2021). As economic alliances become increasingly fluid and conditional, India's strategic economic diplomacy with the EU will determine how far it can extend its influence within this multipolar continental economy (Rodrik, 2020).

Fortunes and Frontiers: The Security-Economy Tightrope in Eurasia

The security-economy interplay has become a defining feature of Eurasian geopolitics, where territorial conflicts, economic sanctions, and strategic competition directly influence trade and investment flows. The Russia-Ukraine war, ongoing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, and EU-US security cooperation have reshaped Eurasian economic alignments (Tellis, 2023). In this evolving landscape, India and the EU must balance their security commitments with economic pragmatism, ensuring trade routes remain open and supply chains remain resilient.

The India-EU strategic partnership extends beyond economic cooperation to maritime security, digital resilience, and cyber governance. The Indo-Pacific maritime routes, crucial for EU-Asia trade, are vulnerable to China's territorial assertions and piracy threats, necessitating closer India-EU naval cooperation (Brewster, 2023). Furthermore, the EU's push for digital sovereignty aligns with India's cybersecurity initiatives, fostering collaboration in critical technologies and cyber-defense policies (WEF, 2022).

The expansion of economic corridors, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), emphasizes the intersection of trade and security considerations in Eurasian geopolitics (European Commission, 2023). As global security concerns escalate, the India-EU partnership will be tested on its ability to ensure economic stability while responding to geopolitical uncertainties.

Conclusion

The India-EU relationship is increasingly shaped by 'external geopolitical pressures', particularly the rise of China, the strategic influence of the U.S., and shifting global trade dynamics. Both India and the EU seek to balance their economic and strategic interests, leveraging their partnership to counter China's assertiveness while maintaining independent foreign policy choices. As the U.S.-EU strategic alliance strengthens, India must navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, ensuring that its partnerships with Europe do not compromise its traditional non-alignment approach. The success of India-EU cooperation in trade, security, and investment will depend on its ability to adapt to evolving global realignments, build resilient supply chains, and reinforce economic sovereignty in an increasingly multipolar world. One key area of potential transformation is renewable energy cooperation, where India and the EU have already demonstrated successful collaborations. India's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, combined with the EU's Green Deal and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), can drive a new standard in climate-linked trade policies. If successfully aligned, this partnership could serve as a counterweight to China's dominance in green technology and infrastructure financing.

Despite the strong strategic convergence, there remain persistent challenges in policy harmonization, trade regulations, and legal frameworks. While the EU seeks deeper security cooperation with India, New Delhi's long-standing strategic autonomy doctrine complicates defense alignments. The EU's NATO partnerships and Indo-Pacific engagements often align with U.S. strategic interests, whereas India maintains its non-aligned status while engaging in issue-based partnerships. This creates diplomatic complexities in finalizing high-level security pacts and defense collaborations. The evolving India-EU partnership must navigate the complex balance between strategic autonomy and deepening economic and security engagements.

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