

Indo-German cooperation should be fostered –

A comment about the potential on the occasion of the German President's visit

The German President Joachim Gauck is visiting India. This is another important step to deepen the relationship between India and Germany as he is also accompanied by members of the German cabinet and parliament as well as a business delegation, so a broad variety of topics can be covered.

Whenever German and Indian leaders, during the last years Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Singh, meet it seems like conditions for close political cooperation between the two countries are just perfect. And now, with a new German government, still under the leadership of Angela Merkel but with a new, yet experienced Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the time has come to push Indo-German relations forward.

First and foremost, both countries share common strengths. They are stable, federally organized democracies and they are the most powerful players within their regions. A strong German economy that is based mainly on exports to European countries, provides many opportunities for India, also regarding relations with the EU. And the growing Indian market seems to offer infinite chances for Germany as well.

First written down in 2007 and extended last April in Berlin, a Joint Statement of a Strategic and Global Partnership is supposed to give the bilateral relations a proper framework. Shared values like democracy, rule of law and religious freedom are highlighted, as well as the potential of cooperation in different sectors like technology, trade and transport infrastructure. But this is not enough to unlock the potential of Indo-German cooperation. So, where could be done more?

If we take a glance on foreign policy in general, we can state that it is an important aspect to facilitate economic, scientific and cultural cooperation between states. Because this is usually supposed to benefit the people of a state. Concerning the relations between India and Germany, the already mentioned Joint Statement of April 2013 was a step in the direction of closer cooperation. During the meeting in Berlin also six MoUs were signed jointly by the concerned ministries including further investment in research, civil security research as well as the promotion of the German language in India.

Germany seems anxious to gain more presence in the Indian public. Examples are the "German Year in India" 2011 – 2012, the newly established German House for Research and Innovation in Delhi and the promotion of the German language at 1000 Indian schools. Whereas the Germans, again after the Hippie-era, are increasingly attracted by Indian

ancient- and pop-culture. Nowadays, events that go by the name “Holi” take place in the major cities, where people can enjoy throwing colourful powder at each other. Indian food is highly appreciated as well as Bollywood movies that are shown regularly in dubbed versions on German television. Thus, soft power, at least the Indian one, might also play a role in bringing both countries closer together, whereas Germany relies mostly on hard power, its economical strength.

Now, to pick up the initial question: where is the biggest potential for cooperation to be found? For example, what about the geopolitical cooperation between the two states?

Both countries play the role of a good neighbour in their respective regions. Based mainly on its economical strength that continues despite the world financial crisis, Germany broadens its influence in the EU, which causes not only joy on the side of its neighbours. But at the same time, the most populous European country is also among the states that foster European integration. And a united EU, speaking with one voice regarding its foreign policy, would be an important player in a multipolar world in the forthcoming decades.

And multipolarity is also India's interest. Thus, mutual support for this goal seems logical. Most visible is this support in the G4 group where India and Germany along with Japan and Brazil are aiming at permanent seats in the UN Security Council, based on the argument that its current composition doesn't reflect global reality any more. India regularly provides large troops for UN missions while Germany is among the top states financing those missions. As parts of their respective neighbourhood is resisting their claim for permanent seats, India and Germany should support each other more by determined advocating each others stance against the ones who block the overdue reform.

Germany is gaining more international influence and is also willing to use it, which can be exemplified through two recent occasions. The first being the NATO Reform initiated and pushed through by Germany despite some resistance. And second being the maybe historical negotiations with Iran on the nuclear topic in which Germany participated along with the permanent members of the Security Council. Foreign Minister Steinmeier straightly emphasized that Germany has to play a stronger geopolitical role according to its size and economical strength.

The growing geopolitical importance of Germany also means that, if India wants to deepen cooperation with the EU politically and economically, there is no way doing this without focussing on Germany. In the same way, Germany should always keep in mind the growing importance of India in Asia, not only South Asia. Recently, while China and Japan

get more hostile to each other, both states are eager to improve their relations with India. Should China and Japan go further in that direction, this might upgrade India's status in the international system in the long run.

The Joint Statement also encompasses the commitment of both states to work together on the issue of proliferation, acknowledging that terrorists in possession of weapons of mass destruction “pose a great threat to international peace and security”. So, the time has come for closer and dedicated cooperation in the field of nuclear security as a major aspect of non-proliferation. Germany, defining its foreign policy as peace policy and being experienced in handling nuclear material, should take action in this regard. With a growing number of nuclear power plants in the future, as well as medical facilities using nuclear material, India is likely to get more vulnerable to nuclear terrorism. And of course, stolen nuclear material from India could also be used for terrorist attacks in Europe.

German economical strength and the prospering Indian market set the basis for cooperation that in some areas already exists but should be deepened. Whereas big German companies like Siemens or the software corporation SAP made their way to India quite a while ago, the German medium-sized enterprises still seem to be hesitant. On the other side, institutions like the German-Indian Business Center in Hannover assist Indian enterprises in Germany. And for Indian companies aiming at the European market, focussing on Germany is necessary, because about 65 per cent of the German exports go to EU countries. Meaning, Germany knows how to do it. To expand economical cooperation, for example in high technology or retail industry, a crucial point is the mutual understanding of cultures and especially business cultures. Because nobody can deny that there are some big differences between both countries. To successfully deal with these differences, more exchange is needed. For instance, Indo-German University programs should be promoted more to bridge the gap.

Lastly, a problem which big Indian cities are facing, especially New Delhi, can be worked on jointly – smog. Latest data suggests that winter smog in Delhi is the worst in the world. This is an issue that can be taken care of in cooperation with Germany, that has experience with smog and developed some useful measures to reduce it since the 1960s. In addition to the governmental level, cooperation between NGOs that work on environmental topics can be promoted. This non-governmental cooperation can be very useful to raise public awareness and contribute to finding feasible solutions.

After the elections last September, it took quite a while for the new German government to be formed. Now, continuing efforts to deepen the relationship with India should be

expected. The visit of the German President along with the delegation can also be seen as an indicator for this. Anyway, as mentioned before, the German government should focus more on the geopolitical cooperation with India and vice versa. Meanwhile, the Indian elections in December have shown that the opposition is on the rise. Whatever the result of the general elections in spring 2014 will be, any change in the political landscape should not affect the upgrading of Indo-German relations. A standstill or even setback can only be a loss for both countries.

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