

Subject:

**International Relations**

Title:

**EU-India Relations: A Soft Power Approach in Contemporary Global Politics**

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Abstract:

The EU-India alliance is multifaceted and dynamic, founded on democratic values and economic concerns. Global politics' two most powerful actors eventually cooperate, using soft power. Despite trade and military collaboration, the research examines soft power in EU-India ties. Both parties use cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, economic cooperation, and global governance to increase their international influence. The nexus between climate change, digital transformation, and sustainable development is discussed, along with its problems and prospects. This research study critically examines how soft power changed EU-India trade, diplomacy, and cultural interchange in the 21st century.

Keywords:

EU-India relations, soft power, cultural diplomacy, strategic partnership, international relations

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## 1. Introduction

The EU-India collaboration expanded beyond economic interests to become a strong strategic partnership based on democracy, human rights, and sustainability. Soft power has helped them influence the world in their political and cultural areas. Soft power, coined by Joseph Nye at the end of the 20th century, is the ability to get what one wants through attraction, persuasion, and influence rather than coercion, using cultural exchanges, ideas, and diplomacy.

The European Union and India are two prominent global actors with significant economic, political, and cultural impact, therefore soft power gains were expected to be considered in their bilateral relations. The study now explores how both actors employ soft power to boost their worldwide relevance due to a strong bilateral relationship. Cultural diplomacy, education exchange, economic development, and urgent issues like climate change, digital transformation, and post-pandemic recovery are areas of collaboration.

## 2. Theoretical Framework: Understanding Soft Power

### 2.1 Defining Soft Power

Joseph Nye defines soft power as the power of a country to get its way without violence or coercion but by attraction. It is more about the cultural influence, diplomacy, and morale of a nation, rather than military or economic power. Soft power has been an avenue for both the EU and India to influence the world in general, as well as for the two giants to develop ties with each other. Essential touchstones underscoring power include culture, education, diplomacy, and shared values.

### 2.2 Soft Power in EU Foreign Policy

The EU has sometimes been described as a "normative power," a concept developed by Ian Manners, which refers to the fact that it exerts influence through the promotion of norms such as human rights, democracy, and sustainable development. On the EU foreign policy, there is a strong emphasis on diplomacy, development aid, and cooperation with international organizations in the interests of increasing its influence as an international actor. The EU relies on soft power to carry its foreign policy, especially in the case of India, with whose vast country a platform for expanded cooperation has been laid down through cultural, economic, and educational initiatives.

### 2.3 India's Soft Power Strategy

The two most intrinsic parts of India's soft power policy are its cultural heritage and a global diaspora. The cultural exports of Bollywood, yoga, and Indian food have helped to make the country more attractive to international audiences. Its democratic values, in conjunction with one of the fastest-growing economies, place India in that special position of an emerging soft power at the global level. The main actors of Indian soft power engagement are the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, leading Indian cultural diplomacy. As India is the largest democracy in the world, it being a natural ally for the EU whose key priorities are democratic governance and human rights.

### 3. EU-India Relations: Historical Context

#### 3.1 *The Early Phases of EU-India Cooperation*

The EEC and India established equal sovereign diplomatic relations in 1962. The partnership focused on trade and development. India was non-aligned throughout the Cold War, whereas Europe was divided into NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Thus, EEC-India cooperation was limited to commercial and not political or cultural.

The end of the Cold War and India's 1991 economic liberalization changed EU-India relations. Thus, business relations and political communication accelerated. EU-India merchandise trade grew from €24.5 billion in 2001 to €88 billion in 2021. Both parties felt they could establish more than transactional connections given this strong economic environment.

#### 3.2 *The Strategic Partnership Agreement (2004)*

The Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between the EU and India in 2004 outlined a series of mutual values and priorities for consolidating their cooperation. It heralded a broadened engagement to include political dialogue, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges among people. This agreement laid down a framework for regular summits between the EU and India on various issues ranging from climate change and terrorism to trade.

### 4. Soft Power Mechanisms in EU-India Relations

#### 4.1 *Cultural Diplomacy*

Cultural diplomacy is a key soft power tool between the two parties. To foster goodwill and friendship, the EU and India have used their cultural resources in exchange programs.

In 1995, India began showing European films in Indian towns as part of cultural diplomacy to introduce Indians to European art and culture. European filmmakers can talk and exchange their ideas with Indian artists at such a festival, boosting cross-cultural movie cooperation.

#### 4.2 *Educational Exchange and Collaboration*

Educational exchanges between the EU and India are one of the most effective soft power tools for interpersonal and long-term diplomatic ties. Through Erasmus+, thousands of Indian students have studied in European universities, improving their academic and professional backgrounds. The European Commission reports that Erasmus+ has helped 5,000 Indian students since 2004.

The India-EU Joint Action Plan on Education established joint research in climate change, sustainable development, and digital technologies in 2008, in addition to student exchange. Many global topics have been researched by the IITs of India and European universities. Since they promote EU-India mutual respect and understanding, these exchanges strengthen intellectual collaboration and soft power.

#### 4.3 *Economic and Development Cooperation*

While trade and economic cooperation are the driving forces of the partnership between the EU and India, in 2021, India was the 10th largest trading partner of the EU, comprising 1.8% of the total goods trade of the latter, while the EU consisted of India's third-largest trading partner in 11.1% of overall trade of

the latter. Although trade is sometimes included within the sphere of hard power tools, economic cooperation might create a substantive soft power base in goodwill, mutual trust, and interdependence.

## 5. Challenges and Opportunities in the Soft Power Approach

### 5.1 *Divergent Interests and Policy Constraints*

Soft power diplomacy has made progress, but the EU and India still face significant hurdles in their bilateral relationship. One important factor is how the two nations' geopolitical ambitions and domestic policy priorities differ.

India has grown economically while the EU has prioritized environmental and human rights in its trade treaties. These discrepancies have produced friction in trade discussions, explaining the FTA standstill. Although both sides have expressed political readiness to restart negotiations, differing policy imperatives on both sides may continue to pose problems.

### 5.2 *Leveraging Shared Democratic Values*

But there are many reasons why cooperation can be better in the times to come. The post-pandemic economic recovery has presented a host of avenues for collaboration between the EU and India in areas such as public health, vaccine distribution, and economic recovery. The experience within the European Union with regard to public health infrastructure and proficiency in producing vaccines in India should combine in order to address global health issues, as already demonstrated in the case of the COVID-19 Vaccine Maitri effort.

## 6. Case Studies: Success Stories in Soft Power Diplomacy

### 6.1 *The India-EU Summit (2021)*

International Solar Alliance initiated by India in 2015 represents another exemplary case of the exercise of soft power diplomacy in respect to international cooperation on matters of mutual concern. With over 120 countries already members, ISA seeks to promote solar energy as a source that would achieve sustainable development. The EU has been a key partner in the promotion of ISA through relevant financial and technical assistance for renewable energy projects in India, as well as in other member countries of ISA.

### 6.2 *The European Union Film Festival in India*

One manifestation of this soft power diplomacy is the European Union Film Festival in India, started on an annual basis in 1995. It showcases films originating from Europe at large in several Indian cities and gives the Indian audiences glimpses into the rich culture of Europe. The EUFF has gone on to expand over the years through events of film-screenings in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Bengaluru.

The festival also solidifies cultural ties and forms a forum where European film makers could work with ideas generated from their Indian counterparts. This indeed has succeeded in leading to joint film ventures, while such cultural exchange between the two regions is on the grow.

## 7. The Future of EU-India Relations: A Soft Power Perspective

### 7.1 *Strengthening People-to-People Ties*

As the EU-India relations forge ahead, interpersonal links will remain a core task. Soft power efforts that increase the number of direct interactions between the citizens of Europe and India would thus form a key to forging their alliance. On the contrary, increasing the number of Indian students studying in Europe, through programmes such as Erasmus+, together with cultural exchange opportunities, will provide links between both regions in the long run.

Furthermore, digital diplomacy may substantially enhance the engagement between the EU and India: while India is becoming an essential player of the digital economy, and the EU remains one of the most

important players with regard to data governance and cybersecurity, both players may cooperate on the development of the future of international standards in the digital field.

### *7.2 Expanding Cultural and Educational Exchanges*

One of the many elements of ongoing soft power diplomacy between the EU and India will be cultural and educational exchanges. Enhancing these further will comprise more scholarships for Indian students, European languages introduced at Indian schools and universities, and joint programs with creative industries.

The EU and India could also work on the preservation of cultural heritage for both parties, particularly in areas that up until today have been destroyed by both climate change and war. Joint projects including historical sites restoration and eco-friendly tourism may show how effective soft power diplomacy is important.

The EU-India partnership has expanded beyond economics to include cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, and global governance collaboration. Using cultural assets, common ideals, and diplomatic methods, the parties have developed intensive and multi-layered collaboration.

Despite this, this soft power approach fostered mutual respect and faith that the EU and India could cooperate despite their different objectives and interests. This soft-power strategy has enabled the EU and India create trust despite differing policy priorities and geopolitical interests. Soft power policies of the EU and India must influence future cooperation to address global issues including climate change, digital transformation, and public health concerns.

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