



## India-EU Cooperation on Climate Change: Convergence and Divergence

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**Abstract:** *The Environmental Kuznets Curve<sup>1</sup> theory defines global warming as a phenomenon that has been borne out of the excessive industrialization of developed countries, thus leading to major environmental problems in the world. The issues of climate change and environmental pollution have dominated the realm of international relations, especially in the last two decades. Thus, this theory opines that developing countries must be provided with an opportunity to reach the levels of developed countries, in terms of income and economic progress. This will result in creating a balance between the developing countries and the developed ones. While the developed and the developing countries were both trying to justify their respective stands on climate change and emissions, the EKC (Environmental Kuznets Curve) theory emerged and proved to be a turning point in climate change negotiations. It discarded the notion that the economic development of any nation would harm the planet. Standing on this divergent path are two important partners i.e., India and the European Union. While India represents the developing country, European Union is the developed partner among the two. Both partners have recognized the seriousness of the issue of climate change and have been working towards a comprehensive international standards formulation to fight climate change. However, the main stumbling block to their cooperation has been the division of the developed and developing worlds, in terms of sharing responsibilities to mitigate the impact of climate change in the world. This paper analyses the history of India-EU cooperation on climate change. Individual policies and frameworks of both partners in fighting climate change and the issues of divergence and convergence in terms of dealing with their common goals vis-à-vis climate change.*

**Keywords:** Climate change, EU-India, Emission, Mitigation, UNFCC, Kyoto Protocol, IPCC

### Introduction

Climate change has become one of the most discussed subjects globally. It is not only being discussed by nation states as part of their negotiating topics but has become one of the cores and integral issues or challenges of the United Nations, International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world. Global climate change negotiations have undergone various stages of ups and downs, whether it is from the initial top-down approach<sup>1</sup> to the bottom-up approach<sup>2</sup> to strategic modification in dealing with climate change i.e., mitigation<sup>3</sup> to adaptation strategy<sup>4</sup>. Climate change as an issue or challenge wasn't recognized in a day or year, it was rather understood, identified, and delineated

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as a discourse in the international realm for around three to four decades.

While the early action plan to understand and work towards mitigating the effects of climate change started in 1972, and the first UN summit on the environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden, numerous other summits and conferences in the last fifty years or so have contributed immensely to the discourse of climate change. If the summit of 1972 Stockholm was dominated by the issues of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), sustainable development and discourse on congruence of environment and development; the first climate conference of Geneva in 1979 contributed toward reasoning of the fact that global warming happened due to excessive human activities. It was this conference that led to the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Similarly, the Villach conference of 1985 brought forth an issue on to the international policy agenda, that was until then, confined to the pages of scientific journals and within the walls of conference rooms; i.e., the threat of anthropogenic climate change.<sup>5</sup> The Toronto conference on the other hand triggered a warning that if the climate change issue goes unchecked then consequences for the human progeny could be second only to a global nuclear war. It also included emerging concerns about global atmospheric issues like acid rain, ozone depletion and global warming.

### **Geopolitics of Climate Change**

International climate change negotiations were initiated in 1991. Since the inception of these negotiations, they have been divided into three phases. Each phase has its own significance. The first phase of the negotiations covered the basic framework of governance, which has been outlined in the Framework Convention. The framework of governance was adopted in 1992 and applied in practice in 1994.

The second phase ranges between the years 1995-2001, wherein the Kyoto Protocol was elaborated and negotiated, that included quantitative emission reduction targets for developed (Annex I) countries until 2012. To attain targets there was also establishment of market-based mechanisms like emissions trading during this phase. The third and current phase has been identified as the conclusion of the Copenhagen Summit. This phase also covers the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol and the post-2012 period on climate change (Bodansky, 2010).

The discourse on climate change has evolved since the beginning and, it led to the establishment of the UNFCCC in 1992, at the Earth Summit held in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Though many important issues like Greenhouse gas concentration were discussed at length at this summit, however, the outcome of this summit was legally non-binding in nature. In this summit, 154 signatories to the UNFCCC agreed to control greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to the level that the atmosphere would be safeguarded from dangerous interferences to the climate system.<sup>6</sup> This summit also marked the classification of countries into Annex-I and Annex-II. The former comprised countries that were developed and advanced and the latter were the developing countries.

Since the Rio summit, climate change and governance have undergone many phases, which include the yearly summits and COPs. One of the prominent negotiating platforms is the Kyoto Protocol. It is an international climate change treaty that extends the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and commits countries around the world to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, based on scientific evidence that a) global warming exists and b) anthropogenic actions are driving it.

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan on 11 December 1997 and came to force on 16

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Feb 2005, having two commitment periods. The first one was on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012 and the second was on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 (UN Data 1998)<sup>7</sup>. It was this protocol that was based on the principle of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), that acknowledged the fact that each nation has its capabilities to fight climate change, and this was mainly due to its economic development. Thus, much of the larger share of responsibilities was owed to the developed nations, as these developed nations were responsible historically for the larger and current levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Similarly, some other important debates and discussions were held in the Bali Roadmap (2007), Durban platform (2011) and Paris Agreement of 2015. The history of climate change discourse is the history of agreements and disagreements, of consensus and conflict, North and South hemisphere division, and division between developed and developing nations' responsibilities. United and divided in the discourse of climate change over these tumultuous phases are two strong and strategic partners; India and the European Union (EU).

Uttam Kumar Sinha (2009) observes that if there is the science of climate change, there is also politics of climate change. Along the way, there are inescapable economic obligations and choices and intertwined security concerns. He further says it is these critical aspects that reflect states' predicament or in other words dilemma in coming to terms with climate change. He concurs on how climate change does affect international politics and security and in the long run the larger geopolitics (Sinha, 2009). He further goes on to discuss, that climate change has challenged states to come out of their narrow-defined interests, and has led them to redefine their priorities in dealing with climate change. However, their failure to gauge the risk perceptions of climate change, and its ability to cause changes in global and regional dynamics, does not only reflect the uncertainty of climate change being the cause of any violent conflict shortly but also directs to the fact that there could be severe consequences on international security and also towards the mitigation and the adaptations efforts of climate change (ibid., 2009).

It is within the confines and premises of these predicaments of geopolitics, and regional and global obligations that India and the European Union (EU) have managed to leverage the challenge and crisis of climate change into an opportunity that binds the two partners for future cooperation despite divergence in their approach and obligations in countering the issue of climate change.

The United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol have both stressed the difference of responsibility in climate change impacts, including the responsibilities of parties to act in protecting the climate system based on equality and under their common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities. The European Union is among the 37 industrialized nations that were mandated by the protocol to cut down on their emissions. While India is among the developing nations that were asked to voluntarily comply and were exempted from the treaty. Despite the divergence between the two because of the policies, approaches or prevailing international norms in dealing with climate change, India and European Union have more convergences than divergences in terms of fighting climate change as both have not only emerged as key stakeholders in this multilateral and multipolar 21<sup>st</sup> century (global security, trade military being other sectors of cooperation) but have also made climate change as a key issue to fight together.

### **India's approach towards fighting climate change**

While cooperation with European Union remains and India continues to do so, India's response to climate change is based on its own needs, plans, programmes and priorities and not by the

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reasons dictated by international negotiations (Malhotra, 2016). Being a developing country, inclusive growth for India is too integral and advanced adaptation efforts along with mitigation efforts are the need of the hour while fighting climate change without compromising developmental compulsions. India does not have any mitigation obligations under the UNFCCC but still announced in January 2010 that it would reduce the emission intensity of its GDP (minus agriculture sector) by 20-25 per cent by 2020 over 2005 levels (ibid., 2016). The arguments of 'inclusive' and 'integral' as far as adaptation and mitigation efforts by India to fight climate change are raised for the reason that, India's per capita GHG emission and energy consumption are far too low compared to the EU or other developed nations in general. That is why India has always argued for its rightful and just ways and means to fight climate change.

Projects like National Action Plan on Climate Change, which was released in 2008, are being attributed to India's fight for environment issues. The plan had outlined eight national missions that were active upto 2017, wherein three more missions were added. NAPCC's goals towards climate change and energy security were concrete and it didn't differentiate the difference between the two, rather considered them as two sides of the same coin. It also asked the states of India to present their respective action plan on climate change, i.e., State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC). One of the most popular initiatives that promoted usage of clean cooking is the Pradhan Mantri Ujwala Yojana or PMUY scheme that provided free LPG connection and connected 80 million women of rural poor households. This also was considered as a viable option for stubble burning to mitigate air pollution in the northern regions of India, though its success has still not been achieved. Some other related prominent initiatives are; e.g., for the water conservation strategy, India has launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA), for transport, under which it has set a target of 30% of vehicles to be run on electricity.<sup>8</sup>

Due to climate change, the world is witnessing issues like sea levels rise, oceans warming, and rise in temperatures globally, shrinkage in ice sheets, ocean acidification, glacial retreats, and decreasing snow cover etc., India's vulnerability is in addition to these issues. India's developmental path as an emerging economic power has led it to choose sustainable pathways to development. India needs to balance economic development and sustainable environmental considerations; one cannot be adopted over the other. India's over-dependence on climate-sensitive sectors has rendered it to be affected by the impact of climate change much more (Majra and Gur 2009). For example, agriculture and food production is impacted by the amount of rainfall a particular place receives, and according to a study conducted by the Indian Agricultural Research Institution (IARI), it was found that every one-degree rise in temperature, results in the reduction of four to five million tons of wheat production (Kumar et al 2012).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be defined as a combination of seventeen interlinked global goals designed to accomplish a safe and secure suitable life for everyone. The goals were undertaken in 2015 under the aegis of the United Nations General Assembly, which are planned to be achieved by 2030.

Each country or groups of countries are assigned policy objectives to comply with the sustainable development goals. India too has been assigned the objectives of energy security, poverty alleviation and attainment of a higher human development index (HDI). The achievement of these objectives will interestingly put more pressure on non-renewable resources or fossil fuels like coal, petroleum and natural gases, thus leading to greater carbon emissions (Gore, Korde 2019). However, in comparison to other developed and developing nations, India's per capita carbon emissions are very low at 4% of the global emissions. As far as the adaptation and mitigation efforts are concerned, India is doing way better than other countries, despite the

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pressure of accommodating a huge population dependent on the available non-renewable resources, India's energy intensity is much less (less than 4% per annum) than the economic growth (over 9% per annum). To fare better in the two major climate change indices computed globally i.e., Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)<sup>9</sup> and Climate Risk Index (CRI)<sup>10</sup>, even this reduced energy intensity isn't enough. India has been leading the way towards historically sustainable patterns of consumption, energy efficiency policy promotion and in the most recent time's usage of the Clean Development Mechanism to substantiate in adopting clean energy technologies (Gore, Korde 2019).

While India is committed to working under the climate negotiations, traditionally as a developing country along with another leading country like China, its approach has been somewhat a combination of cooperation and unwillingness to be dominated by the developed nations. India and China have conveyed their rejection of the mitigation targets under the G-77 platform; this includes the international monitoring of developing countries' domestic actions. India has argued about the applicability of similar mandatory emission reduction goals on developed countries before these mitigation commitments can be forced upon any developing country.

### **European Union's approach towards climate change**

Like all countries around the world, the European Union (will be referred to as the EU henceforth in this paper), has been affected by climate change. The EU has been working towards fighting climate change since 1986, predating any substantive efforts at the international level. However, the initial efforts were isolated ones, targeting some specific challenges and later evolved into a coordinated effort with various policy approaches (Mehling, Massai 2007). EU has been a consistent advocate of stringent mitigation commitments, calling for stricter laws and rules that are often opposed by industrialized and developed nations. Over the years the EU has emerged as a global leader in climate change, and this image of the EU is visible not only in its dealings with member states but also beyond the EU. Notwithstanding the EU's efforts and leadership, the genesis and implementation of climate policies within the EU and its member states display a different picture; it's rather the member states that allow national interests to interfere with the straightforward implementation of common policies, and formulation of a consensus within has become a challenging task for the EU over the years (ibid., 2007). However, over the past two decades, the EU has also worked as a united supranational entity and this has gone to its advantage in fighting climate change.

The EU has become a global leader in adopting and implementing sustainable energy and climate policies and is often described as the 'climate leader' in the world. Substantiating this fact are its positive results as far as reduction in emissions is concerned. For example, in 2008 emissions fell by 11.3% since 1990, reaching 4939.7 Co<sub>2</sub>eq, reminding of the supranational cooperation on energy issues dating back to the early years of the European integration project, in the post-World War II period (Mehling, 2010). Being a signatory to the 2015 Paris agreement, which includes 195 other nations, the EU has pledged through non-binding 'best efforts, to contain the rise in global temperatures below two degrees centigrade, by this century. This goal is in comparison to the pre-industrial levels, and would not reach any more than 1.5 degrees centigrade. EU also agreed to reduce emissions by 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030, and later upped its commitment by 55 percent; however as per 2019 studies EU's

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contribution was only 33 per cent. Though the EU's aims and progress exceed that of the US in the European Commission's Green Deal, it is still not sufficient (Allen et al 2020).

The EU has also made efforts in recognizing climate change as a security threat and debates around this topic have been going around in academic circles in the past few years. It was first mentioned at the highest level in the EU in the year 2003 at the European Security Strategy. However, it was not until March 2008, after the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), wherein the European Council on "Climate Change and International Security" received a jointly submitted report by the EU members. Climate change became a 'threat multiplier' or exacerbates already existing security risks, through this report (Remling, Barnhoorn 2021). As recently as July 2021, the EU has announced a raft of proposals on climate change that would direct it towards becoming carbon neutral by 2050. The yet-to-be-approved proposals by the EU parliament, it includes taxing fuel and effectively banning the sale of petrol and diesel-powered cars by 2040.<sup>11</sup> As the EU plans to reduce emissions by 55% from 1990 levels, the measures have been named as 'Fit for 55 packages', and as of 2019, the EU had cut emissions by 24% from the 1990 levels:<sup>12</sup>

1. Strict emission limits for cars to end new petrol and diesel vehicle sales by 2035.
2. Aviation fuel to be taxed, and a 10-year tax exemption for low-carbon alternatives.
3. A carbon border tariff would require manufacturers from non- EU countries to pay more for importing materials like steel and concrete.
4. To expand renewable energy around the bloc, there will be more ambitious targets.
5. Countries are required to quickly renovate buildings that are not deemed energy efficient.

#### **India-EU cooperation on climate change: Divergence or convergence?**

EU and India have been one of the closest partners since both parties established their diplomatic relations in the early 1960s. One of the first countries to forge diplomatic ties with the then-European Economic Community was India. It was in 1994, that the EU and India signed the cooperation agreement and their bilateral relations strengthened to better trade and economic relations, and further in 2004 at the Hague, during the 5<sup>th</sup> India-EU summit. The relationship was later upgraded to a 'Strategic Partnership'. A Joint Action Plan (JAP) of 2005 followed suit, and was upgraded in 2008, which cemented the political, economic, trade, investment and cultural cooperation between the two (MEA 2013).<sup>13</sup> The following is a statement from the Strategic Partnership in the meeting in 2004, "based on shared values and mutual respect":

*"A new strategy should be guided by the following objectives: to promote peace, stability, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance, inter alia by fighting terrorism and illicit trafficking; to co-operate on fighting poverty, inequality and social exclusion, and on sustainable development, environment protection, and climate change; and to enhance economic interaction and secure a strengthened international economic order."*<sup>14</sup>

The EU and India have attached climate change cooperation as a high priority area. This has led to both parties concentrating on energy security and poverty alleviation, and considering them as

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key to attaining sustainable development goals.<sup>15</sup> Climate change cooperation between the two parties is attached or come within the ambit of other strategic partnerships.

The world has been united by the climate change crisis; however, the measures to deal with the crisis have differed for a long time between nations. India and the European Union have their ways and means of dealing with climate change. As Dinoj Kumar Upadhyay (2014) observes, despite India and the EU recognizing the vulnerability to climate change, they have differing opinions, means and methods to tackle climate issues and negotiations. Especially, on the issue of legally binding measures for emission cuts. Radha Kumar (2013) also writes that; “the EU and India have more disagreements on climate change negotiations than agreements. India was among the first countries to negotiate the Copenhagen Accord in 2009, committing to work on mitigating climate change effects, and setting up monitoring and verification mechanisms, following which the Indian government established a National Council on Climate Change along with a National Action Plan, that reports directly to the Prime minister of India. However, the EU's adoption of airline carbon credits, which goes discriminatory to India, and the then emission cuts being discussed internationally were not proportionate to their respective scale of emissions” (Kumar, 2013). This has not only affected the EU's relations with India in particular but also with other developing countries like the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China climate partnership), as it undermines the multilateral negotiations and is in contradiction to the CBDR principles (King et al 2012).

India is also a member of the 25 members LMDC (Like Minded Developing Countries) established in the year 2012, which is opposed to protocols established by the EU, under which all parties commit to legally- binding mitigation objectives that ensure mitigation efforts to keep the global temperatures below 2°C from pre-industrial levels. Though these countries including India agree to the mitigation obligations in the form of INDCs (Indented Nationally Determined Contributions), but not in legal form, there should be partial inclusion of these protocols as legally binding (Groen 2015). EU and India are also diametrically opposed to climate change-induced agriculture and food security crises.

However, this in no way diminishes the chances of cooperation between the two parties to fight climate change. Instead, India and the EU are striving towards alternative ways like the promotion of renewable energy, clean technology transfer, research and development, and facilitating development planning and decision-making (Upadhyay, 2014)

Understanding the fact that both nations are among the main emitters of CO<sub>2</sub>, they are also major powers when it comes to climate action. Their continued partnership and cooperation on the energy dialogue that was established under the India-EU energy panel were confirmed at the March 2016 summit between the two partners. The summit also concentrated on establishing the India-EU climate change dialogue, which helped reinforce cooperation in energy, climate research and innovation, and water partnership<sup>18-19</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

While climate change issues have taken center stage globally and the geopolitics of the world is being driven by climate change, the EU and India have more convergence than divergence in fighting climate change issues. Since the 2000 Lisbon summit, annual level summits between the two partners have only strengthened their relationship. Last year's 15<sup>th</sup> EU-India summit in 2020 held virtually, adopted an ambitious Roadmap to 2025, and in the most recent 16<sup>th</sup>, EU-

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India summit meeting held virtually on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, both partners committed to protecting the planet and working towards fostering green growth. Both partners reconfirmed their commitment to immediately address the challenges that are interdependent of climate change, loss and pollution and biodiversity. They also stressed the importance of achieving the goals of the Paris agreement. There are many other aspects of cooperation between the two vis-à-vis climate change and sustainable development.

In the last decade or so the cooperation between the EU and developing countries including India has only improved as far as climate change negotiations and efforts to fight climate change are concerned. As far as the UNFCCC negotiations are concerned the EU has contributed the most and is committed to taking most actions against climate change. In pursuing this, its relations with BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China climate change alliance formed in 2009 Copenhagen Summit) countries have improved a lot, especially after the 2009 Copenhagen summit where it was sidelined, while the US and BASIC countries agreed. Though at this meeting many EU positions were considered, however till this point EU had relied on the US as a trusted partner and thought it was a key partner in negotiations and progress in climate change talks. This belief changed after the 2009 summit, as the EU's trust in BASIC countries increased as it thinks BASIC countries are more likely to take action on climate change and decreased with the US. EU is the only block with legally binding agreements to reduce GHG emissions via the Kyoto Protocol and has a very strong bargaining chip. While the challenge of environment is really difficult, based on their cooperation and strategic partnership, it's quite possible that the mentioned counties can lead the world in this regards.

**\*Footnote Cited:**

<sup>1</sup>The hypothesis was advanced by economist Simon Kuznets in the 1950s and 1960s. The hypothesis explains the increase and decrease of economic inequality by the market forces when the economy is developing.

<sup>2</sup> An approach or climate policy agreement, embodied in the Kyoto Protocol, is managed by a strong multilateral institution that is based on legally binding commitments for emission reductions and finance for as many countries as possible. In case of non-compliance, a fully-fledged top-down approach can apply monetary and trade sanctions.

<sup>3</sup> This type of approach became more prevalent after the 2009 Copenhagen accord. In this approach, various forms are possible, both within and outside the UNFCCC. The approach is based on unilateral pledges of mitigation actions.

<sup>4</sup> The international efforts to fight climate change are characterised by global good wherein all countries fight in unison against the bad effects of climate change.

<sup>5</sup> It refers to adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects or impacts.

<sup>6</sup> International Science Council, explaining the origins of the IPCC and how the world woke up to climate change, alerting politicians around the world and also led to the birth of the world's climate science assessment body. March 2018

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.eesi.org/policy/international>

<sup>8</sup> <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Published by EPRS, European Parliamentary Research Service

<sup>10</sup> CCPI refers to the efforts made by a country to effectively counter climate change.

<sup>11</sup> CRI refers to the level of exposure of a country to the risks of climate change.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, Green Paper: A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy, COM (2006) 105

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57833807>

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<sup>17</sup> JOINT WORK PROGRAMME, EU-INDIA COOPERATION ON ENERGY, CLEAN DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE, Kapur Surya Foundation, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> European parliamentary Research Service (EPRS).

<sup>20</sup> EU-India urban partnership includes seventy (70) projects involving India and the EU for a total value of 3.7 billion Euros. Indian experts get technical assistance from the EU. Metro projects in India have been financed by the EU for around 2 billion Euros.





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