

Your Excellency Mr. Soren Gade,
Esteemed Members of the Delegation for Relations with India,
Colleagues from the European External Action Service,
Friends,

I am indeed delighted to have this opportunity for a face-to-face interaction with all of you. It has been more than 20 months since my arrival as Ambassador and this is the first physical meeting of the Delegation that I am attending. Thanks to the easing of restrictions imposed due to the Covid pandemic. I hope that this becomes permanent and we return to normalcy. Let me again say that I am indeed very thankful and of course extremely delighted.

India and the European Union have been strategic partners since 2004. Our relations are not just a bilateral priority but a necessity for the larger global good. India values its multifaceted strategic partnership with the EU, which is India's leading trade and investment partner and a major source of technology and best practices. I have no hesitation in saying that the EU is India's preferred partner in its pursuit of prosperity and development. We must also remember that our partnership is one between two of the world's largest democracies and open market economies. We also share common perspectives on many regional and global issues, including a shared commitment to promoting an international rule-based order and reformed and effective multilateralism. We are also partners on issues such as climate action, clean energy, sustainable growth, digital transformation, connectivity and research and innovation. Our people-to-people contacts are also growing with over a million Indian origin people residing in the 27 EU countries.

I am particularly delighted to convey that our relations have entered a new and unprecedented intensive phase in the last two years. And this has happened despite the global pandemic. A beginning in this regard was made at the India-EU Summit in July 2020 which saw the adoption of a wide ranging joint statement and an India-EU strategic partnership roadmap for 2025. We also witnessed the signing of the Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation Agreement and extension of the Science and Technology Agreement for a further period of 5 years.

This was followed by the first ever India-EU Leaders' Meeting in May 2021 which saw Prime Minister Modi interact with all the Heads

of States and Governments of the 27 EU countries. If the political messaging in this unprecedented meeting was path breaking, the results that emanated from it were equally important. We saw once again a very strong and action oriented joint statement negotiated in a highly cordial and cooperative atmosphere between the two sides. We also witnessed the announcement of an India-EU connectivity partnership. And there was of course an announcement regarding resumption of negotiations for a trade and investment agreement. I can confirm that not many experts had predicted that we were poised for such path breaking outcomes prior to the Leaders' meeting.

At heart of the changes we are witnessing is a strong emphasis on deeper and broader relationships between India and the EU that is coming from our respective political leadership. If we look at the interactions Prime Minister Modi had with world leaders in recent months and years, a very large proportion of that would be with the EU leaders. The same is true of India's External Affairs Minister. On the EU side too the first post-pandemic Summit meeting that took place in India was with the Prime Minister of Denmark. And now we are preparing for the visit of President Ursula von der Leyen to India next month. She will be the Chief key-note speaker at the prestigious Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi. She will of course also interact with the political leadership.

The forward movement and greater intensity in our relations are also visible in the official level dialogues and interactions. Our decision to launch a maritime security dialogue in July 2020 has seen 2 meetings of the dialogue since then. Our decision to have security and defence consultations will lead to the first such meeting later this year. We also witnessed the first ever India-EU Naval Exercises in June last year. In other conventional areas too such as cyber security, counter terrorism and non-proliferation and disarmament, regular interaction and stronger outcomes have become routine.

As regards political dialogues, we have had the Foreign Policy Consultations, Strategic Partnership Review Meeting and regular Ministerial level consultations. Our desire to cooperate in Africa has also seen the first ever bilateral dialogue on Africa earlier this year. We have also resumed our Human Rights Dialogue after a gap of 8 years. Closer interaction between our Delegations in Geneva has also been institutionalised. The EU's Human Rights Envoy has been invited to the Raisina Dialogue in April this year.

Our development-oriented thematic dialogues too are taking place in keeping with our new priorities. We saw the first ever climate dialogue held last year, 5 years after the partnership was announced in 2016. Similarly, the energy panel and its various sub-groups met for the first time last year since 2016.

The resumption of our trade and investment negotiations has also been a result of intensive exchanges between the 2 sides. Various working groups on trade and related matters met multiple times last year. They were monitored and supervised through the high level trade and investment dialogue which took place in February and April last year at the level of Ministers and Commissioners. Our close exchanges also extend to areas such as WTO reforms and agenda, on which we have already seen several interactions.

Excellencies,

Before I conclude, let me make 2 more points. First, when we speak of trade and investment negotiations, we are looking at a new strategic approach at least on the Indian side. This has seen India initiating negotiations with multiple partners, mostly those which are like-minded democracies and open market economies. We are also pursuing them with unprecedented speed and intensity. For example, our FTA with UAE was concluded in 3 months; with the UK we have already held 2 full rounds of negotiations having initiated the process in mid-January this year. We are also very close to concluding our FTA with Australia; and we are pursuing similarly with other partners such as Canada, Israel, GCC and others. The point I am making is that our interest in trade and investment agreements with the EU is part of a broader strategy; even if the EU as India's principal trade partner is perhaps the most important element of this. We are keen and ready to move forward towards full-fledged negotiations and earliest possible conclusion of all the agreements.

Second, India's record on climate is often not recognised sufficiently. Despite being a developing country with millions in abject poverty, we have made remarkable progress on our Paris commitments. In many respects, we have already met our commitments made at Paris in 2015. It is not surprising therefore that an EU Think Tank has rated India's performance very highly. It has stated that India is the only G-20 country which is 2 degree goal compliant. At the COP-26, too, our Prime Minister announced several new commitments. This includes achieving 500 gigawatt of energy

from non-fossil sources and meeting 50% of energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030. We also pledged to reduce the total projected carbon emission by 1 billion tonnes between 2021 and 2030, and to reduce the carbon intensity of the economy by less than 45% by 2030. On top of all this, we pledged that India would become carbon neutral and achieve net zero emissions by 2070. These are highly ambitious commitments which would require an unprecedented level of investments. For this reason, the Prime Minister called on the developed world to also raise its ambition on making climate financing available to the tune of one trillion dollars. The reason I have mentioned this is because I think with India's highly ambitious sustainable development pathway, we need the EU as the global leader in the domain to make the greatest contributions. India's pledge to reach net zero by 2070 would mean that India has 50 years to achieve its peak emissions and also graduate to carbon neutrality. All this while India will expect to grow at a rapid pace to eradicate poverty and achieve a higher level of development. In contrast, the EU reached its peak emissions in 1990 and would take 60 years to become net zero. This will confirm that not only is India's pledge highly ambitious but also deeply challenging. We hope to work with you in making all of this possible.

I thank you once again for your patience. And I remain grateful for the opportunity. I look forward to continued interaction.
