

Good morning/afternoon

Let me first thank Ananta Aspen Centre, Montaine institute and Orient Foundation for the invitation. Really a pleasure to join all of you.

Since the time is short, I would restrict my remarks to two or three broad observations.

First, India and EU ties are entering or have already entered its most intensive phase so far in its evolution. This is reflected first and foremost in the highly successful July 2020 Virtual Summit and the subsequent unprecedented leaders' meeting in May 2021. We have also seen in the last two years our External Affairs Minister being invited twice by the EU Foreign Affairs Council to address the EU Foreign Ministers collectively. First such address was in February 2020 and the second one in September this year at the Gymnich Meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council which was focussed on our respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific. Beyond the leaders level, we have seen almost all of the over 30 dialogue mechanisms meet in the last one year - some of them more than once. Overall the point is that over the past decade, it would be hard to place a 12 to 18 month period of such high intensity in engagements and outcomes between India and the EU.

Second, we are witnessing a number of firsts in our relationship. The leaders meeting at Porto in May this year was itself a first in terms of its format between India and the EU. Even for the EU this was the first such meeting with any partner with a predefined and structured agenda. In the defence and security realm, too, where we have been slow in taking off, we had the first ever maritime security dialogue between India and EU in January this year. We also had our first ever naval exercises in June earlier this year. On the climate agenda, which is now so central, especially after COP-26 this month, we saw the first ever meeting of the India-EU clean energy and climate dialogue earlier this year even though the partnership declaration in this regard was issued way back in 2016. We also saw a resumption of the human rights dialogue after a long hiatus of 8 years earlier this year. And of course there is the most important announcement coming out of the Porto Summit which is the resumption of FTA and Investment

Protection Negotiations after a gap of 8 years - what, as Ambassador Kumar has mentioned, could be the engine of the relationship. First discussions to resume formal negotiations are expected shortly. Overall, the many firsts that I have enumerated clearly indicate a renewed focus and energy being injected in the relationship on both sides.

Third, the relationship is also acquiring a new level of focus especially in terms of the identified priority areas of cooperation. The strategic partnership roadmap of 2025 agreed at the July 2020 Summit provides for the widest possible range of agenda between India and EU. In fact, in this regard, the EU-India relationship is the only one which is comparable in terms of range and depth to the US-India relationship. But what is new is that the EU-India relationship is also acquiring stronger strategic moorings by emphasising on a narrower range of high priority issues. Broadly, there are four such areas.

As I have mentioned earlier, our security relationship is the first among them. Apart from the maritime security dialogue and the first ever naval exercises, we are looking forward to first ever security and defence consultations and exploring possibilities for greater defence industrial relationships within the framework of EU's PESCO mechanism.

Second is the climate. There is greater appreciation of India's achievements and commitments within the EU on Climate and this is leading into more practical forms of cooperation some of which are already developed and others being initiated. These include areas such as renewable energy, green hydrogen and decarbonisation of the industrial sectors.

The third such area is digital. We are witnessing a new interest in the EU in Indian success stories in human centric digitalization. These in turn are also translating into a shared desire to foster stronger business partnerships in the digital domain. The newly established task force on artificial intelligence, initiation of a dialogue on high performance computing and plans to organize a digital investment forum with a focus on startups in March next year is adding new

dimensions to our existing digital engagements in areas of cyber security, regulatory issues and data protection.

The last of the quad is the connectivity partnership that India and EU announced at Porto. Along with the EU's strategy on Indo-Pacific, it imparts an important strategic dimension to our economic engagements in areas such as digital, energy, transport and people to people connectivity. Apart from bilateral connectivity it also envisages cooperation in third countries particularly in central and south-east Asia and Africa.

The above four areas were also the four principal agenda items during the leaders meeting in May. This clearly underlines that these four are the most important defining areas of engagement and cooperation between India and the EU today.

I think I should stop here. My thanks once again to the organizers for the invitation and I also look forward to the discussion today and tomorrow on the different panels.

Thank you !