

# A Plea for Global Cooperation

H.E. Ambassador Jaideep Mazumdar spoke to SOCIETY about India's commonalities with Austria, its cooperation with the EU and the general necessity of global collaboration.

**Last year, India and Austria celebrated 70 years of bilateral relationships – how would you describe the current relations between the two countries?**

Our bilateral relations are excellent – in the past few months, there have been substantive telephonic conversations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Van der Bellen and between our two Foreign Ministers. Over 130 Austrian companies are present in India. Just recently – even at the height of COVID-19 pre-occupations – an Austrian company won a large hydropower contract in India. But certainly, much more needs to be done and can be done. For India, Austria is an important voice in Europe. Its historical as well as current linkages with countries in central and Eastern Europe are strong. As two free and open societies, as two countries wedded to democracy, the rule of law, promotion of individual liberties and committed to multilateralism, we have great convergence in how we see the world even from our different situations.

**Do you think that there will be any long-lasting changes due to the Covid-19 crisis regarding the international diplomatic work? What are some of lessons that we can draw from the pandemic?**

The pandemic has had very contradictory impacts. Ironically enough, while countries shut themselves off physically from one another, it became clear that no country could tackle this pandemic by itself. The need for global cooperation is felt more than ever. The rapid spread of the pandemic showed how globalized we are today. And that it is inevitable – despite impulses to turn back, we cannot turn back, and should not attempt to do so.

Nevertheless, there is recognition of the need to diversify the world's production capabilities and value chains. No country can produce all that it needs but at the same time countries should not be over-dependent on one source. That paradigm has changed for ever. Free and open societies are by nature more vulnerable to pandemics. At the same time, it is important to have free flow of information and openness in order to prevent pandemics. All over the world, governance has suffered due to preoccupation of governments with the pandemic. However, there has been a massive resurgence of the role of governments which will continue into the near future. Working from home is no longer an exception or a luxury. Its impact on traffic and the environment is there for all to see.

While the pandemic has spawned a new term – social distancing – social cohesion and societal support especially for the vulnerable has become that much more important. We are unable to meet friends and colleagues face to face but it has become easier for friends across continents to meet and interact in virtual space – even in large groups, and to have Summits between leaders and groups of leaders in virtual format – something unthinkable earlier. All of these have their impact on the role of diplomats and the work that they do.

**On July 15, 2020, an EU-India Summit via video conference took place, which ended with a joint statement suggesting that the strategic partnership between the two parties should be further strengthened. How much potential for improvement is there still?**

The 15th Summit between India and the EU was held between Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council and Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. The India-EU Strategic Partnership is based on shared principles and values of democracy, freedom, rule of law and respect for human rights. Its



aim is to deliver concrete benefits for the people in India and the EU; promote effective multilateralism and a rules-based multilateral order with the UN & WTO at its core; cooperation to reinforce international security; strengthen preparedness and response for global health emergencies; enhance global economic stability and inclusive growth; implement SDGs; protect the climate and the environment. Both sides agreed to intensify cooperation in response to the coronavirus epidemic including the availability accessibility and affordability of COVID-19 tools.

The European side greatly appreciated the timely assistance provided by India in terms of supply of medicines to EU countries. Prime Minister Modi announced that the development of a COVID-19 vaccine should be declared as a global common good which was accepted by the EU. The EU is India's largest trading partner for goods with trade exceeding US\$100 billion and a service trade of about US\$40 billion. The EU is one of the largest investors in India with cumulative investments

of over US\$91 billion. The EU is also an important source for technology and innovation. The leaders agreed to establish a regular high-level dialogue at ministerial level to provide guidance to the bilateral trade and investment relations. The leaders welcomed the ongoing cooperation under the India-EU clean energy and climate partnership. India and the EU will enhance their partnership in support of sustainable modernization through cooperation in clean energy transition, resource efficiency and circular economy. Both sides will engage on 5G and artificial intelligence including to promote global standards and to foster their safe and ethical deployment. An EU-India Joint Working Group on Artificial Intelligence was proposed by the EU and welcomed by India. Both sides will also jointly promote a transparent, viable, inclusive, sustainable and rules-based approach to connectivity to ensure that projects are environmentally, socially and physically sustainable and provide a level playing field for businesses. They adopted the Strategic Partnership Roadmap to

2025 in diverse fields such as foreign policy, security, investment, economic collaboration, cooperation on innovative and climate friendly solutions, digital technologies and connectivity. The leaders agreed to launch a dialogue on maritime security and consultations on security and defence. The leaders reiterated their commitment to human rights, including gender equality and women empowerment. The India-EU Science and Technology Agreement was renewed for another five years and this will enable continuation of scientific projects and research exchanges. The Summit outcomes emphasize the congruence in thinking and ambition in a very wide number of areas that are of importance for both India and the EU. Both sides have shared values and objectives and have a great complementarity that make together for a great partnership. The Summit has identified the breadth and depth of cooperation between India and the EU that both sides recognize as essential for the world of tomorrow.