EU-India relationship: a strategic partnership

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Emilio **MENÉNDEZ DE VALLE** (PES, ES) on EU-India relations: A Strategic Partnership. (please see the summary of 13/07/2005.) Parliament warmly welcomed the agreement on a strategic partnership between the EU and India, which confers on relations between the EU and India an importance equal to those with China, Russia, Japan, the USA and Canada. However, the goals outlined in the ground-breaking strategic partnership must be properly funded with new resources in order to be able to fulfil our commitments and aspirations. Any additional resources needed to carry out the goals of the strategic partnership should be not sourced from, but additional to, existing EU projects and programmes in India. In terms of human development indicators, India has made considerable progress and has changed to some extent from being a beneficiary to a donor of development aid. Parliament voiced its concern, however, at the persistently high number of Indians who still have to live in absolute poverty and are deprived of all rights. It went on to recognise the legitimate aspirations of the USA to establish a strategic alliance with India, but also the need for a multipolar world. There are significant advantages that European know-how and sensibility may offer India.

Economic issues: India and the EU share the view that trade, investment and free competition are key factors in economic development. They also share the view that, if such development is to be harmonious and equitable, account must be taken of fundamental social needs which strengthen economic and social cohesion. Parliament urges the Indian Government to pay heed to these matters as it embarks on the vast task of development. It also urged the Indian private sector, which has benefited from the full confidence of the government and is playing a key role in the economic measures and plans drawn up by the government, to display the utmost social sensitivity when participating in these plans.

With regard to the abolition of quantitative restrictions on textile and clothing imports, Parliament recalled that India is expected to benefit particularly from this measure. It hoped that India would abstain from any unfair trade practices towards the EU industry, so that the EU in turn will not be forced to have recourse to the appropriate trade defence instruments consistent with WTO rules. The EU should consider it important to encourage India in regard to the implementation of international labour standards, in particular through the comprehensive ratification and practical application of the ILO Conventions with particular regard to child labour.

Development: Parliament expressed its serious concern at the spread of AIDS in the country. It called on the Indian Government to declare a firm commitment to tackling this problem as a priority. It understood that the laws on intellectual property rights recently adopted by the Indian Parliament might have adverse effects on the production capacity of the Indian pharmaceutical industry, which has been a source of affordable medicines, particularly for AIDS. Parliament believed that the law should allow derogations for medicines which are of public interest, such as those used to combat AIDS, cancer, malaria, tuberculosis and hepatitis. Half of the patients who take antiviral medicines in poor countries are using medication produced in India. The EU should support India in further implementing its intellectual property laws in a manner that will avoid barriers to the production and export of essential medicines.

Environment and agriculture: The increasing environmental destruction in India is a constantly growing problem, particularly for the poor population, in terms of water pollution, land degradation, air pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity. Parliament stressed the particular urgency of pressing ahead with EU cooperation with India in this field. It urged India, which has signed the Kyoto Protocol but which enjoys a temporary derogation from certain commitments, to show greater sensitivity to the question of global warming.

Human rights: Parliament recognised that, for centuries, India has preserved a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and linguistically diverse society within its territory, offering an example to the West and to Europe. It called on the Indian Government to guard particularly against the emergence of tensions among communities, which would jeopardise the country's secular heritage of tolerance and coexistence. It went on to ask for reform of the exceedingly slow and antiquated judicial system, the abolition of the use of the death penalty in its judicial system, the ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, the ratification of the conventions on the abolition of child labour and on the promotion of collective bargaining.

International situation: Parliament recognised that India has played a major role in conflict prevention and peacekeeping, for example in Afghanistan. It called upon India, as the largest member of the SAARC, to take a lead in developing SAARC regional cooperation further. It went on to note the rapprochement between Iran, Pakistan and India, as a result of which consideration is being given to the building of a gas pipeline from Iran to India passing through Pakistani territory. Support should be given to projects of this kind, which are essentially peaceful in nature, benefit the peoples of the region and create a network of mutual interests deterring the prospect of conflict between them, and encourage regional stability. Parliament welcomed the signs of progress in Indo-Pakistani bilateral talks on Kashmir and other mutual displays of flexibility, such as the recently launched bus service between the two, Indian and Pakistani, parts of the territory, and the visits by the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs to Pakistan and the President of Pakistan to India.

Finally, Parliament urged India, together with Pakistan and Israel, to become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is an irreplaceable multilateral instrument for maintaining and consolidating international peace.