

# OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S NEW PUSH FOR STRONGER TIES WITH EUROPE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Europe, European Union (EU) and India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi ended his tour to Europe this week by [dropping in on French President Emmanuel Macron](#), who was re-elected recently. What was billed a simple “tete-a-tete” during a “working visit” turned out to be a comprehensive discussion on bilateral, regional and international issues, with a 30 paragraph-long joint statement. As with his other stops in Germany and Denmark for the [Nordic Summit](#), as well as the visit to India by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen the week before, the Ukraine war remained at the top of the agenda. The joint statement records their differences on the issue. However, they also discussed mitigating the war’s “knock-on” effects, and Mr. Macron invited India to cooperate with the Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM) initiative for food security in the most vulnerable countries, particularly in terms of wheat exports. However, as the severe heatwave has damaged India’s crops, the Government will have to do some hard thinking on its promises of wheat supply to the rest of the world at a time when fears of shortages are sending wheat prices soaring. Climate change was another key issue during the stopovers in Berlin and Copenhagen. France and India, that worked closely for the success of the Paris climate accord, and co-founded the International Solar Alliance in 2015, are ready to take it to the next level — setting up industrial partnerships to build integrated supply chains in solar energy production for markets in Europe and Asia. There was also a bilateral strategic dialogue on space issues, which will build on their six-decade-long partnership in the field of space — a contested area now with China, Russia and the U.S. stepping up hostilities in this frontier.

India and France have decades of an unusually productive partnership given that neither has allowed other relationships to play a role in the bilateral. This has been the basis of their strong defence partnership. In 1998, France stood out as a western country that did not judge or impose sanctions on India for its nuclear tests; in 2008, it was the first country to conclude a civil nuclear deal with India after the NSG passed a waiver allowing India to access nuclear fuel and technology. It would be a fitting tribute to the consistency of the relationship if the French bid for six nuclear power plants in Maharashtra’s Jaitapur makes some headway now, more than 12 years after the original MoU was signed and a year after the French company, EDF, last year submitted an offer to the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. It is however disappointing that Mr. Modi’s visit did not give as much fillip to talks on the India-EU FTA (suspended since 2013) as seen in India’s other FTA talks. This was the second such tour where Mr. Modi travelled to Germany and France on the same visit — a significant gesture that he recognises the importance of both in India’s new push for stronger ties with Europe.

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