

Opening Statement

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

‘Fifth India-EU Forum on Multilateralism’

Sapru House, New Delhi

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Dr. Antonio Missiroli, Director, EUISS, Ambassador Jaimini Bhagwati, Ms Anne Marchal, First Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to India, Excellencies, friends, ladies and gentlemen,



(L-R) Dr. Eva Gross, Senior Analyst, EUISS, Dr. Antonio Missiroli, Director, EUISS, Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, DG, ICWA, Ms Anne Marchal, First Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to India, Ambassador Jaimini Bhagwati, RBI Chair Professor at ICRIER & Member Advisory Council IDFC.

2. We are pleased to host the India-EU Forum on Effective Multilateralism. This dialogue takes place on the fifth occasion during 2009-2014. Through sustained mutual collaboration, the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) have piloted this exercise. It continues because both the institutions and their target constituencies have found it to be useful and productive. It is a premier, comprehensive and forward-looking initiative that enables us to look together at the world, the regions of our common interest and the bilateral relationship between EU and India.

3. We met last in Brussels in October 2012. On that occasion, we launched a joint publication entitled “The EU-India partnership: time to go strategic?” The question this

interesting book raised remains valid even today. The key conclusion of our deliberations was that, while our strategic partnership has registered progress, it was yet to realise its optimal potential due to a variety of reasons. Our combined wisdom was that both sides needed to exert more and invest more in order to deepen the India-EU strategic partnership, although at that time our optimism for the short term seemed rather limited.

4. Now a year and half year later, we find ourselves in a deep flux. Fuelled by economic growth and political resurgence, India continues to create space for itself suiting its national interests in a multipolar Asia and multipolar world. Besides, it is now in the middle of an unprecedented national election. The unique features of the election – the size of the electorate, the addition of over 100 million new voters, the enthusiasm of the youth, the employment of social media tools etc. as well as the range of complex issues and challenges facing the nation – are there for everyone to see and assess. To many of us, a critical question is: how will the contours, direction and priorities of India’s foreign policy change after the elections?

5. On the EU side, various developments such as the lingering impact of the Euro zone crisis, a seeming impasse in European integration project, UK’s new thinking, realignment of equations within the EU and, above all, the unfolding burdens of Ukraine in deep crisis, need to be factored in. How does the EU view itself and how do others view it in the backdrop of recent developments is a very important question for us to discuss.

6. At a time when the global community is faced with multiple challenges ranging from political and economic to non-traditional ones – international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organised crimes, maritime security as well as cyber, energy, food and water security and climate change, it is of utmost importance that our two institutions – EUISS and ICWA-- encourage and facilitate a candid and constructive exchange of views at the level of academics and strategic community. We remain fully committed to “enhancing mutual understanding and friendship” through “the promotion of friendly, cooperation and collaborative institutional relations” as our MoU, signed in October 2009, aptly put it.

7. As our agreed Agenda indicates, we shall cover much ground in the next two days, reviewing the international situation, regional issues, and the latest trends in bilateral cooperation. The fundamental driver will be the same as before: our shared desire to deepen the strategic partnership between EU and India.



Participants of the Fifth India-EU Forum

8. I sincerely hope that the distinguished experts assembled here and those who will join us in later sessions will come up with practical ideas – new and old – so that our policy makers could reflect on them and, hopefully, utilise them suitably as they prepare a new roadmap to take the India-EU relationship to newer heights.

Thank you very much for your attention.
