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India-EU Security and Defence Partnership 2026 — Strategic Convergence in a Multipolar World

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SUBJECTS COVERED**IR SECURITY & DEFENCE****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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WHY IN NEWS

At the 16th EU-India Summit on January 27, 2026, India and the European Union signed their first-ever comprehensive Security and Defence Partnership — only the third such agreement the EU has concluded with any Asian country — marking a significant deepening of a relationship long focused on trade and development aid.

THE 16TH EU-INDIA SUMMIT — CONTEXT

The **16th EU-India Summit** was held on **January 27, 2026** in New Delhi, coinciding with the EU leadership's attendance as **chief guests at India's 77th Republic Day** (January 26, 2026) — the first time collective EU leadership has served as Republic Day chief guest.

EU delegation:

António Costa — President of the European Council (first Portuguese to hold this office; assumed October 2024)

Ursula von der Leyen — President of the European Commission (second term; German; assumed December 2024)

Indian side: Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**, External Affairs Minister **Dr. S. Jaishankar**

The choice of the EU as Republic Day chief guest was itself diplomatically significant — India has traditionally invited heads of individual state governments (US President, French President, Russian President, Indonesian President, etc.). Inviting the EU collective leadership signals India's recognition of the EU as a geopolitical actor, not merely an economic bloc.

THE SECURITY AND DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP — WHAT WAS SIGNED

Signatories: EAM **Dr. S. Jaishankar** and EU **High Representative / Vice President Kaja Kallas**

Formal title: *India-EU Security and Defence Partnership*

What it establishes:

Annual EU-India Security and Defence Dialogue — institutionalised ministerial-level consultations replacing ad hoc interactions

Five cooperation pillars:

- Maritime security (Indian Ocean, protection of sea lanes, anti-piracy)
- Defence industry and technology (co-development, co-production, joint R&D)
- Cyber security and hybrid threats (information operations, critical infrastructure protection)
- Space security (satellite monitoring, space situational awareness)
- Counter-terrorism (intelligence sharing, financial flows, deradicalisation)

Security of Information Agreement — to be negotiated; would enable exchange of classified intelligence between India and EU member states

“Towards 2030: India-EU Joint Strategic Agenda” — a 5-pillar, 5-year blueprint for bilateral relations

What makes this extraordinary: The EU has only two previous Security and Defence Partnerships in Asia:

- Japan** (signed 2023)
- South Korea** (signed 2024)
- India** (signed 2026) — **third in Asia**

No comparable agreement exists between the EU and China, despite China being the EU’s largest trading partner. The India partnership is a deliberate strategic signal.

EU FOREIGN POLICY ARCHITECTURE — UPSC BACKGROUND

Understanding why this matters requires understanding how the EU conducts foreign policy:

EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP):

Established under the **Maastricht Treaty (1992)** and strengthened by the **Lisbon Treaty (2007)**
 Decisions require **unanimous** agreement among EU member states (unlike trade, which can be by qualified majority)

The EU’s foreign policy representative is the **High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy** (currently Kaja Kallas, Estonia) who also serves as a Vice President of the European Commission

EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP):

Military and civilian missions authorised under CSDP (e.g., EUNAVFOR — anti-piracy in Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean)

Not a mutual defence pact like NATO — EU member states are not automatically obliged to defend each other (Article 42.7 is a solidarity clause, weaker than NATO's Article 5)

Key EU defence initiatives post-Ukraine 2022: European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA); Strategic Compass (2022) — EU's first integrated military strategy

WHY INDIA AND THE EU NEED EACH OTHER

India's perspective — why the EU matters:

Trade: EU is India's largest trading partner (collective) — bilateral trade ~USD 140 billion annually; India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTEPA) under negotiation since 2022 (paused 2013; relaunched after 9 years)

Technology: EU is a major source of dual-use technology (semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, green tech) not subject to US ITAR restrictions

Strategic balance: India's strategic doctrine of "multi-alignment" means building relationships with all major poles — the EU joining the India-Japan-Australia-US (Quad) + Russia-China-India (SCO) orbit adds a critical Western option without choosing sides

Climate finance: EU is India's largest source of climate and green finance

EU's perspective — why India matters:

Supply chains: Reducing over-dependence on China requires alternative manufacturing bases — India (with 1.4 billion people and growing manufacturing capability) is the most viable alternative

Indo-Pacific access: India controls key Indian Ocean Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs); EU needs reliable partners for its Indo-Pacific Strategy (adopted 2021)

Technology and minerals: India's growing semiconductor, rare earth, and critical mineral ecosystem matters to EU's strategic autonomy goals

Democratic alignment: India and the EU share democratic governance values — differentiating both from authoritarian competitors

THE INDIA-EU TRADE AGREEMENT — STILL PENDING

One of the most significant outstanding items between India and the EU is the **Comprehensive Trade and Investment Agreement (CTIA)** — negotiations commenced in 2022 after a 9-year pause (originally started 2007; suspended 2013 due to disagreements on investment protection, automobiles, and services).

Key sticking points:

Labour and environmental standards: EU demands that India meet ILO (International Labour Organization) standards and climate commitments as a condition for preferential tariffs

Agricultural market access: India protective of its farm sector; EU wants access for European food products

Automobiles: EU auto companies want access to India’s growing market; India protects its domestic auto industry

Services and visas: India wants liberalised movement for skilled workers (Mode 4 services); EU is politically cautious

The 2026 Security and Defence Partnership creates political goodwill that may accelerate the trade agreement – a pattern seen in India-UAE (CEPA signed 2022 after strategic alignment) and India-UK (CEPA completed 2025 after strategic partnership).

INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY — SHARED FRAMEWORK

Both India and the EU have articulated **Indo-Pacific strategies** that are structurally compatible:

Principle	India’s Indo-Pacific vision	EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021)
UNCLOS	Rules-based maritime order under UNCLOS	UNCLOS as binding framework
China	Strategic competition, some cooperation	De-risking from China
ASEAN	ASEAN centrality	ASEAN as partner
Trade	Open, rules-based, diversified	Open connectivity
Multilateralism	Reform of multilateral institutions	Multilateral rule-based order

The convergence is not identical — India engages with Russia significantly more than the EU is comfortable with (India-Russia S-400 deal, oil imports during Ukraine conflict). But on maritime security, supply chain resilience, and counter-terrorism, the alignment is sufficient for a functional partnership.

BROADER SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

The India-EU Security and Defence Partnership, alongside India’s Quad membership (2021), India-UK CEPA (2025), India-US iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology), and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC, 2023), represents a systematic architecture-building that positions India as a bridging power between the Western and non-Western worlds.

India’s traditional **Non-Alignment 2.0** (or “Strategic Autonomy”) is not abandonment of independence — it is simultaneous engagement with all major poles that maximises India’s leverage and options. The EU partnership extends this architecture to the European dimension.

UPSC RELEVANCE

16th EU-India Summit (January 27, 2026, New Delhi); India-EU Security & Defence Partnership (first ever; Jaishankar + Kaja Kallas); EU chief guests at 77th Republic Day; António Costa (European Council President); Ursula von der Leyen (European Commission President); Kaja Kallas (EU HR/VP; Estonia); EU's 3rd Asian defence pact (after Japan 2023, South Korea 2024); CFSP (Maastricht Treaty 1992; Lisbon Treaty 2007); CSDP; EUNAVFOR; EU Indo-Pacific Strategy 2021; India-EU trade bilateral ~USD 140 billion; CTIA (Comprehensive Trade and Investment Agreement) negotiations.

*India-EU relations — historical trajectory, trade, security; EU as an actor in international relations; India's "multi-alignment" foreign policy; how the defence partnership complements India's other strategic partnerships; comparison with Quad, SCO, BRICS — India's strategic positioning in multiple groupings; Indo-Pacific as an emerging strategic space. **GS-3:** EU-India trade negotiations — CTIA sticking points; FDI from EU; dual-use technology transfers; critical minerals.*

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

16TH EU-INDIA SUMMIT (JAN 27, 2026):

Venue: **New Delhi**; Date: **January 27, 2026**

Indian side: PM **Narendra Modi** + EAM **Dr. S. Jaishankar**

EU side: **António Costa** (European Council President) + **Ursula von der Leyen** (EC President)

Kaja Kallas: **EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / VP** (Estonian)

Republic Day 2026: **77th Republic Day**; Chief Guests: **EU leadership** (first time collective EU)

INDIA-EU SECURITY & DEFENCE PARTNERSHIP:

Type: First-ever comprehensive Security and Defence Partnership between India and EU

EU's similar Asia pacts: Japan (2023) + South Korea (2024) + **India (2026)** = 3rd in Asia

Five pillars: Maritime security; Defence industry; Cyber/hybrid threats; Space; Counter-terrorism

Annual dialogue institutionalised; Security of Information Agreement to be negotiated

“Towards 2030 Joint Strategic Agenda” adopted alongside

EU FOREIGN POLICY INSTITUTIONS:

CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy): Maastricht Treaty **1992**; unanimous decisions

CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy): Military/civilian missions

Lisbon Treaty: **2007** — strengthened CFSP; created HR/VP role; European Council permanent president

European Council President: **António Costa** (term: 2024–2029)

European Commission President: **Ursula von der Leyen** (2nd term: 2024–2029)

INDIA-EU TRADE:

Bilateral trade: ~**USD 140 billion/year** (EU = India's largest collective trading partner)

CTIA: Comprehensive Trade and Investment Agreement; negotiations relaunched **2022** (suspended 2013–2022)

Sticking points: Labour standards, agricultural access, automobiles, services/visas

EU INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY:

Adopted: **2021**; Principles: UNCLOS, ASEAN centrality, open trade, multilateralism

INDIA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP ARCHITECTURE:

Quad (India-US-Japan-Australia): Security/supply chains in Indo-Pacific

SCO (India-Russia-China-Central Asia): Eurasian multilateralism

BRICS: Development-focused South-South cooperation

iCET (India-US): Critical and emerging technology

IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor): G20 New Delhi 2023

India-EU Security & Defence Partnership (2026): New European pillar

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

EUNAVFOR: EU Naval Force; operates anti-piracy mission “Atalanta” in Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean (since 2008)

NATO Article 5 vs EU Article 42.7: NATO has stronger collective defence obligation than EU's solidarity clause

Non-Alignment 2.0: India's updated concept of strategic autonomy — not isolation but multi-directional engagement

Sources: EEAS, MEA India, Indian Express, InsightsIAS

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