

Europe's Right-Wing Surge: A Focus on India's Strategic Position

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The outcome of the European Union elections in June 2024 has drastically altered Europe's political situation. Europe's rightward pull has added greater uncertainty to the future of Europe as it falls under the grip of the right-wing populist surge. The emergence of right-wing populism is not only confined to Europe, but the ideology is gaining support globally resulting in more right-wing governments. Amidst this political realignment, the future of European and global geopolitics remains uncertain, as the long-term implications of this ideological shift are yet to be fully unravel.

The emergence of right-wing parties in Europe raises concerns for the European Union's internal cohesion and external relations. They pose a significant challenge to the Eurozone's stability and unity. Should these parties adopt isolationist policies; Europe could fortify itself in a manner that detrimentally impacts the smaller nations within it. The emergence of right-wing parties in Europe can be attributed to various factors, including ongoing economic challenges in the Eurozone and crises in neighbouring regions. However, it is worthy to note that this right-wing political shift has been a steady process rather than an abrupt change in public opinion. Europe has faced several crises since the EU's inception, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, and the tensions in the West Asia being among the recent and impactful events shaping its political landscape.

The EU's perceived failure in handling these crises has provided an opening for right-wing populists to gain support from the general public. These populists have pushed their agenda-a promise to put national interests first instead of allowing a supranational authority to take control of the European countries. For example, the National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen in France, has capitalized on economic grievances and anti-immigration sentiments, that has further bolstered the far-right narratives. Similarly, Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, has used nationalist rhetoric and anti-immigration policies, positioning himself as the protector of Hungarian sovereignty (V. Ntousas & C. Volintiru, 2024).

The rightward shift of the European Union parliament will have significant implications across economic, security and environmental policies. This emergence of the right wing influence reflects a growing public support for more protectionist policies among European voters, potentially reshaping EU's approach to immigration, trade, and international cooperation. Rather than focusing on a more integrated world, the right-wing parties promote the preservation of national sovereignty thus reducing the power of the supra-national entity, and stricter controls and restrictions on immigration, promotion of nationalist and populist ideologies that emphasise the interests of the natives and perceives refugees and immigrants as threats. However, no country or region like Europe can operate in isolation due to the forces of globalisation. Europe's changed policies would not only impact itself but will consequently affect nations like India. Whether these influences ultimately prove advantageous or disadvantageous for India remains a subject of debate, highlighting the complex and far-reaching consequences of Europe's political realignment.

The assertive emphasis on the interests of the native populations and the treatment of refugees and immigrants as "other" raises concerns about racism and discrimination towards immigrant and refugee communities within these European states. It also challenges the core values of the EU of freedom and equality within the Eurozone. There has been an increased use of the slogan 'Europe for the Europeans' by conservative citizens in major European cities indicating the rise of nationalistic sentiment in Europe. This shift in attitude could harm the immigrants and the Indian diaspora residing in various EU countries who could increasingly face discrimination and racism.

Protectionist policies in trade would likely lead to higher trade barriers, increased non-tariff barriers, and stricter regulatory measures. It has potential to complicate trade between the EU and its foreign partners. A prime example of this shift can be seen in Italy, where Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has adopted policies that prioritise home interests over the integrated framework of the EU (Carlo, 2023). The Italian government has implemented strict immigration policies, going so far as to decline entry to asylum seekers. The rejection of these asylum seekers has put Italy in hot waters with France and directly challenges the EU's commitment to shared responsibility in handling migration issues (Decode, 2023). Such policies not only affect intra-EU relations but also signal a potential shift in the bloc's approach to international cooperation.

Building on these trends, European countries have been implementing diverse policy changes in response to recent global challenges, often diverging from traditional EU approaches. Germany, for instance, has sought to diversify its energy sources, rejecting the almost completed Nord Stream 2 project in the wake of the Russia's attack on Ukraine. Italy's actions under the Meloni administration extend beyond immigration, with the government supporting local businesses through tax breaks and subsidies, and vowing to address debts and deficits incurred during the COVID -19 (France 24, 2023). This deviation from EU fiscal targets could potentially cause financial instability for the entire EU. It could further lead to fragmentation within the bloc and could hinder the single market framework that serves as the foundation of the EU's economic policies (I. Krastev & M. Leonard, 2024).

The impact of EU policy shifts on international relations is particularly evident in the case of India. India has faced criticism from the Western countries, including from EU members, for purchasing oil from Russia following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This situation exemplifies how the EU's evolving stance on trade and geopolitics affects its relationships with non-EU countries. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, recently stated that while the EU does not object India benefiting from cheaper Russian oil, they will curb the entry of Indian refined oil into Europe. This measure is part of broader efforts to economically isolate Russia, complementing existing sanctions (Jazeera, 2023). This decision poses a significant challenge for India, as refined oil is a major export commodity. However, while these policies may be detrimental to certain Indian export sectors of India, like pharmaceuticals and refined oil, they might prove beneficial for India. For example, the emphasis on market access and deregulation in some right-leaning EU states could align with India's economic priorities. This alignment might create new avenues for cooperation, potentially offsetting losses in other areas. There are other dimensions to the larger EU-India partnership. The recent Free Trade Agreement signed between certain states like Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein and India in 2023 has significantly reduced tariffs

on exports and thus make Indian goods more competitive in the EU market. This has thus proved to be beneficial to India's exports. Despite this, the overall impact of the shifting policies on India-EU relations remains complex and multifaceted.

Diverging national interests between India and the EU has caused significant tensions. The EU perceives Russia as a threat to its security and on the other hand Russia is a long-standing ally of India. It complicates the relationship between the EU and India. This could cause intense complex geopolitical tensions. India might have to strike a balance between its foreign policy and national interest to maintain bilateral ties with Russia that could influence India's commercial and financial engagements with the EU. The recent comments of the EU regarding the domestic affairs of India have further increased tensions.

The core ideologies of the right-wing may increase tensions as both India and the EU could prioritize their national interests. It has potential to cause a shift in the geopolitical landscape given that India is an emerging power on the international stage and increasingly becoming a close ally of the West. The other side of this picture is that the right-wing parties are also largely sceptical of China, which may drive them to seek stronger alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. China being a common threat could pave the way for increased cooperation between India and the EU. This cooperation might take the shape of the pending EU Free Trade Agreement, efforts to combat terrorism, cyber security, climate change, etc. These could help in creating stronger bilateral ties between the EU and India. The right-leaning parties may prioritize economic growth over environmental protection, which would compromise on climate change and may not align with India's policies. As a result, environmental policies of the EU, such as the Green Deal, which is one of the essential elements of combating climate change, might also suffer. Given that climate change is also significantly affecting global south, the changing of policies by the right-leaning governments might worsen relations between the global south and the Eurozone.

In conclusion, the European elections are more than a regional political event. The policies of the right-leaning governments in Europe will shape global dynamics for the next few years which will have repercussions not only for Europe but also for their allies. The right-leaning governments are also often Eurosceptic. These governments prioritise national sovereignty and nationalistic ideals which could lead to undermining of the authority of Brussels over the policy-making of the members of the European Union. This shift to right-leaning governments poses a potential threat to the unity of the European Union as a supranational entity. The growing nationalism and Euroscepticism promoted by these parties could undermine the foundational principles of the European Union, and its potential failure could alter the political landscape worldwide.

India has gained significant global recognition since the accession of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India in 2014. Europe, the USA and various other countries have eagerly sought to cooperate with India, largely due to the threat that China poses to the West. Geopolitically, India having EU as its strategic ally could lead to a shift in the international arena and thus counter regional threats, security issues etc. This alliance would also prove to be beneficial for India in international organizations like the UN. EU is one of India's largest partners, FTA would benefit Indian exports like pharmaceuticals, textiles and machinery. (Katrak, M. and Devos, B. 2021) EU is a major source of FDI for India in sectors like technology and renewable energy. The European

Investment Bank (EIB) has contributed to India's effort towards renewable energy. The EIB has been a significant contributor in India's renewable energy projects like hydropower, geothermal, solar power etc. that promote clean and secure energy while prioritizing environmental sustainability. The EIB has invested € 5.44 billion in India's sustainable development projects since 1993. (EIB,2024)

For India, the Eurozone's shift towards right could result in both negative and positive changes for India. India's own right leaning leadership and their ideologies could align with the national interests of EU, thus forming a stronger bond and thus prove to be beneficial in the long run. For EU, Brussels might gain an ally in the Indo-Pacific to curb the Chinese. However, many policies of the European countries might conflict with the national interests of India and of the larger global south. Although, the benefits of the EU-India alliance are substantial, the challenges remain. The negotiations between India and the EU for a Broad-Based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), and the FTA had proven to be difficult due to the ideological disparities and lack of trust. Tariff reduction, market access continues to be contentious thus the agreement becomes difficult.

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