

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE EVENT ORGANISED BY HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR  
EUROPEAN AND FOREIGN POLICY**

**Zappio, Athens, June 19, 2018**

1. Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy. ELIAMEP is among the leading foreign policy think tanks in Greece and in Europe, and it gives me pleasure to be here to address a distinguished audience of diplomats, policymakers and academics on the subject “India and Europe in a Changing World”. This is my first visit to Europe since becoming President of India in July 2017. It is appropriate that the visit has brought me to Greece because geographically and historically your country has been India’s gateway to Europe. I must appreciate the warm welcome I have received from the people and government of Greece, as well as the substantive talks with President Pavlopoulos and Prime Minister Tsipras.
2. Greece and India have much in common. We are modern nation states built on the foundations of ancient civilisations. “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” is a timeless Sanskrit phrase that translates to “The World is a Family”. It has guided India’s external outlook down the ages and continues to do so. As sister civilisations from the earliest days of human society, Greece and India are special members of this family.
3. Our bilateral political and economic relationship goes back 2,500 years. Greece was the fountainhead of western culture and its imprint extended across continents. In India too, there is enormous evidence of Greek travellers, traders, scholars and warriors interacting with our ancestors. The most famous Greek to come to India, was of course Alexander the Great. He arrived at the head of an invading army in 326 BC – but he left as a friend. Every Indian schoolchild knows of how Alexander and the Indian

King Porus fought a pitched battle and then, impressed by each other's courage and dignity, became allies.

4. Shortly afterwards, Emperor Chandragupta founded the first great Indian empire, the "Mauryan Empire", which covered much of the Indian subcontinent. Chandragupta, who was known to Greeks of the time as Sandrocottos, was helped in his mission by Seleucus Nicator. Seleucus was Alexander's general and founded his own Greek empire in Asia.
5. It is believed that Chandragupta married Helen, the daughter of Seleucus and she became his queen. Seleucus sent Megasthenes to Chandragupta's court as perhaps the first Greek ambassador to India. Fortunately for us, besides being a diplomat, Megasthenes was a scholar, historian and ethnographer. His travelogue "Indica" remains one of the best known accounts of ancient India.
6. A fusion of Greek and Indian cultural influences gave rise to what is termed "Greco-Buddhist art" and to the "Gandhara School of art and sculpture". The Greek geographer Ptolemy mapped the seven islands that today make up the city of Mumbai. He called this collection of islands "Heptanesia", which is the Greek term for "seven islands". More recently, in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century India, there was a flourishing community of Greek businessmen, traders in spices, jute and other commodities. The Greek Orthodox Church in Kolkata still stands proudly, with its impressive Doric columns.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

7. I have given you only a few examples of the exchanges between Greece and India since antiquity. There are of course several more. Yet, to my mind, the most important attribute we share is a commonality in values. This city, Athens, is regarded as the "cradle of democracy". In ancient India too, there was a tradition of "city republics", such as the "Licchavi republic" in the modern state of Bihar. The values of liberal democracy, popular sovereignty and transparent government continue to guide us and are cornerstones of India's relationship with Greece and with the

European Union. Ours is a partnership of principles. It is much more than a transaction. It is a friendship tested by time, by cherished beliefs – and by sacrifice.

8. Yesterday, I paid my respects at the “Phaleron War Cemetery”. The remains of 74 Indian soldiers, who died fighting for the liberation of Greece during World War II, lie in the cemetery. I wondered what motivated those soldiers to fight for, and among a people, and in a country so far from their families, and their homes. They gave their lives so that peace and prosperity could return to Greece. Their contribution to the liberty of Greece and of Europe inspires us. It serves as a permanent reminder of how India is a steadfast friend to the Greek people – as well as a stakeholder in the continued security and integrity of Europe.
9. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community. This decision, taken in 1962, represented a conscious effort to forge a partnership with Europe. Since then the EEC and later the EU have functioned as a pillar of our foreign policy. The Indian nation building project and the European integration project have run in parallel. After independence from colonial rule in 1947, India sought to put behind it the bitterness of the past and make a fresh beginning – to shape a modern, united nation rooted in shared cultural experiences and shared economic aspirations. Europe and the EU have been motivated by similar hopes – and that is why we in India feel an affinity.
10. Like you, we recognise and believe that the “age of empires” is over. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be built by democracies such as ours – democracies that place a premium and a priority on the wellbeing of common citizens; on jobs and opportunities for local communities, and on a global development model that is economically viable, ecologically sustainable and ethical in its architecture. In the pursuit of these goals, Europe will find no better companion than India. In 2004, the EU and India inaugurated a “Strategic Partnership”. In 2017, we commemorated 55 years of working together. The 14th India-EU Summit, held in

New Delhi in October 2017, has helped energise India-EU relations. Now, as the European Commission seeks to craft a new “India Strategy”, it is for us to raise the bar. There are new frontiers for us to explore.

11. Europe is no stranger to the opportunities that India holds. Yet so rapid and so transformational are the economic changes in today’s India that many of the old rules – about gradualism in the pace of investment decisions for instance – no longer apply. I would urge business leaders and economic policymakers in the audience to appreciate the rapidity with which India is moving ahead. Our GDP growth is the highest for any major economy. In the last three years or so India climbed 42 places in the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index. This has been the biggest jump by any country. A knowledge-based culture is changing the face of the Indian workplace. By 2025, the Indian economy is expected to be valued at US Dollar 5 trillion. This will make India the world’s third largest consumer market.
  
12. Technology is driving not just services but also sophisticated manufacturing and innovation in farming. Technology is also changing social attitudes by dismantling traditional hierarchies and inequities. Using technology, including the humble but extremely versatile mobile phone, in the past four years 300 million underprivileged Indians have been assisted by the government in opening bank accounts. Previously they were outside the banking system. Under the Ujjwala programme, subsidised cooking gas facilities have been made available to 80 million poor families. Gas stoves have replaced coal-fired stoves, with positive implications for the environment, for health and for gender empowerment and dignity. Large-scale sanitation programmes, the de-polluting and renewal of our major rivers and river basins, the upgrading of our cities and the relentless quest for renewable energy are as crucial to the modernisation of India as impressive FDI numbers and GDP expansion. We cannot choose one or the other. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Europe had that luxury. Today, India doesn’t.

13. Europe is irreplaceable in India's determination to achieve the goals it has set itself. The EU is among India's largest trading partners. It is a critical source of investment and technology, especially for sustainability programmes. Indian companies are significant investors in the EU, in industries as far apart as pharmaceuticals and automobile components. In an interconnected world, marked by mobility of both financial and human capital, educated and professionally skilled Indians are increasingly global citizens and are respected for creating value, wealth and jobs wherever they go.
14. As an old and wise civilisation, you in Europe have the enlightenment to take a long view and put India's rise in perspective. I am confident that this sense of perspective will stay with you as you enhance relations with India, invest in India, trade with India or simply sit down for a chat with an Indian.

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15. I have spoken about the process by which India is emerging as a global actor and modernising its economy and society. I turn now to its outcomes, or at least what we hope will be its outcomes. What does India offer the world and what does India bring to the table? If I may put it so, what is the India proposition?
16. The dreams and organising principles that shape India's domestic reforms are the very dreams and organising principles we seek for the international system. India is committed to world peace. We see peace not just as the absence of conflict but as a reflection of sustainable development and indeed of any effort that anticipates and prevents strife and suffering. When we work for combating climate change, we contribute to world peace. When we assist other developing countries, as per their priorities, and strive for a less unequal world we contribute to world peace. When we rescue and evacuate not just our own citizens from troubled regions, but those of 40 other countries – as we did during the Yemen crisis of 2015 – we contribute to world peace. When we put considerable troops and resources at the disposal of United Nations peacekeeping operations, we contribute to world peace.

When we commit resources for the development of people in Africa, we contribute to world peace.

17. India is committed to an international order marked by robust, rules-based multilateral institutions; by multi-polarity in international governance; and by investment and connectivity projects that are viable, sustainable, respect the sovereignty and territory of nations, and enrich rather than detract from local and host communities. This is the type of world India wants to hold up as a pillar of stability, and as a growing provider of developmental assistance to friendly countries. I am sure this is the type of world that Europe wants to nurture as well.
18. Our planet is not without challenges. The predictability and reassuring presence of rules-based multilateral institutions – in trade, in ocean governance and in other areas – has come under stress. Preserving the hard-won gains of the global system of inter-linkages is in all our interests. India and Europe must work together to ensure that the multilateral mechanism remains resilient and serves future generations – as well as accommodates new actors with a merit-based claim for a seat at the table. The global commons must truly remain a shared resource of humanity, governed by open and collaborative international institutions. As a responsible power, India seeks to be a rule framer and rule custodian.
19. On clean energy and climate change, India and the EU are united in their commitment to the 2015 Paris Agreement. Addressing climate change and ensuring secure, affordable and sustainable supplies of energy are our priorities. India is scaling up the share of non-fossil fuels in its energy mix with punishing urgency. This will go up from the current 31 per cent to 53 per cent by 2027. We are targeting 175 gigawatts of renewable energy, of which 100 gigawatts will be solar energy. Earlier this year, India hosted the founding conference of the International Solar Alliance, which is head-quartered in our country. I invite Greece, the land of such dazzling sunshine, to join the ISA. I must also express my happiness at the European Investment Bank's

willingness to mobilise finance for affordable solar energy projects in ISA member countries.

20. Radicalisation and its twin, terrorism, are a pressing global concern. Pockets of instability and extremism can be found in the region to your east and our west. They are a worry for both Europe and India. Promotion of terrorism by state and non-state actors; extremism in a variety of forms and rooted in senseless hate; the proliferation of sensitive weapons; the use of regular communication and financial channels by terror groups – these pose a challenge to not one nation or the other but to all humanity.
21. India and the EU must persuade the world to not distinguish between so-called “good” and “bad” terrorists, to shame and sanction state sponsors of terrorism, and to strengthen multilateral platforms such as the Financial Action Task Force and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum. On the issue of countering radicalisation, India would be happy to share its domestic experiences and success stories in a manner that may be useful to our European friends. Our partner countries in the Gulf States too are engaging with us in such a mutual learning process.
22. Another common endeavour for India and the EU is a framework for cyber-security and for the Internet that must serve three purposes. First, it should meet the requirements of public security, particularly for vital financial and energy networks. Second, it should enable commerce and communication. And third, to the degree feasible, it should respect the privacy of the individual and his or her data. Inherently, this calls for a multi-stakeholder approach. We must also guard against manipulation of the Internet, whether by extremist groups or illiberal states. The template we design will be valuable as other technologies emerge. After all, this is the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution of Artificial Intelligence and of robotics. It could rewrite equations between humans and machines and our regulatory systems will have to anticipate change rather than react to it.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

23. The EU-India partnership is expansive and covers a spectrum of themes, from trade to technology, civil aviation to counter-terrorism. I am told that we interact through 30 different dialogue mechanisms. In my address I have referred to some of these, but obviously it has not been possible to touch upon all subjects. I must add here that we remain committed to an India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), to be achieved in a generous spirit of mutual accommodation and of pragmatism.
24. Above all, however, I would like to emphasise that our cooperation – whether diplomatic and political or business and security – rests on a firm people-to-people understanding. There is no substitute for that. The people of India and of Europe have carefully built and tended our relationship, over centuries. Governments are only playing catch-up. Our people always have been and always will be central to our cooperation. For both the EU and for India, the dignity and liberty of the individual, and the fulfilment of every individual's capacity and potential in a plural and democratic society, is nonnegotiable. Let that ideal spur us to become in-separable partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thank you.

Do have a nice day!