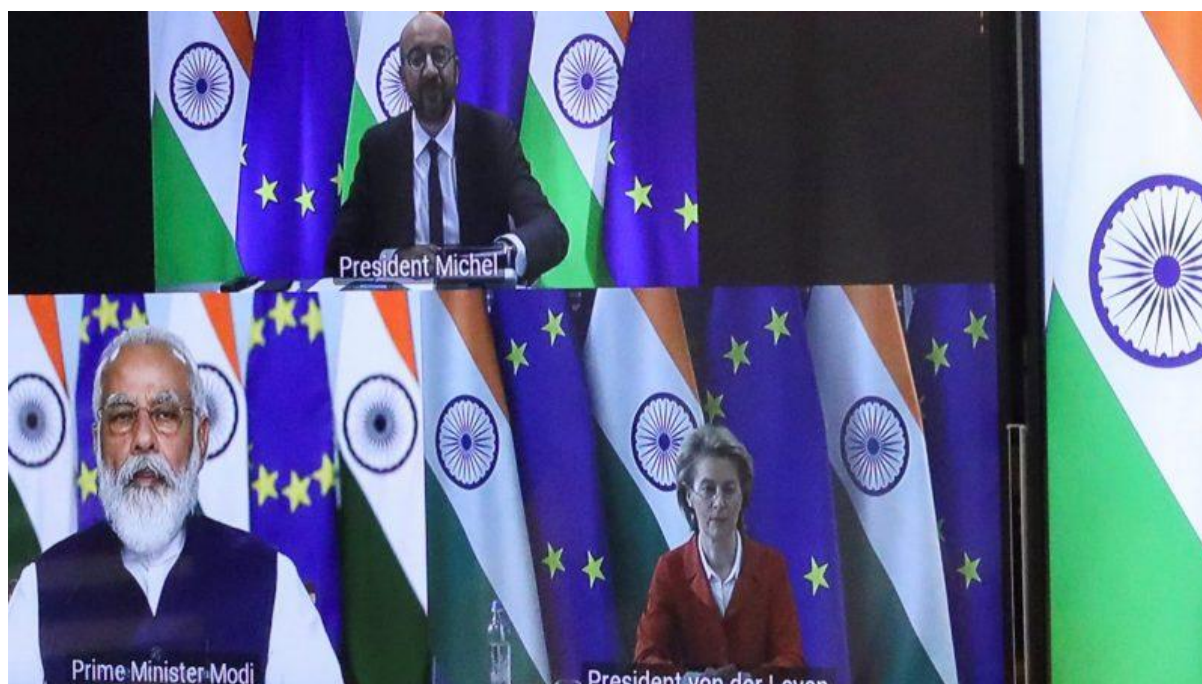


## India and the EU are natural partners for the green economy

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European Council President Charles Michel, Ursula von der Leyen and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi are seen on the monitor as they take part in a virtual summit, in Brussels, Belgium, 15 July 2020. [Pool/EPA/EFE]

As the world recovers from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic and supply chain restructuring, resilience and diversification are clear priorities. Underlying this is the imperative of green growth. Industrial and technological investments we make must be ecologically sustainable and contribute to the battle against global warming.

In this context, India's sustained adherence to its COP 21 Paris Climate Agreement commitments offers opportunity. India is the first major country attempting industrialisation and large-scale urbanisation while also reducing intensity of dependence on fossil fuels. In Paris in 2015 it promised to reduce the greenhouse gas emission intensity of its GDP by 33-35% (below 2005 levels) by 2030. It also pledged to create an additional "carbon sink" of 2.5 to three billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent through added forest and tree cover.

Even before Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Paris, he had raised the bar for India's climate ambitions. In 2014 India enhanced its renewable energy target to 175 GW by 2022. Actual achievement is likely to be as high as 225 GW. By 2030 India will be generating 450 GW of renewable energy. By that year India is committed to reaching 40% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources. In reality, this will easily cross 50%.

India is in the midst of an afforestation programme of unusual magnitude. As per the "India State of the Forest Report: 2019", the area under forest and tree cover went up by over 16,000 square km in the previous five years. To put that figure in context, it is equivalent to more than half the territory of Belgium. Few countries have shown such consistent gains in expanding forest cover. When the ongoing programme is completed, India would have planted 1.25 billion additional trees, especially alongside national highways that are under construction or expansion.

A green, climate-friendly emphasis has been a feature of several of the Modi government's flagship developmental initiatives. These range from Namami Gange, the cleaning and basin-wide rejuvenation of the river Ganga, to the Jal Jeevan Mission, aimed at universalising drinking water access and linking this to the conservation as well as efficient and sustainable use of water sources. By 2021 India would have abolished single-use plastics.

Our country has also undertaken the world's largest programme of switching to energy-saving LED bulbs. Through a mix of direct interventions and subsidies, the government has replaced close to 370 million conventional bulbs with LED bulbs. This has reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 39 million tonnes a year.

From 1 April 2020, all cars sold in India conform to Bharat Stage VI (the equivalent of Euro VI) fuel standards. Notwithstanding the formidable logistics, India leapfrogged from Euro IV to Euro VI fuel standards in a determined, once-in-a-generation attempt to address automobile pollution. In parallel, electrical vehicle adoption is being incentivised with tax concessions and ramping up charging infrastructure.

India's domestic emphasis has been mirrored by its external efforts. The Modi government is among the strongest international advocates of renewable energy. Co-founded by India and France, the International Solar Alliance held its inaugural conference in New Delhi in 2018. The Alliance has expanded to some 90 countries, including small island nations and those in the Global South that are vulnerable to climate change. It is working to facilitate finance and technology that expands use of affordable solar power. Such an approach flows from a conviction that climate change is a global challenge that calls for global response and collaboration.

India's delivery on its Paris pledges has been recognised. A September 2019 "Climate Change Report" released by National Geographic in association with Climate Action Tracker rated the country as "Top of the Class" and a "global leader in renewable energy". The report noted India's stiff targets for renewables and acknowledged "progress has been so rapid" India could reach these earlier than previously predicted.

The Germanwatch Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2020 report arrived at similar conclusions. It categorised India as one of only two G20 countries with a "high" performance, and commended it on benchmarks such as tackling greenhouse gas emissions, climate policy, energy use, and renewables. Both reports acknowledged India's per capita emissions remain much lower than the global average, let alone emissions of developed nations.

India and the European Union are natural partners in the quest for environmental sustainability, climate change mitigation, and green growth and development. Our common hopes and endeavours could define our partnership in the post-coronavirus era.

Continued flexibility in supporting India's green strategy will help it go even further. This requires a careful mix of targets where feasible (such as for renewable energy) and incentivising sustainable business practices and clean energy preferences. Stronger outcomes in India would benefit from long-term finance and green-sector investments from Europe, as well as liberal technology sharing protocols. Our planet will reap the dividend.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/opinion/india-and-the-eu-are-natural-partners-for-the-green-economy/>