

## UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE INDO-SPANISH PARTNERSHIP

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This document has been prepared on the occasion of the III Spain-India Forum, titled “Spain and India and Global Partners: Enhancing Capacity-Building and Cooperation Initiatives to Foster Stronger Ties”, which took place on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, at the Instituto Cervantes in New Delhi. The III Spain-India Forum explored the assets and opportunities for Indo-Spanish cooperation as global partners in four key fields: the participation of the European Union and Latin America in the Indo-Pacific; capacity-building in defence industries; university collaboration and educational exchanges, and the global dimension of the Spanish language. Four different Spanish delegations joined the Spain-India Forum in New Delhi: the Spain-India Council Foundation's delegation, with members of its Board of Trustees; the Spanish language delegation, coordinated by the Directorate-General for Spanish Language in the World; the Universities delegation, coordinated by the Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (SEPIE), and the think tanks delegation, coordinated by the Spain-India Observatory. Juan Ignacio Entrecanales, President of the Spain-India Council Foundation and Executive Vice-President of Acciona, led these delegations. The Forum saw significant participation from experts and authorities from India as well, including Sanjay Verma, Secretary (West) of the Ministry of External Affairs of India; Meenakshi Lekhi, Minister of State for External Affairs and Culture, and Professor Harsh V. Pant, Vice President for Studies and Foreign Policy at Observer Research Foundation (ORF). This Outcome Paper showcases the main conclusions drawn from the different sessions of the III Spain-India Forum based on the lines of analysis and ideas shared.

\* The views and analysis expressed in this Outcome Paper are those of the authors exclusively, based on the exchanges in the III Spain-India Forum. This Outcome Paper does not reflect any opinion or endorsement by the Spain-India Council Foundation.

## A NEW TRILATERAL IN THE MAKING

### The 2023 Presidencies: India, Peru & Spain

The concurrent Presidencies of 2023, namely India's G20 presidency, Spain's presidency of the Council of the EU, and Peru's Pacific Alliance presidency, have played **pivotal roles in shaping regional and global agendas**. India's G20 presidency was praised for **fostering international consensus** on pressing global challenges, including food security, climate change, and technological advancement. India's human-centric focus on promoting global conversations and **amplifying the voices** of emerging countries, particularly from the **Global South**, helped ensure that **development concerns** remained on the global agenda. Spain's presidency of the Council of the **EU established four main priorities**: re-industrialization and ensuring its open strategic autonomy; green transition and climate action; social justice and the consolidation of the welfare state, as well as the strengthening of the European unity. Peru's presidency of the Pacific Alliance concentrated on **strengthening economic and trade ties**, with a specific emphasis on SMEs, **exploring membership expansion, and enhancing cooperation with Observer States**. Beyond these approaches and priorities, the **focus on the Indo-Pacific** has guided the agendas and strategies of all three 2023 Presidencies.

### The Indo-Pacific captures the attention of Europe and Latin America

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a **focal point** for geopolitical competition, economic growth, and strategic cooperation. Within this dynamic landscape, **Europe and Latin America have been increasingly** seeking to enhance their engagement. The European Union's involvement in the Indo-Pacific is framed under the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific, and further reinforced by the Global Gateway initiative<sup>1</sup>, which highlight its firm **commitment to promoting peace, stability, and prosperity**. Similarly, Latin America, exemplified by the Pacific Alliance, is recognizing the importance of **strengthening partnerships** in the Indo-Pacific, while prioritizing **economic integration and trade relations** within the region. The growing participation of Europe and Latin America underscores the increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific as a **key geopolitical and geo-economic arena**, with multiple countries and regional institutions seeking to enhance their presence and influence in the region through various economic, diplomatic, and security initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to the Outcome Paper prepared by the Spanish-India Observatory on the occasion of the "Spain-India Dialogue On The EU Strategy For Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific And The Global Gateway Initiative: Understanding Eu's Vision On The Indo-Pacific". Available at: <http://www.spain-india.org/files/documentos/EN-Outcome Paper-EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific and the Global Gateway.pdf>

## Prospects for trilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

As the Indo-Pacific region continues to gain prominence on the global stage, there is growing recognition of the need for **enhanced cooperation and partnership among key stakeholders**. There is actual **potential for trilateral cooperation** among the EU, India, and Latin America in the Indo-Pacific. By collaborating on common challenges and opportunities, while building on shared values, these actors can promote **mutual interests, stability, and prosperity**, and foster a **more inclusive and interconnected Indo-Pacific** community. On the whole, key areas of focus for trilateral cooperation may include **sustainable development; connectivity, logistics and infrastructure networks; reliable and resilient supply chains; food security**, while also addressing **key shared security concerns**. Through dialogue, partnership, and joint initiatives, the European Union, India, and Latin America can play a **constructive role** in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific.

## SECURITY AS A MEANS TO MUTUAL PROSPERITY AND PARTNERSHIP-ADVANCEMENT

### India's balancing role

Prosperity and stability are **closely linked** to defence capabilities, which play a crucial role in security affairs. The complex **equilibrium between deterrence and strategic dialogue** is essential in navigating the evolving security landscape, particularly in a context of growing **great-power rivalry and rapid technological transformations**. Within this challenging scenario, **India emerges as a pivotal actor**, by exhibiting a proactive engagement and major influence in shaping regional stability, particularly within the Indian Ocean theatre. Through its active **participation in regional security dialogues** like the Quad, and by bolstering its defence capacities, India addresses both conventional and non-traditional security issues, and plays a key role in steering the trajectory of regional security architecture towards a more stable and prosperous future. In this task, **India seeks partners like the European Union** to accompany its role as **security provider** in the Indian Ocean, as well as to deliver on **regional development**, highlighting the **inclusive and collective** nature of its cooperation strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

### The European Union, a trusted and reliable partner for India

While European focus was traditionally limited to the Western Indian Ocean, the EU Strategy for the Indo-Pacific indicates a **broader interest in the Indo-Pacific**, as well as

the intent to be perceived as a **credible geopolitical actor** in that region. This strategic realignment presents an opportunity for deeper collaboration with India. European actors are **key stakeholders** for addressing shared security challenges and fostering a more secure Indo-Pacific, as initiatives such as CRIMARIO I and CRIMARIO II have proven. The EU seeks to strengthen its presence in the region and contribute to the construction of a rules-based international order centred on multilateralism. **Cooperation with India is seen as pivotal** in ensuring a secure environment in the Indian Ocean, with a focus on collective security and responding to regional needs, while addressing common challenges such as **sustainable development, regional governance, and maritime security**. Within the EU, Spain stands out as a significant partner for India in this respect.

### Spain's contribution to India's defence capacity-building

The collaboration between Spain and India in security and defence stands as a cornerstone in strengthening bilateral ties and promoting shared goals and interests. The partnership between Airbus and Tata in the C-295 aircraft programme exemplifies Spain's commitment to support India's **defence capacity-building**, while aligning with the *Make in India* and the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiatives (Self-reliant India). Furthermore, the teaming agreement between Larsen & Toubro and Navantia for the Indian Navy's P75(I) submarine program serves as another notable example of Indo-Spanish cooperation in defence, showcasing **Spain's technological contributions** to meet specific Indian defence requirements. These partnerships demonstrate the synergies between Spain and India in advancing not only security and defence capabilities, but also **technological transfer and innovation**, which could be extended to other areas such as **cybersecurity or surveillance technology**. Moreover, these synergies not only enhance defence capabilities but also **foster economic growth and industrial development**, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between security and prosperity, while opening the door to furthering and deepening Indo-Spanish exchanges.

## BRIDGING DISTANCE BETWEEN INDIA AND THE HISPANOSPHERE

### The cultural asset

Cultural affinities between India and Spain **hold significant potential** to form the bedrock of their bilateral relations. Despite this, it exists a **lack of awareness** regarding the similarities and potential shared between the two nations. India's rich history in the Indian Ocean and Spain's Mediterranean heritage at the crossroads with the Atlantic Ocean, have historically **shaped the identity** of Spain and India as maritime nations, cultural meeting points and trade centers. Historical connections and cultural similarities not only foster

deep **interpersonal connections** but also provide a **solid framework for collaborative endeavors**. Initiatives such as cultural exchanges, educational programs, and joint research projects are key elements that nurture mutual knowledge. By **building upon this foundation**, both countries can further enhance their collaboration, capitalizing on their respective strengths to **jointly address global challenges** and contribute to the **advancement of shared values** on a global scale.

### **The academic opportunity**

Spanish universities' **active participation in internationalization** efforts, including renowned programs like Erasmus Plus, alongside the increasing **interest from international students in Spain**, particularly from India, underscores the significant potential for greater collaboration and exchange between the two countries. Despite differences in their higher education systems, both Spain and India are home to prestigious **educational institutions**, capable of attracting scholars and students globally, indicating a strong foundation for expanded cooperation. There exists, however, untapped potential for deeper engagement, evident in the many possibilities for enhanced **student mobility programs, expanded joint research initiatives, and strengthened governmental and institutional collaborations**. Universities in both countries can harness this potential to address pressing global challenges and drive socio-economic development on a broader scale. Recognizing the vast opportunities for bilateral collaboration in higher education, Spain and India can **unlock even greater academic, cultural, and societal benefits** that can have an echo in the trilateral dimension.

### **A tool for greater mutual understanding**

Given the **growing importance and presence of Spanish language** at international level, as India deepens its global engagement, including with Latin America, proficiency in Spanish presents great opportunities to the Indian society for **cross-cultural interaction, business, and academic exchange** globally. **The rising popularity of Spanish in India** reflects a growing recognition of its **inherent value and the economic opportunities** it presents. Collaboration between the governments and educational institutions from India and the Hispanic world, like **Instituto Cervantes**, is pivotal in fostering this linguistic and cultural exchange. Through the pooling of **resources and expertise**, the integration of Spanish into Indian society fosters a **sense of belonging and interconnectedness with the Hispanic world**. The pursuit of language education serves, ultimately, as a gateway to expanded horizons in the India-Spain-Latin America partnership.

## SPAIN & INDIA AS GLOBAL PARTNERS: FINAL REFLECTION

Despite the considerable geographic distance, there is a significant potential for the India-Spain partnership to thrive in the coming years. The **absence of irritants** between the two countries, coupled with a **shared vision of 21st-century global challenges**, underscore the need for greater collaboration and association. Beyond the bilateral approach, trilateral cooperation among Latin America, the European Union, and India is not only feasible but also desirable. The progressive shifting **centre of gravity** towards the Indian Ocean renders it a pivotal region in international relations, **impacting both Europe and Latin America**. Security in that region is, therefore, paramount for addressing the multiplicity of present challenges and ensuring mutual prosperity and partner-building.

Leveraging the **historical parallels and cultural affinities** between Spain and India can also serve as a solid foundation for deeper bilateral and trilateral cooperation. Initiatives promoting university exchanges, Spanish learning, and joint cultural projects can foster **mutual understanding and trust**, enhancing the scale of the partnership in the long term. To facilitate such collaboration on a global scale, emphasis must be placed on **shared values and adherence to common rules**. This entails fostering synchronization and consistency in the goal definition, nurturing social connections between people, recognizing the importance of common cultural heritage and value systems, as well as promoting empathy. These principles will be instrumental in fostering a **successful partnership** between Spain and India with a global reach.