

By Centre for Industry
and Innovation

Strategic Convergence & Economic Pragmatism

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement

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GEOSTRATA

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The India-EU Free Trade Agreement

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Introduction

European
Commission
President Ms.
Ursula von der
Leyen, more
popularly called
the “Mother of
all Deals.”

India and the European Union, after almost two decades, finally, on January 27th of 2026, concluded their negotiations for a free trade agreement, which has been, by the European Commission President Ms. Ursula von der Leyen, more popularly called the “Mother of all Deals.” The announcement came shortly after the successful 16th India-EU Summit in New Delhi, attended by Indian PM Narendra Modi alongside the European Commission President H.E. Ursula von der Leyen and the European Council President H.E. Antonio Costa.

This “Mother of all Deals,”¹ as remarked by Ms. von der Leyen, is a truism given the India-EU FTA is the largest economic agreement either side has ever concluded, with a combined market of almost 2 billion people and comprising 25% of the global GDP. In a way the deal will prove to be New Deal 2.0 for Europe, but this time, the European Union is in command. The agreement, when viewed against the backdrop of a ruptured global economic and political order and in the context of the “Towards 2030: A Joint India-European Union Comprehensive Strategic Agenda,”² paints a clear picture around trade diversification and strengthening economic security while presenting a shift away from single-source dependencies of the first half of the 21st century, which came as part and parcel of globalization.

The agreement further presents both India and the EU with a win-win partnership, wherein the EU’s quest for trade diversification and greater market access, along with high and standardized trade regulatory frameworks, gets complemented by India’s “Make in India” and domestic manufacturing ambitions in the higher end of the value chain. The FTA, with its scope and proximity, presents the Indian economy a chance at competing globally while ensuring its domestic demands are being met.



EU's quest for trade diversification

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Trade in Goods: Market Access and Tariffs

It will act
This development must be viewed along with the fact that these labour-intensive sectors were the worst-hit when the US, under President Donald Trump, slapped a 25% tariff on Indian exports to the US in the mid-2025.

The agreement is set to provide India with preferential access into the European markets across 97% of tariff lines, covering 99.5% of its trade value. The labour-intensive sectors, including textiles, leather and footwear, tea, coffee, spices, sports goods, toys, gems and jewellery, and export-quality marine products, are set to benefit the most. This development must be viewed alongside the fact that these labour-intensive sectors were the worst-hit when the US, under President Donald Trump, slapped a 25% tariff on Indian exports to the US in mid-2025.³

Additionally, 2.9% of India's exports will gain zero-duty access over 3 and 5 years for certain marine products, processed food items, arms and ammunition, amongst others. The final 6% of the remaining export value from India will have access by way of tariff reduction for certain poultry products, preserved vegetables, bakery products, etc, or through tariff rate quotas, as was widely reported during the negotiations, especially for cars, steel, specific shrimp/prawn products, amongst others.

Key labour-intensive sectors such as the ones mentioned in the first bracket, were hitherto subjected to 4%-26% of import duty,⁴ and which are critical to India's employment generation and sustenance, will now enter without paying any duty once the agreement comes into force, further enhancing export competitiveness of such products in the EU markets. These sectors are set to gain substantially through integration with global value chains by way of their performance and competitiveness in the European markets.



Industry reforms

High technological imports from EU will help the Indian industry climb up the global value chains, diversify import sources (a market dominated by China, especially in the middle to high-tech electronics), reduce their input costs, further pushing internal industry reforms and enhance integration into global supply chains through enhanced global competitiveness.

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The India-EU Free
Trade Agreement



India has reciprocated by offering tariff reduction in 92.1% of its tariff lines, covering almost 98% of all EU exports, wherein almost 50% of tariff lines will have immediate duty elimination, the next 40% tariff lines are subject to phased elimination over 5, 7, and 10 years, and the final 3% will follow the tariff rate quota mechanism, especially for apples, pears, peaches, and kiwi fruit. High technological imports from EU will help the India industry climb up the global value chains, diversify import sources (a market dominated by China, especially in the middle to high-tech electronics), reduce their input costs, further pushing internal industry reforms and enhance integration into global supply chains through enhanced global competitiveness.



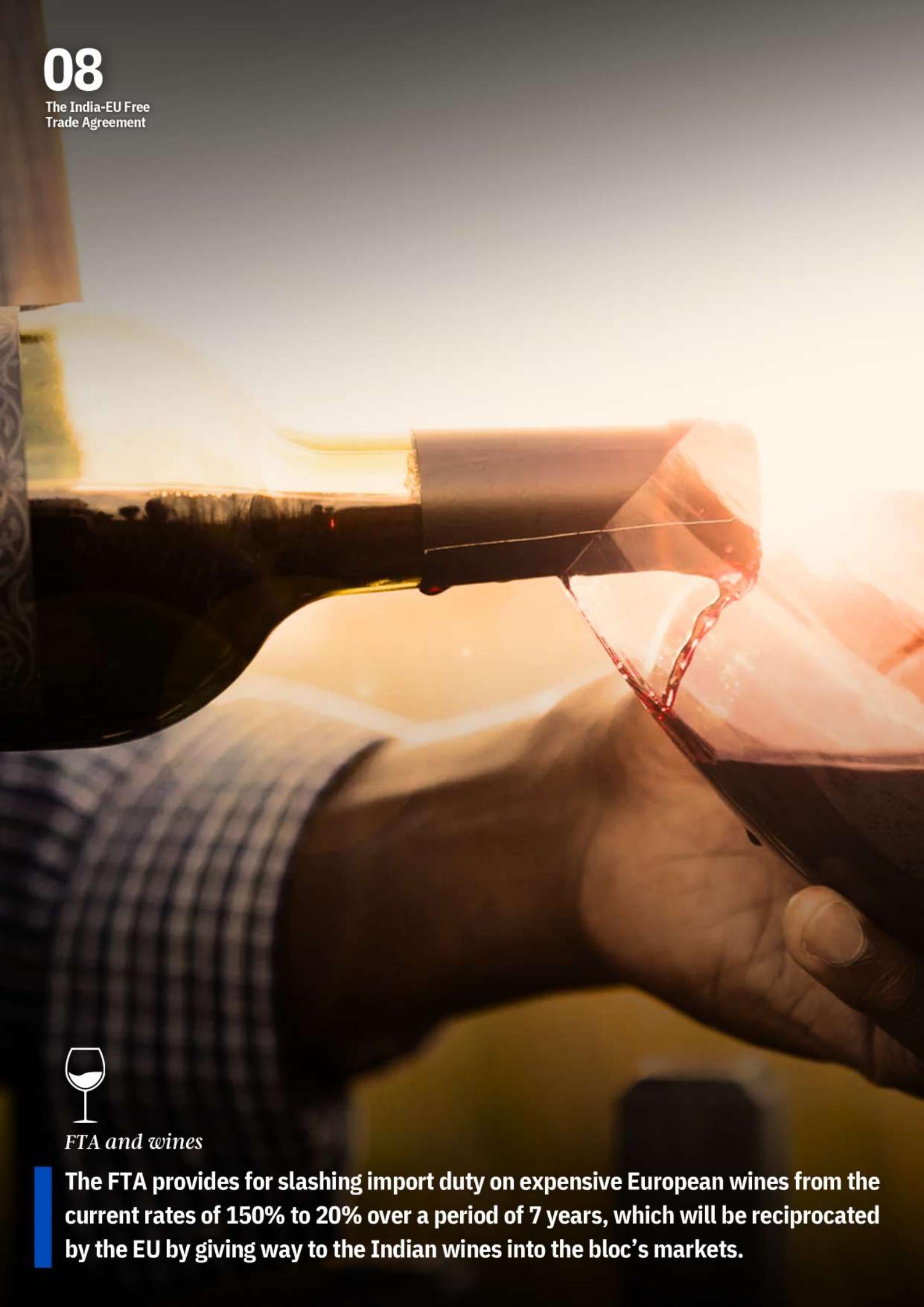
Export sector

India's marine export sector will gain preferential access to the European markets, covering 100% of trade value, subject to a reduction of tariffs up to 26% will unlock the voluminous European market for marine products.



European Union Interests:

- **Automobiles and car parts:** The FTA, concludes that EU-exported vehicles to India, valued at 1.6 billion euros, are set to see a gradual tariff reduction from current 110% to 10% under a tariff rate quota of 250,000 vehicles per year and a complete tariff elimination for car parts after 5 to 10 years. The domestic car industry in India is still at a nascent stage with humongous room for expansion. India has around 34.3 cars per 1000 inhabitants,⁵ which when compared with the developed world seems micro (compared to the US with 877.6, the EU with 585.3, and Germany with 582.4 cars per 1000 inhabitants).⁶
- **Machinery and Chemicals:** EU exports in machinery, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals to India, which were subjected to 44%, 22%, and 11% of tariffs respectively, will now be eliminated for the better part further expanding options for the domestic industry, reducing their input cost.⁷
- **Alcohol and Luxury:** The FTA provides for slashing import duty on expensive European wines from the current rates of 150% to 20% over a period of 7 years,⁸ which will be reciprocated by the EU by giving way to the Indian wines into the bloc's markets. Moreover, there will be no duty cuts for wines costing less than 2.5 euros. Finally, India has secured duty-free access for 85000 tons of grapes, strengthening the domestic agricultural export industry which will become more price competitive, push for crop diversification, push for innovation and investment in the Indian vineyard industry, all while pushing for agricultural quality revolution as a result of the Brussels effect stemming from the EU's strict MRL standards. Finally, on the EU's side olive oil exports from the bloc, which are currently subjected to tariff rates as high as 45%, will go down to 0% in the next five years, while processed agricultural products such as bread and confectionery will see tariffs go down from the current 50% to 0%.



FTA and wines

The FTA provides for slashing import duty on expensive European wines from the current rates of 150% to 20% over a period of 7 years, which will be reciprocated by the EU by giving way to the Indian wines into the bloc's markets.



India Interests:

- **Leather and footwear:** As mentioned earlier, the leather and footwear industry in India employs millions directly or indirectly and supports significant employment, is set to leap onto the European stage with its world-acclaimed craftsmanship and MSME innovation. Under the India-EU FTA, all leather and footwear exports from India will gain duty-free access into the European markets, which currently stands at 17%, dampening their competitiveness. Furthermore, regulatory alignment, simplified compliance, and rational policy frameworks supporting design-led sustainable products will enable the industry to move up the value chain, taking on the value-added global leadership.
- **Marine exports:** India's marine export sector will gain preferential access to the European markets, covering 100% of its trade value, subject to a reduction of tariffs up to 26% will unlock the voluminous European market for marine products. The step is set to boost the competitiveness of Indian marine products, while complementing and strengthening its export capacity in the sector, which is currently valued at \$1 billion. The FTA will help empower coastal communities of India, all while contributing to India's blue economy.
- **Textiles and Apparel:** Zero duty access in textiles and clothing, covering all tariff lines, while reducing tariffs by up to 12%, is set to open a humongous European textile import market of \$263.5 billion, in which India's current share is of just \$7.2 billion, leaving room for expansion. Such preferential access is set to expand opportunities and investment in yarn, cotton yarn, man-made fibre apparel, readymade garments, and others, further enabling the MSMEs to scale, generate significant employment, and reinforce India's spot as a global leader as a reliable, sustainable, and higher-grade trade partner.
- **Gems and jewellery:** Another key labour-intensive sector, will gain preferential access across 100% of trade value, wherein India's \$2.7 billion jewellery exports will become highly competitive in the European import market of \$79.2 billion.



MSME Innovation

The leather and footwear industry in India employs millions directly or indirectly and supports significant employment, is set to leap onto the European stage with its world-acclaimed craftsmanship and MSME innovation.

Defensive Interests (Exclusions):



Both sides have agreed to a set of agricultural sectors, deemed the most sensitive, which will be excluded from liberalisation. Thus, the agreement very carefully balances market access with the protection of sensitive sectors. These strategic safeguards ensure export growth while catering to domestic priorities.

European Union exclusions:

The European Union has decided to maintain its current tariffs on sensitive agricultural products such as beef, sugar, bananas, rice, chicken meat, milk powder, honey, soft wheat, garlic and ethanol, although the bloc will open calibrated quotas for imports of sheep and goat meat, sweetcorn, grapes, cucumbers, dried onions, and rum made of molasses and starches.

Now, since the European agricultural sector is characterised by high production costs and strict regulatory standards, opening the market to large-scale Indian exports in the price sensitive categories would risk price undercutting, flooding of the domestic market, and threatening European farmer incomes.

Finally, through the calibrated quotas, the EU seeks to retain leverage in ensuring that the Indian exports comply with the strict EU health rules regarding pesticide residues and animal health, preventing entry of any product with non-negotiable safety levels.

India exclusions:

India has decided to keep sensitive agricultural sectors such as dairy, cereals, poultry, soymeal, certain fruits and vegetables shut from the tariff rationalisation under the free trade agreement. Two major reasons drive New Delhi's agricultural safeguard policy under the FTA.

First, agriculture in India is not just a profession or occupation, for majority of its participants, it's the most critical social safety net, and a country like India with some of the smallest land holding producers in the world, it becomes a situation of life and death when prices fall due to undue flooding of the domestic market. New Delhi, has for long, argued that European farmers receive huge agricultural subsidies domestically, and reducing tariffs on those products would create an uneven playing field that the small-holder Indian farmers cannot compete with.



Agricultural sectors

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Second, keeping tight controls over the staple food in the country is not just a matter of economics, but national security. Price sensitivity and control around the staples such as wheat, rice, and pulses determine the national politics, while letting the government manage domestic inflation. If India were to open up these sectors to foreign competition, it would most definitely result in integration of the sector with the global economy, but with the downside of dependency on global supply and price shocks.

Trade Remedies:

Both sides have negotiated a first-of-its-kind bilateral safeguard mechanism which strikes a careful balance between advancing market openness and ensuring effective protection against unfair trade practices and import surges. It makes it probable for the two parties to use trade defence instruments such as anti-dumping, anti-subsidy, and other global safeguard practices to tackle unfair trade between them.

The agreement finally includes a mechanism, which allows the EU and India to impose temporary measures in case a significant increase of preferential imports as a result of the FTA threatens or causes serious injury to their domestic industry.



Architecture of trade mechanism

Even though tariff line rationalisation and liberalisation often grab the headlines, the true measure of the free trade agreement between India and the European union lies in the “invisible” architecture of trade mechanism, which is a set of measures deemed so important and central to any kind of bilateral trade relations.



Technical Barriers, Customs, and Rules of Origin

While filling the gap between the EU's strict standardised regulatory measures and India's humongous scale of production requires a consensus, a shared trust and scientific cooperation between the two partners, not just on paper, but in their entry and exit mechanisms too.

Even though tariff line rationalisation and liberalisation often grab the headlines, the true measure of the free trade agreement between India and the European union lies in the "invisible" architecture of trade mechanism, which is a set of measures deemed so important and central to any kind of bilateral trade relations. These measures include technical barriers to trade, customs protocol measures, and SPS measures.

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Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures:

The FTA provisions on the sanitary and phytosanitary measures (animal and plant health) are articulate and balanced, covering the defensive and offensive interests of the European Union. The SPS measures will be subject to the agreement's bilateral dispute settlement framework, and provides for higher transparency and predictability for trade of plant and animal products, including fisheries/aquaculture products. The deal creates mechanisms for faster import approval and audits.

All imports from India to the EU will continue to be subject to the bloc's strict SPS rules without any exceptions, wherein the EU retains full right to provisionally adopt SPS measures based on available pertinent information, where satisfactory scientific evidence is absent. The scope and objectives of the SPS measures section in the FTA can be well understood in the EU's own memo, which reiterates that "EU health is not negotiable".⁹



Tariff preferences

The rules of origin, as agreed to by the EU and India are in conformity with the EU's recent FTAs, which ensure that products that have been significantly processed in one of the parties can benefit from the tariff preferences of the agreement.



Interestingly, under the SPS measures, India and the EU have now achieved something far greater than any other trade deals, wherein in an event of a pest/disease outbreak, the bloc will not impose blanket bans on the entire country, but will move forward with regionalisation assessment and let the goods flow into the European market even if some Indian districts in a state suffer from SPS outbreaks, provided that India can prove scientifically, that other regions are “pest-free”.

Technical Barriers to Trade:

The chapter in the FTA sets out provisions on technical measures with an impact on bilateral trade. The agreement incorporates the commitments under the WTO agreement on TBT, and makes it subject to bilateral dispute mechanisms under the agreement. It further provides practical transparency provisions, which require 60 days for public consultations on new technical regulations, and a gap of 6 months between their publication and entry into force, enhancing predictability and adaptability. The agreement constitutes a dedicated Working Group on Conformity Assessment, tasked with addressing issues relating to the conformity assessment procedures of each party, including India's quality control orders.

Rules of Origin:

The rules of origin, as agreed to by the EU and India are in conformity with the EU's recent FTAs, which ensure that products that have been significantly processed in one of the parties can benefit from the tariff preferences of the agreement. The rules of origin are set to support the MSMEs in the two economies who can avail extraordinary benefits through these measures further incentivising domestic manufacturing capacity and scale. The shift from offline certification to self-certification mechanism is aimed at reducing red tapism in exports further digitising the process for easier compliance and regulation.



Make in India

The PSRs are set to incentivise 'Make in India' by provisioning a transition period for heavy and high tech industries such as machinery and aerospace while maintaining the "originating" status.

Supply chain flexibility:



While the FTA provides for transparent and stringent “rules of origin”, it also ensures that the goods exported under it undergo adequate processing or value addition without compromising on their competitiveness through the product specific rules, which are balanced and aligned with existing supply chains. These PSRs allow for adequate flexibility to source inputs from global value chains, while making sure the manufacturers do not lose out on the preferential access and tariff benefits.

The PSRs are set to incentivise ‘Make in India’ by provisioning a transition period for heavy and high tech industries such as machinery and aerospace while maintaining the “originating” status.

Customs and Trade Facilitation:

India and the EU have agreed to further facilitate trade between them, wherein enterprises trading goods get their goods easier, and faster through customs, while making sure effective customs control in order to uphold the rules of the importing country including requirements related to safety, security and respect of intellectual property rights. The agreement provides for transparency, advance rulings, simplified compliance and importing-exporting procedures and expedited release of goods, reducing red tape for the exports. Finally, the two sides have made the customs and trade facilitation future-proof wherein they have created necessary legal bases to broaden and deepen customs cooperation including on supply chain security and exchange of customs data strengthening the risk management and controls at their respective borders.



On India's part

FTA guarantees non-discriminatory treatment and regulatory transparency in the telecommunications sector, which is primarily critical for EU telecom companies that wish to operate in India.



Services Trade and Digital Economy

On India's part, for the first time in any trade agreement, India has bound itself with commitments in dredging and maritime cable-laying services.

Another important segment of the FTA is the inclusion of services trade and the digital economy. This represents a pivot from trading traditional commodities to a modern trading partnership, which is focused on skills, technology, and regulatory alignment. The FTA secures unprecedented market access for service providers and establishes a rules-based framework for the digital age. Moving beyond the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the FTA provides for a stable environment for trade. The European Union gets favorable access to the Indian market in the sectors concerning maritime transport, financial services, and telecommunications.

- On India's part, for the first time in any trade agreement, India has bound itself with commitments in dredging and maritime cable-laying services. This will allow companies from the EU to bid for massive infrastructure projects in India's shipping ports without being fearful of sudden policy changes.
- In terms of financial services, India aims to provide a level playing field to EU banks and insurance companies with enhanced market access along with furthering cooperation on cross-border electronic payments. Further, a structured Regulatory Dialogue on Financial Services has been established between the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to align financial standards and prevent policy conflict.
- Finally, the FTA guarantees non-discriminatory treatment and regulatory transparency in the telecommunications sector, which is primarily critical for EU telecom companies that wish to operate in India.



Future-ready mobility framework

The agreement creates a "future-ready mobility framework," which facilitates the movement and migration of skilled professionals.



The agreement creates a "**future-ready mobility framework**," which facilitates the movement and migration of skilled professionals. This framework addresses twin challenges: on one hand, it utilizes India's demographic dividend; on the other, it profoundly addresses Europe's talent and manpower shortages. It further facilitates the cross-movement of Intra-Corporate Transferees (ICTs) and Business Visitors, allowing companies to move managers and specialists between headquarters and subsidiaries very easily. Further, it also grants entry and working rights to the spouses and dependents of these employees, paving the way for a sustainable family life.

The EU has opened 37 sub-sectors for Indian employees who are fulfilling contracts in Europe, granting more rights to Contractual Service Suppliers (CSS) in addition to opening 17 sub-sectors (including IT, R&D, and higher education) for self-employed Indian professionals to work with EU clients directly. In a way, the FTA also establishes a framework for post-study work opportunities, allowing Indian students graduating from European universities to stay and work in Europe. This move hugely integrates graduating Indian students into the EU labor market.

Above all, in a landmark recognition of India's soft power, the EU agreed to allow practitioners of Indian Traditional Medicine (AYUSH-Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy) to provide services under their home titles in EU Member States where the profession is not currently regulated.

Ensuring that the digital highway between both the economies remain strengthened and opened, the deal aims to align India and the EU on the rules governing the digital economy. Strengthening mutual IT and BPO industries, commits both sides to allow cross-border data flows in addition to balancing this with strict provisions on personal data protection and privacy, aligning with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards. One of the setbacks for Indian companies might be the provision related to the prohibition on mandatory transfer of source code that provides major defensive protection to the EU's tech sector. Under the said provision, India cannot force EU companies to reveal their proprietary source code as a condition for market access in the country.



Landmark recognition

Above all, in a landmark recognition of India's soft power, the EU agreed to allow practitioners of Indian Traditional Medicine (AYUSH-Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy) to provide services under their home titles in EU Member States where the profession is not currently regulated.



Enhancing the interoperability between their digital ecosystems, the deal aims to link the European Digital Wallet with India's Digital Wallet, further facilitating seamless cross-border travel, trade, and identity verification. In order to ensure a secure environment for digital transactions, it also includes a clause related to binding rules protecting consumers from online fraud and unsolicited spam.



Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

The EU has made forward-looking assurances to extend flexibilities to India regarding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which currently detrimentally affects the price competitiveness of high carbon emitting Indian exports like steel, cement, or aluminium when entering EU markets.



Sustainable Development, Intellectual Property, and SMEs

The EU has made forward-looking assurances to extend flexibilities to India regarding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which currently detrimentally affects the price competitiveness of high carbon emitting Indian exports like steel, cement, or aluminium when entering EU markets.

As a core part of the deal India and the EU have agreed to adhere to binding commitments to support sustainable development like the Paris Climate Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity and ILO labor conventions, while also pledging support to women's economic empowerment through increasing equitable female participation in important growth sectors.

The EU has made forward-looking assurances to extend flexibilities to India regarding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which currently detrimentally affects the price competitiveness of high carbon emitting Indian exports like steel, cement, or aluminium when entering EU markets. Simultaneously it has also pledged €500 million of financial support for industrial decarbonization over the next 2 years. The two have also signed a memorandum of understanding that intends to establish an EU-India collaborative platform on climate action, which is going to be launched later this year.

The FTA promises to support the development of a mutually beneficial framework to support a transition to a more sustainable food system through providing Indian marine exports 100% preferential access to the EU's \$53.6 billion seafood market, with similar access for its agri-exports, while also gradually lowering Indian agricultural tariffs in key areas such as wine (where tariffs will be decreased upon the agreement's entry into force from 150% to 75%, with an eventual goal of 20%), olive oil (with a 45% decrease over a 5 year period), and processed agricultural products (which will see tariffs of up to 50% eliminated). This will give agricultural producers mutual market access, increase women's participation, strengthen rural incomes and secure India's position as Europe's trusted agricultural partner without sacrificing the welfare of sensitive sectors e.g, beef, chicken meat, rice and sugar, which are excluded from liberalisation by the agreement as mentioned earlier.



Intellectual Property rights

Bridging the gap between legal protections and practical business support, the India-EU FTA paves the way for the flourishing of a modern, knowledge-based economy. Intellectual Property rights have been a bone of contention for India and EU for a long time.



To ensure key elements of the treaty are successfully enforced with minimal friction between the parties, a dedicated dispute resolution mechanism will be created to resolve TSD issues, staffed by independent panels agreed by both Parties, (with the use of pre-established rosters if the Parties do not agree on panel composition) making binding reports which can be enforced through suspension of concessions in case of non-compliance, with full transparency of procedures and open hearings and finally should this course of action become troublesome; the option of seeking outside mediation.

Bridging the gap between legal protections and practical business support, the India-EU FTA paves the way for the flourishing of a modern, knowledge-based economy. Intellectual Property rights have been a bone of contention for India and EU for a long time. The deal aims to ensure a high level of protection and enforcement of IP rights beyond basic WTO requirements. The agreement further secures enforcement for copyright, trademarks, and designs. In the domain of Traditional Knowledge, the EU affirms the importance of the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL). Both India and EU aim to prevent the erroneous granting of patents on traditional Indian knowledge (e.g., yoga or medicinal plants) in Europe which does both, balances cultural heritage and protects IP Rights.

The point to recognize here is that complex trade deals, such as this, often exclude smaller players. However, this FTA includes dedicated segments concerning Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to democratize their access to the new market opportunities. The deal empowers the both sides to establish dedicated SME Contact Points and a publicly accessible digital platform, ensuring that small businesses can easily access information related to tariffs, regulations, and Rules of Origin without needing expensive legal consultants.



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URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT



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**Pillars
of CREATION**

For a Distinctly Indian Take on World Affairs

Pillars *of* CREATION

For a Distinctly Indian Take on World Affairs

The Geostrata, with a commitment to fostering a comprehensive understanding of global dynamics and thereby promoting a distinctly Indian take on world affairs, has structured its expertise into distinct pillars of creation. These pillars represent a synthesis of profound research, informed perspectives, and proactive engagement in each domain.

In our "Strategic Studies" division, we delve into critical issues ranging from national security challenges, such as aerospace threats and terrorism, to focused areas like maritime and cybersecurity. Recognizing the pivotal role of international relations, our "Diplomacy" pillar spans geographic-specific desks, ensuring we maintain a nuanced perspective on global interactions.

Our commitment to sustainable futures is evident in our "Environment" section, where we tackle everything from energy security to biodiversity conservation. Meanwhile, the "Trade and Development" segment ensures a comprehensive understanding of both global trade dynamics and intricate nuances of India's economic sectors.

The "History and Culture Desk" stands as a testament to our belief in the importance of understanding our past, rich cultural heritage, and linguistic diversities. With the rapid advancements in the technological sphere, our "Science and Technology" division remains at the forefront, analyzing developments from nanotechnology to AI.

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Our endeavor to remain at the cutting edge is further cemented with our "Space Desk," where space exploration and technology come to the forefront. Lastly, our additional centers like the "Problem Identifier Center" and "Graphics Innovation Center" underscore our commitment to innovation, risk management, and holistic analysis.

Together, these pillars underscore The Geostrata's unwavering dedication to understanding and interpreting the world in its multifaceted complexity.

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